

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, INFORMAL ONE-DAY MEETING

Geneva, 27 September 2005

The informal one-day meeting took place in advance of the 60th session of General Assembly in New York to facilitate the exchange of information on human rights issues on the agenda of the Third Committee (the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee).

Address by the Chairperson

In his opening speech, the Chairperson, Mr. Makarim Wibisono (Indonesia), noted that the meeting was informal and there would be no formal outcome. The Chair remarked that the conclusion of the World Summit in New York produced a draft outcome document that linked human rights to development and security issues. He also reflected on the agreement by States at the World Summit to create a Human Rights Council and encouraged States to continue the momentum in discussing the composition, membership, and modality of the Council.

Address of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. **Louise Arbour**, congratulated the work of the **Working Group to implement a draft instrument on the protection of all persons from enforced disappearances** on the completion of their draft text.

The remainder of her address focused on the reform of the human rights system and strengthening the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). She stated that during the World Summit, States recognised human rights as one of the pillars of international relations. The High Commissioner declared that the proposed new Human Rights Council would promote the universal aspects of human rights. She outlined the three main aspects of the Plan of Action for the OHCHR and its implementation. Through **country engagements**, the Plan of Action would streamline country oriented research, analysis, and enhance response capacity. This would also increase involvement at the national level through support for UN country teams and peacekeeping missions. The Plan of Action includes measures to strengthen the **leadership role** of the OHCHR. In particular the expertise in thematic human right issues, such as economic and social rights and women's rights, would be reinforced through consolidation in the OHCHR. The **partnership role** of the OHCHR plays a central role in the Plan of Action. The High Commissioner stated that member States, civil society, UN agencies, funds and programmes, the human rights mechanisms, and national human rights institutions are indispensable in the work of the OHCHR. In addition, the OHCHR would encourage other actors to engage a "rights based" approach in their work.

To implement specific aspects of the Plan of Action, 13 in-house task forces have been established. The High Commissioner stressed the consultative approach of the task forces by seeking input from a broad range of partners. She hoped to pursue regular informal discussion with member States and regional groups to implement the Plan of Action. The High Commissioner concluded that the Plan of Action would be the focus of her report to 60th session of General Assembly and hoped that the momentum on human rights related issues will continue to forge in the months ahead.

Protection and Promotion of Rights of Child

The Secretariat of the Committee on the Rights of the Child outlined the improved working methods of the Committee. The Committee will proceed in two chambers for two years to deal with the backlog in considering State reports. A progress report on the Secretary-General's study on violence against children will be presented to the 60th session of the General Assembly. It was also reported that the **Independent Expert on violence against children**, participated in 9 regional consultations producing an outcome document on best practises on preventing violence against children.

Indigenous Issues:

The **Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples** will primarily focus his report on the development and challenges of millennium goals and protection of indigenous people in armed conflict. The report will include a discussion of thematic research on the impact of development project on the human rights of indigenous communities. The Special Rapporteur will also report on country visits conducted in Colombia and Canada.

Elimination of racism and racial discrimination:

The **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** held thematic discussions and adopted a general comment on the prevention of genocide. The report of the **Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance**, will include conclusions of his preliminary country visit to Japan. The report will also emphasise the need to take strong measures through education and awareness to combat the discriminatory treatment of immigrants in airports around the world.

Right to Self-Determination:

The mandate for the **Special Rapporteur on the use of mercenaries to suppress the rights of peoples to self-determination** has ended and is to be replaced with a Working Group. In his report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur will provide an overview of how to further develop the mandate under the Working Group. This working group will meet for the first time in October.

Human Rights Questions:

The OHCHR Secretariat reported that the 4th inter-committee meeting focused on increasing cooperation among treaty bodies. Recommendations included developing common working methods, adopting lists of issues to be considered, using standardised terminology, effective measures to follow up on concluding observations and joint general comments on issues of general concern.

Many of the Special Procedures mechanisms reported on the need for preventative and early warning measures. The **Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief** encouraged a creation of mechanisms for countries that do not respond to Special Procedures. The **Special Representative on human rights defenders** noted that human rights defenders are disproportionately targeted for serious violations. An informal meeting of NGO's and States on enhancing the effectiveness of Special Procedures resulted in recommendations to establish a coordination committee to improve coordination and communication.

The OHCHR Secretariat reported on the situations in Afghanistan and Nepal. Despite the fragile security situation, the country mandate for Afghanistan has not been renewed. An OHCHR field presence was established in Nepal where violations of human rights by State parties and insurgent groups continue. In addition, the OHCHR Secretariat reported that the country mandate in Sudan had been extended.

General Comments:

The UK, on behalf of EU, made a statement in support of the urgent need to strengthen the OHCHR. The UK stressed the importance of Special Procedures and strongly supported the creation of a Human Rights Council.

NGOs also took the floor to convey their support in creating a strong and effective **Human Rights Council**. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Association for World Education expressed their desire for the participation of NGOs in consultations regarding the modalities and working methods of the new Human Rights Council. In addition, NGOs hoped for full access to the Council to ensure that NGO input is taken into account. The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) made a statement reiterating their concerns about the growing number of States that are in breach of their obligations regarding the prevention of torture in the fight against terrorism.