

NGOs make urgent appeal to UN member states to back Human Rights Council resolution

9 March, 2005

We [undersigned NGOs] believe that the draft resolution to establish a Human Rights Council presented by the President of the General Assembly is a sound basis to strengthen the UN's human rights machinery. World leaders pledged to do this when they met at the September 2005 World Summit. We call on all states to join the consensus that has emerged in countries from all regions of the world and to adopt the draft resolution.

The proposed Human Rights Council will be better equipped than the existing Commission on Human Rights to address urgent, serious and long-running human rights situations wherever they occur. It will hold more frequent meetings throughout the year instead of only one. More competitive election procedures will encourage a membership that is more dedicated to the protection of human rights. Instead of slates being adopted by acclamation, members must be elected individually and a higher threshold of votes applies - at least 96 individual votes out of 191 members. A country's human rights record will be taken into account by those voting and those committing gross violations of human rights can be suspended from the body. All members must fully cooperate with the Council and they will undergo a review of their human rights record through a new universal review system that will apply to all countries.

This is an historic opportunity to create a better human rights protection system within the United Nations.

*We call on all members of the United Nations to ensure that the draft resolution is adopted by consensus in the General Assembly.

*No country should call for a vote or propose amendments. To do so will seriously jeopardize this sound and carefully balanced agreement that we have before us.

It is now time to move forward together to ensure that the new Human Rights Council is implemented in the spirit of reform — that governments which are seriously committed to human rights should be elected to this body to make it strong and effective.

ActionAid International, Richard Miller, Director of ActionAid UK

Amnesty International, Irene Khan, Secretary General

ARC International, John Fisher, Co-Director

Carter Centre, Karin D. Ryan, Senior Advisor for Human Rights

Center for American Progress, Morton H Halperin, Senior Fellow

Center for Development of International Law, Lene Schumacher, Director of Programs

Center for Women's Global Leadership, Charlotte Bunch

Citizens for Global Solutions, Don Kraus, Executive Vice President

CIVICUS: World Alliance for citizen participation, Vicente Garcia-Delgado, UN Representative

Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos- Peru, Francisco Soberon, Executive Secretary

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, Katherine R. Parisi, Ph.D, CSJP-Associate Justice & Peace Coordinator

Democracy Coalition Project, Ted Piccone, Executive Director

Dominicans for Justice and Peace Geneva, Philippe LeBlanc, Director

Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees (FEDEFAM), Patricio Rice, Senior Adviser

Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, Sidiki Kaba Simia, Permanent Delegate FIDH in Geneva

Fédération Internationale de l'Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture, Sylvie de Pontual, President

Franciscans International, Alessandra Aula, International Advocacy Coordinator

Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), Nancy Irving General Secretary

Human Rights First, Michael Posner, President

Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, Executive Director

International Center for Law in Development, Clarence Dias

International Commission of Jurists, Nicholas Howen, Secretary General and Maria Lourijsen (Dutch section)

International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Aaron Rhodes, Executive Director

International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Mr Hideki MORIHARA, Secretary-General

International Service for Human Rights, Chris Sidoti, Director

Open Society Institute and Soros Foundation Network, Morton H Halperin, Director of US Advocacy

Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture, Eric Sottas, Director

Temple of Understanding, Sr. Joan Kirby, UN Representative Chair, NGO/DPI Executive Committee Member, NGO Committee on Human Rights

United Nations Association of the United States of America, William H. Luers, President

United Nations Foundation, Timothy E. Wirth, President

World Federalist Movement, William R. Pace, Executive Director

World Organization Against Torture, Eric Sottas, Director