



Human Rights Council – 8th session

NGO Statement on Item 2 – Monday, 2 June 2008

This is a joint statement on behalf of:

*Action Canada for Population and Development
African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies
Amnesty International
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia)
Asian Legal Resource Centre
Association for the Prevention of Torture
Baha'i International Community
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Center on Housing Rights and Evictions
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CLADEM
Colombian Commission of Jurists
Conectas Direitos Humanos
Franciscans International
Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers)
Human Rights Watch
Humanos International
International Commission of Jurists
International Service for Human Rights
Lutheran World Federation
Organisation Mondial Contre la Torture
Pax Romana
Rights and Democracy.*

The statement has been endorsed by the following NGOs that do not enjoy ECOSOC consultative status:

*African Democracy Forum
Bahrain Center for Human Rights
Carter Center
Democracy Coalition Project
East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network
Martin Ennals Foundation
Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights
Que Me: Action for Democracy in Vietnam*

High Commissioner,

On the occasion of your last address to the Council we would like to take the opportunity to highlight some of the significant achievements you and your Office have made during your term in office.

We commend you for your strong personal commitment to strengthening the international human rights system and to the fundamental principle of universality and interdependence of human rights, which you have demonstrated through your outstanding leadership as a human rights advocate. Your vision and dedication have brought increased momentum towards achieving our common goal of the full implementation of human rights standards. Your successful efforts to secure additional resources for this ambitious task are remarkable.

Under your leadership, the profile of human rights as one of the fundamental pillars of the United Nations, and of OHCHR as a crucial part of the UN Secretariat have been raised. The integration of a strong human rights component in UN peace missions is one example of this approach. We hope that your successor will be able to build on your efforts to mainstream human rights into other parts of the UN system. We also welcome your personal commitment to improving the geographical representation of the staff of OHCHR, and we note the progress achieved so far.

Your dedication to human rights, justice and the fight against impunity has led to a significant improvement in the protection offered by the human rights system and has directly contributed to the prevention of human rights violations.

Your commitment to consolidate OHCHR's protection and technical cooperation mandates in OHCHR's country work has been of the essence. You have given clear vision and direction to your offices in Geneva and around the world and a common focus on key challenges: impunity, poverty and inequalities, discrimination, armed conflict and violence, democratic deficits and weak institutions.

The establishment and strengthening of national protection systems through the elaboration of focused country engagement strategies has been a significant achievement of your Office. This is essential in bringing the human rights work done in Geneva and New York to the country level and ensuring its effective implementation and redress for victims of human rights violations. In this respect, we encourage a continued focus of your Office on supporting governments, national human rights institutions and civil society in implementing recommendations made by various parts of the UN human rights system towards strengthened human rights protection.

You and your Office have played a critical role throughout the transition from the Commission on Human Rights to the Human Rights Council. Your personal advocacy and support for preserving the independence of the special procedures system, and for the establishment of a strong universal periodic review (UPR) mechanism were crucial during that period. The OHCHR's continued commitment to service all of the human rights mechanisms effectively and professionally is vital to their success.

Of particular significance for us is the fruitful cooperation you, Madame High Commissioner, and your Office has sought with all sectors of civil society, including through the establishment of the dedicated Civil Society Unit within OHCHR. We have greatly appreciated the close collaboration that has been developed between OHCHR and civil society and would like to thank you and your Office for the openness and commitment to working with us.

Finally, and most importantly, you personally and OHCHR as a whole have demonstrated leadership in upholding the universal character of human rights throughout all activities. We commend your repeated and strong affirmation that human rights apply to everyone, everywhere without any distinction whatsoever, and are thus universal. You leave a legacy of unwavering commitment to the principle of universality of human rights as a fulfilment of human dignity.

“Dignity and justice for all”, the theme of the campaign to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), reflects your aspirations and the emphasis you have placed on the implementation of human rights. While we regret to see you leave as an untiring advocate for human rights, we are confident that OHCHR and the future High Commissioner will build on your achievements and continue to defend the principle of universality and the need for strong human rights mechanisms, to protect all human rights for all. We also trust that you will continue to contribute to the human rights cause.

Thank you.