

STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE FOLLOWUP TO AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION

Almost fifteen after the Second World Conference on Human Rights adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, that document remains a common basis for human rights work internationally, regionally and locally. Its recognition that all human rights are inherent, universal, indivisible, inter-related and interdependent is now unquestionable.¹ Its statement that the promotion and protection of all human rights are legitimate concerns of the international community is irrefutable.² As well as making profound statements about international human rights law, the Declaration made important recommendations in relation to mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights at national and international level.

The Declaration recommended the establishment at the national level of national human rights institutions in conformity with the Paris Principles.³ That endorsement has led directly to the four or five fold increase in the number of these institutions over the past 15 years, with the active encouragement and support of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, itself a product of the World Conference.⁴ The High Commissioner's support for these institutions has been critical to their establishment, growth and strengthening. It has been important too in ensuring that the international standards for national institutions, the Paris Principles, have been applied and respected so that institutions established are truly independent and effective.

The implementation of these provisions of the Vienna Declaration was promoted by the annual debate in the former Commission on Human Rights on national human rights institutions. Existing national institutions had an opportunity to report on their work and the challenges they faced. States that had not yet established institutions were encouraged to do so. The work of the High Commissioner to this effect was affirmed. We urge this Council to continue this practice of annually considering the role and contribution of national human rights institutions and of supporting the establishment and strengthening of institutions that comply with the Paris Principles.

The Vienna Declaration also affirmed the continuation of international mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights, including the Special Procedures of the then Commission on Human Rights. It urged them to harmonise and rationalise their work through periodic meetings.⁵ On that basis annual meetings of Special Procedures mandate holders have been held to promote harmonisation and rationalisation of their work and coordination of their activities. More recently the mandate holders themselves decided to establish a Coordination Committee to facilitate this. We welcomed the establishment of the Coordination Committee in 2005 and the decision of mandate holders this year to extend and

¹ VDPA Part I paragraph 5.

² VDPA Part I paragraph 4.

³ VDPA Part I paragraph 36.

⁴ VDPA Part II paragraph 84.

⁵ VDPA Part II paragraph 95.

enhance its work, as reported by the chairperson of the Committee to the organisational session of the Council in June.

The Council should take a continuing interest in the system of Special Procedures even after the current review process is completed. In furtherance of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, this item should be used to enable an annual exchange between the Council and the Coordination Committee on behalf of the mandate holders to discuss system wide issues, concerns and challenges. It is perhaps best incorporated into the Council's annual Programme of Work for the June session, near to the annual meeting of the mandate holders.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action have continuing relevance for this Council. We welcome the opportunity to enhance its implementation through this agenda item and urge the Council to use it to good effect.

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