



International Service for Human Rights

As we commence discussion of the agenda and methods of work of the Human Rights Council, the International Service for Human Rights offers some general principles that it sees as the basis for the Council's operations after this first transitional year. ISHR is grateful for the various papers produced to commence this discussion.

ISHR supports the view expressed by many States that the Council's agenda and program of work should balance predictability and flexibility.

The proposal presented today by Friends' World Committee for Consultation offers a useful framework for this and we commend it for further study and development.

Predictability is especially important for non-governmental organisations outside Geneva. We share the view of China that it is essential that the procedures of the Council facilitate their participation.

Predictability, however, does not require an agenda that is set in concrete and is repetitious and detailed. As the delegation of Japan said, the agenda should not be excessively detailed and cluttered. But adequate notice should be given of issues to be discussed so that delegations can prepare adequately and NGOs outside Geneva are able to decide the most appropriate time to come to Geneva. The suggestion by Friends' World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) that each session decides the detailed issues to be discussed at the following session, within a broader annual cycle, would meet that requirement. Of course it must also be possible for urgent or chronic human rights issues to be discussed at shorter notice – that is flexibility.

The overall agenda should be simple, short and broad. It should allow both themes and situations to be discussed. It should not be a straight-jacket for the Council, an agenda that the Council is compelled to follow slavishly in a routinised, repetitive manner. It should enable effective human rights work.

Two points on working methods.

It goes without saying that the Council's methodology must be open and inclusive, including all stakeholders, as many States have stated today. The inclusion of NGOs and NHRIs is essential.

The methodology of work should also incorporate a wide range of possible results from Council discussions, including where appropriate no actual decisions or resolutions where one is premature or unnecessary. The methods of work should encourage cooperation and consensus-building – but this presupposes transparent, genuine consultation, dialogue and negotiation among States, rather than the adoption of intransigent, non-negotiable positions. And consensus must not preclude honest acceptance of the fact that many human rights issues are inherently sensitive and controversial and so not always susceptible to consensus. The seriousness of the Council's work requires at times that it proceeds debate, difference of view and votes rather than staying mute in the face of grave human rights situations.

Thank you, Mr President.