

Date and Time: Saturday, May 4, 2024 2:31:00 PM EEST

Job Number: 223508196

Documents (91)

1. [More civilians rescued by Navy](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

2. [Coming to terms with a bloody record](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

3. [National Briefs. Stories may have moved as regional or national separates on the Canwest News Service wire. Guard against duplication.](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

4. [Menace of terrorism](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

5. [The urban jungle After a haunting novel set in colonial Ceylon, Michelle de Kretser brings the troubled past of trendy Melbourne to life. BOYD TONKIN talks to a writer who summons up the ghosts that stalk the modern world](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

6. [Norwegian Government: Part 2 - Foreign Policy Address to the Storting, 10 February 2009](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

7. [Walk on 'trapeze'](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

8. [Sri Lanka :A doomed region](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

9. [Lanka presented compelling case for GSP Plus - Prof. G.L. Peiris](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

10. [Terrorism, B.5a nemesis for government and masses](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

11. [INITIATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY'S CHAIR AMBASSADOR HUNT ISSUES STATEMENT ON U.N. SECURITY RESOLUTION 1325: RECOGNIZING WOMEN'S VITAL ROLES IN ACHIEVING PEACE, SECURITY BEFORE HOUSE PANEL](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

12. [Suicide bomber kills 28 at Sri Lanka refugee camp: military](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

13. [SPORTING LIFE COMES FULL CIRCLE In our early days, sport flourished while war and revolution raged. Is the world really all that different 225 years on?](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

14. [More civilians rescued in Puthukkudiyiruppu](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

15. [IS 'Aba' AN ANTI- SINHALA ANTIC?](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

16. [A CEASEFIRE COULD EASE PRABHAKARAN AND CEASE RAJAPAKSA](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

17. [At least 46 rebels dead in heavy fighting](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

18. [Forces recover weapons haul](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

19. [Female suicide cadre arrested](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

20. [39 Tamil civilians seek refuge](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

21. [*Civilians seek security forces protection*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

22. [*Police recover cache of weapons*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

23. [*32 more crossover to Govt.-controlled areas*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

24. [*15 escape Tiger claws*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

25. [*UNP must support Govt. at this juncture, says Sajith*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

26. [32 civilians flee uncleared areas](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

27. [EIGHT LANKAN REFUGEES IN MANDAPAM SPECIAL CAMP](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

28. [FIVE SRI LANKAN NATIONALS TAKE REFUGE AT MANDAPAM CAMP](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

29. [3 Lankans in TN Refugee Camp](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

30. [More civilians arrive in Omanthai](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

31. [Not a UNICEF vehicle](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

32. [Six Tamils flee Tiger clutches](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

33. [Navy help sought by fleeing families](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

34. [World report](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

35. [No ceasefire, says PM](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

36. [*21 Civilians killed, over 50 injured in the explosion - Moratuwa*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

37. [*Moral high ground is shifting beneath secularists' feet*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

38. [*Going to the show; The allure of this year's show is diminished, but outrageous surprises are still possible*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

39. [*Sri Lanka says 35 killed in fresh fighting*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

40. [*Seven Sri Lankan Tamil refugees arrive*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

41. [*10 Lankan nationals take refuge in Mandapam refugee camp*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

42. [Seven Sri Lankan refugees arrive at Mandapam camp in TN](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

43. [Three civilians killed, 26 injured in Sri Lanka bus attack](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

44. [More Wanni civilians arrive in Omanthai](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

45. [Seven refugees arrive](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

46. [3rd Ld Explosion injures 4 in Sri Lankan zoo](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

47. [*TAMIL REBELS USING CIVILIANS AS 'HUMAN SHIELDS'*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

48. [*Four killed as Tamil Tiger rebels fire at bus*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

49. [*Navy rescues another 139 civilians*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

50. [*12 killed, 23 injured in Sri Lanka suicide blast*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

51. [*Mullaitivu civilians cross to govt. areas*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

52. [Suicide bomber killed in blast near Colombo harbour](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

53. [More civilians cross over from uncleared areas](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

54. [Silent heroes need recognition](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

55. [Canada should revoke radar sale to Sri Lanka](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

56. [Female suicide bomber attacks relief camp](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

57. [796 civilians flee Tiger clutches](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

58. [20 killed, 40 injured in blast near Colombo](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

59. [All Our Black Julys](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

60. [Navy rescues 165 civilians fleeing Tigers](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

61. [Special unit to help children, women from uncleared areas](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newsires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

62. [Madras court hears early release petition](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

63. [keeping the message](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

64. [Lankans hail President Ahmadinejad 's visit](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

65. [TEA AND SYMPATHY On a journey to the heart of the troubled nation of Sri Lanka , Sophie Lam finds serenity amid ornate temples, ancient reservoirs and fields of emerald green](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

66. [Sanctuary seekers are nobody's people](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

67. [OFFICE OF SECRETARY-GENERAL CONDUCTS DAILY PRESS BRIEFING, JAN. 3](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

68. [The renewal of GSP+ concessions](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

69. [DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

70. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATES ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES AND MECHANISMS](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

71. [MEETING IN PROGRESS: GENERAL ASSEMBLY GENERAL DEBATE](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

72. [COUNCIL CONTINUES INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH EXPERTS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

73. [DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY OFFICE OF SPOKESPERSON FOR SECRETARY-GENERAL 15 JANUARY 2008](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

74. [DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY OFFICES OF SPOKESPERSON FOR SECRETARY-GENERAL, SPOKESPERSON FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

75. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL HOLDS INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON RIGHT TO EDUCATION, EXTREME POVERTY AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

76. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL HOLDS GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS REQUIRING ITS ATTENTION](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

77. [COUNCIL HEARS FROM EXPERTS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, SUMMARY EXECUTIONS AND INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES AND LAWYERS](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

78. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL OPENS TENTH REGULAR SESSION](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

79. [SPECIAL PROCEDURES ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, SALE OF CHILDREN AND TORTURE PRESENT REPORTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

80. [THIRD COMMITTEE SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN GLOBAL DECLARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION ON GROUND](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

81. [No Headline In Original](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press

82. [THIRD COMMITTEE SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN GLOBAL DECLARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION ON THE GROUND](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

83. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE ON PROMOTION OF CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

84. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DISCUSSES HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE ITS ATTENTION](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

85. [No Headline In Original](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
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Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

86. [No Headline In Original](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type

Narrowed by

News

Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

87. [UN : MEETING IN PROGRESS: SECURITY COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT 12
FEBRUARY 2008](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

88. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT
REQUIRE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

89. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONTINUES DISCUSSION WITH SPECIAL PROCEDURES ON ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCES, SALE OF CHILDREN AND TORTURE](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

90. [UNOG: HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONTINUES GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES
THAT REQUIRE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers,Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

91. [HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DISCUSSES REPORTS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS,
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE, AND MINORITY ISSUES](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Tamil Tigers" OR LTTE

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers, Newswires & Press
Releases; Timeline: Jan 01, 2008 to Mar 30, 2009

More civilians rescued by Navy

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

February 17, 2009 Tuesday

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Length: 194 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Feb. 17 -- The Navy rescued 77 civilians who were fleeing from **LTTE** held areas in overcrowded fiber glass dinghies in the northeastern seas early yesterday.

The first group consisting of 34 civilians was rescued at about 2:00 a.m. whilst the second group of 19 civilians was rescued at about 5:00 a.m. and the last group comprising 24 Tamil civilians was rescued yesterday around 8:00 a.m. All were safely brought ashore and provided with food and refreshments. Those who were sick and weary were provided with immediate treatment by naval medical personnel. "The Navy has made special arrangements to receive innocent Tamil civilians fleeing from the **LTTE** clutches. Naval personnel and vessels along with stand-by rescue and medical teams are specially deployed for this humanitarian assistance mission in the northeastern seas," the navy headquarters said. Meanwhile, the army said t 24 civilians from un-cleared areas in Mullaitivu reported to the security forces at Munai in Welioya on Sunday. These civilians comprised six males, nine **females**, six male and three **female** children. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Daily Mirror Sri Lanka.

For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Load-Date: April 1, 2009

Coming to terms with a bloody record

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 14, 2008 Saturday 2:20 PM EST

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Length: 2218 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 14 -- A series of events, both untoward and regrettable, have led to the issues of media freedom and freedom of expression being kept in focus for the past several months, with some gleefully pointing an accusing finger at the government for all incidents, often with scant regard for the truth.

There is a robust exchange of views between the government and organisations that campaign for media freedom on what is undoubtedly a key issue of democracy.

The UNP is chipping in with its own dubious claims to be a champion of both these freedoms, and several foreign organisations are also moving in on the side of those who see a serious decline in these necessary props of democracy.

They are often seen as having a somewhat one-sided approach to the issue, more in keeping with the western attitude of hectoring Third World countries on how democracy should be practised.

We have often heard leading voices from the UNP make loud claims about their support for media freedom and issue dire warnings that they will not let the government threaten or destroy these great freedoms of democracy.

Politicians of the UNP have been seen craftily joining the demonstrations of journalists and media freedom activists, often to the embarrassment and annoyance of the organisers of these events, who would like to distance themselves from the machinations of politicians in carrying out their campaigns, especially because of diverse views among the public today on the justification of these campaigns, and rightly or not, the possibility of political motivations of the organisers.

The UNP's attempts to position itself as the greatest supporter of media freedom and freedom of expression, faces a major challenge from its own contemptible record when in office. Try as it may, the UNP cannot push aside the memory of Richard de Zoysa, whose killing during the Premadasa administration epitomized the very negation of media freedom in the country.

The UNP's efforts to be seen as the new knights in shining armour riding in to save democracy and media freedom in the country face considerable difficulty from the manner in which it has been working against democracy, especially after its landslide victory in 1977; and the blows it dealt to media freedom during the days of JRJ, and even worse under Ranasinghe Premadasa, as well as the premierships of Ranil Wickremesinghe after the Premadasa assassination and from December 2001 to April 2004.

State control

Coming to terms with a bloody record

The party that opposed the acquisition of the majority shares of Lake House in 1973, and vowed to restore it to its former owners or make a change in the ownership to take it away from government control, was happy to forget that promise even after the resounding victory it won in 1977 with a five-sixth majority in parliament.

It was quite happy to consolidate the government's hold over Lake House, and soon extend State control to TV, and also manipulate most of the print media of the day.

Whatever its faults may be, complaints of the partisan attitude of Lake House today sound hollow when it comes from leading members of a political party that has acted in such a cavalier fashion with regard to State and political control of the media, particularly Lake House, before and after State intervention there; and all its protestations about the need to defend media freedom hardly impresses those who know the UNP's record on such an important freedom.

If the killing of Richard de Zoysa stands out as the major blot in the Premadasa presidency's suppression of dissent and media freedom, the role of the UNP in obstructing a fair judicial inquiry into this killing, and the role of Ranil Wickremesinghe in preventing the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry to probe that killing will continue to haunt the UNP, and stand in the way of every attempt it makes to show that it can be trusted on matters of media freedom, freedom of expression and the right to dissent.

Today, when Ranil Wickremesinghe, with his two loud and empty acolytes Lakshman Kiriella and Tissa Attanayake, seek to position the UNP as the defender of media freedom, one is compelled to look at the record of Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister in his second and last spell when he was signatory to the Cease Fire Agreement with the LTTE.

The UNP's media manipulation at that time, and the manner in which it dealt with journalists that were not in agreement with the green mafia that controlled the media at the time, stands out as proof of its inbuilt contempt for media freedom and political dissent.

One glaring example is how the UNP moved through its operatives in key positions in the media to keep out the statement of the Mahanayaka Theras that was critical of aspects of the Cease Fire Agreement and its implementation.

There are certainly many issues of importance about the role of the media and the role of the State and Government vis-...-vis the media today, and many questions can also be raised today about the freedom of the journalist and the right to dissent. No one can be pleased about the number of journalists killed in the past few years, in whatever part of the country.

The abductions and assaults on journalists while calling for condemnation have also given cause both to contentions debate and certain doubts about the background to these regrettable incidents, as well as their outcome.

The prevailing conditions of an armed confrontation by a terrorist organisation with the goal of a separate State, and the efforts of government to eradicate terrorism; the widespread presence of arms in our society due to many other factors such as the JVP insurrection of 1989 - 92, as well as the PR system and the "manaapey" are also seen as contributory to this situation, which needs arresting.

But it hardly helps to resolve these core issues of media freedom and freedom of expression when those who shout loudest about them are those who have the blackest of records on these very issues, and have not given any indication that they regard their past record as repugnant to the ideals of democracy.

New kid

The issue of media freedom and the freedom of expression assumes new relevance today with the entry of the JVP as the latest vociferous defender of these freedoms. In an effort to either grab the spotlight from the UNP on this issue, or acting in concert with it, which has deeper political meaning, the JVP is raising media freedom as one of its key issues almost on par with the demand for an immediate and all round increase of wages by Rs. 5,000, the

Coming to terms with a bloody record

warnings of an imminent General Strike, the stirrings of action over legislation covering the CEB, as well as restoring the full subsidy of fertilizer.

The rash of posters on city and suburban walls, the statements by its leaders to the media, comments by its spokesmen on radio and TV talk shows and interactive programmes, all indicate the JVP is seeking to make media freedom, or its own interpretation of it, as a key issue to win over public support for its forthcoming moves in politics.

It is thus necessary to take a closer look at what appears to be a new kid on the block that is glad to sing the song of media freedom for whatever advantage there is to be gained, in the JVP's new drive to become a force to be reckoned with in democratic politics.

As this leads to a fierce competition with the UNP to be accepted as the saviour of democracy, it is necessary to see how much of respect for media freedom and the freedom of expression one sees in the record of the JVP so far.

If the killing of Richard de Zoysa stands out in bold relief as the pointer to the UNP's real attitude to media freedom and free expression, there are important names that come to mind when considering the JVP's own record in dealing with the media, journalists and other media professionals, as well as key personalities who had their own views on politics and social organisations that were not in sync with the JVP views, in the dark and bloody days of its second violent uprising from 1989 to 1992.

Much like the UNP did in dealing with dissent, the JVP too appeared to see little harm, if any, in the violent elimination of those from the media who dared to have views different to its own, whether they were giants in their own fields of media activity, or others who were little known but held key positions in the media.

One of the victims of the violence directed at the media and media personalities during the JVP's so-called campaign to get the IPKF out of the country was Thevis Guruge, a former Director General of the SLBC, whose career began from the early days of Radio Ceylon, and whose contribution to broadcasting in Sri Lanka has been outstanding.

Bloody record

There was more blood shed with the killing of Premakeerthi de Alwis, another accomplished broadcaster who had also won the hearts and minds of our people for his ability as a Sinhala lyricist. His name was a household word both for his radio programmes and the many songs that remain favourites to this day.

But he apparently had no place in the JVP's order of things - that included ordering broadcasters to be silent at its command sent on a slip of paper with dire warnings for those who disobey; in the same way that the right of traders to carry on their legitimate business was stopped by the chit that ordered whole streets to close shop or face the deadly consequences.

Much less known but a very good broadcaster, especially in the area of news and news editing was Kulasiri Amaratunga, who began his career in radio with the SLBC and then moved on to TV at Rupavahini. He was gunned down at his home at the height of the JVP's trail of blood targeting media personalities.

This violence against media professionals compelled the State to use services personnel to hold the administration and management desks at radio and TV stations, and also do some announcing and news reading, due to the media people being the targets of red reformers who were calling the shots from Siyambalanduwa or wherever they were holed up; but certainly not in the posh planter's bungalow in the Badulla area where their leader Rohana Wijeweera was hiding with his treasure trove of bullion.

The targets were not only those in the media, but most anyone who had the courage to have a dissenting view from the thinking of the JVP, which was certainly not Marxist, had no association with socialism and was the furthest from democracy.

Coming to terms with a bloody record

One such victim of the assertion of one's own freedom of expression was Nandana Marasinghe, a former JVP'er, who was disillusioned with that rigid organisation and began publishing his own pamphlets of dissent.

But such a voice had no place in the thinking of the pseudo- revolutionaries who could not rest until President Premadasa ordered the IPKF out, giving the **LTTE** an opportunity to resume its war of separation in greater strength.

There are many more that paid the ultimate price for having the courage of their own convictions and dared to express them - such as the Communist Party's veteran trade unionist L. W. Panditha, Vijaya Kumaratunga the film idol who led the Mahajana Party, and Prof. Stanley Wijesundera, who was Vice Chancellor of the Colombo University.

There were also many provincial correspondents of the newspapers who were killed, ordered to stop their work with dire threats or given summary punishments for their work with the media. It did not stop at that. Even news agents and the small newspaper vendors and delivery boys also came under the writ of the JVP that could not bother to consider the people's right to know, be informed or even to be misled or fooled by the media.

As much as it is inevitable that memories of Richard de Zoysa are rekindled when the UNP tries to wax eloquent about media freedom and freedom of expression, one cannot help remembering all these other victims of the JVP's opposition to media freedom and the right to dissent.

These memories come to us when we see the posters that are now screaming out for the protection of media freedom and the right to free expression.

Despite the JVP's terrible record on dissent, even the Free Media Movement has thought it necessary to defend the JVP's right to protest and free expression after that regrettable incident at Arachchikattuwa earlier this week.

However, with its bloody record in dealing with journalists, the media and even minor employees of media institutions and their agents, one wonders how far the JVP has in fact departed from those old beliefs to be able to genuinely support and defend media freedom in the country.

It showed one aspect of its respect for the right to dissent with that near-naked demonstration at the Fort Railway Station last Tuesday, causing a great deal of embarrassment to **women** passers-by, who were not excited, but repelled, by the pot-bellied rebels past their prime, parading their lack of respect for the standards of decency in our culture.

It is obvious that with such a bloody past we cannot take them on their posters or their nakedness. We will have to watch how they really deal with dissent in the days and months to come, before we are convinced of their belief in media freedom and their commitment to freedom of expression. There is a lot of blood to be washed away and atoned for, before that.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: September 16, 2008

National Briefs. Stories may have moved as regional or national separates on the Canwest News Service wire. Guard against duplication.

Canwest News Service

March 16, 2009 Monday 06:57 PM EST

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Length: 1702 words

Dateline: SAGUENAY, Que.

Body

SAGUENAY, Que. - A mother charged with murder after an alleged New Year's Day murder-suicide pact that left her husband and three children dead was released on bail Monday.

Cathie Gauthier, 35, faces three charges of first-degree murder and one of aiding or inciting her husband to kill himself.

At a bail hearing Monday, defence lawyer Dominic Bouchard called several witnesses to testify, including Gauthier herself, her psychiatrist, and the head of a women's treatment centre that is willing to welcome her.

There is a publication ban on the details of the hearing.

Judge Robert Grenier gave in to the defence arguments that Gauthier doesn't pose a danger to herself or others.

``It's a courageous decision," said Bouchard. ``In cases like this, public opinion isn't always on your side, but the judge emphasized the presumption of innocence and the fact that my client will present a defence."

Gauthier has remained in custody at the psychiatric unit of a hospital in Chicoutimi, about 200 kilometres north of Quebec City.

She was released on bail under strict conditions. She will have to remain at the treatment centre at all times, except for psychiatric and medical treatments.

Gauthier is due back in court Wednesday for her preliminary hearing.

Police allege Gauthier had a suicide pact with her husband, Marc Laliberte, 46, to kill themselves and their children: Joelle, 12, Marc-Ange, 7, and Louis-Philippe, 4.

There is speculation the jobless couple couldn't find a way out of their financial troubles as the economic downturn worsened.

Police arrest man wanted in sex assault incidents. 173 words.

Canwest News Service

TORONTO - Toronto police have arrested a man they believe is responsible for sexually assaulting at least four young women, including a woman inside a subway station and two 16-year-old girls last month.

National Briefs. Stories may have moved as regional or national separates on the Canwest News Service wire.
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The man was arrested Monday after victims identified him as their attacker. Images were released of the suspect leaving the Sherbourne subway station, after he allegedly engaged a 27-year-old in conversation, followed her and sexually assaulted her within the subway station.

Since then, the man is said to have been linked to the Feb. 2 sexual assault of two teenage girls inside the Rosedale Valley Heights School of the Arts.

“The public was a great help. People came forward with the person's name and the result was an arrest was made,” said Const. Tony Vella. “Once officers looked into it further, they realized there was more than one alleged case of sexual assault ... and there possibly could be more.”

A fourth assault is believed to have occurred Sunday night when the accused allegedly approached a young girl and sexually assaulted her.

National Post

Manitobans brace for severe flooding. 103 words.

Winnipeg Free Press

WINNIPEG - This year's flood in Manitoba could be of the same magnitude as those in 1979 and 1950, given average weather and rainfall in the coming weeks, provincial flood officials said Monday.

However, because of improved flood-proofing, most Red River Valley residents should have nothing to fear, said Steve Topping, the provincial official in charge of fighting the flood.

“The floodway is substantially complete and can easily handle this flood,” he said.

In May 1950, almost a quarter of the city of Winnipeg found itself underwater. Twenty-nine years later, flood levels came close to the 1950 levels, but no communities were flooded due to protective dykes.

Man found dead in grain bin on Sask. farm. 56 words

Canwest News Service

REGINA - A 60-year-old man was found dead in a grain bin on his Saskatchewan farm Sunday.

Paul Ellingson's body was found on his farm south of Carievale, Sask.

The death is being treated as accidental.

The provincial coroner and the provincial farm occupational health and safety branch were investigating.

Carievale is about 320 kilometres south of Regina.

Regina Leader-Post

Valuable mask stolen from quadriplegic. 88 words

Canwest News Service

VANCOUVER - A valuable native mask was stolen from above the hospital bed of a quadriplegic while he was sleeping.

An avid aboriginal art collector, Norman Ryall has lived at the Vancouver General Hospital for 30 years after becoming a quadriplegic at the age of two. He treasured this particular mask, created by a well-known artist, and paid several thousand dollars for it.

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Vancouver police are investigating the Feb. 28 theft and requesting the help of local art dealers, collectors and the public to return it to its rightful owner.

Vancouver Province

Homicide unit investigates woman's death in Burnaby, B.C. 171 words

Canwest News Service

BURNABY, B.C. - A woman was found dead under suspicious circumstances in a Burnaby, B.C. home Sunday evening.

The Integrated Homicide Investigation Team, comprised of investigators from regional RCMP and police departments, was called in after the discovery around 7 p.m. in a home in the Vancouver suburb.

Late Sunday, police were saying little about what took place or how the woman died.

IHIT spokesman Cpl. Dale Carr told Global News the death did not appear to be a shooting, while noting investigators had yet to make a detailed examination of the body.

In a release issued at about 12:30 a.m. Monday, Carr said police believed they had an identity for the victim, but wouldn't release a name until it was confirmed and next of kin had been notified.

Carr said RCMP investigators were canvassing the neighbourhood for witnesses.

"At this early stage of the investigation, there is no clear indication of whether this incident is linked to gangs, drugs or organized crime," said Carr in a statement.

No suspects were in custody.

Vancouver Province

Thousands gather for Tamil protest in downtown Toronto. 174 words

Canwest News Service

TORONTO - A massive protest by Toronto's Tamil community Monday afternoon was progressing peacefully, Toronto police said, as thousands of Tamil supporters lined downtown sidewalks to condemn attacks by the Sri Lankan military on Tamils in that country.

A human chain of as many as 30,000 protesters was formed along a massive downtown square.

The rally was expected to create some traffic congestion in the downtown area, after demonstrators at a similar event in January flooded the streets, making them impassable. Police were appealing for calm from both the public and protesters, and warned the rally could grow as the afternoon progressed.

"It has been very peaceful, and part of the Toronto Police Service's mission in this demonstration is to allow these protesters to have a peaceful and lawful demonstration, keeping in mind, of course, public safety," said Const. Wendy Drummond.

People carried signs and waved Canadian flags alongside red ones representing the **Tamil Tigers**, a liberation group in Sri Lanka that has been added to international lists of terrorist organizations.

National Post

Halifax bus driver investigated after clubbing fake seal. 230 words.

National Briefs. Stories may have moved as regional or national separates on the Canwest News Service wire.
Guard against duplication.

Canwest News Service

HALIFAX - Halifax police are investigating a 54-year-old bus driver who attacked a fake baby seal during an anti-sealing protest Saturday.

Police are trying to determine what the bus driver used to strike the fake seal made out of blankets and painted with red marks to resemble blood, said spokeswoman Theresa Rath.

"At this point, there is not enough evidence to lay criminal charges, but the investigation is ongoing," said Rath.

The driver stopped his run at about 12:23 p.m., jumped out, ran toward the fake seal and struck it twice with a "bar or baton," said Rath. The bus driver then ran back onto the bus and continued his run.

Rath said the incident happened so fast police could not intervene and only managed to contact transit authorities after the bus driver had gone on his way.

"We would like to understand what he used," said Rath. "(The bus driver) said it was a stick. We want to confirm that."

Metro Transit could not be reached for comment.,

The transit authority is already investigating an incident involving the actions of bus driver and a burka-clad woman. The driver allegedly did not want to let the woman on the bus, citing policy against allowing passengers who have their faces covered. The driver, however, radioed his operations centre and was told to let the woman on.

Calgary man arrested for hatchet, bear spray attack. 124 words

Canwest News Services

CALGARY - RCMP in Airdrie, Alta. have arrested a man after a 35-year-old woman was stabbed at a local restaurant, police said Monday.

Police said 20-year-old Andres Connors of Calgary has been charged with multiple offences, including aggravated assault and possession of a weapon. Connors was arrested after some patrons at Our Flames Bar and Grill in Airdrie said they were sprayed with bear spray around 2:20 a.m. Sunday.

One female patron was taken to hospital after sustaining a serious stab wound to her abdomen. Police said the wound was caused by a hatchet.

Connors is scheduled to be in court sometime Monday. The name of the victim is not being released, the RCMP said.

Airdrie is a little over 30 kilometres north of Calgary.

Calgary Herald

Alta. has \$3 billion plan to end homelessness. 173 words.

Canwest News Service

CALGARY - Alberta now has a plan to eliminate homelessness in a decade - but it won't come cheap.

A report submitted to the provincial government Monday morning estimates it will cost Alberta taxpayers about \$3.3 billion to end homelessness across the province by 2019.

The plan, prepared by the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, suggests specific actions to build permanent housing for the homeless and outlines ways to break the cycle of homelessness.

National Briefs. Stories may have moved as regional or national separates on the Canwest News Service wire.
Guard against duplication.

It aligns with similar 10-year plans in Calgary, Edmonton and Red Deer, Alta.

At a news conference, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Yvonne Fritz said the province will start putting money toward the plan in this spring's provincial budget, set to be released on Apr. 7.

"We are committed to funding the program, but there are processes that need to take place," she said.

Fritz wouldn't say how much of the \$3.3 billion would be funded this year.

The report, however, suggests it would cost the province about \$6.6 billion to simply manage the side-effects of homelessness.

There are an estimated 8,400 homeless people across Alberta.

Calgary Herald

Load-Date: March 17, 2009

End of Document

Menace of terrorism

The Nation (AsiaNet)

April 1, 2008 Tuesday

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Length: 1710 words

Byline: SYED ALI ZAFAR

Body

The most serious crises which the government is going to face and have to surmount is that of the cyclone of terrorism, suicide bombings, deaths and violence which is sweeping the country and eating away at the very guts of the nation. No country has had to face such a magnitude and frequency of killings of innocent people as Pakistan has in the recent past.

Some people say that the blame for this lies on President Musharraf and want him impeached. Musharraf's removal however is a political issue and will not suddenly and magically become the solution for making the nation safe. This is certainly not the time for blame game, and the new government needs to focus on what has to be done to meet the challenges ahead by adopting a fresh approach to tackle this menace.

The world of violence cannot always easily be divided into black and white. Palestinian fighters waging Intifada or Kashmiris struggling for independence may be "terrorists" for Israel, US or India, as the case may be, but are "freedom fighters" for others. People who laid down their lives in the war of independence in 1857 in India may be "martyrs" for us but the incident is a "mutiny" for the British and the soldiers involved are "traitors" for them. Muslims who were trained and armed by west to fight in Afghanistan were heroes for the West and Islamic world together and were called mujahdeen in the 80s but were "enemies" for USSR. The same people now allegedly constitute "Al-Qaeda" and are now the West's foremost foes.

Terrorism is generally understood to me as a "deliberate and systematic acts of murder and maiming of innocent men, women and children despaired to inspire fear and instability in society for the purpose of some political or religious cause." Terrorism is believed to be a result of a grievance which stems from a real or perceived injustice and inequality and often the group involved, when faced with the mightier force that cannot be defeated through conventional means, uses violence to subjugate and force the opposition to accept its demands.

The most devastating and fearsome form of terrorism and which Pakistan is currently facing is that of suicide bombings. Suicidal attacks are indeed the most difficult to protect against. What drives these attacks is the key to resolving the conflict. It all began in 850 when a monk called Perfectus went shopping in the souk of Cordoba, capital of the Muslim State of al-Andalus and started insulting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Upon his refusal to stop Perfectus had to be sent to the goals by the reluctant Qazi in accordance with the laws of the land.

The Christian Community made the monk a religious hero and started a cult movement of martyrs (who were given the title of "Soldiers of God"). These "Soldiers" presented themselves before the Qazi and invoked death sentences by committing scandalous attacks on the character of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The idea was to "whip up" popular

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resistance against the Muslims through these acts of suicide. Therefore, they became the first organised society of martyrs who courted death (suicide) known to history.

Just like "Soldiers of God" were inspired by a resistance to the domination of Muslim culture, suicide operation today is viewed as the only option when faced with a mightier or invincible army. When Palestinians are faced with insurmountable odds or Tamil Tigers see no way of winning independence or Chechnyans are unable to combat with the majesty of Russian troops or when the Irish did not find any other way to enforce their demands on the British, suicide bombing is adopted as an effective method of terrifying the population and achieving the vested interests. In the words of Loretta Napoleoni in her book titled The Modern Jihad:

"Becoming a martyr is a highest moral achievement...death, paradoxically, restore the dignity lost with the land alongwith political identity attached to it. Refugees are obsessed with dignity; like exposed bodies in a fully clothed society they search frantically for something to cover their nakedness. Martyrdom is the best protection they can get. It ends the life of misery and grants a social status, a very high one, something to be proud of for the entire family." At the same time suicide bombing is the most effective form of terrorism and according to a political leader of the Liberation Tigers in Sri Lanka, suicide attacks "ensure maximum damage done with minimum loss of life (to the movement)."

One approach to combat terrorism is what I call the "Bush Option" which is to "bomb and kill" the terrorists. This tactic is typical of a military solution to conflict and reflection of army mindset. While no one can deny that physical force may be necessary in certain circumstances but the fact is that if no limits are set and if this remains the only option then instead of solving the issue it will only ensure the resistance becomes greater. It is rightly said that if one innocent is killed, 10 suicide bombers will be born.

Terrorists are "asymmetric force." A standard military retaliation is welcome to these groups because it eventually swells up the ranks of recruits and fans the flames of civilisations between West and Islam.

US policy of counter attack alone has also been unsuccessful as proved in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq where western armed forces with their highly sophisticated weapons, trained armies and latest war planes have been unable to defeat the local rag tag resistance. In fact the weakening of states of Iraq and Afghanistan have made these countries incubators for recruit. Similarly Israel has been able to win the war against the combined Arab forces but in spite of her might has not been able to control the Palestinian uprising.

The fact is that the violence which we are experiencing in Pakistan is a result of mistaken policies and blunders made by the US and West and blindly followed by our past governments since the late 1970s when Pakistan was allowed to become a front line state for fighting the war in Afghanistan. Madrassas which traditionally are the centres of learning became breeding grounds for training and churning out fighters. Entire families and particularly children were raised, supported and indoctrinated to believe that their only aim in life was to die for a cause.

After Afghanistan war was won, West, of course, abandoned Pakistan leaving these same people rudderless and with no stake in life. Previous governments in Pakistan also did nothing to rehabilitate these people and in fact either used them and allowed them to be used by vested interests for various violent activities. September 11 incident and Bush's mindset of bombing out the terrorists and invading Afghanistan and Iraq was a final disaster.

Pakistan, which had experienced violence, but was not the target of bombings itself, again followed US policies. We of course should have known our own Muslim culture and should have judged that following US's policies of using just force could turn the wrath of those affected onto ourselves. Moreover it has to be realised that terrorism is a political pathology generated by conditions of communal violence, civil decay, social despair, polarisation and alienation. It is deeply rooted in modern conditions and not vulnerable to a quick knock out blow.

While traditional methods of combating terrorism are squeezing the blood flow of the organisation and attacking their financial support systems, apprehending the organisation members through intelligence gathering activities, impeding their movement through checks and procedures at critical gateways and improving the protection of highly valued targets. This by itself has failed.

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The overall and non-traditional strategy needs to be adapted to reflect Pakistan's peculiar situation. The fact is that Pakistan's population is predominantly under 25 years old, most of whom are uneducated and majority of the uneducated also unemployed. People are living below the poverty line. Many of them are not even acknowledged in the country's economic system and have no rights and privileges or access to justice. Religious teachings are left to an illiterate class, who has their own views on most subjects. Joining a particular group and having a particular cause gives an identity to these people who otherwise have no stake in life. The task of the government is to give back people their dignity.

The solution for the government lies in implementing the policies of the two 'Es' and the two 'Ds'. The government's first priority has to be education which teaches tolerance and understanding of the views of others. The egalitarian principles of Islam have to be wedded to the so-called secular sciences. If the task of the scholar is more precious than the blood of a martyr as the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, the effort to produce scholars must begin now and without compromising the need for education with any other priority.

Employment is the surest way of dignifying a person. Simultaneously therefore the new government needs to concentrate on pumping money into infrastructure and projects in backward areas for the creation of employment opportunities for these people. Gainful employment in the economy will give people a stake in life and is the surest way to eradicating the sense of deprivation which breeds terrorism.

Dialogue and negotiation bring the conflicting sides on equal footing to the table of reconciliation by giving each side its due respect. As the so-called Talibanisation in Pakistan is homegrown dialogue on reconciliation is imminent and possible. I endorse the views of the two winning parties that the time has come to review the anti-terrorism policy and to extend the invitation for a dialogue.

This parliament and the government to be formed out of this mandate of the people indicated in the recent election has to work out a solution through a coalition government of dialogue, reconciliation and tolerance. People of Pakistan did not give power to any one political party so that they learn to live with each other. We are waiting for a collective wisdom which alone can be the panacea against the menace of terrorism. The writer is an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan

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The urban jungle; After a haunting novel set in colonial Ceylon, Michelle de Kretser brings the troubled past of trendy Melbourne to life. BOYD TONKIN talks to a writer who summons up the ghosts that stalk the modern world

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Body

The best stories lodge in the memory and return to haunt their readers. Michelle de Kretser, whose fiction often dwells on the ghostly afterglow of narrative, spooked my summer holiday last year. On a showery, late-monsoon August day in Sri Lanka, I took a cab through swamp to jungle to the lovingly-preserved home of Bevis Bawa. A soldier, lawyer and aesthete, Bawa carved a beautifully unlikely landscape garden out of the tropical profusion. I found myself viewing every classical statue, flowering tree and oddly displaced lawn through the lens of *The Hamilton Case*. In that novel, de Kretser captured a doomed clan's rage for order as colonial Ceylon was engulfed and smothered by a history that not even the most manic cultivation could resist.

The author has never been to Bawa's "Brief Garden". In fact, she has rarely re-visited the island where, the daughter of a judge, she lived for 14 years until the family migrated to Australia. "I deliberately didn't go back when I was writing *The Hamilton Case*," she says over coffee atop a high-rise West End hotel, the hubbub of London reduced to a silent diagram. "Memory is good filter. You remember what is striking. Fiction is about selection - it's about leaving out - and memory does that for you." Besides, she grew up in Ceylon: "It's a lost country, a ghost country. The name changed the week I left... Modern Sri Lanka has been shaped, sadly, by the war [between the state and ***Tamil Tigers***]. I, luckily, have not been part of that."

All the same, a Colombo paper recently greeted her new novel's triumph in a Sydney fiction award as: "Sri Lankan author wins prize". "I was extremely touched," says a writer who avoids the stale protocols of "migrant identity" fiction and, "most of the time", feels "terribly Australian. It's a successful multi-cultural model in that sense. When multi-culturalism is working well, you're not aware of it."

After a debut, *The Rose Grower*, set in revolutionary France, *The Hamilton Case* proved a breakthrough book. Here was a dazzlingly accomplished author who commanded all the strokes. Her repertoire stretched from a hallucinatory sense of place to a mastery of suspense, sophisticated verbal artistry and a formidable skill in navigating those twisty paths where history and psychology entwine. De Kretser, for years an editor at the Lonely Planet travel group, came to fiction relatively late. Indeed, the sole quality that I missed in *The Hamilton Case* was a feeling of intimate investment in an island story that, after all, was hers as well. Yet it did lurk there, somehow buried in the rampant foliage.

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"Going to Australia was an awfully big adventure," she recalls. "There was no sense that this was anything but gain. And I always had that sense that I never said goodbye properly. I think that, completely unconsciously, that novel was my way of going back and taking my leave in a more considered and, I hope, honouring way than I was capable of when I was young."

Leave-taking, loss and the fragile gifts of memory propel de Kretser's third novel. In *The Lost Dog* (Chatto & Windus, £15.99), the Anglo-Indian academic Tom Loxley - who himself left Asia for Australia at 14, and now writes on Henry James - spends eight days searching for a beloved mongrel who goes missing in the bush. Day by anxious day, we learn of his insecure childhood in the "aromatic streets" of south India; of his delphic, seductive artist friend Nelly Zhang, the queen of a bohemian tribe; and of the unburied secrets that return to "ghost" his life and hers. Behind their troubled affections lies the "ghost story" of Australia itself, "this country with a haunted past, which we don't want to think about too much. Yet it comes and visits us when we're least expecting it."

The mutt comes back, as did de Kretser's own - late - dog, Gus, after a longer absence. "We never knew how he got free. So there was real-life story with a mystery at the heart of it." As for the family riddles that crowd around the disappearance of Nelly's banker husband, they remain as tantalising as the semi-occult tales of Henry James - which do the literary haunting here. De Kretser praises the "fantastic undecidability" of James's open-ended plots. "James is so endlessly quotable," she says, "but one of his great mots is 'Never say you know the last word about any human heart'." William Boyd, she notes, liked the idea so much he took it for a title. "People always exceed your understanding of them. People are endlessly surprising". And so, "No one is beyond redemption."

The Lost Dog springs its own surprises. Many British readers still expect a literary Australia of broad vistas and open hearts. Yet de Kretser depicts an arch and arty Melbourne, so steeped in coterie in-jokes and post-modern ironies that it could make Shoreditch feel like Saskatchewan.

As she evokes Nelly's deadpan art of urban collage and kitschy bricolage, de Kretser becomes a psychogeographer to match London's Iain Sinclair or Will Self. "More than 80 per cent of the country's population lives in big cities," she says, "not different from London or Berlin or Paris or LA. They are Australian, but they are also global." Even out in the soggy wilderness, when Tom looks for his little beast in the jungle, man-made forests have replaced first growths: "The wilderness is not as wild as it seems."

The novel unleashes plenty of hyper-conscious irony, but finally muzzles it. Tom, a dark and timid migrant boy, has learned to flourish as an ironist: "the trope of mastery; of seeing through, of knowing better". Nelly, with her parodic, thrift-shop Chinoiserie, at first seems to trump even him in a taste for masquerade. But need, and curiosity, will get the better of both.

Tom's love for his wayward hound trumps every cool boho pose. "Dogs don't do irony," de Kretser points out. Above all, his relationship with his ailing mother, Iris, deepens his "affiliation" to others. Divorced and childless, Tom must learn to act as "parent to his own mother". He has to clear up the mess of a mutinous body and a wandering mind. "Sex is something written about so endlessly," says de Kretser. "Now, the bedroom door is so wide open. But bodily functions are still slightly taboo in literature. I wanted to write about it in a way that was neither prudish nor sensational." Although "In the West, there's a tendency to privilege mind over body," ageing means "that is reversed... In the end, the body will triumph over all of us."

De Kretser had her own warning foretaste of debility when a slipped disc plunged her into pain and immobility. "If you've got any kind of debilitating illness, it is like a flash-forward into dependent old age. And what you fear... is that you will be treated as an object. I was very lucky: I had a very loving partner who looked after me. But I couldn't walk." Later, she even came to think of her affliction as "one of those weird gifts, in very unwelcome packaging. It did give me... a glimpse of what it is like when the circumference of your life shrinks to the constraints of the body. I've always been someone who considered myself an intellectual - the mind, the mind, the mind. But it was a reminder that you are a body."

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Some critics have saluted de Kretser's almost flagrant virtuosity while worrying that she might come over as - well, too clever by half. That strikes me as unjust. The *Lost Dog* showcases not only a writer as subtly perceptive about feelings as ideas, but one who, via Tom, traces a thinker's quest to overcome cerebral detachment.

What is true is that the novel loads much of its emotional charge not into talk but into things - from Iris's tatty ornaments to Nelly's artfully-mounted detritus of condom wrappers or mutilated dolls. Both women seek to invest "the valueless things of the world with joy". De Kretser connects this urge to curate ephemera with the migrant's separation from a cherished past.

When her mother died, in 2006, "I was just struck by how little she owned that was hers, apart from her jewellery. So much had to be just left behind. This is the story of so many people's lives in a century of migration." In contrast, "If you were to come to my house you would notice that I don't do minimalism. It is extremely cluttered." She admits that "I do haunt flea-markets". In the novel, bric-a-brac and kitsch stand for oceans of unspoken passion or yearning. As Henry James himself advised, de Kretser's fiction shows rather than tells. And the story that it shows, just as she hopes, "goes on haunting you, after you have finished reading it". The artful beasts in this jungle never go to sleep.

Biography

MICHELLE DE KRETSER

Born in Colombo, Michelle de Kretser (49) moved with her family from Sri Lanka to Australia in 1972. She graduated from Melbourne University and then studied in France. In Australia, she worked as an editor for the Lonely Planet guides, and set up its travel-literature list. During a sabbatical she wrote her first novel, *The Rose Grower* (1999). Her second, *The Hamilton Case* - set in colonial Ceylon - won several awards including the Encore Award and a Commonwealth Writers Prize. *The Lost Dog* is now published by Chatto & Windus, and has just won the Christina Stead fiction prize. De Kretser lives with her partner, poet and translator Chris Andrews, in Melbourne.

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Norwegian Government: Part 2 - Foreign Policy Address to the Storting, 10 February 2009

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Unless it succeeds in unifying the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority will not have the strength and legitimacy needed to once again enter into a political process, which is the only way to move towards peace, reconstruction and Palestinian statehood.

Palestinian reconciliation has therefore once again been put on the region's agenda by the Palestinians themselves. What is being discussed is the establishment of an interim government with the broadest possible base, which could pave the way for new Palestinian elections. Egypt is leading these efforts, and they are supported by Norway.

Such a government would need a platform that meets all the key criteria for engaging in international relations and makes it possible to resume final status negotiations with Israel.

The reconciliation process, which has now been intensified, is fragile. Relations between the Palestinian factions are deeply distrustful. Norway is in contact with all parties, including Hamas. Our message is clear: we condemn the use of terror and violence. Representing the Palestinian cause will require more than the backing of the majority of the Palestinians.

International legitimacy can only be achieved if the agreements previously entered into by the Palestinians are respected.

This brings us to the core of the matter, Mr President, namely the occupation, the reciprocal security threats and deep tensions in the region, which are also running through the Arab world to an increasing degree.

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We must demand and expect the resumption of negotiations on a two-state solution. We also need to take an overall view of the conflicts in the region and the tools to resolve them.

Extremism and terrorism must be fought and prevented, but not with methods that undermine and weaken the moderate forces in the region.

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis can only be brought to an end through a broad approach that is able to secure the committed participation of the involved parties by recognising their legitimate concerns.

It was a broad framework of this kind that enabled the Israelis and Palestinians to conclude their first, historic peace agreement. The Oslo Accords were an offshoot of the Madrid Conference. We called for the resumption of such a regional process following the war in Lebanon in 2006. We believe that it is still necessary to promote such a regional approach.

For there is much at stake. It is extremely worrying that time seems to be running out for a two-state solution. Israel's closure regime and the continuous building of settlements on occupied territory are undermining the Palestinians' belief in the possibility of reaching a negotiated solution.

The fact that the Palestinian national movement has split into two irreconcilable camps has reduced the prospects of negotiating and implementing an agreement with Israel.

Continued terrorism targeted at civilian Israelis and brutal acts of war that primarily affect the Palestinian civilian population have opened wounds that will take generations to heal.

The tragedy is that this is taking place at a time when opinion polls on both sides are repeatedly showing broad public support for negotiations and for the main elements of a peaceful solution.

But this is precisely why there is hope that a way to peace can be found.

Mr President,

The conflict in Sri Lanka has also taken a dramatic turn for the worse, with the loss of thousands of civilian lives in the past few weeks. Every effort must now be made to stop the bloodshed, which has particularly affected the Tamil people.

Tamils in Norway have helped to make us aware of the tragedy.

Ever since Norway was requested by the Government of Sri Lanka and the

LTTE (the Tamil Tigers) to facilitate a peaceful solution to the conflict, we have pointed out to the parties that negotiations are the way forward. The ceasefire in 2002 was promising, and with the support of the other Nordic countries we established a unique monitoring mechanism, the SLMM. This saved many lives, and gave rise to the hope that a broader political solution could be negotiated.

The parties did not seize this opportunity. The ceasefire was not respected in the long run, and the parties failed to show sufficient will to proceed. The ceasefire failed, and the SLMM was asked to withdraw one year ago.

Since then, words have given way to weapons. The LTTE is now in a desperate military situation, and about 250 000 civilians are crowded together in a small area where they are extremely vulnerable. We have condemned the fighting, which is causing terrible civilian suffering. Norway, together with the US, Japan and the EU, has urged the parties to enter into negotiations to end the hostilities, and the international community expects a ceasefire to be among the goals of such negotiations.

In the time ahead, it will be crucial to secure the rights of the Tamil civilian population. Norway will work to ensure that the international community continues to play a leading role in this respect, and Norway will remain at the disposal of the parties.

Mr President,

Norway is seeking membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2009-2012. Efforts to promote universal human rights are given high priority in Norway's foreign policy.

The establishment of the Human Rights Council has not eliminated the sharp political differences that characterise international human rights efforts - and that existed before the Council was established. The fact is that the composition of the current Council reflects today's world to a greater degree than the composition of the former Commission did. Those who share our views may become a minority.

This cannot be used as an argument against becoming engaged.

The Human Rights Council is, and will continue to be, the UN's most important intergovernmental human rights body. Our voice is needed. Our approach should be to engage in the institutions that exist.

In these efforts, as in many other areas today, we will seek alliances across regions - in addition to our traditional partners - in cooperation based on openness and mutual respect.

If we become a member of the Council, we will continue the bridge-building role we have had as an observer.

But at the same time, we will clearly state our fundamental views. We will continue to work actively against capital punishment and torture, and for the rights of vulnerable groups.

Other Norwegian priority areas are protection of human rights defenders, internally displaced persons, corporate responsibility for human rights, and the rights of women and children.

We know that freedom of expression is under growing pressure in many countries. In recent weeks we have seen this in Gaza and Sri Lanka. And we see the same thing in less well known conflict areas around the world as well: journalists risking their lives to document human rights abuses. We will continue to give priority to protecting freedom of expression and the independence of the media.

This also applies to the run-up to the Durban Review Conference, also known as Durban II, where the theme will be anti-racism. We will work to counter attempts to use the conference to formulate proposals that limit freedom of expression.

When the UN Human Rights Council was established, the US chose not to be involved. It is encouraging that the new administration has signalled that the US will take an active part in the Council's work by applying for membership.

Mr President,

It is important that we take an overall view of our foreign and development policy tools. The links between security, peace, health, human rights, poverty eradication and access to vital natural resources are plain to see in the challenges that are facing the world community in Africa.

Africa is particularly hard hit by extreme poverty, war and conflict. On the other hand, we must avoid making sweeping generalisations about the miserable state of the continent.

Several countries are showing signs of considerable progress towards democracy and development. It is important that our policy for Africa promotes such progress, particularly by helping to improve African countries' own capacity to deal with crises and address and resolve conflicts.

Zimbabwe has been heading towards total collapse for a long time. Prime Minister Stoltenberg has, on behalf of Norway, repeatedly called on the

Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to play a more active role in efforts to find a solution to the situation. We welcome the agreement to establish a unity government in Zimbabwe. But profound changes are needed in many of the country's policies before a normalisation of its relations with the international donor community can be expected.

Norway will continue its efforts in Zimbabwe in close cooperation with the other Nordic countries. We are providing substantial support for humanitarian assistance, and in 2008 our contribution amounted to NOK 67.7 million. Norway is also supporting civil society actors in the country and in the region.

In Sudan it is encouraging to see that the peace agreement between the north and the south is being respected, although it is fragile. Norway is maintaining its active engagement in the country, focusing mainly on assisting the parties in implementing the various parts of the peace agreement.

Nevertheless, the situation in Sudan is serious, and if the peace agreement were to collapse, this would have a destabilising effect on the whole region.

The war and suffering in Darfur continue. Norway is engaged in attempts to find a political solution in various forums. Our engagement is based on a national perspective, with a clear connection between political goals and development assistance.

We are focusing on development in the south and reconstruction in war-torn areas in the north. The Oil for Development initiative is also important, because Sudan as a whole is now entirely dependent on having an efficient petroleum sector.

In its policy platform, the Government stressed the importance of strengthening Norway's presence in UN-led operations in Africa. We have a solid presence in terms of police forces in Sudan and Liberia. Since the Norwegian-Swedish military contribution to the UN force in Darfur was denied access by the President of Sudan, the Government has considered other possible military contributions.

The decision to provide a field hospital in Chad has been well received, and the hospital is now being prepared for deployment. It will be of great value to the UN operation, which will take over from the present EU operation in Chad on 15 March.

Norway is also considering how it can contribute to the UN's efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the war is affecting

thousands of civilians. We have increased our humanitarian assistance to the country. Norway is giving priority to measures to prevent sexual violence and protect women, in line with the aims set out in UN Security Council resolution 1325. We are also providing financial support to the UN Special Representative for the DRC.

The Government is in ongoing contact with the UN regarding possible future contributions to the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC (MONUC). Following her visit to the region last month, the Minister of Defence has signalled that in the short term Norway could provide a number of staff officers to MONUC. We are now in dialogue with the UN on this matter. We are also preparing to provide support for defence-related security sector reform in the DRC, and the Government will examine the possibility of sending a Norwegian force contribution to the DRC this autumn.

Somalia is an example of what can happen if the state institutions of a country collapse completely. The pirates at sea are a symptom of the collapse on land: lawlessness, war, chaos and severe humanitarian suffering. More than 22 000 persons of Somali origin have sought refuge in Norway, which brings home to us these realities.

Norway has actively supported the political efforts to put an end to the piracy and to create peace and stability in Somalia.

This applies to the efforts that are being undertaken in the Security Council and other international forums and to the regional efforts in the Horn of Africa. We are cooperating closely with the UN Special Representative for Somalia in what is known as the Djibouti process. It is encouraging that Somalia has recently elected a new president who intends to establish a government of national unity, and who has promised to implement measures to curb piracy.

About five per cent of the ships that pass through the Suez Canal are Norwegian-owned. These ships sail under both Norwegian and foreign flags. We are participating in the international Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, and we will consider contributing to the maritime efforts to combat piracy.

Mr President,

In line with previous foreign policy addresses, I would like to devote the rest of my time to issues that primarily relate to the High North - the Government's most important strategic priority. And I will therefore discuss some foreign policy trends of importance for us in this area.

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Our broader High North efforts are set out in the 22-point plan in the High North Strategy - which we launched on 1 December 2006. Implementation of the strategy is on schedule, and the Government will present a summary of this work next month.

The really new dimension that has emerged in the foreign policy picture in the north over the last two to three years relates to developments in the Arctic or - you could say - the renewed international interest in this area.

As climate change is becoming a reality, the whole world is becoming aware of developments around the poles - both north and south. In the north, the melting ice in the Arctic Ocean is making resources and new transport routes more accessible in a very fragile environment.

Climate change will have serious and irreversible consequences for the environment, including the ecosystems in the Arctic Ocean. This can only be addressed through extensive international cooperation. The Government will seek to put knowledge of the rapid changes to the Arctic Ocean on the agenda in the run-up to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

As an Arctic coastal state, Norway has attached great importance to creating the broadest possible consensus on the legal basis for developments in the Arctic. Apart from the delimitation negotiations with Russia, where progress is being made, Norway has reached agreement with its coastal neighbours on all the outstanding boundary issues over the last few years.

We have also reached agreement on quotas and management schemes for all joint fish stocks. Clarification of such issues creates stability.

It was following an initiative by Norway that the five Arctic coastal states - the US, Canada, Russia, Denmark and Norway - agreed to discuss the legal basis for the Arctic Ocean. Legal experts from these countries met in Oslo in October 2007 for discussions that were followed up by a ministerial meeting in Ilulissat in Greenland in May 2008.

Put briefly, the conclusion from this historic meeting is this: the Law of the Sea applies in the Arctic.

We have an extensive legal basis that provides a platform both for drawing up new rules and regulations and for further developing existing ones as necessary.

The agreement reached in Greenland has significance in terms of international law. This is underlined by the fact that the European

Commission has based its proposal for the EU's Arctic policy on a similar approach. Moreover, the US Arctic strategy, which was launched just before President Bush left office, reflects the recognition of this fact. The main principles of the strategy were reiterated in a detailed response from Secretary of State Clinton during the confirmation hearings in the Senate last month.

This broad clarification gives the green light for continuing to work on the necessary updating and further development of rules and regulations for activities in the Arctic. A lack of clarification would have meant major uncertainty and would have reinforced the impression that a kind of uncontrolled "scramble for the Arctic" was taking place.

It will be important to ensure that the International Maritime Organization completes the revision of the Guidelines for Ships Operating in Arctic Ice-Covered Waters and that they are made binding. Close cooperation on search and rescue will be of great importance.

Norway, Finland, Russia and Sweden have recently signed a new search and rescue cooperation agreement for the Barents region, under which these countries will provide cross-border assistance to one another in the event of an emergency. This agreement is in addition to the agreements that already exist between the Nordic countries and Russia.

We will also initiate consultations in accordance with the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, which is a supplementary agreement to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. If climate change makes it possible to harvest the living resources in the Arctic in the future, we will seek to ensure that a sound management regime is established. Norway will also seek to ensure that an integrated management plan for these sea areas is implemented in, and by, all the Arctic coastal states.

We will seek to ensure that the five coastal states take a particular responsibility for protecting the environment in the Arctic Ocean. The Climate Change, Biodiversity, Stockholm, Espoo, Basel and OSPAR Conventions, together with various other environmental agreements, are important tools for limiting the overall pressures and impacts on the environment and ensuring the soundest possible management of the area. It is important that Russia in particular and other countries concerned ratify these conventions and ensure effective implementation as rapidly as possible.

Mr President,

Due to developments in the Arctic, the Arctic Council could have a more important role to play. The Council members are the Arctic coastal states, together with Sweden, Finland and Iceland. In addition, a large

number of other countries are interested in becoming observers. So is the European Commission. Norway takes a positive view of this interest. It consolidates the Arctic Council's position as the key political forum for discussing Arctic issues.

Norway will hold the chairmanship until the Ministerial Meeting in Tromsø/ on 28-29 April, which will be an important Arctic event. Denmark will take over from Norway, and will be followed by Sweden, making a total of six years of Scandinavian chairmanship. In connection with the Tromsø/ meeting, we will hold an international symposium on melting ice together with Nobel Laureate Al Gore. This will look at the Arctic as well as other areas of the world where ice sheets and glaciers are melting.

Our aim is that the Arctic Council should give a clear message to the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen about the consequences of the melting ice sheets.

The broader picture, Mr President, has been drawn before, but the details are becoming increasingly clear: a climatically and politically frozen region is starting to melt in more ways than one.

These are areas close to home. Here is where our main national interests lie. Here is where we must focus our attention, build knowledge, and seek partnerships and close cooperation with our neighbours, allies and other actors in the region.

We intend our own research institutions both on the mainland and in Svalbard to develop cutting edge knowledge about the High North and the Arctic. This will require long-term focus on research and development of the type seen in the project under the European Roadmap for Research Infrastructures that is under way in Svalbard. This project, which is being led by Norway, will strengthen the archipelago's role as a platform for Norwegian and international research.

This knowledge will give us a stronger voice and greater influence in discussions in international arenas on the full range of High North issues.

Norway is several steps ahead having already drawn up an integrated, strategic policy for the High North, and we will continue to be at the forefront.

The High North, maritime policy, the environment and the Arctic can become important issues in our cooperation with the EU in the future. The European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission have started work on the EU Arctic policy. We are following

this process closely. The overall picture in the Commission's proposals corresponds to a great extent with our own priorities.

We intend to cooperate with the EU in the north. And we welcome the broadening engagement of the US. It is positive that Secretary of State Clinton and influential voices in the US Senate have indicated a renewed focus on US ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Mr President,

Relations between Norway and Russia form one of the main axes of our High North policy.

We must acknowledge these facts: Russia is a leading Arctic nation, with a long history, the longest coastline along the Arctic Ocean, major interests to safeguard, substantial resources, and a high level of expertise in the region.

Generally, we find that Russia behaves in a constructive way in our neighbouring areas and in the Arctic. Our bilateral relations are continuing to improve. We see this at our meetings and talks at different levels and within different sectors of society. We are planning more important bilateral meetings this spring, including a visit to Moscow by the Prime Minister.

Norway's relations with Russia will always be coloured by the fact that we deal with Russia both as a neighbour and in our capacity as a member of NATO and a close partner of the EU.

We bring to NATO our experience of successful cross-border cooperation, positive results from our fisheries cooperation in the Barents Sea, the potential for cooperation on developing energy resources, and an innovative and pragmatic regional cooperation within the framework of the Barents cooperation, and increasingly in the Arctic Council. Other allies have other experiences from their histories. NATO's strength is its ability to draw up a joint policy based on a common denominator.

NATO has been a cornerstone of Norway's security policy since 1949, and this year it will mark its 60th anniversary. NATO has demonstrated a unique ability to adapt to new challenges. It will be important to ensure that the modernisation of the Alliance, both political and military, is continued at the anniversary summit in Strasbourg/Kehl on 3-4 April.

At this meeting, agreement will probably be reached on starting work on a new Strategic Concept for NATO. Security policy developments have created a need for a comprehensive review of the Alliance's tasks and

strategic vision in order to further strengthen NATO's relevance in the future world order. The Government will keep the Storting informed on the progress of this work.

Mr President,

In recent months we have seen indications of a more ambitious and self-assertive Russian foreign policy that may make cooperation more difficult, including for Norway. We are noting a more assertive approach to sovereignty and a return to old patterns of military exercises.

Russia's increased military activity along the Norwegian coast probably reflects a desire to show its strength. There is little reason to interpret this message as being primarily directed towards Norway. At the same time, we cannot disregard the fact that the High North is still of military-strategic importance as a base for Russia's nuclear fleet and as an exercise area.

The armed conflict with Georgia six months ago created uncertainty about Russia's future course and damaged its reputation. This winter's gas conflict with Ukraine has increased this uncertainty.

Firmness, contact and dialogue are the only viable way of meeting these and other challenges in our relations with Russia. Isolating this huge and historically proud nation is not in anyone's interest. The further development of our relations with Russia should be based not on old tensions but on interdependence within a broad range of areas.

Our proximity to Russia in the north underpins the importance for Norway of a strong alliance with our Euro-Atlantic partners.

It highlights the importance of our initiative in NATO, which has won broad support among our Allies, to increase focus on the Alliance's own territory and neighbouring areas - not to indicate that "NATO is returning home", but to show that NATO never left its core area.

On two occasions, in November 2007 and in January this year, I have given the North Atlantic Council in Brussels a general presentation of developments in the High North. The region was also the subject of a NATO seminar in Reykjavik two weeks ago, which was well attended, including by parliamentarians.

In other words, there is considerable interest in Arctic and High North issues, and this is arising in a new era, Mr President: the main focus is not on the military dimension, but on the importance of a stable regulatory framework and extensive cooperation, including with Russia.

We are very pleased that the EU has resumed negotiations on a

partnership agreement with Russia. And that NATO agreed in December on a measured and phased approach to reopening political contact within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council. This was a wise decision, and one that Norway supported. Our interests are served by NATO having open channels for political contact and dialogue with Russia - even when relations are strained and difficult.

Norway welcomes the signals of more open lines of communication between Russia and the US since the new president took office.

There are indications that disarmament issues will receive renewed attention. This is encouraging and necessary. We see a more pragmatic approach to the US plans for a European missile defence system, which are no longer being pushed rapidly forward. Russia, Europe and the US have a large agenda that they should approach together without reverting to reflexes from the Cold War.

Russia is vulnerable to the economic crisis. The political and economic consequences are as yet unclear. The country's own prognoses indicate that personal income will decline by 10-15% this year. These are significant figures, not least for all the Russians who have been lifted out of poverty in recent years.

In response to the crisis, Russia has announced increases in tariffs on certain goods to protect its industry. These signs of protectionism give cause for concern and could affect Norwegian exporters. We would like Russia to be part of the WTO and we are working towards a free trade agreement between the EFTA countries and Russia.

Political stability in Russia could be affected by the economic crisis. At present there is narrower scope for political protest and debate in the Russian media.

We have been appalled by the killings of journalists and lawyers. The situation of human rights and democracy in Russia, not least with regard to freedom of expression, continues to cause concern.

Norway attaches importance to continuing to assist NGOs, journalists and other actors in Russia, through political dialogue, project cooperation, and support for the efforts of the Council of Europe, among others.

Strengthening cultural cooperation with Russia is another key part of the Government's focus on the High North, and last month the ministers of culture of both countries signed a three-year action plan for intensifying common efforts to promote cross-border cultural cooperation in the north.

Mr President,

Yesterday, Thorvald Stoltenberg presented his report on the way forward for Nordic cooperation on foreign and security policy.

It contains 13 proposals for closer cooperation. The Nordic governments welcome debate on these proposals, both at political level and among all those who are interested in this area. The foreign ministers will consider the further follow-up of his recommendations when we meet again in May.

I would like to say this: the main characteristic of these proposals is that they are modern. They respect the fact that the various Nordic countries have different ties with NATO and/or the EU, and thus different obligations and security guarantees. These remain unchanged.

But apart from this, a new window of opportunity is opening up for Nordic cooperation as a result of developments in adjacent areas. The Cold War is over, climate change is altering our region and opening up new sea areas, and greater attention is being directed to resources, transport routes, safety at sea, and new threats in connection with migration, crime and environmental degradation. New opportunities are arising as small countries share burdens and seek joint solutions through cooperation, for example in the field of defence, where new technology will predominate and be very costly.

The Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian chiefs of defence set the tone with their proposal for how these three countries could cooperate on defence issues. Norway welcomes the Stoltenberg report. Its thrust fits well with our identification of the High North as our most important strategic priority.

Mr President,

Finally, I would like to add that in recent years we have had an increased focus on Norwegian interests in the formulation of our foreign policy. A sharper focus on interests makes it easier to distinguish what is important from what is not, and set priorities.

Norway's central interests remain unchanged. They are related to our role as a coastal state, our rich resources and our position in the High North, and they are closely tied to our ability and responsibility to show international solidarity.

Norwegian interests are closely linked to developments in the north and our neighbouring areas, and they are safeguarded through transatlantic solidarity and our close integration with the EU and our Nordic and European partners.

Norwegian Government: Part 2 - Foreign Policy Address to the Storting, 10 February 2009

The EEA Agreement and our broad cooperation with the EU are important ties for Norway as we meet the forces of globalisation. One of Norway's foreign policy priorities is to safeguard these ties at a time when the EU is both changing and being enlarged. I will say more about this in my next address on Europe to the Storting towards the end of this session.

A striking feature of globalisation is the expansion of Norway's interests. We must look ahead to new points of contact that will influence Norwegian interests and entail new challenges, new responsibilities and new opportunities.

The objective of the Refleks project has been to foster debate all over the country about globalisation and Norwegian interests. There has been - and is - genuine engagement, and the debate is lively, not least among young people.

During the course of this week, the Government will present a white paper on development policy. Next month a white paper on foreign policy priorities, the first since 1989, will be presented. This marks the culmination of the Refleks project.

These white papers will give the Storting a good opportunity to undertake a broad review of Norway's interests and engagement in our work on foreign and development policy.

The Government looks forward to the ensuing debate on new ways forward for our foreign and security policy with a basis in the best Norwegian traditions.

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Walk on 'trapeze'

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Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, April 27 -- Keep to the path, Walk only on the path, Follow the path! These were the words repeated by the troops and their superiors while walking on the battlefield of the Wanni front.

Be it the open terrains of the rice bowl towards Mannar or the jungles in the Madhu area or the thick tropical Andankulam forest reserve in the Weli Oya front, the order was the same. They were on the track so we kept on to the track.

No one deceived or no one doubted his (or her) teammate walking in front. These were the steadfast rules in the battlefield.

In the Mullaithivu jungles:

We were in the Mullaithivu jungles walking upright and safely thanks to our brave soldiers steadily holding the line stretching up in that area which was captured just two days before our visit.

We were walking swiftly, my colleague and I wearing heavy flak jackets with plates and the bulky tough helmet to protect ourselves from being hit with sharpened in a mortar attack. Alert soldiers with weapons were briskly walking around us securing the two non-military souls.

This was my first ever walk in the Mullaithivu jungles. This area was under the 57 division of the Wanni battle lead by Major General Jagath Dias, General Officer Commanding the division.

Just two days later when my colleagues and I were returning home after a very long visit in the Wanni battlefields troops of the 57 division (to be precise the 573 brigade) entered the sacred Madhu shrine few kilometers away from the place we were visiting, without firing a single shot.

"No infiltration attempts were reported ever since we secured these areas.

Our soldiers are keeping the lines tightly secured," said Lieutenant Colonel Liyanage, Officer Commanding the battalion.

We walked on the gravel road cleared by soldiers of Lt. Col. Liyanage's battalion under the scorching sun. Troops deployed in the defence line were firing mortars towards a location from where the Tigers were firing mortars.

Walk on 'trapeze'

At a point we were all ordered to divert our path away from the gravel road and walk in the trenches by the side of the road and cross the road through a culvert just three feet in height.

This was to be out of sight from the terrorists who have located themselves just a few hundred meters away from our location. In the thicket, talking in whispers the soldiers showed us terrorist movements just ahead of us.

Sergeant Premarathne, who commands the company deployed in the line said, that they have moved forward a lot. "With the guidance from our Commanding officer we are surely moving ahead. Yet we have great difficulties. We were 2km behind ten days before" he added.

The rain, huge puddles made our forward march difficult. On top of it the area was heavily trapped by the LTTE, Premarathne said.

"We see that our enemy has lost its morale. Almost all the time they have escaped from their positions and hardly came to a face to face attack," soldiers of Sergeant Premarathne's company said.

Terrorists could not hold their positions against our strong hits on them and what they could only do is to lay booby traps and AP mines to slow down us but that would not happen, they said. We returned on the same path as the mortar firing was continuing yet they said. Comparatively it was a 'quiet' day.

In the rough terrain:

During our visit to the 58 division we were able to visit certain parts of the so called LIMA III base held by terrorists. The 58 division led by Brigadier Shavindra Silva has advanced by leaps and bounds in the terrains of Mannar, the rice bowl.

Captain Kumarasinghe the Officer Commanding the battalion holding this line showed us the 'terra' movements across the abandoned paddy fields. The location of 58 division is totally covered by paddy fields and dotted with a large number of tanks, the Giant's tank being the most prominent. In this open any movement is visible for hundreds and hundreds of miles.

We were able to see terrorists moving a far and obviously they were able to see us.

"While we were on our mission to capture this base we heard many female voices. They were shouting at each other sometimes in Tamil and sometimes in Sinhala," soldiers of Capt. Kumarasinghe's battalion told us.

"Miss wathura tikakwath genalla dennada? (Miss can I fetch you some water?) one of the soldiers asked me, may be feeling a bit guilty of being unable to serve their visitors. Forward Defence Lines are not luxurious. Yet these soldiers have made their line as comfortable as possible.

Again wearing the protective jackets and helmets my colleagues, and I along with officer from the Division and several soldiers with weapons protecting us, we walked under the blazing sun. We had to walk more swiftly because of the nature of the terrain.

By the time of our visit the area was much dried up and soldiers were able to move more comfortably. A few days back the area was badly affected by the unexpected rainy weather. Troops had to stay in bunkers flooded with rain water.

The 58 division blocks the supply route of the Tigers that lies along the western coastal belt. Hence, terrorists' resistance is quite high in the area yet the soldiers are highly confident in holding and securing their positions while marching forward. Though both sides were quite visible to each other yet no attacks broke out.

In the Andankulam forest reserve:

The 59 division lead by Brigadier Nandana Udawatta has secured an admirable position in the south of Andankulam forest reserve blocking the supply routes of the Tigers.

Walk on 'trapeze'

This jungle with undergrowth and a thick canopy shows signs of damages by the unexpected rains. Yet the troops have moved forward without any draw back launching surprise attacks on the enemy.

The routes were suitable only for war tanks; hence our moves were quite 'smooth', comparatively. These jungles which were rescued by the troops quite recently are infested with killer traps and anti personnel mines buried by the terrorists.

Yet the routes used to evacuate the injured and deliver the supplies are totally secured by the troops. Colonel Manisha de Silva, Commander of the 592 brigade confirmed that there were no infiltration attempts by the Tigers towards the captured areas.

There were thundering sounds of mortars and artillery fires some distance away but it was evident that a battalion in a close range was engaged in an attack.

Our next stop of the 59 division was an artillery position close to the Tactical Headquarters of the respective battalion. Major Hettiarachchi, the Officer Commanding, and his men were standing alert to support their colleagues marching forward a few kilometers away.

"There was an attack in the morning and we retaliated. Now we are standing by for a second attack. Perhaps by night fall, we can expect," Major Hettiarachchi said, giving us a hint of sleepless nights they are used to.

That evening we returned to Colombo where all of us were able to sleep comfortably and securely while those brave young men of the Sri Lanka Army, the true sons of our motherland were getting ready for another sleepless night.

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Sri Lanka: A doomed region

Right Vision News

January 1, 2009 Thursday

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Dateline: Pakistan

Body

Pakistan, Jan. 01 -- WHEN I longingly look at Europe having one visa, one currency (euro), stronger than dollar, and one parliament to reflect on the decisions taken by individual parliaments, my eyes woefully go to South Asia which is nowhere near normalization, much less cohesion. It is wracked by internal conflicts and outer dangers. The two main countries, India and Pakistan, are not even on speaking terms.

The limited trade between Srinagar and Muzzafrabad was suspended a few days ago. Not that the European countries, 27 of them, did not quarrel. They had, in fact, wars for hundreds of years and killed thousands of nationals of one another. But they were ultimately seduced by the idea of conciliation and cooperation which has brought them prosperity and stability. But South Asia remains stagnant. It does not map tidily onto progress for their peoples. It is still stuck in distrust and disruption. Its leaders-leave apart the founders-have never risen above their pettiness and parochialism. It seems that countries in the region realized at one time that they could benefit through friendship and founded the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). But their ego and enmity towards one another are so strong that they have not allowed the organization to function. They simply cannot cast off their animosity to begin a new chapter. The result is that South Asia has the largest number of poor and the illiterate in the world. The child mortality is the highest. Violations of human rights are in thousands. And the infrastructure that the governments should have built is the weakest. Whatever they earn they spend on armaments- the deadlier, the better. And they have enacted so many draconian laws in the name of security that they have even encroached upon the space of individual freedom. What the rulers in the region do not realize is that governance has to be not through the police or the paramilitary forces, but through the willing consent of the people. Development is the key. The more people are better off, the lesser would be the tension. India's GDP is increasing by 8 to 9 per cent per year. But when 70 per cent of its people and the states like Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and the eastern UP do not have enough even to afford two square meals, what does the growth mean? The fallout has been the larger sway of Maoists who believe in the armed struggle to "free the masses" from poverty. In Pakistan, particularly in Punjab, the growth of Talibanisation has been primarily due to dire poverty. Those wallowing in it have come to believe that fundamentalism is the only solution to their problems. The menace of Taliban can be fought provided the army is focused and supported by the joint front of political parties. But the Muslim League (Nawaz) has its eyes fixed on "some gain" from the turmoil. I was disappointed by Nawaz Sharif's latest speech which deprecated the Asif Zardari government for not making amendments to the constitution to make it more democratic but did not have a word against the Taliban. He cannot ride two horses at the same time. In Nepal, the government feels that it can reap a rich harvest if it plays the China card against India. The Nepalese prime minister has visited Beijing in the belief that if Kathmandu were to introduce a new factor, China, in its affairs it would end New Delhi's 'dictation'. The real malady is that different political parties have not learnt how to behave in a democratic set-up. In fact, the point of concern for South Asia is the manner in which China is trying to act as a Big Brother in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and even Bangladesh. Islamabad is already on Beijing's side. However some

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countries in the region wash off their hands with the argument that it is New Delhi which should worry because China's strategy is to surround India. Yet Beijing's real ambition is to dominate the region which is pursuing a different culture and is striving to establish a society that remains democratic, without following a doctrinaire line. The responsibility of unleashing the forces of destruction lies on eight SAARC countries. Terrorism was the genie which the Pakistan government brought out from the bottle. Many gullible people still believe that the Taliban only want the true Islam to come back. Does it mean the killing of the innocent and the denial of right to education and freedom to women? New Delhi has released the Frankenstein of balkanization by issuing its fiat at midnight that the government is proposing to take measures for creating the state of Telangana. The Manmohan Singh government's flip-flop has reignited fires of individual identity throughout the country. Already in schools of some of the states songs exalting the regional idea have been introduced into text books. History books taught in lower classes have disclosed a marked tendency to exaggerate the past achievements of the dominant linguistic groups. The government may rue the day when it announced the formation of Telengana because it has led to a sense of frustration, with grave consequences, if similar demands are not met. In Pakistan, there is a demand for autonomy by Baluchistan, the North Western Frontier Province and Sind. It looks as if the country faces a real danger of disintegrating. In contrast, Bangladesh has consolidated itself through present democratic government. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has retrieved the disturbed Chittagong Hill tracks by giving it more authority. Decentralisation of power is the only way to keep nations together. No country in the region seems to realize this. I hope that Sri Lanka has learnt the lesson. Otherwise, some other elements from among the Tamils may rise and constitute themselves into another LTTE to demand for the right to rule themselves. Busy as they are in politicking, which only means power and corruption, the governance in South Asia is practically non-existent. There is a nexus of politicians, the police and bureaucrats. India, although more democratic in the region, has small fires of defiance burning all over. More stringent measures, which are the only mantra that Home Minister P.Chidambaram has learnt, may build up resistance. This is a lesson for the rest of South Asia. If countries in the region had a common union, they would have together fought some of the challenges they face-terrorism and backwardness. But they would rather shoot at the neighbour than cooperate. The cooperation may help the countries to extinguish the "prairie fires," a la Che Guevara, raging within. At present, the countries are wasting all their energy in harming one another. This is the reason why South Asia remains a doomed region. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Right Vision News. For more information on news feed please contact Sarabjit Jagirdar at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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Lanka presented compelling case for GSP Plus - Prof. G.L. Peiris

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Body

Colombo, June 30 -- Sri Lanka has presented a very compelling case and has requested the European Union for the continuation of Generalized System of Preferences facilities for another three years, from 2009 to 2012.

Sri Lanka has taken up the issue with France, which will be taking over from July 1 the rotating EU Presidency for the next six months from Slovenia, the present holder.

Minister Professor G.L. Peiris was in the French capital last week and held talks with French authorities regarding this issue. Sri Lanka Minister for Export Development and International Trade had discussion with his French counterpart for the continuation of the arrangement of GSP + which enable Sri Lanka to export about 7,200 items produced in the country, duty free, to markets in European Union.

Export Development and International Trade Minister Professor Peiris, speaking to Asian Tribune said, "In the beginning we had discussion on the GSP+ facility that we have enjoyed for the last three years from 2005 to 2008 and is coming up for review. We discussed with Anne-Marie Idrac, French Minister for International Trade.

He said, "We discussed with her about the continuation of this arrangement of GSP + i.e., Generalized System of Preferences, which enabled us to send about 7,200 items produced in Sri Lanka duty free to markets in European Union. We asked for the continuation of these preferences from 2009 to 2012, and that was one of the main matters that we discussed.

When asked whether he was optimistic, he said, "To decide on this request there is still time. We have to make our written request before October 31 and they will announce their final decision by the December 15.

The Minister also said that "they raised some issues about human rights and we explained that the country is in a state of turbulence due to LTTE terrorist activities and there are some security concerns, but we have been dealing with the situation as best we can. We told them about some of the steps so far we have taken, like 400 indictments which have been sent out by the Attorney General in cases involving the violation of fundamental rights.

And of the election that was held for the election of the East Provincial Council and also told about other matters like Assistance and Protection to Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill and it is tabled in Parliament.

"So what I said is that they have to understand the on going situations, which is complicated and that it could be quiet unfair to deprive the country on some reason or other, when hundreds and thousands of women who are working in the garment factories, who have become the sole bread winners of their families, the Minister said.

Lanka presented compelling case for GSP Plus - Prof. G.L. Peiris

"I pointed out that the garment factories have become the principal instrument for uplifting the economic conditions in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. The total values of export of apparels out of the country was US\$ 3.2 billion and out of that about US\$ 1.8 billion worth of garments were exported to EU. So it is obviously is a critical industry for Sri Lanka. The health of the industry depends to a large extent on GSP + arrangements. So that was one of the main matters that were discussed at the meeting, he said.

In his conversation with Asian Tribune, Professor Peiris said, "We also met the French Garment Federation and many of the large companies here in Paris, who purchases their products from Sri Lankan companies such as Brandix, MAS Holdings and others. We found very strong support from these French companies that buy their products from Sri Lankan companies.

The Minister added, "Most of the French Companies who buy their requirements from Sri Lankan garment factories are impressed over the quality of the products, delivery on time and most of all of the ethical standards.

Customers in Europe are prepared to pay a little more for garments that are prepared in factories that comply with high ethical and moral standards.

Professor Peiris told the French delegations that "Sri Lankan companies do not have child labour or prison labour and the working conditions are exemplary in our garment factories. Also the compliance with environmental standard concept of green and green garment factories has greatly impressed the European buyers.

He said that two month ago, Stuart Rose, Chief Executive Officer of Marks and Spencer Group came to Sri Lanka, to open two environmental friendly garment factories - one in Thulhiriya and another in Seeduwa. The Minister said Rose was very much impressed and said that those are the two of the best garment factories he has seen.

The Minister expressed optimism by saying that for all those reasons, the French buyers are very pleased with their relationship with Sri Lankan companies and they are also eager as we are to ensure the GPS + arrangements is approved for Sri Lanka.

Asian Tribune asked the Minister whether there was any mention about the 14 Sri Lankan aid workers of Action Faim NGO killed in Muttur on 5th August 2006 ?

Minister said, "Well, they did not raise it directly with me, but we know that Action Faim, the French NGO is directly in touch with French Government and of course Sri Lanka's position is that we are inquiring and there is a commission of inquiry presided over by Justice Udagama and this is one of the matters probed by the commission of inquiries and the hearings are public and done with full compliance with the rules and mechanism by which the inquiries are being held, that is on going in Sri Lanka.

He said, other than that he also took part in the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) conference which went on for two days.

The OECD has its headquarters in Paris. When briefing about the two-day conference, the Minister said it has to do with international trade, tariff and that kind of things. "I participated in the discussion and I pointed out that our export volumes are improving and last year we had a growth of 15% across the board," Professor Peiris explained.

Asian Tribune asked the Sri Lanka's Minister for Export Development and International Trade, "Are you trying to set up export promotions villages in Sri Lanka?" He said, "Yes, basically they are already in existence."

Asian Tribune reminded that we remember during the time when Thaksin Shinawatar was the Prime Minister of Thailand, he introduced the export Tambon system in that country.

"Yes, one village to produce one product for export," said Professor Peiris.

Asian Tribune asked, we are not going to say that Sri Lanka is following the export Tambon system introduced by former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatar, but is it the similar system you are following in Sri Lanka?

Lanka presented compelling case for GSP Plus - Prof. G.L. Peiris

The Minister said: "Yes, it is something of a similar pattern.

Take for example in the North Central Province in the Anuradhapura district they emphasise on fruits and vegetables, whereas in the Subaragamuwa area the focus is naturally on the gems and jewellery. Then we have plantain production in Embilipitiya and in Galle District it has lace production for garments.

So these different products are manufactured in different parts of the country and the idea is to bring the producer to be in direct contact with the companies that are responsible for the export in order to eliminate the middlemen eating into the profit of the producer.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Terrorism, B.5a nemesis for government and masses

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Body

Colombo, Aug. 14 -- No country would like to share expertise and technology with other nations to fight terrorism, which is still not recognised as a common enemy. Consequently, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness prevails.

The scourge of terrorism is universally endemic barring a few countries for some reasons. Like a double-edged sword, it hacks right and left indiscriminately or like a blind mad elephant kills anything and everything that comes in the way as it marches on towards its target.

At present, it is more frightening than the likelihood of the third world war, which is more calculating and sane than in the past. It could be Al-Qaeda, LTTE, Maoists or any other fundamentalist or politically motivated groups.

Among the terrorists that kill in the name of religion, the structure is minus one. Leaders of the first and the second wrung two. The technical hands/experts are the third slot. The ground forces, the executors of the evil plans.

Of all, the worst type belongs to the fundamentalist groups. The suicide bombers belong to this group. They are programmed to kill like unfeeling robots. They are incapable of possessing any conscience and are devoid of rationality.

To most, ignorance is bliss. I watched with amusement, a group of university students in Delhi shouting anti-government slogans demanding that laws stricter than Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) should be applied to terrorists.

A journalist asked the mike holding student leader to elaborate POTA. He started beating about the bush giving foolish, irrelevant explanations and finally shying away with an embarrassing smile.

Obviously, terrorist are just programmed like robots and they can do only one thing and that is to kill and destroy. By what, whom and how could this vast ungainly fatal machine be controlled, is a serious question.

The real intent of their leaders is just beyond these robots to comprehend and is not intended to either. Creating anarchy, affecting a nation's economy, demoralising and destabilising governments and causing panic among the masses are some of their motives. They disrupt the civilised society and push civilisation to the barbaric era.

Those they kill include Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Parsis, and anyone. Men, women, children, the good and the bad are all bundled together and are killed, for powerful blasts or indiscriminate shooting do not have the intelligence to distinguish between human species.

Terrorism, B.5a nemesis for government and masses

All are killed indiscriminately. No tears are reserved by these inhuman robots that are incapable of sharing misery. It takes eons to build castles of a civilisation, but, just a few seconds to demolish them, leave scars that can never be healed. Such considerations are alien to them.

These zombies just inexorably move from one destruction to the next heaping more misery and leaving pools of blood and tears. Their leaders bask in the sun of the success of their inhuman acts.

Governments around the world acknowledge this modern cancer that pesters civilisation, but they are hindered in their efforts to counter it. There is distrust of each other in international relations.

Narrow national interests, exposure of their vulnerability to the other nations, their sense of inadequacy in dealing with terrorism, etc., are a few of the things that the world doesn't fight terrorism as a united front.

No country would like to share expertise and technology with other nations to fight terrorism, which is still not recognised as a common enemy. Consequently, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness prevails.

One nation pats another nation on the back and gives huge grants for joining it in fighting terrorism where nothing of the sort has happened. Formal protests are made by the rival nation or nations with the full conviction that they are not worth the paper they are written on. They are just deluding themselves and are perhaps meant for the public consumption.

The security agencies and intelligence gathering network suffer from inadequacies in many aspects. The training of their personnel has not kept pace with the fast technologically changing scenario.

As such there is no accurate information about the impending terrorist attacks. The response time is too long and the harm has till then been done. People fear harassment at the hands of the police more than an injury in an attack. Brave hearts are rare. There is as such public apathy and rarely do people tend to lend a hand to the police.

In Stalin's era when the notorious KGB (KGB was a Russian organisation with a military hierarchy aimed at providing national defence) men knocked at a door, nobody dared speak up. It was feared more than a devastating fire. When there was in fact a fire, some one would shout, "Neighbours, it is only a fire in the neighbourhood not the secret police."

The Government wakes up after the harm has been done. Then a red alert is declared. Security is beefed up. Then TV channels show handbags or purses of ladies being searched as classic examples of the very alert police.

The oft- repeated cliches of red alert or beefing up of the security or posting police men at the site of the blasts look more a mockery than anything of any practical use. When and why, so to say, the red alert or the beefing up of the security were slackened is perhaps not known even to the authorities responsible to put them on.

These activities are mere futile exercises and are always hard to sustain by the insufficient police. The routine of life again starts slowly moving down the old ruts and things are conveniently forgotten till the next calamitous incident occurs.

In recent times, the recovery of over 20 live bombs in Surat, in Gujarat is the type of work that is expected of our security agencies. But then, has such a thorough work been done in other cities. The government knows which cities are prone to face blast threats.

Political leaders are compelled to give vent to bravados on the TV for people who just ignore them or take them with a pinch of salt. All know that the fight against terrorism is an unequal one but, has to be fought as there is no other way to tackle it.

Alerts are not sustainable and practicable from many angles and are not financially viable. People try to shield themselves behind the short memory and pretend that everything is normal.

Terrorism, B.5a nemesis for government and masses

The need of the hour is for the Governments to sincerely treat terrorism as a global problem faced by the entire humanity and not by any given nation and discuss all its aspects in detail to find ways and means to effectively deal with it. Patchwork, here and there, is no solution and the cancer will keep spreading its tentacles with immunity.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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**INITIATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY'S CHAIR AMBASSADOR HUNT
ISSUES STATEMENT ON U.N. SECURITY RESOLUTION 1325: RECOGNIZING
WOMEN'S VITAL ROLES IN ACHIEVING PEACE, SECURITY BEFORE HOUSE
PANEL**

US Fed News

May 15, 2008 Thursday 4:45 AM EST

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Body

The House Foreign Affairs Committee issued the following statement from a subcommittee hearing:

Distinguished members of Congress,

I would like to thank Chairman William Delahunt and Ranking Member Dana Rohrabacher for inviting me to testify about the critical role women play in preventing conflict, leading efforts to resolve it, and securing viable peace after the violence ends. I thank all the members of the Foreign Affairs committee as well as representatives from other committees here today. Considering the daily news from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan, it is very timely for the US Congress to focus its attention on finding long term, sustainable solutions to deep-rooted conflicts. One such way is to highlight many contributions women make to peace and stability.

On May 1, 2008 the Washington Post had a cover page story about Army Specialist Monica Brown of my native Texas. Last year Specialist Brown was awarded a Silver Star, only the second women in history to be awarded such a military honor. The eighteen year-old-medic faced insurgents fire in eastern Afghanistan as she ran to assist her wounded comrades, "displaying bravery and grit." Specialist Brown is one of 26,304 American women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the article pointed out, these women are valued by the military not only their skills as soldiers, but also their cultural sensitivity to connecting with local women in these worn torn countries. Congresswomen Gillibrand, and other members of House and Senate, have told me repeatedly that if we value women's cultural sensitivity as warriors, we should also value them as peacemakers.

I began promoting a more inclusive concept of security, one that acknowledges women's contributions to peace processes, as US Ambassador to Austria. While helping resolve the conflict in the Balkans from 1993 to 1997, I became keenly aware of the unwillingness of the international community to use the enormous pool of talented, well-educated women peace builders to help resolve the conflict. Yugoslavia, the country torn apart by a bloody war that lasted a decade and killed close to 200,000 people, had the highest percentage of women PhDs per capita; yet, when we convened the parties in Vienna and later at Dayton to negotiate, there were no women on any formal delegations.

The marginalization of these experts in the Balkans was simply part of a broader problem of exclusion. To address it, in the fall of 1999 I founded a program called The Initiative for Inclusive Security. Its corner stone has been the

INITIATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY'S CHAIR AMBASSADOR HUNT ISSUES STATEMENT ON U.N.
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global network of women peacebuilders, which has since grown to include over 800 women from 50 conflicts. My primary goal was to connect its members to policymakers around the world. Members of the Network, all demonstrated leaders are elected and appointed government officials, directors of NGOs and movements in civil society, scholars and educators, businesspeople, representatives of multilateral organizations, and journalists. With varied backgrounds, perspectives, and skills, they bring a vast array of expertise to the peacemaking process. Over the last decade these leaders have led major efforts to create stability in the most volatile places in the world, ranging from Guatemala to Sri Lanka, Colombia to Liberia, the Middle East to Cambodia. I am honored to have three members of our Network join me here today to testify about their personal experiences of securing peace in Uganda, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

"Inclusive security," a paradigm I discussed in a Foreign Policy article published in 2001 and the title of a course I teach at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, recognizes the changed nature of modern conflicts. Just as warfare has become more inclusive--with civilian deaths more common than soldiers'--so too must our approach to ending conflict. The concept of inclusive security builds on a diverse, citizen-driven approach, motivated by efficiency. Our goal is not simply the absence of war, but a sustainable peace fostered by fundamental social changes. Women are crucial to this change since they are often at the center of civil society, electoral referenda, and other citizen-driven movements. An inclusive security approach expands the array of tools available to police, military, and diplomatic structures by adding collaboration with local efforts to achieve peace.

Why Include Women in Peace Processes?

Women constitute over half the population; sidelining them is discriminatory and fundamentally undemocratic. But the rights argument is persuasive only to those who cherish fairness alone. For those who value efficacy and efficiency, ignoring them is foolish. Worldwide, women make profound contributions to peace building. If we hope to transform instability and violence into stability and prosperity, we must incorporate their expertise.

Women are still a shockingly underutilized resource in conflict prevention and resolution. By failing to leverage women's expertise and include them fully, we are squandering a tremendous opportunity. In Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Bosnia, and elsewhere, I have seen firsthand how women prevent the eruption of violence, mediate among warring factions, and repair shattered societies after conflict.

Evidence of women's contributions is compelling. The Initiative for Inclusive Security has conducted field studies to document women's impact in every stage of conflict. It is evident they are highly invested in peace. And were they consistently at the table for strategic planning with policy makers they could have had an enormous positive impact on discussions, debates, and decisions relating to security. Instead, peace processes excluded women and conflict rages in some 50 countries today.

Our research proves:

Women lead conflict resolution efforts throughout periods of armed conflict; and women's groups often lead the call for negotiations and an end to violent conflict.

Nothing illustrates this point better than the work of Ana Teresa Bernal in Colombia. As coordinator of the National Network of Initiatives Against the War and for Peace, Ms. Bernal mobilized 10 million people to vote for peace in a 1996 national referendum. She helped create a vehicle for civil society and government to bring their interests into the negotiations between the government and the guerillas. Today she is one of two women representing civil society on the recently established National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation.

Women play an important stabilizing role during the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process.

Though women and girls were active militarily in the conflict in Sierra Leone and twelve percent of all combatants were women, they were mostly excluded from official reintegration programs. Nonetheless, women supported the reintegration of former fighters and filled many gaps in official programs, such as community reconstruction efforts, in addition to opening their homes to former child soldiers.

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No one can tell Sierra Leone's story better than its Foreign Affairs Minister Zainab Hawa Bangura, who ran for president and was arguably the driving force behind the signing of the peace accord. Ms. Bangura mobilized thousands of women to confront armed soldiers in pro-democracy street protests. With little experience confronting thousands of unarmed women, the confused soldiers found themselves receiving orders from Ms. Bangura. "We are your mothers, your sisters, your wives and your daughters," she told them. "If you are going to shoot us, then do it now. But remember, the whole world is watching."

3. Women capitalize on their traditional roles to reach across conflict lines as mediators and promoters of dialogue.

More than 65,000 people have lost their lives and nearly one million have been displaced during two decades of war in Sri Lanka. Fighting between the Tamil minority and the Sri Lankan government intensified in the 1990s; in 2002, the Norwegians brokered a cease-fire and parties committed to sign a peace agreement. However, large-scale violence resumed after Sri Lanka's 2005 presidential elections and subsequent talks have failed. Still, national and international women's organizations have advanced important peace initiatives. On the national front, Sri Lankan women have been active in campaigning for an end of the war, reaching across conflict divides to advance dialogue through specific peace initiatives.

After Visaka Dharamadasa's son, a soldier in the Sri Lankan army, disappeared while fighting, she traveled into Tamil territory to negotiate with the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to ensure the identification and return of soldiers' bodies. She advocated for combatant use of identification tags and for adherence to international laws addressing the proper treatment of prisoners of war. In the process, Ms. Dharamadasa gained the trust of LTTE leaders; and so when talks were floundering and Tamil representatives refused to speak directly with negotiators, they asked her to carry messages to the government.

Women are at the forefront of good governance efforts and often serve as a bridge between government and civil society, working across political lines to achieve important policy priorities.

No example better highlights women's contributions to governance than Rwanda, where women now hold 49 percent of the seats in Parliament--the highest percentage in the world. They are playing a significant role in politics and governance in the country, thanks to women like Aloisea Inyumba.

At the age of 26, Ms. Inyumba became Rwanda's minister of gender and social affairs after the genocide. She designed programs to bury 800,000 corpses, and designed a national adoption campaign to find homes for 500,000 orphans. As head of the Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, she went village to village helping victims dramatize their tragedies, preparing them for the reintegration of perpetrators. She created women's councils that fed into the parliament, resulting in the highest percentage of women legislators in the world.

What Congress Can Do?

These women are not exceptions to the rule--they are but a few examples of the valuable contributions that millions of women make everyday to peace building in their homes, communities, and countries.

Despite all this evidence, policymakers and practitioners rarely include women in stabilization and reconstruction processes. A quick scan of today's major conflicts reveals that from Darfur to Afghanistan to Iraq, women continue to be marginalized and underrepresented in everything from peace negotiations and constitution drafting committees to service provision and peacekeeping missions.

We all recognize the pressing need to employ new tactics, policies, and strategies to resolve the scores of intransigent conflicts raging around the world. I believe that from a purely utilitarian standpoint we need to push to ensure that more than half of the population is represented at the table.

Particularly important is ensuring that sufficient number of women are integrated in peace building. In Liberia, a critical mass of women mobilized across sectors, ethnicities, and religions. When negotiations floundered, the women literally locked warring factions in the room to ensure they remained until a peace agreement was signed.

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The women's efforts culminated in the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female president in Africa and the appointment of women to several key positions in the administration. We now see the fruits of Liberian women's labor as the country is on its way to becoming one of the few African post-conflict success stories.

The US Congress must play an important role in making inclusive security an important component of its work. In particular:

1) Congress should use its oversight role to request from the Administration much more significant political and financial attention to programs that promote women's leadership, particularly in conflict resolution and peace building. In fiscal years 2002 and 2003, US assistance to Afghanistan was close to one billion dollars; of that amount, only \$200,000 went to Afghan women NGOs, an abysmal 0.02 percent. For the past seventeen months, bill S. 147 has been in the Senate Foreign Relations committee. It calls for allocation of 30 million dollars for grants to women-led organizations in Afghanistan. That money would support human rights education for women and girls and create more opportunities for women to exercise leadership in programs that strengthen women's security and safety.

2) UN Security Council resolution 1325 was a first, critical acknowledgement that women must be included in all efforts to promote peace. Since its passage there has been some progress. Gender focal points are now included in many UN missions. In places like East Timor, the UN mission organized women's political coalitions to build bridges to civil society. Recognized as a stabilizing force, women were provided resources to become active participants in their country's political affairs. As a result, 26% of Constituent Assembly members are women.

Unfortunately, such examples are rare exceptions; for most part, the UN has failed to realize meaningful inclusion of women into its core mission: peacemaking and peace building. As the subcommittee that oversees intersection of the US foreign policy with international organizations, you can advance the UN commitments by:

a) Holding the Secretary General and Secretariat accountable for compliance with the spirit and mandates of 1325. For example, one female Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and two female Deputy SRSGs in 26 peacekeeping missions is indefensible; a list of dozens of qualified women has sat on the Secretary General's desk for years.

b) Demanding, through our influence at the Security Council, that governments, negotiators, and signatories of peace agreements fulfill their commitments to include women. Request that the Secretariat publish lists of the commitments, and send monitors into conflict regions to identify and recruit talented women.

c) Insisting that all relevant parties include women in decisions related to constitutions, justice systems, or security sector reform. You could demand the UN withhold funding when post-conflict governing committees and commissions fail to involve strong contingents of women.

3) On the political front, there are many ways in which you can press the Administration to fulfill the US commitment to implementation of Resolution 1325. Most specifically, I recommend you:

a) Insist that the Department of State submit lists of qualified women for key posts in UN peace missions, especially for policy-making functions;

b) Call for women's involvement as mediators, members of negotiating teams, service providers for reconstruction, and members of transitional and permanent governing structures;

c) Push for participatory, transparent, and inclusive peace negotiations that empower forces for peace, not just armed combatants, and that make greater use of Track II processes.

4) I hope you will find the time on your CODELs to find an hour when you are in Bogot?, Baghdad, or Belgrade to sit down and listen to women's agendas for peace. You would be surprised at the difference in substance and in tone. As ambassador, I worked closely with President Clinton, Secretary Albright, and Ambassador Holbrooke on

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Bosnian peace. We all had many frustrating encounters with stubborn local politicians who refused to support the possibility of co-existence. I always countered that resistance by meeting with hundreds of local women who had their fingers on the pulse of their communities. Each time I left inspired by their energy and motivation to rebuild their country.

5) Members of this committee and other Congress members could also help in simple ways that can help ensure protection of these courageous women. For example, four years ago we brought a delegation of 16 leading Colombian women from all sides of the conflict to work on a common agenda for peace. One morning, Jim McGovern hosted a congressional briefing, and some of you stopped by to meet the Colombian women. I remember Ana Teresa Bernal begging our staff to take a picture with several Congressional members that morning, and I thought it would be a pleasant piece of memorabilia. But of course, Ana is always much more strategic than that--later, she told me that having a picture with four US Congress members was a major safeguard for her back in Colombia. It was a protection "chip," one she would cash should threats against her life continue. It was a proof that she met important people in the US who would hopefully aid her in the case of an emergency.

Congress can recognize the importance of including women like Ms. Bernal, Zainab Bangura, Visaka Dharamadasa, and Aloisea Inyumba. It should regularly invite women like Ms. Amiri, Ms. Bigombe, and Ms. Okwaci to testify. Including these, and other women, is key to sustainable peace.

Thank you.

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Load-Date: May 16, 2008

Suicide bomber kills 28 at Sri Lanka refugee camp: military

Agence France Presse -- English

February 9, 2009 Monday 9:58 AM GMT

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Dateline: COLOMBO, Feb 9 2009

Body

A suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber attacked a camp for civilians fleeing Sri Lanka's war zone on Monday, killing 20 soldiers and eight civilians, army spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said.

He said the female bomber from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) targeted a camp near Visuamadu, an area the military recently captured from the rebels.

"Twenty soldiers, including three women soldiers were killed," Nanayakkara said. "Another eight civilians were also killed and 40 civilians were wounded."

Load-Date: February 10, 2009

SPORTING LIFE COMES FULL CIRCLE; In our early days, sport flourished while war and revolution raged. Is the world really all that different 225 years on?

The Herald (Glasgow)

March 15, 2008 Saturday

Final Edition

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The Herald

Section: 225 YEARS; Pg. 54

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Byline: Words Doug Gillon Athletics Correspondent

Body

UPON superficial examination, there's no mention of sport whatsoever in the first edition of the newspaper which metamorphosed into what is now The Herald. Things, however, have changed since 1783. There has never been wider coverage of sport in these columns, 225 years on.

Yet readers of The Glasgow Advertiser, as we were then, had been identified as interested in sport. Our very first edition advertised "Hoyle's Games, improved, new edition neat 1/3d bound" (6 pence today) beside four volumes of Voltaire's Universal History (10 shillings, or 50p) and Dr Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield at 10p.

This edition of Hoyle, published in 1772, included chapters on chess, backgammon, quadrille and picquet, and their rules. A section on whist contained early clues to probability theory, foundation of modern poker. If you can find a copy today it will cost around GBP30. It was revised in 1790, with cricket, billiards, tennis and draughts added. A copy of that could now fetch GBP500.

Like ourselves, Hoyle remains in a business linked with games. His name has passed into the language: "according to Hoyle", meaning conforming to established rules.

Sport surfaced but tenuously in our earliest years. Adverts for lessons in "fencing for gentlemen" were carried - less a sport than a life skill. The French Revolution was peaking and duels (often over gaming and sport wagers) occurred almost daily.

Recreation for its own sake was evident as early as July 16, 1789, when we reported the death of a lad while swimming in Linlithgow Loch: "third melancholy accident that has happened in the same place in a twelvemonth."

The same edition carried our first report of a sport challenge: "A race was run at Hampton Court between Powell, the famous walker, and a Boy. The distance was one mile. The boy ran three fourths of a mile in five minutes;

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Powell at that time wanted only 123 yards of having performed the mile - the bet was for 20 guineas." Foster Powell walked that year from London to York and back in six days, for a wager of 1000 guineas.

This same edition carried an advert for bread: a half pound loaf at 1d (ie 240 of them for GBP1). Among more weighty matters: "The Bastille has been wholly demolished, " we revealed. "The Governor of the Bastille was seized, his right hand was first cut off, and then his head. His head and body have been placed in conspicuous parts of the city, where they were treated with the utmost indignity."

That day we also reported the National Assembly discussing a proposal from the Citizen's Committee: the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Yet upper class society in Scotland continued untroubled. We reported elsewhere, from Edinburgh races: "Sir Archibald Hope's bay horse Star walked over the Sands of Leith, for the City of Edinburgh's plate of Fifty Pounds value. His Majesty's purse of one hundred guineas was run for, and won at three heats, by Ben Nicolson Esq's Tom Tring."

A month passed. Glasgow's gentry watched an exhibition of feats of horsemanship opposite Jamaica Street: "Standing places at 6d and seats priced one and two shillings. Places may be kept by sending a servant at opening of the doors."

Another forthcoming event was the horse race and fair at Kirkintilloch, on August 28, 1789. Our columns revealed first evidence that sport existed for women: "There will also be a Woman Race, for a Spinning Wheel, which, it is expected, will afford good diversion."

At Versailles, Louis XVI was forced to enshrine the Rights of Man in the constitution. We reported the National Assembly bestowing the title of "Restorer of the Liberty of France" on the king. The monarch expressed his "gratitude", the first time this word had ever been uttered in addressing his subjects.

That sport had become part of the fabric of the life of the nation in 1789 was evident in what amounted to an editorial, a commentary disparaging the mores of the era, headlined: "Fine Times; or the Glorious eight-nine".

It included the following: Fine times - when generosity is shown only to wh---s, waiters at bagnios [brothels], and horse jockeys.

Fine times - when an Imperial War gives place to a boxing match.

Fine times - when tradesmen bet fifty or one hundred pounds on the head of a boxer, and pay a shilling in the pound to their creditors."

The greatest wager of the era involved Captain Robert Barclay: a 1000-mile challenge (one mile every hour for 1000 hours, and a 1000-guinea wager). At today's prices his bets totalled GBP40m. At Spithead, Royal Navy seamen were mutinying over a wage of GBP11 per year.

We reported that Barclay, from Ury in Aberdeenshire, had seven street lights erected to deter assaults which might lose him the bet. Lighting had been installed in the most fashionable London streets only in 1807.

Barclay was accompanied by his brother and a bodyguard who carried cudgels and a loaded pistol.

On June 30, 1809, we recounted: "His diet generally consists of beef steaks and mutton chops, which he always eats heartily of, but always cold, and he drinks two bottles of Port wine every day."

This 1000-mile challenge was replicated in 2003. Five people (two women) completed the distance. The London Marathon was the decider, starting just an hour after completion of the 1000 miles. Shona Crombie-Hicks, born in Aberdeen, took the title. "I wanted to win the Barclay Challenge, to prove women can beat men at something like this, " she said.

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But female extreme sport was not new. In June 1906, during a gala day in Yorkshire, 21-year-old Lily Cove parachuted to her death from a balloon - fourth British female aeronaut to die. The attention of Viscount Gladstone, son of the former Prime Minister, was drawn to the case. The Glasgow Herald reported his response to a Commons question: "I have prepared, and hope to introduce shortly, a bill extending the Dangerous Performances Act to all women, whatever their age may be."

The act, dictated by an all-male parliament, covered only females up to 18. Women being banned from extreme sport is a preposterous notion today.

Exactly 100 years later, we ran a story marking female sports emancipation. Chillingly it coincided with the funeral of British parachute world record-holder, Tamsin Causer, who drowned, victim of another freak accident.

The article saluted Tanya Streeter and Ellen MacArthur, respectively a free diver and yachtswoman who surpassed men in their sports; Jane Couch, who won a restraint-of-trade battle to carve a career in boxing; and jockey Muriel Naughton, who used the Equal Opportunities Act to become the first woman to ride over National Hunt fences: "You'd have thought I'd won the Grand National, rather than just finished fifth in a hunter 'chase at Ayr," she said of the media circus.

Women have now conquered formerly exclusive male preserves from rugby to bull-fighting. Yet 138 years ago, men who represented Scotland in the first football international were socially privileged, not chosen on merit.

Charles Alcock, secretary of the Football Association, wrote to this paper in 1870 proposing a Scotland versus England match (the SFA didn't exist). Aspiring players were invited to contact Scotland goalkeeper Kinnaid, or full-back Kirkpatrick. This was strictly for gentlemen - no proletarians, or professional players.

This was the first of five internationals before Queen's Park picked the inaugural official team. Five in the match had been at Harrow, and three went to Eton. England played in white, but each individual wore the stockings of their former public school.

The Scots included the future anti-female parachute legislator, Gladstone who, "though rather out of practice, fully proved that his foot had not lost the cunning for which it was famed only a few years back, when doing battle on behalf of the Eton College XI . . . his back play was equal to the best that we have seen, and his kicking was marked by the most consummate accuracy and certainty of aim . . . the worthy member for Boston's gigantic stature proved of some little assistance."

Gladstone junior remains the only MP to play for Scotland.

Our match bulletin was carried between a Clyde report of a sugar beet cargo arrived from Antwerp (ship movements were very important) and another on the jailing of two female English pickpockets in Paris.

That game, at Kennington Oval, ended 1-1. It led to the formation of the SFA in March 1873.

One hundred years ago this summer, we reported Scotland's first Olympic athletics gold, at 400 metres, by Boer War hero Lieutenant Wyndham Halswelle. John Carpenter of the US was disqualified, and we reported American allegations of bias. They called Halswelle "idol of the British aristocracy" and "favourite toff of the Cockney crowd".

Athletics' rules were changed to avoid a repetition, with running in lanes being introduced. Halswelle became a metaphor for the doomed youth of his generation, killed by a sniper in the trenches of World War I.

Extracts from his combat diaries were later published in The Herald. Of one engagement, he wrote: "I must have started 140 strong. Seventynine men died to gain 15 yards, which were given up again within hours." Days later he was shot.

Sport now routinely appears on the front page, which 225 years ago was exclusively adverts. Recent "sport" on Page 1 has included the Ibrox Disaster, Munich Massacre, Bradford, Heysel, and Hillsborough, Ben Johnson's

SPORTING LIFE COMES FULL CIRCLE In our early days, sport flourished while war and revolution raged. Is the world really all that different 225 years on?

steroid charge to Olympic 100m gold, and Glasgow's success in landing the 2014 Commonwealth Games - final vestigial relic of that Empire of which we were so proud in previous times.

Yet still, as during the French Revolution, sport continues untroubled by traumatic events elsewhere. New York's towers crumbled on 9/11 and were still burning as football in Britain was played that day and the next.

Famine, war, and revolution still do not disturb frivolity. Shankly-esque, sport assumes more importance than death.

Athletes haggled for souvenirs in the Munich Olympic Village, uncaring, yards from where Israeli colleagues vainly pleaded with terrorists for their lives. **Tamil Tigers** killed as the 2014 vote was conducted in Sri Lanka. Kenyan athletes raced in Edinburgh last month, while in their homeland, atrocities were perpetrated as they had been all those years ago in France.

The agenda is still abuse of power and human rights. The world is more complex, but so-called civilisation has thus far failed to mitigate man's inhumanity. Plus ca change.

My Herald

Congratulations on reaching 225 years. The Herald is one of the few newspapers that has not drifted into tabloid format or outlook. You soon know the score right across Scotland and the world. Dignity too, tempered by some humour.

CLIVE FAIRWEATHER FORMER DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE SAS AND FORMER CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS IN SCOTLAND

Graphic

Asketch showing the first official football match between Scotland and England in 1872. Picture: Scottish Football Museum Wooden printing block from August 1789. The First Lady of National Hunt, Muriel Naughton on Ballycasey in the Spittal Hill Amateur race at Ayr in 1976. Fallen hero: Lieutenant Wyndham Halswelle, winner of Olympic 400m gold, 1908. The 'idol of the British aristocracy' was killed by a sniper in 1915.

Load-Date: March 17, 2008

More civilians rescued in Puthukkudiyiruppu

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

March 12, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 85 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, March 12 -- Sri Lanka Army soldiers rescued a group of 297 Tamil civilians fleeing **LTTE** clutches in Puthukkudiyiruppu East on Tuesday, the Defence Ministry said.

The group of civilians consisting 103 men, 118 **women** and 76 children, had sought refuge with the soldiers engaged in humanitarian operations in the Kombavil and Iranapali north-east areas, during daytime. The civilians were rushed to the welfare centres in Kilinochchi. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Daily Mirror Sri Lanka.

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Load-Date: April 1, 2009

IS 'Aba' AN ANTI- SINHALA ANTIC?

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

October 9, 2008 Thursday 1:13 PM EST

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Length: 1350 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Oct. 9 -- The technically well made film, *Aba* of Jackson Anthony should be easy analytical prey for any sociologist of colonial culture or for that matter for any intelligent observer who can see behind the film's tinsel. It belongs to the manipulated cultural world that feeds fast food, Coca-Cola and the crudest belief systems to unsuspecting American sheep, giving them simple minds and blind US patriotism. But this film is not targeted at the Sarah Palin God-fearing, gun toting morons in the US Midwest, held in contempt by more sophisticated Americans. Its target appears to be the local Buddhist culture that was brutally assaulted by the fanatical Portuguese and now the LTTE.

First, *Aba* deals with events which occurred during that time as related in the Mahavamsa. Vijaya is succeeded by Panduvasudeva who is succeeded by Abhaya to be eventually succeeded by Pandukabaya. Pandukabaya, *Aba* of this film, is the son of Ummadacitta who was put in a secluded tower by her nine brothers as astrologers had said that her son would kill her nine brothers and seize the throne. Yet the same, she gets pregnant through Dighagamani who creeps in through a rope ladder to the tower. When *Aba* is born, he is spirited away and brought up in a village. After growing up to be a man, he kills his uncles and reigns for 70 years. Pandukabaya is succeeded by his son Mutasiva, and his grandson Devanampiyatissa introduces Buddhism from which time hard evidence in the form of archaeological remains and inscriptions appear. The period of Pandukabaya is a period before strong archaeological and inscriptional evidence were found. Abayawewa tank is a remnant from the time.

But, there are other hard cultural facts. Whatever their genetic makeup, Sinhalese speak a Northern Indian dialect. Doubts on the historicity of Vijaya faces the incontrovertible fact of the name Sinhala. In the absence of hard facts, historians can imaginatively attempt to fill in gaps. But Jackson Anthony, although trained as a historian brings in constructed theatre and not reconstructed history. The same showmanship through which he transferred his television programme to unscholarly theatre is repeated in a grosser fashion. The theatre in this case, however, is invented history. Art could be many fold, but the standard principle on which sociologists work is that art is not neutral, it carries hidden messages.

Yakkas' blood line

The father of *Aba* is designated as carrying the "blood line of yakkas" which directly goes against the Mahavamsa version that he is Sinhalese. Jackson's yakkas resist unreasonable Sinhalese who are depicted as invaders. Two of the guards Chittaraja and Kalavela were executed by the uncles for letting the infant *Aba* smuggled out of the palace. The execution, Jackson style is depicted using features of the killing of Christ.

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Chittaraja and Kalavela are seen being marched to the place of execution with a bar over their necks, very much like Christ being marched chained with a cross on his neck but in this film without the vertical bar of the cross. Watching the execution are veiled women very much dressed like those in the time of Christ and the dress of Catholic nuns of today. The veil for women came to the sub-continent only after the Muslims. No Sinhalese women of the pre-Portuguese era dressed like that. After the execution, the souls of Chittaraja and Kalavela are seen rising to heaven. And Aba as he leads his anti-Sinhalese revolt sees several times a holy apparition of Chittaraja with a beard and flowing locks dressed in white who urges him on.

There are other features of this film which strike those familiar with colonial narratives. First, is the depiction of the yakkas as natives from old Tarzan films. Around four decades ago, Frantz Fanon wrote how the colonised are made to internalise the image given to them by the coloniser especially through narratives like of Tarzan. The palace of Panduvasudeva is depicted as a mud village out of sub-Saharan Africa without any brick buildings; hardly believable when just a few decades later in the time of Devanampiyatissa, one sees many large brick structures whose remnants are seen even today. It appears that Jackson goes out of the way to make Sinhalese appear primitive.

But such negative depiction without any self-respect of Sinhalese and South Asians in films made in Sri Lanka has a recent shameful history making us perhaps the most self colonised in the world. Two films that were disallowed to be filmed in India were filmed in Sri Lanka. One was the Harrison Ford film 'Temple of doom' where a South Asian king was seen scooping out the brains of a live monkey and eating it. The extras in this film, the subjects of the king, were all heard jabbering in Sinhalese. For anybody interested in a severe denunciation of this colonial film, please read the take of Professor Kotwal of the Ohio State University's Theatre Department. The other colonial film was the alleged biography of Mother Teresa where she is seen battling Hindus. No wonder the Indians did not want this film shot in India. For those who want to see the real story of Mother Teresa as opposed to this fairy story film shoot, read Christopher Hitchens' book 'The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice.' Incidentally there is a common actress in all three films - Iranganie Serasinghe

Another fictional incongruity is the presence of a large number of Brahmins with their sacred threads chanting Sanskrit slokas appearing side by side with the tribal yakkas. Brahmins require for some of their ceremonies, brick-built platforms as described in the Sulba Sastras. A brick building community living among tribes while the capital city has only mud walls!

Anti-Sinhala antics

The key mischief of the movie is trying to place an anti-Sinhala Christian figure as a key religious figure a few decades before the arrival of Buddhism and the consolidation of Sinhala Buddhist culture. This semi-fictional approach has been seen in the director's populist Mahavamsa Vidyuth Tika spectacle which has many historical falsities. His first programme for example gave equal time to the respectable archaeologist Dr. Siran Deraniyagala and to Arisen Ahubudu who had taken in the full South Indian Dravidian baggage that Ravana was a historical figure. Suriyapperuma, the other commentator in Jackson's show gives many inaccuracies on European history. I am on the editorial board of an international Encyclopaedia of History of Science and could see the many inaccuracies relating to history of science of Suriyapperuma which I pointed out to Professor Mendis Rohanadeera, the other frequent presenter on this show. Fortunately, there are many matter-of-fact serious history programmes in the country as in the many broadcasts on Poya days from historical Buddhist sites by all the major channels. And at the international level, one has on Sri Lankan cable, the History Channel, Discovery Channel and National Geographic Channel.

Artistic freedom

Let us sum up the "artistic freedom" of Jackson. Aba's story is in basics. Chittaraja was a leader/hero to his people (who were against the Sinhala). He was unjustly put to death. Then Chittaraja rises from the dead with a shining light. Chittaraja is seen by his people, dressed just like Jesus, blessing his people. He has passed on his 'seed' to Aba. Deegagamani who was Chitra's husband is a bystander, impotent and stupid (Sinhala, modaya) whereas Chittaraja is a potent, dynamic leader. Other images from the bible include all male children killed because of a

IS 'Aba' AN ANTI- SINHALA ANTIC?

prophecy - the baddies are the Sinhalayas. The film retells the Sinhala Buddhist story and reclaims it making it 'their own'-they being non-Sinhala Buddhists. But most important -the Buddha is left outside. He came to Sri Lanka and claimed this land according to the Mahavamsa in the time of Vijaya. This is a rewriting of history - just like the 'historians' did before Eelam to prepare the ground for an anticipated first coming of Prabhakaran.

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Load-Date: October 9, 2008

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A CEASEFIRE COULD EASE PRABHAKARAN AND CEASE RAJAPAKSA

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

August 2, 2008 Saturday 1:50 PM EST

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Length: 1301 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Aug. 2 -- If one considers President Rajapaksa and the Tiger leader Prabhakaran as the direct antagonists, the survival of both the president and Prabhakaran depend on whether a ceasefire is granted or not at this crucial stage. It is so crucial a stage that if a ceasefire is granted even for a short period of time that would allow the Tigers to re-group, re-arm and regain lost lands and attack later with much vigour and vitality. In such an eventuality all what the regime had gained would be lost militarily and politically. On the other hand if a ceasefire is not granted that would be the end of the thirty-year curse.

It is clear the Tigers' previous irresponsible behaviour and the military victories gained so far have played a role in prompting the government to reject the ceasefire. However without closing the chapter altogether the government had placed a condition for a ceasefire. The one and only condition is total disarmament. The government seems to be conveying the message that if one is genuine one must come forward clean. On the other hand the government also must be conscious of the fact that rejecting a call for ceasefire altogether is a risky business for a government spearheading a war. But offering a ceasefire to a group like LTTE is suicidal to say the least. Considering all these facts the government would have thought a lukewarm treatment is the best way to keep the vultures and sympathizers away from the dying patient.

It is a well-known fact that only when the patient reaches dying stages the call for ceasefire comes in. It is also a fact that those who responded to such calls of ceasefire previously had to pay dearly. Irony of it is that despite shamelessly disgracing its reputation, the Tigers continue to send calls for ceasefire. Under such circumstances these calls for ceasefire seem to be nothing but SOS messages to sympathizers to rescue them from virtual death. As a result of such disastrous episodes Tigers' calls for ceasefire tend to go unheeded.

But in this case the present regime has responded but cautiously. Maybe they had to respond because rejecting a call for ceasefire is deadly from whichever corner it comes. Those who promote such ceasefires argue that it is the innocent civilians that get benefited from ceasefires. But a mere glance at the Tigers' report card will reveal that it was during the ceasefire which was in force that more and more buses with women and children were blasted, more and more civilians were killed. It was during such so called peaceful periods that the Tigers smuggled in ship-loads of armaments. In fact it was due to such continuous massacres of innocent civilians and such other violent acts that the authorities abrogated the ceasefire agreement.

In a way such behavior is expected from Tigers mainly because they are a group that do not believe in peaceful resolution of problems. They believe in violence, death and destruction purely because they have reached the position they are in today illegally by way of violence, death and destruction. They know no other way of achieving

A CEASEFIRE COULD EASE PRABHAKARAN AND CEASE RAJAPAKSA

their goals other than through violence, death and destruction. Ironically it is to restart such death and destruction that they seek a lull period through ceasefire to revive themselves from the hopeless situation they are in today.

When the Tigers lost the Mannar "Rice Bowl" the Tiger spokesman boasted that they are still strong and will come back. Then they lost their main sea base on the West coast in Vedithalathivu. But Tigers maintained absolute mum over the loss. Finally they lost Illuppaikkadavai another major base towards Pooneryn and then they realized the military forward march cannot be stopped by their armed cadre. Such a realization would have prompted them to call for a ceasefire unilaterally. As far as Tigers are concerned a ceasefire would serve two of their immediate purposes. Firstly they get breathing space to reorganize and to keep their remaining bases intact so they can remain where they are. Secondly they can smuggle in ship-loads of armaments to replenish their armoury.

Under such circumstances it is clear that the Tigers find it impossible to face the military. They know they cannot face the military head on to retain their bases and remain where they are that may be why they declared a ceasefire unilaterally in the name of SAARC.

If the Tigers are so worried about summit meetings and things like that they should not have continued a reign of terror killing absolutely innocent civilians. No one can forget the barbarianism displayed in carrying out civilian massacres by attacking passenger buses. Almost all the main cities around Colombo had to experience bus bomb blasts. It was after capturing one of the king pins who had masterminded operations in Colombo that the city of Colombo was brought under some kind of lull period.

Ironically the Tigers too need a lull period in their areas to re-organize. In addition to themselves their prime requirement at this stage is to retain the remaining bases. They would have realized that it is only through a ceasefire the military onslaught can be stopped. Prabhakaran would have thought that President Rajapaksa too needs some breathing space during the SAARC summit. This is not the only occasion Prabhakaran misjudged President Rajapaksa. But this time it would be a costly mistake.

Even the international community and the NGO fraternity is silent about the ceasefire as it is a foregone conclusion that the Tigers cannot be trusted. It is also very clear that if a ceasefire is to be arranged the Tigers' next attempt would have been to extend it beyond the SAARC summit. An extension after the summit would have solved Prabhakaran's problems of replenishments, cadre training and regaining lost territory.

Hence under such circumstances if the Rajapaksa regime agrees to an unconditional ceasefire even for a nominal period even in the future that would be the beginning of the end of a successful military operation. The end of such a military operation that had cleared the entire Eastern Province and majority of the western seaboard including massive landmasses that were under the Tiger command would isolate President Rajapaksa. The president would get isolated mainly because it is he who is considered as the man behind the war. In the same way he gets credited for victories and he suffers when the operation ends prematurely.

Had the president accepted the ceasefire in the name of SAARC or peace, that would have exposed the regime to the pent up anger of the people.

It is a fact that people are ready to bear up any burden as long as the regime shows results at the battle front. Hence a premature halt to the forward march would propel people to rise against the regime over cost of living. On the other hand terror in the city would become a daily occurrence as it happened before the victories in the North.

Finally the left leaning parties will revolt openly against the government for stopping the war against terror. All these factors and President Rajapaksa's avowed goal of wiping out terrorism would have propelled him to maintain the status quo.

As for Prabhakaran this is his last chance to protect his last remaining bases in the Wanni. He is in a "do or die" situation. If he fails to get a ceasefire agreement at this stage he would be left with only two options. Either he should continue till the end and bite the cyanide capsule that had been hanging around his neck for three decades or flee the country before the military juggernaut arrives in the heartland of the Wanni leaving his cadre of fighters to fight using the human shield as a cover till the end. Either way Prabhakaran knows that the inevitable end is near.

A CEASEFIRE COULD EASE PRABHAKARAN AND CEASE RAJAPAKSA

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Load-Date: August 11, 2008

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At least 46 rebels dead in heavy fighting

UPI

February 3, 2008 Sunday 9:58 PM EST

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Length: 111 words

Dateline: COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Feb. 3

Body

At least 46 Tamil Tiger rebels and two government soldiers have been killed in heavy clashes in northern Sri Lanka, the Media Center for National Security said.

Also, a **female** suicide bomber at a central rail terminal killed at least seven people and wounded nearly 100 others. A grenade attack earlier Sunday killed an as-yet undetermined number of people at a Colombo zoo.

Officials suspect the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, **LTTE**, are behind the attacks, but there was no immediate claim of responsibility by the group.

The Sri Lankan government postponed the Deyata Kirula exhibition until Feb. 7 due to the security situation in the country, Lanka Page reported.

Load-Date: February 4, 2008

Forces recover weapons haul

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 30, 2008 Monday 4:12 PM EST

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Length: 104 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 30 -- A special Police investigation team during a search operation has recovered a large haul of arms and ammunition from Kadakarachchena, Muttur on Saturday night.

Further search operations are being conducted in the area, sources said.

Meanwhile, thirteen civilians fleeing from the clutches of the **LTTE** have sought the Navy's help for protection in Mannar.

According to sources six **females** and seven males hailing from the Kilinochchi and Paranthan areas had reached the Pallemunai Naval detachment on Saturday night seeking their help.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: September 16, 2008

Female suicide cadre arrested

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

October 27, 2008 Monday 2:07 PM EST

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Length: 104 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Oct. 27 -- The Puttalam police arrested a **female LTTE** suicide cadre engaged in construction work at the Norochcholai coal power plant to target a VIP frequently visiting the site.

Police said that the suicide cadre was arrested about two months ago but she had revealed the motive of her mission only recently. The suspect is being further interrogated by the Terrorist Investigation Division.

It is believed that the Power and Energy Minister John Seneviratne could have been the possible target of her mission. The suspect is a resident of the area.

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Load-Date: October 27, 2008

39 Tamil civilians seek refuge

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

October 15, 2008 Wednesday 2:15 PM EST

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Length: 112 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Oct. 15 -- A group of thirty-nine Tamil civilians including fourteen women and twelve children from un-cleared area of Mullaitivu sought refuge with Security Forces last morning.

Despite the LTTE's restrictions and obstacles, these civilians from the Mullaivaikkal area had reached the Security Forces in Pulmoddai, the Defence Ministry said.

Thirteen men are among the escapees. Meals and other basic needs have already been provided before arrangements were made to relocate them. The civilians were later directed to an IDP centre after completing initial investigations, the Defence Ministry said.

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Load-Date: October 15, 2008

Civilians seek security forces protection

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

May 27, 2008 Tuesday 4:22 PM EST

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Length: 114 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, May 27 -- Seven Tamil civilians including two **females** sought protection with security forces at the Navy and Police jointly manned fishing marshalling point at Pallaimunai, Mannar on Sunday, Defence Ministry said yesterday.

The Defence Ministry said that the civilians had sought protection after fleeing from the **LTTE** controlled Vedithalathivu area.

The civilians were later handed over to the Mannar police and subsequently taken to an IDP centre in Mannar, the Ministry said.

According to available information, the civilians had fled due to unprecedented hardships and forced recruitment by the terror outfit.

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Load-Date: August 11, 2008

Police recover cache of weapons

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 11, 2008 Wednesday 4:29 PM EST

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Length: 106 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 11 -- A haul of arms and weapons was recovered by police in a jungle patch in Vakarai on Monday at 2.15 p.m., SSP Ranjith Gunasekera said.

Police unearthed 43 AP mines, 23 hand grenades, six 82mm mortar bombs, two 60mm mortar bombs, six 82mm mortar bomb fuse, 80 AP mine fuse and a locally made gun.

Meanwhile, three bodies of **female LTTE** cadres were recovered by the Security Forces last morning following a confrontation on Monday in Mankulam, Mannar.

Arrangements have been made to hand over these bodies to the ICRC after completing the investigations.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: September 16, 2008

32 more crossover to Govt.-controlled areas

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 25, 2008 Wednesday 4:42 PM EST

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Length: 113 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 25 -- Thirty two civilians from the Mullaitivu district arrived in Kokilai and Pulmudai during the past two days and sought the protection of the security forces, the Defence Ministry said.

"Fourteen males, three **females** and three children from Mullaithivu and Malayanwadu came to the government-controlled areas to escape **LTTE**'s harassment and forcible recruitment," the Defence Ministry said. The refugees had arrived on small boats.

The military said that steps had been taken to provide food and shelter at IDP camps and some of them have sought accommodation in the houses of their relatives.

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Load-Date: August 11, 2008

15 escape Tiger claws

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

November 11, 2008 Tuesday 2:02 PM EST

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Length: 129 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Nov. 11 -- Fifteen more civilians yesterday fled from uncleared areas at Paranthan in the Kilinochchi district and surrendered to the Army in Thanankilappu in Jaffna.

The army said refugees including two children, eight women and five men had made their way across the Kilaly lagoon in two Theppams -locally made sea craft.

After preliminary inquiries they were sent to the Thelippalai welfare centre where they were provided with basic facilities in coordination with the Jaffna District Secretary. IDP welfare centre at Thelippalai in Kankasanthurai presently provides shelter for 47 refugees who arrived in cleared areas on two occasions seeking protection against terror activities of the LTTE.

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Load-Date: November 11, 2008

UNP must support Govt. at this juncture, says Sajith

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

September 19, 2008 Friday 1:57 PM EST

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Length: 118 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Sept. 19 -- The UNP should extend unconditional support to the Government, at this critical juncture when the Security Forces are engaged in a decisive war to liberate the country from terrorists, UNP Parliamentarian Sajith Premadasa said.

He was addressing a women empowerment meeting at Hakuruwela Purana Raja Maha Viharaya, Hakuruwela, Angunukolapelessa.

"Far, from weakening the Forces valour and courage, we should boost their morale in their fight to unite the country," he said.

Premadasa said the LTTE was not the sole representative of the Tamil community and emphasised the need for a political solution to end the conflict.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: September 19, 2008

32 civilians flee uncleared areas

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

July 11, 2008 Friday 3:02 PM EST

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Length: 111 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, July 11 -- Thirty-two civilians from un-cleared areas in the Mannar district crossed over to cleared areas in Pesalai on Wednesday night seeking protection from the security forces.

The Army Headquarters said "these civilians from Nachchikuda on two dinghies comprising thirteen males and nineteen **females** with their children had sailed to reach the Navy Camp due to **LTTE** harassment."

They said three boys aged 7 and 14 years and six girls of 2, 4, 5 and 17 years were among those civilians. Naval troops handed over the civilians to the Churukkandal Internally Displaced Persons Welfare Centre.

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Load-Date: August 11, 2008

EIGHT LANKAN REFUGEES IN MANDAPAM SPECIAL CAMP

UNI (United News of India)

May 13, 2008 Tuesday 6:13 PM EST

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Length: 120 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Ramanathapuram

Body

Ramanathapuram, May 13 (UNI) Eight Sri Lankan Tamil nationals, including two **women**, took refuge in the Special Refugee Camp for Tamil Refugees at Mandapam, here today. Official sources told UNI here that the refugees, hailing from Jaffna, Colombo and Vavuniya regions of the Island nation had arrived in Tamil Nadu recently with valid documents. The refugees registered their names with the authorities of the Special Refugee Camp today and were housed at the Camp, the sources added. It may be recalled that there has been a heavy influx of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka in the last couple of months following renewed fighting between the Lankan army and **LTTE**.

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For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Load-Date: May 13, 2008

FIVE SRI LANKAN NATIONALS TAKE REFUGE AT MANDAPAM CAMP

UNI (United News of India)

July 25, 2008 Friday 6:00 PM EST

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Length: 115 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Ramanathapuram

Body

Ramanathapuram, Jul 25 (UNI) A fresh batch of five Sri Lankan Tamil nationals, including four **women**, were lodged in the Special Refugee Camp for Tamil Refugees at Mandapam, here today. Official sources told UNI that the refugees, hailing from Yalpanam region in the Island nation, had arrived here recently with valid documents. The refugees registered their names with the authorities of the Special Refugee Camp this evening and were housed at the camp. It may be recalled that there has been a heavy influx of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka in the last couple of months following renewed fighting between the Lankan army and **LTTE**.

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Load-Date: July 28, 2008

3 Lankans in TN Refugee Camp

UNI (United News of India)

April 7, 2008 Monday 3:59 PM EST

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Length: 113 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Ramanathapuram(Tamil Nadu)

Body

Ramanathapuram(Tamil Nadu), April 7 -- Three Sri Lankan nationals, including two women, took refuge in the special camp for Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees at Mandapam, here today.

Official sources told UNI Krishnaveni alias Mishana (24), Pappathi (38) and Padmaraj (17) from Vavuniya and Jaffna in the island nation arrived in Tamil Nadu recently with valid documents.

They arrived here this evening and registered their names with the camp authorities.

There had been heavy influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to the state in the past couple of months owing to fierce fighting between the country's armed forces and the LTTE.

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Load-Date: July 7, 2008

More civilians arrive in Omanthai

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

November 25, 2008 Tuesday 11:53 AM EST

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Length: 134 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Nov. 25 -- Another seven civilians had crossed from the uncleared area seeking protection with the Security Forces in Omanthai yesterday morning.

Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said seven civilians from four families reached the Omanthai roadblock around 7.30 a.m.

"There were five males and two **females**," he added. "We expect the number of civilians escaping from the **LTTE** hardship to increase in the coming days. Troops are marching forward to Killinochchi and the humanitarian operation to liberate the Wanni is successful as at troops poised to captured Killinochchi from all three flanks," Brigadier Nanayakkara told the Daily News.

The civilians were directed to an IDP centre where they will be provided with all facilities.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Load-Date: November 25, 2008

Not a UNICEF vehicle

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

January 30, 2009 Friday

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Length: 131 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Jan. 30 -- UNICEF yesterday said "a Toyota double cab" which the Army says it has seized from the **LTTE** does not belong to UNICEF.

An Army website had erroneously claimed the vehicle belonged to UNICEF. UNICEF does not have any double cabs in its fleet. However in the past years UNICEF has donated a large number of this type of vehicles to Government partners such as the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, Ministry of Education, National Water Supply and Drainage Board and the Ministry of Social Services and Social Welfare to support their activities. UNICEF said it is regrettable that this donated vehicle might have been illegally taken away from a partner implementing programs for **women** and children. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Daily News Sri Lanka.

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Load-Date: May 5, 2009

Six Tamils flee Tiger clutches

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

August 20, 2008 Wednesday 3:10 PM EST

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Length: 127 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Aug. 20 -- Fleeing from ***LTTE*** clutches in the aftermath of defeats at the hands of Security Forces, six Tamil persons belonging to two families sought Navy protection at the Pallemunai Fishing Marshalling Point in Mannar on Monday, the Navy said.

The group consisting of five youth accompanied by an elderly mother aged 55 had fled from Semmangundu in Pooneryn, an uncleared area in a fibre glass dinghy fitted with a 9.9 Horse Power Out Board Motor.

The four males are between 17 to 21 and the ***female*** is aged 17.

After they were provided food and drinks the group were directed to the representative of the Government Agent at the Civil Coordinating Office in Mannar for further action.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: August 20, 2008

Navy help sought by fleeing families

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 28, 2008 Saturday 2:47 PM EST

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Length: 116 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 28 -- Eight persons of two families, four in each, fleeing from Matalan in Mullaitivu, sought protection of the Navy, military said.

The naval crews on routine watch out and look out duties had initially spotted and detected a fibreglass dinghy flying a white flag in the sea a little far off from Kallawarawa situated about 40 kilometres from Trincomalee prompting them to investigate. There were 02 **females** of the ages 53 and 47 years, and 06 males of the ages 46, 23, 22, 21, 20 and 19 years. The atrocities, harassments and forceful conscription of youngsters made them to flee the clutches of **LTTE**, they claimed.

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Load-Date: August 11, 2008

World report

Windsor Star (Ontario)

September 9, 2008 Tuesday

Final Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. C2; World Report

Length: 1349 words

Byline: Compiled from Star News Services

Body

ASIA

NORTH KOREA'S KIM COLLAPSED DUE TO ILLNESS?

SEOUL - North Korea's Kim Jong-il collapsed last month, a South Korean official in Beijing was quoted as saying, as analysts wondered whether the reclusive leader will appear at his state's anniversary festivities today.

Kim, who is 66, overweight and plagued with chronic medical maladies, has been the subject of persistent rumours in the South about his health, but his actual condition is one of the secretive state's most tightly guarded secrets.

"We have obtained intelligence that Defence Commission Chairman Kim Jong-il had collapsed on Aug. 22," the official with the South Korean embassy in Beijing was quoted as saying by the Chosun Ilbo newspaper today.

The same daily reported last week that five Chinese doctors have been visiting Pyongyang from late August to treat a high-level North Korean official, possibly Kim.

South Korea's intelligence agency could not immediately confirm the report.

INDIAN SCHOOLS SHUT AS DOGS GO ON RAMPAGE

BHUBANESWAR, India - Authorities in eastern India on Monday ordered more than a dozen schools to close after scores of people were attacked by street dogs, an official said.

The incidents were reported over the past two days after a pack of dogs entered the small town of Bamra in coastal Orissa state.

"We have ordered all 14 schools in Bamra to be closed till Wednesday as a precautionary measure amid the growing stray dog menace," the town's chief administrator Bibhuti Bhusan Behera told AFP.

He said 62 people had been given anti-rabies treatment after being bitten, but gave no further details.

The dogs would be captured and released outside the town, Behera said.

20,000 COWS REMOVED FROM DELHI STREETS

World report

NEW DELHI - City authorities in Delhi have rounded up 20,000 free-roaming cattle in the past year to improve health and safety standards, officials said Monday.

"Last month alone we caught about 2,000 cows," an official from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), which presented the annual figures to the Delhi High Court last week, told AFP.

"We keep catching cows as they are constantly brought into the city," said the official, who declined to be named.

The court has repeatedly ordered Delhi authorities to clear the streets of the animals, which they say pose a threat to traffic as well as a health risk.

Many of the animals belong to dairy farmers who do not have space to house the cattle and thus let them wander at will.

"Our workers and vehicles have been attacked by dairy owners when they try to take the cows away," said the official.

The captured cows are sent to state-run shelters and then auctioned.

SRI LANKA'S TIGER REBELS STAGE ANOTHER AIR ATTACK

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels today staged another air strike in the north and carried out a long-range artillery barrage, local residents and officials said.

Residents in Vavuniya, 256 kilometres north of the capital Colombo, said they saw anti-aircraft fire illuminating the night sky while huge blasts were also heard in the de facto frontier town.

Hospital sources in Vavuniya said at least three policemen and a civilian were brought to the main hospital in the area following the rebel attack and one of them succumbed to his injuries.

The Tigers are believed to operate five Czech-built Zlin-143 aircraft smuggled onto the island in pieces and re-assembled.

Satellite images have shown that they have more than one air strip inside areas they hold.

Troops are braced for a fierce battle as the military tries to capture the LTTEs de facto state in the north after ejecting them from the east last July.

- - -

AFRICA

UP TO 15 YEARS PRISON FOR EGYPT SCHOOL EXAM CHEATS

CAIRO - Fourteen Egyptians, including officials and parents, were jailed for up to 15 years on Monday for involvement in leaking secondary school exams in a scandal that has rocked the country.

A court in Menya, 240 kilometres south of Cairo, convicted the group for trying in June to cheat the dreaded "thanawiya amma" -- Egypt's equivalent of A-levels or SATs -- that largely determine a child's future.

The court found the accused guilty of "having organized leaks, which damaged the principle of equality of opportunity between pupils," in the English and maths sections of the exams, a judicial source said.

Ringleader Ezzat Khalil Mansour, head of Menya's Examinations Committee, was jailed for 15 years and sacked.

His friend Ayman Rabie was jailed for 10 years for having bought the exam papers for \$55 and for subsequently selling them.

World report

UNITA ACCEPTS MPLA VICTORY IN ANGOLA ELECTION

LUANDA - Angola's opposition UNITA party reversed course on Monday and said it accepted the results of the country's parliamentary election, which showed the ruling MPLA winning a landslide victory and extending its 33-year rule.

The decision, coming a few days after UNITA vowed to contest what it described as a flawed poll, ensured the oil-rich African nation would emerge from its first election in 16 years without the turmoil that marked recent polls in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

The MPLA had taken an insurmountable lead over UNITA, the former rebel group and largest opposition party. With nearly 80 of the vote counted from the two-day poll, the MPLA had about 82 per cent of the vote versus just over 10 per cent for UNITA.

"The leadership of UNITA accepts the results of the election," UNITA leader Isaias Samakuva said in a news conference at his party's headquarters. He added that he hoped the MPLA would govern in the interests of all.

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EUROPE

MAN ACCUSED OF CONFINING, RAPING DAUGHTER

WARSAW - A 45-year-old Polish man was charged Monday with kidnapping and raping his teenage daughter over a period of six years, Polish police said.

The man, whose identity was not made public, was arrested in Siedlce, central Poland, while he was attempting to escape.

His daughter, now aged 21, reported the abuse to police last week, according to national police spokesman Mariusz Sokolowski.

The young woman, who went to police in Siemiatycze, eastern Poland, accompanied by her mother, testified to being confined and raped by her father from age 14, Sokolowski said.

She gave birth to two children, in 2005 and 2007, which she left in hospital for adoption.

"They were probably a result of rape," Sokolowski said.

SPANISH CHEF ARRESTED OVER 'TOXIC SHELLFISH'

MADRID - One of Spain's leading female chefs has been arrested for allegedly selling toxic shellfish in her restaurant.

Toni Vicente, the owner of the eponymous restaurant in Santiago de Compostela, has been detained along with nine others for allegedly selling produce from a contaminated river.

The arrests followed a two-month police investigation into the alleged illegal fishing and marketing of banned shellfish.

Scallops sold in the restaurant, widely considered one of the best in Galicia, in the north of the country, were allegedly illegally harvested from Ferrol's busy estuary.

Shellfish from the Ria de Ferrol were banned because they were thought to contain high levels of a toxin that can cause Amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP) which leads to memory loss. Among those detained are six fishermen and several restaurateurs.

World report

They all face four years in prison if found guilty.

FRENCHWOMAN, 59, GIVES BIRTH TO HEALTHY TRIPLETS

PARIS - A 59-year-old Frenchwoman has given birth by Caesarean section to two boys and a girl, who are in good health, the Paris hospital treating her said on Monday.

"Everything went smoothly," said a spokesman at Cochin hospital where the triplets were born overnight Saturday.

The woman, of Vietnamese origin, is thought to have resorted to a private Vietnamese clinic willing to overlook the age limit for egg donation and in vitro fertilization (IVF), set at 45 in Vietnam, according to press reports.

Egg donations are authorized in France but most fertility clinics here set a maximum age limit of 42 for would-be mothers. But nothing prevents couples from seeking fertility treatment abroad and in 2001 a 62-year-old Frenchwoman gave birth to a child conceived through IVF.

Earlier this year, an Indian woman said to be 70 years old gave birth to twins after receiving IVF treatment.

Graphic

Colour Photo: Reuters; FIGHTING FOR A FREE TIBET: Police detain a Tibetan exile during a protest outside the venue of a meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee in New Delhi on Monday. Jiechi is in New Delhi on a three-day state visit in an attempt to resolve a festering border dispute dating back to the 1962 war between the countries. The two Asian giants are also working to increase bilateral trade beyond its current US\$30 billion annually. ;

Colour Photo: Kim Jong-il ;

Colour Photo: Isaias Samakuva ;

Load-Date: September 9, 2008

No ceasefire, says PM

Colombo Times

March 9, 2009 Monday

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Length: 167 words

Body

Colombo, March 9 -- Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickremanayake said that certain foreign forces were seeking a ceasefire with the aim of strengthening the **LTTE**.

The premier stressed that the government was not prepared to declare a ceasefire. He said that the government would not do so even if a rich and powerful country called for a ceasefire. He said certain people had expressed views in foreign newspapers that a ceasefire was required at this time. He said the government would not agree to such a suggestion. He said Sri Lanka had learnt lessons from the past. During ceasefire periods the terrorists had always strengthened themselves, he said.

The PM expressed these views at a function held at the Ingiriya hospital, to transform it into a Children's and a **Women's** Hospital and to inaugurate a Dental Surgical Unit there. An ambulance was also gifted to the hospital. Minister Nimal Siripala De Silva, and Vidura Wickremanayake, the SLFP's Chief Organizer for Horana, also addressed the gathering.

Load-Date: May 5, 2009

End of Document

21 Civilians killed, over 50 injured in the explosion - Moratuwa

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 6, 2008 Friday 3:17 PM EST

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Length: 134 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 6 -- **LTTE** terrorists have exploded a bomb targeting a crowded public transport bus close to the Shailabimbaramaya Buddhist temple at Katubedda, Moratuwa this morning (June 06). According to the police sources the bomb has been exploded using a remote controlled device targeting a bus that has been traveling from Kottawa to Mount Lavinia (Route No 255).

Hospital sources said that 21 people including 13 males and 8 **females** have been killed. over 50 have been injured. Injured civilians have been admitted to the Kalubowila and Lunawa hospital for immediate treatments.

According to the available sources it is believed that the terrorists have exploded a roadside bomb which had been triggered off by a remote controller.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: September 16, 2008

Moral high ground is shifting beneath secularists' feet

The Irish Times

March 21, 2008 Friday

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Section: OPINION; Opinion; Pg. 11

Length: 2210 words

Body

OPINION Anti-religious zealotry will not eradicate religion. But it may prompt it to assume grotesque forms, writes John Gray.

CONTEMPORARY OPPONENTS of religion display a marked lack of interest in the historical record of atheist regimes. In *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason*, the American writer Sam Harris argues that religion has been the chief source of violence and oppression in history. He recognises that secular despots such as Stalin and Mao inflicted terror on a grand scale, but maintains the oppression they practised had nothing to do with their ideology of "scientific atheism" - what was wrong with their regimes was that they were tyrannies. But might there not be a connection between the attempt to eradicate religion and the loss of freedom?

It is unlikely that Mao, who launched his assault on the people and culture of Tibet with the slogan "religion is poison", would have agreed that his atheist world-view had no bearing on his policies. It is true he was worshipped as a semi-divine figure - as Stalin was in the Soviet Union. But in developing these cults, communist Russia and China were not backsliding from atheism. They were demonstrating what happens when atheism becomes a political project. The invariable result is an ersatz religion that can only be maintained by tyrannical means.

Something like this occurred in Nazi Germany. Richard Dawkins dismisses any suggestion that the crimes of the Nazis could be linked with atheism. "What matters," he declares in his book *The God Delusion*, "is not whether Hitler and Stalin were atheists, but whether atheism systematically influences people to do bad things. There is not the smallest evidence that it does." This is simple-minded reasoning. Always a tremendous booster of science, Hitler was much impressed by vulgarised Darwinism and by theories of eugenics that had developed from Enlightenment philosophies of materialism. He used Christian anti-Semitic demonology in his persecution of Jews, and the churches collaborated with him to a horrifying degree. But it was the Nazi belief in race as a scientific category that opened the way to a crime without parallel in history.

Nowadays most atheists are avowed liberals. What they want - so they will tell you - is not an atheist regime, but a secular state in which religion has no role. They clearly believe that, in a state of this kind, religion will tend to decline. But America's secular constitution has not ensured a secular politics. Christian fundamentalism is more powerful in the US than in any other country, while it has very little influence in Britain, which has an established church. Contemporary critics of religion go much further than demanding disestablishment. It is clear that he [Dawkins] wants to eliminate all traces of religion from public institutions. Awkwardly, many of the concepts he deploys - including the idea of religion itself - have been shaped by monotheism.

Moral high ground is shifting beneath secularists' feet

AC Grayling provides an example of the persistence of religious categories in secular thinking in his *Towards the Light: The Story of the Struggles for Liberty and Rights That Made the Modern West*. As the title indicates, Grayling's book is a type of sermon. Its aim is to reaffirm what he calls "a Whig view of the history of the modern West", the core of which is that "the West displays progress". The Whigs were pious Christians, who believed divine providence arranged history to culminate in English institutions, and Grayling too believes history is "moving in the right direction".

No doubt there have been setbacks - he mentions Nazism and communism in passing, devoting a few sentences to them. But these disasters were peripheral. They do not reflect on the central tradition of the modern West, which has always been devoted to liberty, and which - Grayling asserts - is inherently antagonistic to religion. "The history of liberty," he writes, "is another chapter - and perhaps the most important of all - in the great quarrel between religion and secularism."

The possibility that radical versions of secular thinking may have contributed to the development of Nazism and communism is not mentioned. More even than the 18th-century Whigs, who were shaken by French Terror, Grayling has no doubt as to the direction of history.

But the belief that history is a directional process is as faith-based as anything in the Christian catechism. Secular thinkers such as Grayling reject the idea of providence, but they continue to think humankind is moving towards a universal goal - a civilisation based on science that will eventually encompass the entire species.

In pre-Christian Europe, human life was understood as a series of cycles; history was seen as tragic or comic rather than redemptive. With the arrival of Christianity, it came to be believed that history had a predetermined goal, which was human salvation. Though they suppress their religious content, secular humanists continue to cling to similar beliefs. One does not want to deny anyone the consolations of a faith, but it is obvious that the idea of progress in history is a myth created by the need for meaning.

Belief in progress is a relic of the Christian view of history as a universal narrative, and an intellectually rigorous atheism would start by questioning it. This is what Nietzsche did when he developed his critique of Christianity in the late 19th century, but almost none of today's secular missionaries have followed his example.

One need not be a great fan of Nietzsche to wonder why this is so. The reason, no doubt, is that he did not assume any connection between atheism and liberal values - on the contrary, he viewed liberal values as an offspring of Christianity and condemned them partly for that reason. In contrast, evangelical atheists have positioned themselves as defenders of liberal freedoms - rarely inquiring where these freedoms have come from, and never allowing that religion may have had a part in creating them.

Among contemporary anti-religious polemicists, only the French writer Michel Onfray has taken Nietzsche as his point of departure. In some ways, Onfray's *In Defence of Atheism* is superior to anything English-speaking writers have published on the subject. Refreshingly, Onfray recognises that evangelical atheism is an unwitting imitation of traditional religion: "Many militants of the secular cause look astonishingly like clergy. Worse: like caricatures of clergy." More clearly than his Anglo-Saxon counterparts, Onfray understands the formative influence of religion on secular thinking. Yet he seems not to notice that the liberal values he takes for granted were partly shaped by Christianity and Judaism.

The key liberal theorists of toleration are John Locke, who defended religious freedom in explicitly Christian terms, and Benedict Spinoza, a Jewish rationalist who was also a mystic. Yet Onfray has nothing but contempt for the traditions from which these thinkers emerged - particularly Jewish monotheism: "We do not possess an official certificate of birth for worship of one God," he writes. "But the family line is clear: the Jews invented it to endure the coherence, cohesion and existence of their small, threatened people." Here Onfray passes over an important distinction. It may be true that Jews first developed monotheism, but Judaism has never been a missionary faith. In seeking universal conversion, evangelical atheism belongs with Christianity and Islam.

In today's anxiety about religion, it has been forgotten that most of the faith-based violence of the past century was secular in nature. To some extent, this is also true of the current wave of terrorism.

Moral high ground is shifting beneath secularists' feet

Islamism is a patchwork of movements, not all violently jihadist and some strongly opposed to al-Qaeda, most of them partly fundamentalist and aiming to recover the lost purity of Islamic traditions, while at the same time taking some of their guiding ideas from radical secular ideology. There is a deal of fashionable talk of Islamo-fascism, and Islamist parties have some features in common with interwar fascist movements, including anti-Semitism. But Islamists owe as much, if not more, to the far left, and it would be more accurate to describe many of them as Islamo-Leninists.

Islamist techniques of terror also have a pedigree in secular revolutionary movements. The executions of hostages in Iraq are copied in exact theatrical detail from European "revolutionary tribunals" in the 1970s, such as that staged by the Red Brigades when they murdered former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro in 1978.

The influence of secular revolutionary movements on terrorism extends well beyond Islamists. In his book *God Is Not Great*, Christopher Hitchens notes that, long before Hizbullah and al-Qaeda, the **Tamil Tigers** of Sri Lanka pioneered what he rightly calls "the disgusting tactic of suicide murder". He omits to mention that the Tigers are Marxist-Leninists who, while recruiting mainly from the island's Hindu population, reject religion in all its varieties.

Tiger suicide bombers do not go to certain death in the belief that they will be rewarded in any postmortem paradise. Nor did the suicide bombers who drove American and French forces out of Lebanon in the 1980s, most of whom belonged to organisations of the left such as the Lebanese Communist Party. These secular terrorists believed they were expediting a historical process from which will come a world better than any that has ever existed. It is a view of things more remote from human realities, and more reliably lethal in its consequences, than most religious myths.

It is not necessary to believe in any narrative of progress to think liberal societies are worth resolutely defending. No one can doubt that they are superior to the tyranny imposed by the Taliban on Afghanistan, for example. The issue is one of proportion. Ridden with conflicts and lacking the industrial base of communism and Nazism, Islamism is nowhere near a danger of the magnitude of those that were faced down in the 20th century. A greater menace is posed by North Korea, which far surpasses any Islamist regime in its record of repression and clearly does possess some kind of nuclear capability. Evangelical atheists rarely mention it. Hitchens is an exception, but when he describes his visit to the country, it is only to conclude that the regime embodies "a debased yet refined form of Confucianism and ancestor worship". As in Russia and China, the noble humanist philosophy of Marxist-Leninism is innocent of any responsibility.

Writing of the Trotskyite-Luxemburgist sect to which he once belonged, Hitchens confesses sadly: "There are days when I miss my old convictions as if they were an amputated limb."

He need not worry. His record on Iraq shows he has not lost the will to believe. The effect of the American-led invasion has been to deliver most of the country outside the Kurdish zone into the hands of an Islamist elective theocracy, in which **women**, gays and religious minorities are more oppressed than at any time in Iraq's history. The idea that Iraq could become a secular democracy - which Hitchens ardently promoted - was possible only as an act of faith.

In *The Second Plane*, Martin Amis writes: "Opposition to religion already occupies the high ground, intellectually and morally."

Amis is sure religion is a bad thing, and that it has no future in the West. In the author of *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* - a forensic examination of self-delusion in the pro-Soviet western intelligentsia - such confidence is surprising. The intellectuals whose folly Amis dissects turned to communism in some sense as a surrogate for religion, and ended up making excuses for Stalin.

Are there really no comparable follies today? Some neocons - such as Tony Blair, who will soon be teaching religion and politics at Yale - combine their belligerent progressivism with religious belief, though of a kind Augustine and Pascal might find hard to recognise.

Moral high ground is shifting beneath secularists' feet

Religion has not gone away. Repressing it is like repressing sex, a self-defeating enterprise. In the 20th century, when it commanded powerful states and mass movements, it helped engender totalitarianism. Today, the result is a climate of hysteria.

Not everything in religion is precious or deserving of reverence. There is the claim of religious authorities, also made by atheist regimes, to decide how people can express their sexuality, control their fertility and end their lives, which should be rejected categorically. Nobody should be allowed to curtail freedom in these ways, and no religion has the right to break the peace.

The attempt to eradicate religion, however, only leads to it reappearing in grotesque and degraded forms. A credulous belief in world revolution, universal democracy or the occult powers of mobile phones is more offensive to reason than the mysteries of religion, and less likely to survive in years to come.

Victorian poet Matthew Arnold wrote of believers being left bereft as the tide of faith ebbs away. Today secular faith is ebbing, and it is the apostles of unbelief who are left stranded on the beach.

John Gray's *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* will be out in paperback in April (Penguin)

Load-Date: March 21, 2008

End of Document

Going to the show; The allure of this year's show is diminished, but outrageous surprises are still possible

The Vancouver Sun (British Columbia)

February 9, 2008 Saturday

Final Edition

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Section: ARTS & LIFE; Pg. E1 ; Weekend Extra

Length: 1912 words

Byline: Amy O'Brian, Vancouver Sun

Body

The big question surrounding the 50th Grammy Awards show this Sunday was whether troubled, yet supremely talented Amy

Winehouse would show up.

The British Rehab soul singer was denied entry to the United States earlier this week due to her difficulties with drugs and the law.

But after further legal negotiations with the U.S. Embassy in London and stateside officials, the decision was reversed Friday, causing rampant speculation that the singer would appear in the flesh at the Los Angeles gala.

The latest word, though, from the singer's publicists is that the divine Ms. W. will perform via satellite, leaving her fellow artistes to sit staring at a screen, looking generally amused and perhaps slightly sedated.

But without the Winehouse wild card sitting in the audience, the allure of this year's Grammys is sadly diminished.

Sure, we can look to the notoriously outspoken and egotistical Kanye West to say or do something outrageous. He's nominated for an astounding eight awards and is scheduled to perform.

There's a handful of Canadian reasons to tune in -- namely B.C.'s own Michael Bublé, Nelly Furtado and, perhaps most importantly, Feist, the delightful indie chanteuse who finally gained recognition south of the border when one of her songs appeared in an iPod commercial.

And there are some unusual duets, which might make for interesting TV. It could be -- fingers crossed -- a battle of the divas when Tina Turner and Beyoncé take to the stage. There's no guessing what will happen when Fergie duets with John Legend. And Andrea Bocelli and Josh Groban will perform together for the first time.

But even with the fantastic Ms. Turner -- or maybe because of her -- it all seems so behind-the-times, so safe, even irrelevant.

There's little about the awards show that makes it a need-to-watch affair when you can catch the highlights on YouTube the next day.

Going to the show; The allure of this year's show is diminished, but outrageous surprises are still possible

I'm a sucker for red-carpet glamour and the possibility that someone will say or do something spontaneous and outrageous. But that seems increasingly unlikely.

And while I also enjoy a good musical performance, I'm not optimistic that I'll see something risky or truly original.

The Grammys are celebrating their 50th year, meaning the show will be framed by highlights from years gone by, ramping up the nostalgia factor rather than focusing on what the Grammys are supposed to do -- recognize and celebrate the best of contemporary music.

Even the artists named in the best "new" artist category are not really all that new. Feist has been a notable name in music since 1999, when she collaborated with Peaches and released her debut solo album.

Ledisi, also nominated in the best new artist category, has released three solo albums since 2000, while the notorious Amy Winehouse released her first album back in 2003 and was nominated for a Mercury Prize in 2004.

Instead of being shiny and "new," Winehouse's career sadly appears to already be careening toward its demise. So much for being current and relevant.

Radiohead's online release of *In Rainbows* -- an album that was on almost every best-of list for 2007 -- isn't eligible for a Grammy this year because it was released after the Sept. 30 deadline. But one also has to wonder if its risky pay-what-you-want online release -- without a major label, no less -- might have prevented it from earning a nomination even if it were eligible. We'll have to wait until next year to find out.

M.I.A., the politically-outspoken U.K. artist, was overlooked despite having one of the most original and infectious albums of the year. But maybe the sound of gunshots, not to mention her connections to the *Tamil Tigers*, were too much for voters?

Kudos must be given though for the slew of nominations for Kanye West and his album, *Graduation*. The rapper is not only known for making controversial statements during live televised appearances, he's also a superb performer.

My eyes and ears are sure to perk up every time he appears on the screen.

But as much as I agree with West's haul of nominations, others are downright baffling.

As I scrolled through the exhaustive list of nominees (there are 110 categories), I let out an audible gasp of amazement at the name Nickelback.

Yes, millions of people love them and they're based in B.C. -- so I should be proud -- but do they really deserve to be recognized for musical excellence when so many of their songs sound the same? And, as far as I can recall, they didn't put out an album in the past year.

In fact, they're nominated for the single, *If Everyone Cared*, which was recorded for their 2005 album, *All the Right Reasons*, meaning the song is well over two years old.

But I suppose the academy can be partly forgiven for some of its stale choices, as the voting process is complex and cumbersome, requiring many months before the shortlist can be announced.

Part of the problem likely lies in the huge list of categories. If the academy were to whittle down the list to just those categories they bother to announce on television (that is, the relevant ones) imagine the time they could save in the voting process.

Is it really necessary to award a Grammy for best classical crossover album? Best surround sound album? Or, my favourite, best album notes?

Going to the show; The allure of this year's show is diminished, but outrageous surprises are still possible

In a world where fewer and fewer people are buying hard copies of albums, and instead buying them -- or downloading them illegally -- online, it would be far more relevant to be awarding a Grammy for best web site, rather than best liner notes. But a Grammy Award for either is excessive.

This has all been said before, by other music writers and television critics.

But the icing on the griping cake this year is the announcement of a Grammy salute to fashion. The esteemed academy -- along with In Style magazine -- celebrated musicians-cum-designers with a fashion show featuring the designs of Beyoncé, Sean (Puffy) Combs, Jennifer Lopez, Justin Timberlake and Jessica Simpson, whose singing career has always been something of a joke. The academy has also launched its own Grammy Brand clothing collection, marking an end to any pretending that the Grammys are about musical integrity and excellence, rather than commercialism.

Ah, well. Despite my whingeing, I'll still watch the show.

Even via satellite, Amy Winehouse is worth watching.

aobrian@png.canwest.com

WHICH OF OUR STARS WILL FIND GRAMMY GLORY?: A SELECTED LIST OF CANADIAN GRAMMY AWARD NOMINEES

FEIST, 31

Nomination: best new artist, best pop vocal album, best **female** pop vocal performance and best short form music video for 1234.

The song/album: The Reminder, Feist's highly lauded 2007 album has won her critical acclaim and international recognition.

Canuck factor: Nova Scotia-born Feist was only 15 when she began fronting Calgary punk band Placebo. Several years later the singer relocated to Toronto, where she became guitarist for the indie rock group By Divine Right.

MICHAEL BUBLE, 32

Nomination: best male pop vocal performance for a solo vocal performance (single) for Everything, best traditional pop vocal album for Call Me Irresponsible.

The song/album: Everything, from the 2007 album Call Me Irresponsible.

Canuck factor: The son of a salmon and herring fisherman, Bubl  was born in Burnaby. His music-loving Italian grandfather introduced him to his idols: Bobby Darin, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles, and Elvis Presley.

NELLY FURTADO, 29

Nomination: best **female** pop vocal performance for Say It Right, best pop collaboration with vocals for Give It to Me by Timbaland featuring Nelly Furtado & Justin Timberlake.

Song/Album: Say It Right from the 2006 album Loose.

Canuck factor: Born in Victoria to Portuguese immigrants. As a teen, she wrote her own songs and performed with a Portuguese marching band.

JAMES EHNES, 31

Nomination: best instrumental soloist, performance with orchestra.

Going to the show; The allure of this year's show is diminished, but outrageous surprises are still possible

The album: Barber/Korngold/Walton: Violin Concertos -- James Ehnes, violin, with the Vancouver Symphony conducted by Bramwell Tovey (CBC Records).

Canuck factor: Born in Brandon, Man., Ehnes began violin studies at four years of age and made his orchestral solo debut with the Montreal Symphony at age 13. He has performed with other major Canadian symphonies -- including Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Ottawa's National Arts Centre Orchestra -- and is a regular recitalist across the country.

ARCADE FIRE

Nomination: best alternative album.

The album: Neon Bible, the band's sophomore follow-up to breakthrough album Funeral (2004).

Canuck factor: Formed in Montreal in 2003, which is also the city where bandleader Win Butler met wife and bandmate Regine Chassagne.

JONI MITCHELL, 64

Nomination: best pop instrumental performance.

The song/album: One Week Last Summer from Shine, her 2007 album released by Starbucks's Hear Music.

Canuck factor: Born in Fort Macleod, Alta., Mitchell grew up in Saskatoon. After attending art college for a year in Calgary, she relocated to Toronto to become a folk singer.

PREDICTING THE WINNERS: THESE ARE OUR BEST BETS

We won't predict who will trip on their way up the podium or slur their acceptance speech. But we're happy to share our thoughts on who should win Grammy awards in five of the night's biggest categories.

1. ALBUM OF THE YEAR: Who knew Herbie Hancock even had a new album out last year?

Well, he's nominated for Album of the Year, along with the Foo Fighters, country singer Vince Gill, rapper Kanye West and troubled rehab soul singer Amy Winehouse.

But considering Herbie's efforts were barely recognized by the public and the critics, it's unlikely he'll walk away with the award.

Then again, this year's ceremony is all about nostalgia, so who knows?

But my guess is that this, the biggest award of the night, will go to Ms. Amy Winehouse. As good as Kanye West's album is, it hasn't made an indelible mark the way Back to Black has.

2. BEST NEW ARTIST: It may be that Amy Winehouse cleans up in all of the six categories in which she's nominated, including this one. But if there's any justice in the world (or at least at the Grammys), it will go to the lovely Leslie Feist, even if she's not exactly "new" in our eyes.

3. BEST **FEMALE** POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE: There are two Canadians in this category, but as much as I enjoy that warm feeling that comes with patriotic pride, I don't think Feist or Nelly Furtado will win. Feist is nominated for 1234, in which she gives a gorgeously honest and almost adolescent-sounding vocal performance. But I have to go with Amy Winehouse. She deserves it.

4. BEST MALE POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE: We have another Canadian in this category. Michael Bublé is nominated for his song Everything. But John Mayer, Paul McCartney, Seal and Justin Timberlake round out this competition, making chances for our hometown boy kinda slim. My bet's on McCartney, not because he deserves it

Going to the show; The allure of this year's show is diminished, but outrageous surprises are still possible

(sorry, Beatles fans), but because, well, he's a former Beatle and Sunday's show is set to include a Beatles tribute with Cirque du Soleil.

5. BEST ALTERNATIVE MUSIC ALBUM: I'm not sure who chose to categorize Lily Allen or the White Stripes "alternative." And Arcade Fire, fair fellow Canadians, were featured in nearly every mainstream publication with a music section last year. The Shins and Bjork round out this category, making it a tough call, but my guess is it'll go to the White Stripes.

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ONLINE: www.vancouversun.com

For more Grammy coverage today and Sunday.

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Graphic

Graphic/Diagram: (See hardcopy for graphic) ;

Colour Photo: Amy Winehouse (above) is nominated in the best new artist category and Nickelback (Chad Kroeger) is nominated for the single If Everyone Cared from the album All the Right Reasons. ;

Colour Photo: Chad Kroeger ;

Colour Photo: Feist ;

Colour Photo: Michael Bublé ;

Colour Photo: Nelly Furtado ;

Photo: James Ehnes ;

Colour Photo: Arcade Fire ;

Colour Photo: Joni Mitchell ;

Colour Photo: Steve Bosch, Vancouver Sun; Rapper Kanye West is not only known for making controversial statements during live televised appearances, he's also a superb performer. ;

Load-Date: February 9, 2008

Sri Lanka says 35 killed in fresh fighting

Agence France Presse -- English

March 11, 2008 Tuesday 11:14 AM GMT

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Length: 165 words

Dateline: COLOMBO, March 11 2008

Body

At least 30 Tamil Tiger rebels and five government troops were killed in fresh clashes on Tuesday across Sri Lanka's embattled north, the defence ministry said.

Pre-dawn fighting erupted in the coastal district of Mannar where the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (**LTTE**) tried to re-take territory they lost to security forces this week, the ministry said.

The ministry said most of the rebel casualties were **women** fighters, though there was no immediate word from the guerrillas.

So far this year, the defence ministry has reported that security forces have killed at least 1,987 rebels while 123 government soldiers have died.

The government numbers and those given by the Tigers cannot be independently verified as Colombo bars journalists and rights groups from frontline areas.

The government pulled out of a Norwegian-arranged truce with the Tigers in January and fighting has escalated since then.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in the separatist conflict which erupted in 1972.

Load-Date: March 12, 2008

Seven Sri Lankan Tamil refugees arrive

UNI (United News of India)

April 25, 2008 Friday 3:33 PM EST

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Length: 140 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Ramanathapuram

Body

Ramanathapuram, April 25 -- Seven Sri Lankan Tamil refugees including two women, arrived in three batches here today.

Official sources told UNI that the Lankan Tamils, comprising three families, hailed from Yalpanam and Ambarai regions in the island nation. They arrived at Rameswaram, Arichalmunai and Mandapam seashores in a clandestine boat after paying a huge sum.

After preliminary investigations by the state intelligence and revenue officials, the Sri Lankan nationals were housed at the Special Refugee Camp in Mandapam.

Another Sri Lankan woman, who had arrived with valid documents was also given refuge at the camp this evening.

There is a heavy influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees for the past couple of months, owing to the fierce fighting between the armed forces and LTTE there.

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Load-Date: July 7, 2008

10 Lankan nationals take refuge in Mandapam refugee camp

UNI (United News of India)

April 23, 2008 Wednesday 4:27 PM EST

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Length: 128 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Ramanathapuram (Tamil Nadu)

Body

Ramanathapuram (Tamil Nadu), April 23 -- Ten Sri Lankan nationals, including five **women** took refuge in the special refugee camp for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees at Mandapam, here today.

Official sources told UNI that the refugees, hailing from Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Mannar and Jaffna regions of the island nation, arrived in Tamil Nadu recently with valid documents. They arrived here this evening and registered their names with the authorities of the Special Refugee Camp. Later, they were housed at the Camp, the sources added.

It may be recalled that there was heavy influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to Tamil Nadu in the last couple of months owing to fierce fighting between the Lankan armed forces and the **LTTE**.

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Load-Date: July 7, 2008

Seven Sri Lankan refugees arrive at Mandapam camp in TN

UNI (United News of India)

March 26, 2008 Wednesday 3:51 PM EST

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Length: 137 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Ramanathapuram

Body

Ramanathapuram, March 26 -- Seven Sri Lankan nationals, including four women, arrived at the special camp for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees at Mandapam here today.

Official sources said the seven-member family, hailing from Yalpanam region in the Island nation, had arrived at Chennai, with valid documents on March, 2007, by a Sri Lankan flight.

They reached the special refugee camp and registered their names with the authorities. After preliminary investigations by the State Intelligence and revenue officials, they were housed at the camp, the sources added.

It may be noted that there was heavy influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees for the past couple of months due to fierce fighting between the Lankan Armed Forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE).

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Load-Date: May 4, 2008

Three civilians killed, 26 injured in Sri Lanka bus attack

Deutsche Presse-Agentur
July 11, 2008 Friday 6:46 AM EST

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Section: POLITICS

Length: 160 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

DPA POLITICS SriLanka Conflicts Three civilians killed, 26 injured in Sri Lanka bus attack Colombo
Suspected Tamil rebels Friday fired at a civilian
bus in south-eastern Sri Lanka, killing at least three passengers and
injuring 26 others, senior police superintendent Ranjith Gunasekara
said.

He said the bus, carrying 40 passengers, came under fire in
Buttala, 360 kilometres south-east of the capital Colombo, on Friday
morning.

A 12-year-old child and two women were killed, Gunasekara said.

A series of similar attacks on buses, including one with a
claymore mine, have taken place in the area in the last year.

The government earlier blamed the attacks on the rebels of the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and stepped up security in
the region.

Military officials said the rebel attacks in the area were an
attempt to divert the attention of the security forces who are
engaged in military operations against the rebels in the north.

Jul 1108 0646 GMT

Load-Date: July 12, 2008

More Wanni civilians arrive in Omanthai

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

November 24, 2008 Monday 12:53 PM EST

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Length: 136 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Nov. 24 -- The first group comprising 43 males and 28 **females** of 15 families arrived around 7.45 a.m. while the other comprising six males and four **females** arrived around 10 a.m. The majority were youth while there were a few children too, defence sources said.

The civilians were residents of Kanakarayankulam, Sinnadampan, Puthukulam and Nainamadu.

The civilians have told the Forces that the Wanni residents' only hope lay in the Security Forces' planned liberation of all areas dominated by the **LTTE**. Thousands more were waiting to cross over to cleared areas when an opportunity arises, they said. A group of 39 civilians sought refuge with the Forces. On Saturday, 41 civilians in two groups arrived at the Omanthai entry/exit point.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

-894238

For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Load-Date: November 24, 2008

Seven refugees arrive

UNI (United News of India)

April 10, 2008 Thursday 3:56 PM EST

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Length: 144 words

Byline: Report from UNI brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Rameswaram

Body

Rameswaram, April 10 -- Seven Sri Lankan refugees, including two women, today arrived at Dhanushkodi seashore in view of fierce battle between the Sri Lankan Army and LTTE.

Official sources here said the refugees, hailing from Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Kilinochi regions in the island nation, arrived with the assistance of a clandestine boat operator.

After preliminary investigations by the Tamil Nadu Intelligence and Revenue officials, they were sent to a 'Special Refugee Camp' at Mandapam near here.

Meanwhile, another batch of six Sri Lankan nationals, including three women, took refuge at the camp today.

The refugees, hailing from Yalpanam had arrived Tamil Nadu recently with valid documents.

They arrived here this evening and registered their names with the authorities of the camp, the sources added.

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Load-Date: July 7, 2008

3rd Ld Explosion injures 4 in Sri Lankan zoo

Xinhua General News Service

February 3, 2008 Sunday 1:15 AM EST

Copyright 2008 Xinhua News Agency

Section: WORLD NEWS; Political

Length: 181 words

Dateline: COLOMBO

Body

At least four civilians were injured in an explosion occurred in a zoo in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo Sunday morning, defense officials said.

Officials from the Media Center for National Security said four people were injured when the Dehiwala Zoo was hit by a small explosion at around 10:35 a.m. local time.

"The injured include two female civilians and two girls. The responsible has not been identified," said a spokesman from the media center.

Witnesses said the explosion occurred when some unknown individual threw an object into a dust bin.

After the incident, an official of the Dehiwala Zoo declared that the zoo will be temporarily closed to the public.

The incident came one day after a bus explosion in the island country's Central Province that killed 20 civilians and wounded over 50 others.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was blamed for Saturday's bus explosion, according to officials.

The government is beefing up the security in Colombo as the country prepares to celebrate its independence day on Monday.

Load-Date: February 5, 2008

TAMIL REBELS USING CIVILIANS AS 'HUMAN SHIELDS'

Press Association Mediapoint

February 8, 2009 Sunday 11:42 AM BST

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Section: HOME NEWS

Length: 179 words

Byline: Senan Hogan, Press Association

Body

Civilians are being used as human shields by rebels in war-torn areas of Sri Lanka, Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Micheal Martin said today.

The minister called for a ceasefire in hostilities between Tamil guerillas and the government to avert a humanitarian disaster.

“Large numbers of men, women and children have been subjected to indiscriminate bombardment by government forces, while there is clear evidence that Tamil guerillas have been blocking their escape and using them as human shields,” he said.

“Such blatant disregard for the lives of innocent civilians is indefensible and constitutes a serious breach of international humanitarian law.”

The minister called for both sides to declare a ceasefire to allow for the evacuation of the sick and wounded and to rush medical aid to civilians.

“A truce will also allow for re-engagement in a political process to achieve a lasting solution to this 25-year-old struggle,” he added.

There has been a long-running conflict between Sri Lankan government forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) group.

Load-Date: February 9, 2009

Four killed as Tamil Tiger rebels fire at bus

Suna News Agency

July 11, 2008 Friday 2:25 PM EST

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ARABIA 2000

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Length: 170 words

Body

COLOMBO, July 11, 2008 (AFP) - At least four people were killed and 26 injured Friday when Tamil Tiger rebels opened fire on a bus in southern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry said.

The incident took place just south of the capital Colombo in Buttala, police said, adding that the injured had been taken to nearby hospitals for treatment.

"Two **females** and a 12-year-old child were among the victims killed when **LTTE** (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) terrorists opened fire at the civilian bus," the ministry said. The fourth victim died shortly after admission to hospital.

In January, 25 people died when Tamil Tiger rebels set off a roadside mine in the same area, hitting a crowded passenger bus.

Sri Lanka's rebels have been waging a war against the government since 1972 to carve out a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the island's north and east.

Fighting is currently centred around the north, but the rebels routinely carry out attacks against military, economic and civilian targets elsewhere on the island.

MD

Load-Date: July 12, 2008

Navy rescues another 139 civilians

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

March 25, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 175 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, March 25 -- The Navy rescued 139 civilians fleeing from **LTTE** bondage in Mulaithivu on two separate occasions on Monday. Navy spokesman Captain D.K.P. Dassanayake said the Naval personnel rescued two groups of people in the seas off Mullaitivu seeking protection with the Security Forces.

The first group consisted of 126 persons while the second group consisted of 23 persons. "The first group had been found fleeing in seven dinghies with white flags around 10.50 a.m. They comprised 40 children, 43 males and 43 **females**. The second group was rescued around 12.50 p.m. on two dinghies," he added. The rescued civilians were safely brought ashore at Pulmudai. Naval personnel and vessels along with stand-by rescue and medical teams are on special deployment for this humanitarian assistance mission in the North-Eastern seas. Meanwhile, another group of 810 civilians crossing the uncleared areas sought protection with troops of the 58 division on Monday in Puthukudiyiruppu. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Daily News Sri Lanka.

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Load-Date: March 27, 2009

12 killed, 23 injured in Sri Lanka suicide blast

Indo-Asian News Service

June 16, 2008 Monday 2:54 PM EST

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Length: 147 words

Byline: Report from Indo-Asian News Service brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 16 -- At least 12 policemen were killed and 23 others injured when a motorcycle borne Tamil Tiger rebel blew himself up opposite the office of the senior superintendent of police (SSP) in Vavuniya town in northern Sri Lanka Monday, the defence ministry said in a statement.

Three women constables were among the 12 killed in the explosion that occurred around 7.10 a.m., the ministry said.

It added that 23 people, including 19 police personnel and four civilians, were injured and had been hospitalised.

"A school girl was among those injured," the statement said.

The suicide blast has taken place at a time when the government has opened many fronts in the northern Vavuniya and northwestern Mannar districts to help troops advance into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) held Wanni area.

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Load-Date: June 16, 2008

Mullaitivu civilians cross to govt. areas

Indo-Asian News Service

September 27, 2008 Saturday 3:28 PM EST

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Length: 168 words

Byline: Report from Indo-Asian News Service brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Sept. 27 -- The Defence Ministry says 37 civilians representing at least 9 families crossed over to government controlled areas on Thursday and sought protection with the security forces.

The civilians including 15 children, 8 **females** and 14 males, reportedly locals from Mullaitivu, had braved their way along the choppy eastern waters in two boats into the liberated territory, the Defence Ministry said.

"We had no option other than to make our move despite the presence of sea Tigers along the Mullaitivu coast. Now we know our lives are in safe hands and our children spared from been dragged into the battlefield", the Defence Ministry quoted one of the escapees as saying.

"Their eyes were glittering with hopes of a new life, and why not after decades of unprecedented hardship at the hands of the **LTTE**. These people will be sent into the civilian welfare centres in Vavuniya and Mannar," the Defence Ministry said.

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For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Load-Date: September 27, 2008

Suicide bomber killed in blast near Colombo harbour

Indo-Asian News Service

February 29, 2008 Friday 10:01 AM EST

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Length: 155 words

Byline: Report from Indo-Asian News Service brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Feb. 29 -- A suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber was killed and eight others injured in a blast near the Colombo harbour early Friday.

Military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara told IANS that a police party was searching a house in Aluth Mawatha in Modera near the Colombo harbour when a bomb suddenly went off there at about 6.10 am.

He said a suicide bomber had triggered the blast. Four police personnel and four civilians, including two women, were injured.

The police had earlier received information that a suicide bomber of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was hiding in the house.

It was not immediately known if the suicide bomber was a man or a woman.

Ambulances were rushed to the spot to evacuate the injured to the nearest hospitals. The area was cordoned off and investigations were on, the defence ministry said.

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Load-Date: February 29, 2008

More civilians cross over from uncleared areas

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

August 29, 2008 Friday 3:33 PM EST

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Length: 176 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Aug. 29 -- Around 29 civilians sought Security Forces protection fleeing from the **LTTE** grip in uncleared areas of Mullaitivu to the cleared area Pulmodai on Wednesday.

Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said civilians facing unbearable hardships in uncleared areas are entering cleared areas seeking Security Forces protection.

"A total number of 29 civilians had reached Pulmodai from the Mullaitivu districts within a week. Seventeen civilians comprising three children, three **women** and 11 men had come to the coast of Pulmodai by boat on Wednesday at around 2.00 p.m." he added. Meanwhile, ten other civilians who crossed the uncleared area from Mullaitivu had sought protection with the Security Forces in Pulmodai earlier on Wednesday, he said.

Two more civilians also surrendered to the Security Forces at the newly liberated Illuppaikkadavai around 8.45 a.m. Brigadier Nanayakkara said there is an exodus of civilians from uncleared areas to the cleared areas.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Load-Date: August 29, 2008

Silent heroes need recognition

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

February 20, 2009 Friday

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Length: 1526 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Feb. 20 -- Here are the extracts from an exclusive interview conducted with the Social Welfare Deputy Minister Lionel Premasiri. Attorney-At-Law Lionel Premasiri came into active politics in 1991 from the Galle Municipal Council Election and then became a member of the Southern Provincial Council in 1993. He is a member of the UNP - Democratic Group.

Q: What will be the result of the upcoming Western Provincial Council Election? A: The Government will definitely win all upcoming Provincial Council Elections just as it did in all previous Provincial Council Elections. There is no doubt about it at all. The Government does not need to ask for votes because the people are eagerly waiting to vote for the Government. "We were expecting only around 150,000 votes more than the Opposition but we won over 300,000 votes. This shows what people think of the Government. I worked in the Dodamgaslanda electorate during the Provincial Council Election", he said. Q: Why do you think that people will vote for the Government and what is the response of people in your electorate towards the Government's humanitarian operation? A: The people of Sri Lanka had been watching how the President rules the country and how he was going to eradicate terrorism while carrying out a massive development drive. They were eagerly waiting to vote for the Government to show their gratitude, approval of the Government's development drive and the eradication of terrorism. Now there is a new nation which loves motherland and it was President Mahinda Rajapaksa who created that nation. That new nation has problems in connection with Cost of Living, doing businesses etc. but they never complain and that is not because of war mentality. That is because of their love towards the nation and the motherland. They have an assurance about the economical safety of their future and they know that economical problems will be over when terrorism is finally eradicated. "I want to thank President Mahinda Rajapaksa for being far sighted, and for understanding the importance of developing agricultural sector of the country. I am very happy that he has given priority to the local economy and doing his best to upgrade local production and our crafts. With the world economic crisis, Japan has been facing its second economic crisis at the moment. But here in Sri Lanka the Government has not sacked even a single worker from his/her job and is giving more and more jobs for youths. The Government did not stop even a single relief package enjoyed by the people and offered more relief packages. Q: What is the role played by INGOs and NGOs? A: The role played by INGOs and NGOs in the North is very disappointing. They have not done anything for the Tamil community in the North. Neither development projects nor social welfare projects are visible. What they have done is funding the LTTE to build bunkers, air strips and strengthen their military capabilities. Apart from that they have cultivated a very negative attitude in the minds of the Tamil community towards Sri Lankan Armed Forces and the Government. At the moment, only 14 NGOs have been allowed to work in the villages to be built because of the corruption and malpractices discovered in connection with their operations. But now they do not have a chance to poison the Tamil community against the Armed Forces and the Government. The NGOs can assist the Government's development drive launched in the North and can supply infrastructure facilities for the people. These are the real requirements of the people. Q: What is the latest situation

Silent heroes need recognition

of the new Act on NGOs? A: "We have already finalized the new Act on NGOs and will be able to present it in the Parliament by the end of this month. The main objective of this Act is bringing all NGOs under one system. Accordingly they will be able to work with the Government and assist in the projects required by the country. At the moment they do whatever project they like and some such projects are useless for the country and people. We have to make use of the foreign funds which come through NGOs. At the same time we should not let them execute any offences in Sri Lanka. A significant amount of foreign funds come through NGOs and often NGOs are found guilty of various types of offences. The conduct of some NGOs cannot be accepted on any ground. What we should do is to streamline NGOs. We should introduce a new system which enables all the NGOs functioning in Sri Lanka to register themselves at one place under one institution. At the moment registration of NGOs is something very disorganized and takes place at several places under different institutions and their funds which comes in millions and billions are not accounted too. Q: Would you like to talk about some of your favourite topics such as the death penalty, prisoners and their welfare? A: I personally believe that the death penalty should be implemented in Sri Lanka at least for a short period of time. At the moment criminals know very well that they can execute any crime and get away with it. They have an assurance that nothing happens to their own lives even if they destroy the lives of others. Therefore they freely commit crimes. Apart from this they know there is a great chance of getting cut their prison sentences commuted and they can come out from prison within a very short period of time. The other side of the same story is more pathetic. The prisoners who had been given death penalty, stay in the prisons with great difficulties. They do not have adequate space to stay and do not have any other facilities, especially sanitary facilities. They live like this for over 20 and 30 years and the life is like hell for them. May be they are thinking that the death penalty is much better than living like that. They do not have even the basic facilities required for a human being to live. This is one of the areas which caught my attention and I initiated some welfare programs for them. Therefore we have to look into this matter seriously. Q: As the Deputy Minister of Social Services and Social Welfare have you any special message? A: There are several communities that live with us in this country apart from Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burgher. They are the Veddha community, gypsy community, a small community of black people, Sea Veddha community. We have worked hard and given them an identity, due recognition and houses to live because they are parts of Sri Lankan community. Apart from that, there are above 30,000 patients awaiting heart surgeries and there is a large number of children among them. The Ministry got together with some private sector organisations and launched a special program to offer them free heart surgeries through private hospitals. Houses were handed over to a large number of blind couples living at Nayanalokagama built by late President R. Premadasa. Another program to be launched shortly to diagnose cancer in the initial stage, especially in women. This will also be done with the assistance of private sector. The children living in children's' homes have no future after they reach 18 and the Ministry will take steps look after them after they leave children's' homes. Apart from this there is a large number of heroes who carry out enormous amount of social services silently. No one knows about them. Media should discover them and give due publicity in order to encourage more people to do social services and social welfare activities. One blind person sold the wedding ring and gave Rs.12,000 to save a land of another blind couple and another person donated a part of his own land to build houses for war heroes. After getting to know it another person who owned a smaller land offered 10 perches to build a house for a war hero. This shows how many donors live in our society without much publicity and how kind and generous they are. Q: Do you have any special message to deliver to the Sri Lankan society? A: Yes. What the President and the Government told Sri Lankan society through 'Deyata Kirula' is that we are one country, one nation without any differences. We have to live in our country without petty party politics, ethnic conflicts or religious rifts. Worship your own religion, love your motherland which is full of natural beauty and resources. Sri Lanka can very easily become the fourth economic giant in Asia. Sri Lanka has started to produce heroes and heroins once again as it did in our proud history. They are the persons who should be recognised and rewarded. That is why my Ministry facilitated five heroins last year on the International Women's Day and the same will be done this year too. There is a nine year old boy who saved five lives. There is no difference between him and the pilot who saved many lives by landing a plane in the Hudson river recently. We need such heroes and they are here in Sri Lanka once again. There are a lot of rich and educated Sri Lankan professionals living abroad. I kindly remind them of the request made by President Mahinda Rajapaksa to return to Sri Lanka, their motherland. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Daily News Sri Lanka.

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Silent heroes need recognition

Load-Date: April 1, 2009

End of Document

Canada should revoke radar sale to Sri Lanka

Ottawa Citizen

January 30, 2008 Wednesday

Final Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. A11

Length: 182 words

Byline: Usha S. Sri-Skanda-Rajah, The Ottawa Citizen

Body

Re: Radar fell off the screen at home, but sells well in Sri Lanka, Jan. 28.

As a Canadian of Tamil heritage whose kinsmen are at the receiving end of Sri Lanka's relentless firepower and deplorable human rights abuses, I find the sale of radar equipment to Sri Lanka to be outrageous and hypocritical.

Canada, which has repeatedly called for the parties to resume peace negotiations should not aid and abet Sri Lanka, which has unilaterally withdrawn from the ceasefire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (**LTTE**) and opted for a military solution. Yet Canadian entities should not be seen as circumventing regulations to disguise the sale of military hardware to Sri Lanka, such as radar equipment, used mainly to intimidate and kill civilians and also to harass and deter fisher folk.

As a woman, I am concerned for lives and the safety of families, especially **women** and children who would be the real victims.

We don't expect Canada to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. We appeal to our Canadian government to immediately revoke the sale.

Usha S. Sri-Skanda-Rajah,

Toronto

Load-Date: January 30, 2008

Female suicide bomber attacks relief camp

UPI

February 9, 2009 Monday 6:44 AM EST

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Length: 196 words

Dateline: COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Feb. 9

Body

Up to 24 people died Monday in a suicide bombing at a relief camp for people fleeing fighting between Sri Lanka's army and Tamil fighters, officials said.

The **female** suicide bomber set off her explosive device at a camp in Mullaittivu, where the government said it was providing refuge, medical care and food to displaced civilians, CNN reported.

The account couldn't be independently verified because the Sri Lankan government bars media access to combat areas, CNN and other media outlets said. Conflicting reports indicated between 17 and 24 people died, while 45 people were wounded.

Sri Lanka's military says a **female** Tamil Tiger suicide bomber was among a group of civilians fleeing the fighting, the Voice of America reported.

Military spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said the suicide bomber was from a **female** unit of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

&"Large numbers of civilians were coming in seeking protection from the army. And, when they were coming in, they were being checked,&" Nanayakkara said. &"When we were checking this **female** by the **women** soldiers, the **LTTE** suicide **female** cadre exploded herself.&"

He says the attack killed and wounded mostly **women** and children.

Load-Date: February 10, 2009

796 civilians flee Tiger clutches

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

January 15, 2009 Thursday 1:51 PM EST

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Length: 186 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Jan. 15 -- The largest number of civilians to cross over to government controlled areas from the **LTTE** clutches in Mullaitivu took place during the 12 hours ending early last (14) morning, with 796 civilians, reaching cleared areas under the 58th and 55th Divisions in the Kilinochchi and Jaffna districts, the Army said.

One lot of civilians comprising eighteen males, fifteen **females** and fourteen children had reached Thimilamadam in a boat early on Wednesday (14).

Another two hundred and seventy five civilians, in three groups, had arrived at three different locations under the same 58th Division troops. They comprised one hundred and four males, one hundred and five **females** and sixty six children. Four hundred and seventy four civilians, comprising one hundred and forty two males,

one hundred and forty four **females** and one hundred and eighty eight children meanwhile had reached Kevil in the Jaffna peninsula.

Arrangements were being made to direct them to the nearest IDP centres after initial procedures were over, the army said.

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-960083

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Load-Date: January 15, 2009

20 killed, 40 injured in blast near Colombo

Indo-Asian News Service

June 6, 2008 Friday 1:38 PM EST

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Length: 183 words

Byline: Report from Indo-Asian News Service brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 6 -- At least 20 people were killed and 40 injured when a powerful bomb ripped through a packed bus near an university on the outskirts of the Sri Lankan capital Friday, the defence ministry said.

The bomb went off at about 7.30 a.m. near the Moratuwa University, about 20 km south of Colombo on the Pilyandala-Kaddupedda road.

"**LTTE** (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) terrorists exploded a bomb targeting a crowded public transport bus close to the Shailabimbaramaya Buddhist temple at Katubedda, Moratuwa this morning. Twenty people, including 12 men and eight **women**, have been killed while over 40 are injured," the defence ministry said in a statement.

"According to the police, the bomb was exploded using a remote controlled device. The bus was travelling from Kottawa to Mount Lavinia," it added.

Military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara said police and military teams have been rushed to the blast site to carry out a search operation, while the injured have been sent to hospitals in Kalubowila and Lunawa.

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Load-Date: June 6, 2008

All Our Black Julys

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

July 26, 2008 Saturday 3:30 PM EST

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Length: 1496 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, July 26 -- It was 4 a.m. that Monday morning in July 1983 when the telephone call from Ramachandran my old classmate at Royal woke me up. As only those who have grown up together from childhood can be so friendly to each other, I snapped why he was waking me up so early. His answer yanked me out of sleepiness. He said that he was leaving that morning to his adopted home Canada (which of course I knew already) but that some problem was brewing. The "problem" as he related was that a few hours earlier, there had been attacks on Tamil shops in Borella and he wanted me to drive him to the airport. He said that the attacks were a reaction to soldiers killed in Jaffna. On the way to the airport with him that morning, there were no incidents. But on my way back, the signs were ominous as I saw people gathering on street corners.

Dropping Rama at the airport, I was at my office around 10 or 11 a.m. in the upper storeys of the People's Bank Head Office. From my window, I could soon see a band of thugs; it was then actually a small band, snaking through from Borella attacking people and shops. One unspeakable incident that I saw from the People's Bank was a set of thugs near the Regal Cinema setting upon and assaulting a schoolboy pulled down from a bus. A *female* colleague watching the scene said although repulsive "Tamils deserved it" for the killings "they" were doing in the North. Disgusted, I moved away. I went to my phone and telephoned the police, but to no avail.

My worried schoolboy son rang up saying that my wife had rushed to her University at Kelaniya to help her Tamil colleagues there but she had not returned. I went home, got into my private car and went with my son towards Kelaniya. The crowds on the roads had swelled and the vehicle transport was grinding to a halt as milling crowds of thugs were challenging every car and pulling out Tamils. I tried to protest, but was hit and nearly yanked out of the car. We turned back. My wife eventually did reach home walking all the way from Kelaniya with her Tamil friends who had washed away their pottus. Those walking silently with the crowds could escape questioning but not those in vehicles.

Within hours, further hell did break loose. We had some experience in the 1978 riots as well as in the 1977 post-election violence. We were then living in a small flat and in 1978 during the riots, we had mobilized; my wife in fact helping form the Citizens Committee for National Harmony with Fr. Tissa Balasuriya and she as joint secretaries. (A few years later for reasons we do not have to go into now, she resigned). In 1978, the trauma was limited as we went into different Colombo-based refugee centres and helped. One small but telling event stands out in my memory, namely the use of our two bathrooms by so-called lower caste Tamils who had been refused such facilities in the refugee centres by their higher castes. My role was to transport these kira growers from refugee camp to our house and back again.

All Our Black Julys

But this time in 1983, the days that followed were different as a government refused to function. It later reminded me of how the Indian government refused to function in the 1984 Delhi anti-Sikh riots.

In our immediate neighbourhood behind Police Park we organised a small committee of both middle-class and nearby slum dwellers to keep the local peace. Elsewhere very many Sinhalese helped, others remained silent (as they would remain silent a few years later in the period 1987 to 1990). We helped organise other groups that would ferry people to safety. A group of young monks banded together at a Borella Temple and got involved in saving lives. (Out of that experience they launched a magazine Vinivida, which later was to expose the later atrocities with one monk having to pay the price by being blown up in a tyre at Kegalle in 1989). Our house had three Tamil families of nearly 20 residing for six months (they have not visited us since, a deep insight into human nature). My brother at Ratmalana hid people in his ceiling. In the midst of help by many Sinhalese, there were some notable absentees; nowhere to be seen was one who is now so shrilly screaming from diplomatic immunity to the newspapers.

The expatriate community joined in the action. Ashamed of what was happening, I took the French academic Eric Meyer to film some of the incidents. When the government banned the JVP and the NSSP falsely accusing them of responsibility for the riots, we hid the NSSP Politburo member physicist Dr. Shantha de Alwis and his Swiss wife directly in front of JR's house in the residence of a French employee of the French embassy. (Alwis later left the country, never to return).

We heard of a poignant incident of a middle-class Tamil man, continually banging his head on the railing of the residence of President JR Jayewardene till he bled. It was clearly a case of a citizen who having voted for JR, was feeling so completely let down. We heard the story of the trainload of thugs from the Veyangoda direction which came to Wellawatte and attacked from the seaside. At a refugee centre, we came across a disoriented man who kept muttering that his name was Tamil but his language was Hela, in fact he said he had published a poem to that effect. (A few months later my wife got him invited to be a speaker at the annual Munidasa Kumaratunge event where he recited his poem "Mage nama Demala, Mage basa Hela". We lost track of him since then.)

Finally on Wednesday, that great statesman JR Jayewardene - and indeed this country has been blessed with many such great statesmen - broke his self imposed silence and came on TV and radio. There was a curfew now and the Tamil families in our house crowded around the TV and radio. Unbelievably there was not much call for action or of remorse but the man said sadistically that the Sinhalese had to be appeased. Who were these appease-demanding Sinhalese, he did not name. The Tamils in our house who had voted for him paled and went silent.

Our statesman Jayewardene had just a few years earlier famously said that, with his newly acquired powers, he could do anything except turn a man into a woman. And even before 1983, he had indeed begun those fantastic wonders. (He and his successor, were to continue these wonders in the much greater bloodletting of 1987 - 1990). On being elected in 1977, he had let loose unprecedented attacks on opposition supporters destroying their houses and property as truckloads of UNP thugs roamed the country. Soon he got letters of undated resignation from his willing sheep, falsely misnamed as UNP MPs. In 1978, his goons were involved in the attack on Tamils. In 1980, he sacked overnight 100,000 striking workers. In 1982, he crowned himself king by a rigged referendum. It was with all these kingly powers that he was now addressing the nation in 1983.

Two days later on the Friday with the population - both Tamils and Sinhalese - on edge the new horror broke. The hysterical story came out that the **LTTE** was marching down towards Colombo. Panicked "respectable" Sinhalese rushed home from office. Sinhalese thugs rushed for further attacks on Tamils. (Among those attackers, later we found were Colombo slum dwellers from both Tamil and Muslim communities who were seen carting away stolen goods.) Instead of temporarily putting a ring of government troops around the predominantly Tamil areas for protection, Jayawardena eventually decided otherwise. He was to ship them away to Jaffna.

A couple of months later, we followed them by car along the A9 to Jaffna - actually to the Jaffna University. Even after Sinhalese students and academics had all been chased away from the Jaffna University in the late 1970s, I had given a lecture there to a large audience. We now went around meeting Tamil students asking them to return to

All Our Black Julys

Colombo. I even volunteered to put them up at three houses of relatives to give them confidence. But the wounds were still very raw. (My friend Ramachandran returns now and has completed a multi storey apartment block in Wellawatte as has many other Tamil expatriates.)

1983 was but part of a series of other events. In 1961 Tamil government servants formed a secret racist outfit called Pulip Padai "Army of Tigers", in 1973 India sent 20,000 detonators for 20,000 explosions and at least from 1982 the Indians started training various Tamil groups for cross border terrorism. To put these in context, we have also to address the many other Black Julys. And these include those of 1958, 1971, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1987-1990 and 1992 (the mass expulsion of Muslims and Sinhalese from Jaffna).

To this list, we must add the anti-Sikh 1984 Delhi riots where the parallels with 1983 were so uncanny that a friend wondered whether both events could have been triggered by Indian secret services. In Delhi, it partly was. To these questions we must return - at another time.

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Load-Date: September 9, 2008

End of Document

Navy rescues 165 civilians fleeing Tigers

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

March 27, 2009 Friday

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Length: 190 words

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, March 27 -- The Navy rescued 165 civilians fleeing from **LTTE** captivity in Mullaitivu on Tuesday and Wednesday. Among the rescued civilians were 49 men, 59 **women** and 57 children seeking protection with the Security Forces.

Navy spokesman Captain D.K.P. Dassanayake said Naval troops carried out the rescue missions on three occasions in the Northern seas, one on Tuesday and the other two on Wednesday. He said the first group comprising 94 persons were found fleeing in six white flag hoisted dinghies around 10.45 am on Tuesday while the second group comprising 45 persons were found on two dinghies and the third group consisting 26 persons were found huddled in a lone dinghy on Wednesday around 9.55 am and 11.15 am."After rescuing the first group and the third group, they were safely towed ashore at Point Pedro while the second group was escorted to Pulmudai. All were provided with essential needs and medical treatment," he added. Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said nearly 55,286 fleeing civilians sought protection with the Security Forces. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Daily News Sri Lanka.

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Load-Date: March 28, 2009

Special unit to help children, women from uncleared areas

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

September 27, 2008 Saturday 1:40 PM EST

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Length: 199 words

Byline: Daily News Sri Lanka

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, Sept. 27 - A special unit has been set up at Vavuniya by the Child Development and **Women's** Empowerment Ministry to ensure the well-being of children and **women** coming from uncleared areas in the North, Child Development and **Women's** Empowerment Minister Mrs. Sumedha G. Jayasena told the Daily News yesterday.

In an exclusive interview with the Daily News Minister Jayasena said that officials from the Child Development and **Women's** Empowerment Ministry, Health Ministry and the Education Ministry are now in this unit attending to the requirements of children and **women** fleeing from **LTTE** tyranny.

Responding to the request made by the Government, people are coming to the cleared areas from the uncleared areas.

When staying in camps, there is a possibility that children and **women** may be subjected to abuse and harassment.

Therefore, measures have already been taken by the Government to ensure their safety and well-being.

The unit will look after them and attend to their requirements.

Chairman of the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) Jagath Wellawatta is presently in Vavuniya inspecting the unit, she added.

Report from Daily News Sri Lanka brought to you by HT Syndication.

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Load-Date: September 27, 2008

Madras court hears early release petition

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

June 11, 2008 Wednesday 4:04 PM EST

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Length: 189 words

Byline: Report from Daily Mirror brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 11 -- The Madras High Court yesterday heard a petition seeking early release of Nalini Sriharan - one of the plotters in the killing of ex-premier Rajiv Gandhi.

She has spent the past 17 years in prison at Tamil Nadu for sheltering the suicide bomber and several others who worked to carry out the assassination.

The petition points out that her behaviour during imprisonment had been good and she should be freed soon.

Gandhi's daughter Priyanka Vadra said her family had pardoned Sriharan after a controversial secret meeting with her in March.

Sriharan's death sentence was reduced to life imprisonment on compassionate grounds.

She has a teenage-daughter and her husband Murugan, also a plotter in the case, is facing the death sentence.

A **female** suicide bomber sent by the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist group **LTTE** killed Gandhi at an election rally in Sriperumbadur in Tamil Nadu state in 1991.

The assassination that shocked India is seen as a reaction after Indian troops briefly engaged the rebels in a chaotic battle to halt the separatist war in Sri Lanka.

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-691090

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Load-Date: August 11, 2008

keeping the message

Post (South Africa)

February 25, 2009 Wednesday

e1 Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 12

Length: 2111 words

Body

WORDS OF WISDOM: Perseverance - aspire to acquire the desire that u admire! but if in the process u perspire, don't retire! but aspire to acquire the desire that u admire.

- - -

FAMILY MATTERS: I just wanted 2 know how many women feel the same as i do. taverns are one of the biggest causes for marriages falling apart. men often prefer going 2 taverns before going home. when u confront your man about it, it always becomes an issue about us being naggy. it's amazing how these men don't have money when u really need it but they have money 2 drink. i just wish all these taverns could be shut down. to my husband who visits the tavern everyday - i hate u for what u do 2 us. u don't need a wife, u just need a maid.

- - -

CHEATERS: My husband has cheated on me with females as young as 18 years old, whom he met on mxit. now he wants to end our 12 year marriage and we have a 5 year old daughter who is traumatised by the problems between us. my in-laws knew abt the affairs and didn't do anything to reconcile us.

- - -

MR RIGHT: Wid response 2 last wk's POSTchatter abt findin Mr Right. i'm a young Hindi gal n i always find da absolutely wrong guys dat are right 4 me. n many ppl judged me 4 dat. ppl, u can't really choose da right person 2 luv. wat do others think?

r To the Muslim gal who believes that there are nice guys out there, u r so right. bad news travels faster than good. i'm a 24 year old Hindi guy, looking for that special woman. but the question remains, where do the decent guys and women out there find each other, when all we see and hear makes us more defensive.

- - -

HELP: I go 2 Simla Primary in Shallcross. i really luv going 2 school everyday. but it's really sad that my friends n i don't get 2 do much sporting activities. we really really wish somebody could help 2 sponsor us sports equipment. i can be contacted on 084 409 2419.

- - -

keeping the message

RELIGIOUS CRIME: It's a crying shame when a pastor uses his church to allow politicians to spin their lies. for God's sake, is nothing holy anymore. Paul Lutchman - be ashamed. u manipulating 500 souls coz you an ANC member. read the book of Revelation - you hav 2 answer to God. shameless man!

- - -

MOVIES: With ref to Tamil remakes - has it ever occurred to those who r complainin that the Hindi versions r remakes coz da Tamil ones r such flops and not publicised coz of the way Tamil actors act. therefore, Bollywood makes use of those gud stories wasted by poor Tamil actors.

r To those who complained abt da Ghajini remake. in a day where togetherness is of da utmost importance, it is ppl like u who continuously create division. so what if Aamir Khan remade da movie, do ur'll continuously have to bring it up just coz it's better than da Tamil version. stop dividng, start uniting! grow up, ppl!

- - -

LOTTER MURDER: Wid ref 2 the Lotter murder and Mathew Naidoo. i am sure if the magistrate wasn't a Naidoo(u) Mathew would never have got bail. how could a murderer get bail?

- - -

CRIME: With response to the POSTchatter who spoke abt crime in Laudium. u 2 quick 2 pick on Muslims, while many families are gettin robbed, raped, ect. u must sit and wait 4 the law to take its course and wat about the war in Sri Lanka? ain't it Jihad 4 da **Tamil tigers**? or is it only terrorism when Muslims defend? wake up!

r Our home was broken into last Thursday at 11.30am. someone saw an Indian couple who buys broken jewels break-in. they stole from plenty other homes. we reported it to da police but they arrived 3 hours later. they only steal jewellery n cellphones. beware of jewellery "buyers", they mite be timing ur home.

- - -

METRO POLICE: Metro Police direct traffic every day opposite Duffs Road. opposite 2 it, there's a man selling used tyres. he polishes it in order to hide the damages. this is illegal but happens right under the policeman's nose.

- - -

ROAD NAME CHANGE: It's strange how the changing of road names is priority but not the fixing of robots. seems like pride is valued over life. u can fix that with ur vote.

- - -

SMOKING: da best way to stop smoking, is don't try it in the first place. then you don't have to worry about quitting.

- - -

LOGIE NAIDOO: Logie Naidoo is an attention seekin man. does his wife not give him attention at home?

- - -

SOCCER: 2 da guy who said dat people should stop buying POST coz of Deena Pillay's opinion. aren't ppl entitled 2 their own opinion. i'm a Man United fan.

r I am disgusted at ppl's behaviour towards Liverpool. no one is askin 4 ur'lls pathetic comments. Liverpool is and always wil be da best n most outstanding team ever n ur'll just gotta live wid dat. it's not abt winning or losing, it's abt team spirit. 4 those who cannot see it in dat way, then ur'll r not true supporters.

keeping the message

r 2 Brijlall Ramguthie (Editor of POST), plz remove Deena Pillay as Sports Editor as he is biased. how can he fav Liverpool 2 win da league? 2 da Man Utd fans, plz send a petition 4 his removal.

r 2 Deena Pillay (Sports Editor), how dare u insult da Man Utd fans - sent letters 2 Manchester United Supporters Club 2 register your comments.

r 2 all Liverpool fans, who hoped 2 win da league, thy wil be done on March 14.

r 2 all Chelsea fans who wants 2 win da league, go n eat guus curry first.

- - -

DRESS CODE: The education department should think of having teachers wearing a uniform 2 school.

- - -

NEIGHBOURS: 2 all those neighbours who complain dat drivers shld turn their music down in their vehicles coz it's causing a disturbance, y on earth do ur'll do dat. wid all da sadness dat happens, i'm sure a little music would cheer u.

- - -

CORRUPTION: How does a national airline carrier employ a french company for its catering requirements? SAA obviously not proudly South African. talk abt corruption!

- - -

CULTURE CLASH: Christianity is non-racial. God so loved da world that He gave us His son. not just whites or blacks! one needs 2 be mature 2 understand da difference.

r Don't mix culture n religion! stay united n keep our culture if it doesn't clash wid da Bible.

- - -

ROLE MODEL: Wat sort of role model is Julius Malema as a youth leader? no education, sense, tact or scruples. he shud be dropped like a hot potato 4 the sake of da youth.

- - -

IN SEARCH: I am looking for Sapna Maharaj, date of birth Feb 25, 1995, last known address 2 be around Morningside. last information we got is that her mother put her in the homes. if any one can help me find this child plz contact me on 074 874 0566/084 684 1998.

r Last year I was in contact with a wonderful lady by the name of Michelle (Lady Bird). I am sure she lived in Phoenix n worked in an Umhlanga office and had a beautiful 3 year old daughter. plz can she contact me on 076 514 4923.

r My name is Deneshree Alwar n i'm in search of my brother Dane from Chastworth. it's urgent pls call me on 082 365 3370. i love n miss u.

- - -

DEATH PENALTY: Please bring back the death penalty. i say , if u kill then u must also be killed.

- - -

PARKING METERS: Has anybody noticed that the municipality is doing away with loading zones? now with half the parking meters out of order, that's a lot of cash from the public.

keeping the message

POLITICS: When Sbu Ndebele's house was broken into, i saw many crime scene experts with their laboratory buses on the scene. when my house was broken into no crime scene experts arrived. only a police van, 2 hours late with the passenger fast asleep.

r 2 Visvin Reddy, your behaviour regarding the COPE meeting is disgraceful. it is a sign of sheer desperation on the part of the ANC. to date Visvin Reddy has failed to win an election in ward 73. remember empty vessels makes the most noise.

CHILLI BOY: Matthew Ribnik n his Indian coconut Geraldine Naidoo r back with their denigration of Hinduism in da crap Chilli Boy. Naidoo should hav written abt her Christian/Muslim culture or Ribnik's Jewish/Christian culture. no Hindu scripture talks abt a life 4 a life. abrahamic scriptures do! thy teach eye 4 eye, woman 4 woman, man 4 man, etc. time 4 tit 4 tat!

LOTUS FM: Does Salma Patel of Lotus fm not know that there r other political analysts besides Imran Bacus; Ebrahim Fakir & Adam Habib? even 4 da Mumbai attacks, she got Habib.

RADIO: To South Africans, no more fighting that we don't have a radio station 4 our South Indian families. just enjoy the music. happy listening! to the South Indian community, we can pick up 100% pure Tamil programme on DSTv audio. choose 174 KL radio, direct from India Chennai.

MOTHERS-IN-LAW: Why won't mums-in-law let go of their sons. they swear, insult n curse daughters-in-law n pray like they r innocent. why dont they get a life? they expect their sons 2 divorce so they can do everything 4 them.

NIGHTCLUB: I was at a nightclub on Valentine's Day n was disgusted with da dj who was there. he's quite a popular radio dj n married but i saw him getting 'up n close' with no less than 3 women in one night. ladies, don't throw yourself at djs. most of them are womanisers who think they 2 hot.

SOUTH AFRICA IDOLS CHALLENGE 2009: I was very disappointed wid Nikhil Devnarain's show. plz be professional when u organise a show. da audience were very bored n da plannin n set up was very unprofessional. please focus on your school work rather than doing shows.

CREMATION: Religious beliefs aside - if we continue to bury instead of cremate, there won't be much space left for the living because land will be used for graves!

POST CHAT: 2 POSTchatters, when u say u know who u r, 100's of people think it must be them. plz be specific.

keeping the message

FRIENDSHIP: With great friendship comes love. but love conquered all. guess wat, u cannot escape destiny. u know who u r, if u r reading this.

- - -

APPRECIATION: To my future in-laws, Maureen and Michael Matthews n 2 my fiancé, Reuben Matthews, thank u 4 making my birthday such a wonderful one. i enjoyed it very much n was speechless wid da beautiful ring Reuben had put on my finger. i luv ur'll lots. and 2 my mum-in-law, i know it's hard 2 see ur brother in pain but put ur faith in Jesus coz he his the greatest physician. 2 my dad-in-law, i wish u a speedy recovery n 2 Reuben, thanks 4 being da best part of my life.

- - -

CONGRATULATIONS: Congratz 2 Danny Kowlassur 4 da release of his new CD, Om Namaha Shivaya.

- - -

BEST WISHES: To Danny Bugwandeem, happy belated birthday 4 Feb 17.

r Happy 1st birthday goes to 2 my beautiful baby boy Abdur Rahmaan 4 today (wednesday) and his geogous dad 4 tomorrow (thursday). may allah shower his richest blessings upon u.

r Happy belated 16th bday 2 Ruweshka Gopie for Feb 21 and Naresh Gopie for today (wednesday) of Dundee. God bless u both eternally.

r Happy birthday 2 Trisha Govender of Dacca Road, Merebank n congrats on da award. the lord is always wid u.

r Wishing my husband Dashern Naidu, a happy bday 4 today (wednesday). hope you have a wonderful day n may all your dreams and wishes come true.

- - -

r Wishing my cuz Sajedah Khan a very happy bday 4 today (wednesday). u r da best!

r Happy Birthday to Kerusha Bharath 4 Feb 27. hope u have splendid day.

r Wishing Shalini n Gerald Govender a happy anniversary 4 tomorrow (Thursday) n also a happy bday 2 Shalini 4 tomorrow as well. may u both hav a wonderful day.

r Wishin our angel Megan Govender a happy 5th birthday 4 Feb 22. we love u n God bless u.

r Wishing uncle Ramesh Hiralall a happy belated birthday 4 Feb 23. hope u had a great day

r Happy birthday wishes goes 2 Raj Hira 4 Feb 27. enjoy the day

r Wishing my husband Emile Els a happy birthday for the Feb 28.

r 2 my love Sahil Singh, wishin u a happy 20th bday 4 Feb 27. hope u see many more n may ur day be filled with love, laughter n joy.

r Wishing our son, Rithik Mahadeo a very happy birthday 4 tomorrow (Thursday). may Durga Mata bless u with health, wealth n prosperity.

- - -

LOVE MATTERS: 2 Raj Lutchman, my life is beautiful coz u've been gud 2m e in so many ways. i only wanna be wid u.

keeping the message

r 2 Meryl Naidoo, remain as sweet as u are.

r 2 my darling husband Collin Keith Marion - love u with all my heart.

r To Jarryd Naidoo, thank u 4 bein da persn u r - kind, thoughtful, sensitive, considerate, a generous n thoughtful giver. thank u 4 da countless times u were there 4 me, esp during this past wkn. there r no words 2 xpress da depth of my gratitude. u wil never know how much i appreciate ur gracious heart n lovin ways. just remember, our luv is like a river. it wil cut a new path whenever it meets an obstacle.

r To Shobana Samdutt, it's wonderful 2 be in love wid a person like u. no one else in all the world cud make me feel this way.

r To the love of my life, u know who u r, i know i hav hurt u. i'm hurting also coz i'm feeling lost without u. please forgive me! i love u!

r To Kereshni Padayachee, i love you and miss you.

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Lankans hail President Ahmadinejad's visit

Sunday Observer (Sri Lanka)

April 27, 2008 Sunday 2:46 PM EST

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Byline: Report from the Sri Lanka Sunday Observer brought to you by HT Syndication.

Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, April 27 -- The Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's choice of Lanka to start his main official tour in Asia would be a great honour to our country and its people. It also reflects on the excellent foreign relations especially with Asian members by President Mahinda Rajapaksa's Government.

The Government and the people of Sri Lanka have placed many hopes on President Ahmadinejad's visit, which would add significance to the bilateral relations, cultural and economic ties which will be strengthened following this visit.

Political ties between the two countries are of paramount importance as Sri Lanka and Iran uphold democracy, human rights, unity and sovereignty of all nations.

Sri Lankans still remember how Iran encouraged its tourists to visit Sri Lanka at a time some other countries imposed travel advisories after the **LTTE** attacked the Katunayake International Airport.

Iran's private airline Mahan Air even started a new service to Colombo while certain other airlines cancelled or withdrew their operations after the attack. Therefore, Sri Lankans welcome Iran as a true friend in keeping with the old adage, "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

Sri Lankans expect the Iranian Leader's visit to open a new chapter in the spheres of politics; economy and culture especially in the tourism, oil exploration and energy development sectors.

Besides the friendship, Iranian Government's financial assistance to construct a major hydro and irrigation project -- the Uma Oya Multi Purpose Development scheme -- would be hailed by Sri Lanka when people enjoy the benefits particularly in the districts of Hambantota, Moneragala and the country in general.

Of the total monetary assistance of US\$ 1.8 billion pledged by the Iranian Government to Sri Lanka, US\$ 450 million has been allocated to the Uma Oya Hydropower project which would add 100MW to the national grid. This will also irrigate over 5000 acres of parched land in the two districts, and create about 1000 direct jobs.

President Rajapaksa extended a special invitation to President Ahmadinejad during the former's visit to Tehran last year.

Political analysts said President Ahmadinejad's ready response to President Rajapaksa, and their economic support to construct several development projects including the Uma Oya which was kept on hold for over two decades due to lack of funds, could be considered a personal victory of President Rajapaksa as the Head of State.

Lankans hail President Ahmadinejad 's visit

This correspondent wrote the following article titled Sojourn in the desert country, Iran a cultural store in East Asia in the Daily News after a familiarisation tour in Tehran in 2000. It is reproduced here to mark President Ahmadinejad's two-day visit to Sri Lanka tomorrow.

A visit to Iran

Salaam, said a resident greeting us in Niavaran street Tehran in the morning. We too reciprocated saying Salaam. Another Tehranian stopped near us and asked 'Pakistani'? When we said we are from Sri Lanka, he said 'Oh best tea country' and went away.

The two of us wanted to chat longer but the language barrier stood in our way. We saw him leaving looking back at us again and again. We waved till he disappeared into a by lane at the end of the Niavaran Street.

The average Sri Lankan, like a friend of mine who had unfounded fears on Iran, are compelled to think of Iran as a country where strict rules of Islam have deprived people of their democratic freedom forcing them to live under pressure.

This impression has been inculcated in the minds of many people in other countries as well by the international media backed by certain enemies of Iran in the Western world after Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Rohollah Khomeini imposed death penalty on writer Sulman Rushdi for his controversial book Satanic Verses, blaspheming Islam.

But we, seven journalists, who toured Tehran in a bid to build cultural and economic ties between the two countries have some sort of confidence as Iranian Ambassador in Colombo Dr. Gholamreza Nazarboland asked us to feel free to explore Tehran, investigate and write the truth independently.

Unique country

Yes, it is a unique country for many reasons. Iran has full-fledged democratic rights as any other country. In the name of democracy to achieve narrow political aims are not permitted as in most other countries.

Because Islamic rules have dominated Iranians for the sake of their age-old traditions and Islamic values. That may be one reason why the international media criticised Iran. As a country Iran is fully independent and has a solid economy which can stand in her own feet.

Before 1979, Iran was like any other colony and the Phalavi dynasty ruled the country safeguarding the interests of the colonial masters. A majority of the people who disliked the Western cultures dominating their own culture supported the Islamic clergy led by Khomeini to launch the Islamic Revolution.

Islamic Revolution

Phalavi king Shar who stooged the West became unpopular among the majority Iranians and the Islamic Revolution ousted king Shar enabling Khomeini to form the present Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.

Democratic rights are guaranteed in Iran after the Revolution. Under articles 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39 and 169 of the Iranian Constitution, basic rights of people have been ensured. Equal rights are ensured to every citizen irrespective of communal and religious differences.

According to the Constitution, the President, members of Islamic Constitution Assembly (Parliament), and members of different councils who are directly elected by people must administer the country.

The powers in the country are shared by the legislature, executive, and judiciary that are independent but coordinated by the President and supervision of the Leader. There are 270 representatives in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (ICA) elected by people for a period of four years.

Lankans hail President Ahmadinejad 's visit

All approvals of ICA must be ratified by the Guardian Council for adaptation with Islamic Religious Laws. The President, who is directly elected by people for a tenure of four years is vested with executive powers like in Sri Lanka.

Judiciary powers are supportive of individuals as well as social rights for the national. The highest body in judiciary power is Judicial High Council. The members of this council are heads of Supreme Court, Attorney General, and three judges from the clergy who are elected for five years.

Politics

Free and fair elections and freedom to engage in politics is another highlight in Iran. Under Article 26 of Iran's Constitution, any one can form a political party or professional or any other organisation.

There were some 39 political parties and other such associations permitted before 1997 but this number rose to 103 within a period of 28 months. But there are only about a dozen political parties and other groups that are active in Iran.

Among them are: Militant Clergy Association, Islamic Coalition Association, Society of Islamic Association of the Bazaar and Trade Unions, Islamic Society of Engineers, Zainab Society, Militant Clerics League, Islamic Iran Partnership Front, Executives of Construction Party, Islamic Revolution Mujahedin Organisation, Islamic Republic of Iran Women's Society and Islamic Assembly of Women, Islamic Iran Solidarity Party and Iran Nation Resolution Party.

Iran covers an area of 1,648,000 square kilometres and its largest province is Khorasan which covers an area of 313,000 square kilometres. There are 27 other provinces where each one is administered by a governor-general.

The smaller provinces that have less than 15,000 square kilometres, are Gilan, Chahar, Mahal Bakhtiari, Hohgiloooyeh and Boirahmad, Gorgan, Qazvin and Qum. There are 252 towns and 680 districts in these provinces.

Iran is the birthplace of Zoroaster, one of the oldest prophets of the world and founder of Zoroastrian religion. The official religion of Iran based on Article 12 of the Constitution is Islam (Shiite), and about 99.5 per cent of people are Muslims. Disciples of other branches of Islam like Hanafi, Maleki, Shafei, Hanbali, and Zaidi in Iran are highly respected and live freely without any limitation.

Christian and Jewish religions are also recognised officially in the Constitution to enjoy equal political, social and economic rights in Iran. Other minorities like Armenian, Jewish, Assyrian, and Chaldean have their own independent representatives in the Consultative Assembly (Parliament).

Richness in culture is another specific feature in Iran. Different Eastern arts, literature and Gnosticism, Iranian myths, fiction, philosophy, poetry, music, folklore, handicrafts, architecture, and decorative art are important parts of the Iranian life, which have won the global recognition.

The country has a population of over 60 million, according to the census in 1996. Thirty seven million out of this live in major cities like Tehran, Meshed, Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, Qum, Ahwaz, Orumyeh, and Kermanshah while 23 million in the periphery.

Several tribal groups still live in the pastoral of Iran maintaining and preserving their age old customs and tranquil lifestyle.

Youngest population

Iran is one of the countries with the youngest population in the world. Around 39.5 percent Iranians are below 14 years of age, 17.9 are active population and total employed population is 14.5 million and per capita income is some US\$ 3000.

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Major incomes in Iran are oil, natural gas, mine and metal industry, agriculture and handicraft. Iranian carpets are world famous for their intricate design and fast colours. The economy is composed of three major sectors: Private, Government and Cooperative. But 87.5 per cent of the economy is owned by the Private and Government sectors.

Apart from the traditional sources of income, Iran has today achieved new development arenas in industry, mine and metal sectors. As a result, the country, a major importer of steel during 1960 to 1970s, is a major steel exporter today.

Exports

The industry of exploiting decorative stone quarries too, which once was done by old methods like explosion, has changed to one of the most developed industries with the help of modern technology.

Today, metal and mineral products of Iran including alloys of different metals, are exported to industrial giants like Japan, South Korea, China and Italy.

Total agricultural lands of the country are estimated at around 18.2 million hectares that constitutes only 11 percent of the total area of Iran, according to statistics in 1972. Apart from this, Free Trade Zones and Special Economic Zones are a major strategy in Iran's National Development Plan, which were introduced to attract foreign investment, transfer of technology, production of export goods, employment generation, and penetration to the global markets.

FTZs

At present three large Free Trade Zones are functioning in Kish Island, Queshm Island and Chabahar in the Persian Gulf area.

Approval has been given to set up two more Economic Zones in Sirjan and Bandar in a bid to expand the economic development and solve the country's employment problem.

Iran is a large country with political stability, expanded resources and manpower to go on par with other economic giants. Other than such development goals, the country can be proud of its historical and cultural wonders of their forefathers - the Aryans who inhabited in Iran (Persia) about 9,000 years ago.

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TEA AND SYMPATHY; On a journey to the heart of the troubled nation of Sri Lanka, Sophie Lam finds serenity amid ornate temples, ancient reservoirs and fields of emerald green

Independent Traveller

January 24, 2009

First Edition

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Byline: Sophie Lam

Body

A distant rumble cut through the chatter of birds as I lay by the pool of the serene Park Street Hotel in Colombo, prompting a hasty avian exodus from the trees above. My companion looked up from his book; we exchanged uncertain glances then returned to our lounging. The notion that it could have been a bomb felt so incongruous in the gracious surroundings of the 250-year-old mansion-turned-boutique hotel that we swiftly dismissed the idea, until an hour or so later when the crackle of what sounded like gunfire again rattled us from our repose.

The start of 2009 heralded what might be a pivotal period in Sri Lanka's decades-long political struggle. A year after withdrawing from a ceasefire, the government's military forces were closing in on Tamil Tiger strongholds in the far north of the country and had just captured the Tigers' de facto capital, Kilinochchi. A suicide bomber retaliated the same day outside an air force camp around 2km from our hotel, hence the explosion we'd heard. But we later learnt that the gunfire was in fact firecrackers being let off by civilians celebrating the capture of Kilinochchi. As we ventured out of the hotel that evening there was eerie quiet on the streets; our tuk-tuk - a motorised three-wheeler - had to backtrack and slalom through a concertina of road blocks to reach a restaurant that was just a couple of hundred metres away. Yet the faces we encountered expressed warmth and openness rather than fear.

It wasn't the most auspicious start to our trip, but we comforted ourselves with the knowledge that we were journeying away from the capital and the battle-scarred north into the interior of Sri Lanka.

When Marco Polo visited in the late 13th century, he described this place as the finest island of its size in all the world. And while the only other island of its size in all the world is ruggedly beautiful Tasmania, which Marco Polo never visited, his praise is nevertheless understandable. Sri Lanka is pendant-shaped, and ringed by over 1,340km of Indian Ocean coastline, of which only a relatively small proportion is developed. You can drive alongside endless pristine beaches where teal-coloured waves froth on to completely vacant sand. Political strife feels a world away.

I could quite happily have trickled down the coast from Colombo for the duration of my stay. The temptations include the Tropical Modernist architecture of Geoffrey Bawa - which many cite as a blueprint for Balinese style - at the Hotel Serendib, the Bentota Beach Hotel and Lighthouse Hotel, as well as the beautiful Portuguese-Dutch fort of Galle, with its cutesy porticoed houses, immaculate whitewashed churches and lighthouse. But instead we turned east, into the heart of the country.

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Our guide and driver, Nishantha, collected us from the hotel. We chugged out of the capital towards the city of Kandy, the fresh sea breeze dwindling as the road rose into the hills. Where we had been flanked by urban sprawl and buffered by cars, now palm trees began to gather, with emerald-green rice fields spread out beyond. Villagers displayed their wares by the roadside - at Yakulla we stopped for one of the sweetest, juiciest pineapples I've ever tasted, sprinkled liberally with an acquired-taste combination of salt and chilli.

Each community we passed catalogued our ascent from sea level: at a 30-metre elevation road sign we passed through cashew and cane fields; 200 metres further up we were amid corn fields and mango trees. Intense human activity began to give way to a tranquil, pastoral landscape of red earth that seemed to absorb the sunlight tumbling through the tree foliage. Roadside stalls selling fish - and, curiously, inflatable toys - provided shade for sleeping dogs that twitched as we sped past.

We turned off at Kegalle, an unattractive city that, for tourists, serves as a focus for visits to the Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage. The sanctuary was founded in 1975 to protect five injured and orphaned elephants. Since then it has mushroomed into a home for up to 80 of them. The elephants spend their days roaming around the park with their mahouts and are led down to the Maha Oya river twice a day for a two-hour bath.

A poignant reminder of the political conflict came in the shape of Sama, a female elephant whose front leg had been partially blown off by a landmine in the north. Depending on their adaptability, some of the animals will later be released into Uda Walawe National Park in the south.

The next leg of our journey required us to veer north, pressing on to Habarana. This town is at the heart of the so-called Cultural Triangle, in the centre of the island. Its three points are Sri Lanka's ancient capitals: Anuradhapura in the north west, Polonnaruwa in the east, and Kandy in the central highlands. The word "habarana" roughly translates as jewellery; halfway between Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, it was here that Sri Lanka's ancient rulers are said to have hidden their treasures when their kingdoms were captured. "Habarana's riches are underground," Nishantha informed us. But there is wealth, too, in the handful of luxury resorts located here. Ours, the Cinnamon Lodge, lay on an idyllic lake where the water crept up to the springy lawn to settle in lily-clustered pools around trees. Rooms were scattered in low-rise chalets among over a thousand trees, including ebony, mahogany and palms. As dusk fell, a cacophony of chirrups, bleeps, trills and cooing echoed around the lake as scores of birds sloped off into the disappearing sunlight.

It's a tranquil place, ideal for those caught up at the business end of Sri Lanka's problems. I spoke to one notable fellow guest: Ranil Wickremesinghe, the former prime minister of Sri Lanka and now opposition leader. Wickremesinghe's UNP party agreed to a ceasefire with the Tamil Tigers in 2002 that helped boost the country's economy: tourism took a leading role in the process. Now tourists are staying away, a fact he lamented. "People are coming less, despite the fact that we have everything here - the coast, the cultural triangle, hill stations and seven Unesco sites. They just aren't aware of it all."

What I hadn't been aware of was that we'd stumbled into the country's "dry zone", where rain falls for only around two months a year. There aren't many clues in the scenery. On the road to Polonnaruwa the following morning, we passed several of the large, man-made lakes that are scattered through the region, and drove through greenery that would make the Grinch blush. But Sri Lanka's ancient rulers created these reservoirs to irrigate their kingdoms. At Polonnaruwa - capital from the 11th to the 13th centuries after the fall of Anuradhapura - the vast "Sea of Parakramabahu" was created by the first monarch of that name. It's almost twice the size of Windermere.

The city itself fans out north around the water's edge and is home to some of the finest Buddha statues in the country, as well as astonishingly well-preserved buildings set among ancient, planned parkland. King Parakramabahu's one-time seven-storey royal palace stands defiant, with three-metre thick walls; his audience hall is intricately carved with elephants. The site has been re-colonised by toque macaques, which scamper around the ruins, comical pudding-bowl hair crowning their pink faces.

Polonnaruwa's most impressive site is the Gal Vihara, a group of four Buddhas carved from one long slab of granite, including a seven-metre-high standing Buddha that has long been controversial because of its unusual

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crossed hands and sad expression. The 14 metre-long reclining Buddha next to it depicts his entry into Nirvana, the pillow imprinted with a depression where his head lies.

But even these statues are overshadowed by the bizarre geological formation underpinning Sigiriya.

An hour's drive west of Polonnaruwa, the ancient fortress was built in the late fifth century on a giant rock outcrop that sprouts 200m skywards from the plains like a large cumulonimbus cloud of red, ochre, black and brown. It was used as a stronghold by King Kassapa, who must have had some stamina, given his reputed harem of 500 women, who lived at the summit.

You can trace King Kassapa's pilgrimage towards female companionship via a series of stairs, ladders and walkways, although these days you're rewarded with stunning views rather than carnal gratification.

Halfway up - with a vertigo sufferer already in tears behind me - we arrived at the mirror wall, a corridor made of porcelain so polished that the king was said to be able to see his reflection in it. Vanity aside, the corridor at least shields you temporarily from the sheer drop to your left. A spiral staircase winds up to a small cave above, decorated with flawless frescoes of the king's concubines, the curves of the caves accentuating their voluptuousness.

The last stage of the ascent brings you to a huge pair of lion's paws carved from the rock, at which point you edge up on a series of steel stairs, the wind whistling past you on one side. The summit not only affords spectacular views of the central plains of Sri Lanka, but reveals how elaborate the planning of the site was, with ornamental gardens and a moat laid out in perfect symmetry below.

We later admired Sigiriya from the watery bliss of Vil Uyana, a hotel set among rice fields, lagoons, mangroves and forest, with the majestic rock in the background. The hotel suggests that to stay here is to experience life cultivating rice, but you'd have to be a farmer with a lucrative hobby to live like this.

Our stilted, thatched hut came with a plunge pool and stone bath big enough for two. Birds swooped in formation over the infinity pool; the jarring cry of a peacock was followed by its clumsy landing in a tree overhanging a lagoon. Crocodiles and wild elephants were said to stalk the peripheries of the resort, but with such sublime views available in our immediate vicinity, we ventured no further than our balcony.

We made rather more of an effort the next morning during a trek up to the Dambulla Rock Temple, a series of five caves that lie 150m above the road and were used as temples during the first century BC. The garish modern temple and huge gold Buddha at the foot didn't bode well. Nishantha shook his head solemnly when we enquired about its provenance. But the caves were well worth the hike: they contain around 150 statues of Buddha, and vibrant paintings using natural dyes cover the interiors, from dainty mosaics to geometric and floral patterns.

The road almost directly south of Dambulla starts to rise more sharply, twisting between the satin sheen of rice fields and sporadic Buddha statues until you reach the outskirts of Kandy. This hill town was Sri Lanka's capital until the British captured it in 1815 and Colombo was given primacy. The concrete tangle of the city spills out towards Kandy Lake, beside which sits a huge temple housing a relic of one of Buddha's teeth. Here we paused to join the steady trail of pilgrims offering water lilies at the temple complex; we processed up to the two-storey shrine, with its gilded roof and elephant tusks (the tooth itself is kept locked away in a series of six caskets, each opened with a different key).

Beyond Kandy, the road continued to meander skywards; mist began to creep across the cobalt sky. Paddies were exchanged for tea plantations, like an eiderdown of electric green covering every surface in each direction. As we climbed higher still the temperature dropped (we passed men in woolly hats and ski jackets, even though the temperature never fell below 15C). We peaked at 1,868m in the hill town of Nuwara Eliya, once the hub of Sri Lanka's tea plantations and still an English pastiche complete with mock-Tudor houses.

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We dipped down again via country roads. All at once, in a theatrical scene change, the daylight disappeared and rain-heavy clouds drew in. Visibility dropped to just a few metres. Nishantha had to edge the car along the single-track road, a sheer drop on one side. We came to a standstill when a tractor approached us from the opposite direction; luckily, its driver decided to embark on a brave passing manoeuvre while we waited.

Our final destination was Warwick Gardens, a former tea estate-owner's bungalow tucked into the folds of precipitous fields of tea. The old-fashioned British decor of the hotel was in keeping with the colonial atmosphere of the region, but the setting was extraordinary. We were enveloped in a sea of green, with just the odd red-roofed house or farm building in the distance. In the morning, the still air was interrupted only by the rustle of tea-pluckers.

Of course, the best way of getting to grips with local geography is from the air. We'd arranged our transfer back to Colombo with Simplify, a charter helicopter outfit. Our transport awaited us in Norwood, in the dusty bowl of a school playing field. After a celebrity-style send-off from the schoolchildren, we lifted into the air, gliding over the bumps of green tea leaves, over the thrashing water of St Clair's and Devon Falls, past the conical spire of Adam's Peak and over lakes so green they looked unreal, until the land started to even out, the haze of the ocean appeared once again and Colombo drew near.

Marco Polo may not have had all the facts at his disposal, but he got one thing right: of Sri Lanka he said, "All their things are different from ours - more beautiful and better."

TRAVELLER'S GUIDE

Getting there

The writer travelled as a guest of Sri Lanka Tourism (0845 880 6333; srilanka.travel) and Luxury Holidays Direct (020-8774 7290; luxuryholidaysdirect.com), which offers similar itineraries from £1,175 per person, including return flights from Heathrow, seven nights' accommodation with breakfast and private transfers with a guide.

SriLankan Airlines (020-8538 2001; srilankan.aero) flies direct from Heathrow to Colombo. Airlines such as Qatar, Emirates and Etihad fly via their Middle Eastern hubs.

To reduce the impact on the environment, you can buy an "offset" through Abta's Reduce my Footprint initiative (020-7637 2444; www.reducemyfootprint.travel).

Getting around

Simplify (00 94 77 770 3703; simplify.com) offers tailor-made helicopter trips around the island. Trips from Norwood to Colombo cost \$1US,700 (£1,214) for up to four passengers.

Staying there

The Park Street Hotel, 20 Park Street, Colombo (00 94 11 576 9500; taruvillas.com). B&B starts at \$281US (£201).

Hotel Serendib, Bentota (00 94 34 227 5248; serendibleisure.com). Doubles from \$86 (£61), half board.

Aditya Resort, near Hikkaduwa (00 94 91 226 7708; aditya-resort.com). B&B starts at \$225 (£161).

Cinnamon Lodge, Habarana (00 94 66 227 0011; cinnamonhotels.com). B&B starts at \$100 (£71).

Jetwing Vil Uyana, Sigiriya (00 94 66 492 3584; jetwing.com). B&B starts at \$230 (£164).

Jetwing Warwick Gardens, Ambewela, Nuwara Eliya (00 94 06 02 53 2284; jetwing.com). B&B starts at \$156 (£111). The hotels are part of the Secrets of Ceylon collection.

Visiting there

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Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage, near Kegalle. Admission is Rs2,000 (£12.80).

A ticket covering combined entrance to the cultural sites of Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya and Anuradhapura (cultural.gov.lk) costs \$50US (£36). Single admission to each site is Rs2,700 (£16.20).

Dambulla Rock Temple, Dambulla (00 94 66 228 3606; goldentemple.lk). Admission is Rs1,100 (£6.60).

Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, Kandy (00 94 81 223 4226; sridal adamaligawa.lk). Admission is Rs500 (£3).

More information

The Foreign Office (0845 850 2829; fco.gov.uk) warns: "There is a high threat from terrorism in Sri Lanka. Fatal attacks have become more frequent. They have occurred in Colombo and throughout Sri Lanka, including places frequented by foreign travellers... We advise against all travel to the north and east of Sri Lanka, and to Yala National Park and the areas around it."

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Sanctuary seekers are nobody's people

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)

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Dateline: Colombo

Body

Colombo, June 20 -- Selvi* was among the seven children who were stranded on a sand dune in the sea near Dhanushkodi, half way through to India. At first her mother tried to pacify her saying that they had already reached the shores of their new home. She was fleeing with six other children huddled between her mother and seven other women. The group of 23 persons was cramped into the motor driven catamaran with the promise of being delivered onto the shores of Tamil Nadu. The price tag for the journey was Rs.10,000 per head. But, halfway, the boatman claimed aloud that the engine oil had run low and that he had to return. The group was left stranded on the third and fourth sand dunes in the sea near Dhanushkodi without any food or water.

When a group of Indian fishermen found them, 17 hours later, the children were already showing signs of dehydration with cracked lips, covered with a powdery sand dust. Indian naval officials confirmed that the group had persons fleeing from both Mannar and Vavuniya. The frequency of being stranded in mid sea has increased as the Indian coastguard had intensified its patrols of the Indian maritime border, adding air surveillance to its arsenal of protective schemes. This has pushed up the price and the risk of the flight towards freedom.

Along with the clashes, the recruitment drive is also being stepped up. According to JVP MP R. Chandrasekaran, a vocal refugee rights activist the fear of child recruitment is a key force that drives innocent families to take this perilous journey.

Other key reasons are the loss of livelihoods due to the strict fishing bans and the continuous volatility that exists between different Tamil political elements, who are actively trying to bolster their membership bases.

The most preferred route to set sail seems to be coming from Mannar to Thalaimannar and then embarking on the journey from Pesalai. The cost of these boat rides is anywhere between SLRs. 6,000 to SLRs. 10,000. "Increasingly, people are dropped off on islands close by without any food or shelter. Once rescued they are taken to Danushkodi and handed over to the police. Next they are taken to the Mandappam refugee camp to be registered, (Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR)) treasurer, Chandrahasan said.

India's unique stance

India adopts a unique 'unilateral philosophy' on the issue of refugees. It is not a signatory to the 1951 International Convention Related to the Status of Refugees, which defines who a refugee is and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. The wave of Sri Lankan fleeing the war riddled North and East was the latest addition to India's burgeoning refugee problem with earlier influxes from

Sanctuary seekers are nobody's people

Bangladesh, Tibet and Burma. It only allowed the UNHCR to get involved in the 'voluntary relocation' efforts of the Lankan refugees.

Despite the 'tolerant' attitude of the state, Indian media had recently quoted the Indian Premier Dr. Manmohan Singh saying that "the conflict in Sri Lanka has given a lot of worries because many times it happens that when ethnic tensions increase, there is a tendency of increased inflow of refugees in our country. It also creates both domestic problems as well as foreign policy problems."

India is also a signatory to the SAARC optional protocol on terrorism of 2004, which recognizes refugees as 'a distinct class of foreigners' who are entitled for 'some protection, provided they do not engage in terrorism.'

A security headache?

Sleuths of the 'Q' branch of Tamil Nadu Police arrested two Lankan refugees in May, while they were trying to smuggle walkie-talkies and resin to Jaffna.

Working on a tip-off, the police team arrested P. Viji alias Jayaraj of Pesalai and T. Chinnavan alias Padmarasa, a native of Jaffna. They also seized 44 high-frequency walkie-talkies and Rs. 459,000 cash. In January last year, five LTTE supporters, most of them refugees, were arrested with ball bearings meant for making bombs, according to Indian media reports.

In September, 2007, police found that 200 refugees were missing from Mandapam camp, while two dozen were missing from the Puzhal camp near Chennai. The fate of these refugees is yet unknown. Highly placed diplomatic sources confirmed that the Indian Intelligence organisations were working closely with inmates and that their camps were under constant surveillance.

A ray of hope

Candrasenan, treasurer of OfEER says, "There is no inbreeding of militancy amongst young inmates despite the difficult circumstances because there are facilities to provide them with education. There are about 2,500 graduates among the refugees and there is a Special Graduate Employment Programme in place. The focus is on ensuring that the youth have a future, without violence, bloodshed and the trauma of war which they have already experienced."

The government has also taken steps to conduct the G.C.E. OL Examination in Chennai to ensure that the educational path of students do not come to an abrupt halt.

Resettlement blues

However, many are waiting to come back to their homes, stifled by the strict regulations that curtail their economic, social and political lives. Over 4,000 families who fled the country due to the fresh spate of violence have returned to Sri Lanka.

While the Ceasefire Agreement was a key motivator for the earlier resettlement, at present the clearing of the East has become a key motivator. According to Mr. P.M. Amza, Sri Lanka's deputy High Commissioner in Chennai, the relaxation of fishing bans in the eastern coast has also prompted groups of fishermen from Trincomalee and Batticaloa to return home.

Another hidden motivator is the completion of tsunami projects that has allowed another group of refugees to return home to reap the benefits. "The low cost flights offered by Mihin air from Trichy also made it easier for people to return," Mr. Amza added.

Names had been changed to protect the privacy of victims

The issue of citizenship

Sanctuary seekers are nobody's people

Out of the 90,000 refugees languishing in Tamil Nadu camps the plight of 28,489 persons is made worse by the fact that they are 'nobody's people' without legal citizenship in India or Sri Lanka.

"These are mainly Tamils of Indian origin who were relocated in the North and East. The legal framework to provide citizenship to Sri Lankan Tamils of Indian origin was put in place in 2003. But the people who belong to this category living in South Indian refugee camps are yet to reap the benefits of this legal amendment," Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee to provide citizenship rights to Sri Lankan Tamils of Indian origin in refugee camps Mr. R. Chandrasekaran said.

"There were several unsuccessful attempts in the past to provide them with citizenship. The biggest challenge is that these people don't have ID cards. But they do have scraps of evidence like birth certificates, ration coupons or even school certificates, to prove that they were once residents of Sri Lanka. Discussions are now being carried out with the Department of People Registration to treat this as a special case and to devise an emergency procedure to handle this issue," Mr. Chandrasekaran said.

The Sri Lankan High Commission in Chennai estimates that the process to gather information and do the relevant documentation to provide citizenship will take 3 months and incur an estimated cost of Rs. 6.1 million.

New home, but can they feel at home in refugee camps?

Colombo, June 20 -- In general terms a refugee is a person who has been forced to leave his or her home, region or country for political or religious reasons or because there is a war or because there is not enough food etc. A fugitive or a person who is running away or escaping (for example from the police or prison) can also be regarded as a refugee.

Various people take refuge in or under various places, in various other persons or in foreign countries in times of risk, danger, trouble or threat. Thus one takes refuge to avoid danger, inconvenience, fear, death or anything that is likely to affect someone adversely. For example we may have to take refuge under trees if it rains when we walk in an area where there are no houses or other shelters. In times of natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, land slides or earth quakes victims are forced to take refuge in places provided by the government, benevolent associations, welfare service organizations etc. Refugee camps are provided in schools, other public places, temples and other places of worship.

In our own country we have the social service department, provincial social service departments and other government organizations in addition to private sector organizations to come forward to provide welfare services to refugees. Food including dry ration, clothing, tents and sanitary services are provided to them.

A large section of Sri Lankans in the Southern and Eastern coasts had to take refuge in refugee camps for long periods when their homes and property were washed away in the Tsunami Tidal waves' disaster. Some members of their families lost their lives. Floods in various areas in our country make people homeless in large numbers. Similarly people living in hilly areas face the danger of earth slips and landslides. Due to famines the affected people have to seek the assistance of others. This is a threat not confined to our country. People throughout the world are affected due to natural disasters. In some countries like Ethiopia, famine is a natural disaster in which the government has to seek international support.

War is the deadliest cause seriously affecting people living specially in the frontiers. During the first and second world wars and in the wars in countries like Vietnam, Korea, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Iraq etc. people had to take refuge in peaceful areas of their own countries and in foreign countries.

In our own country the war in the North caused serious hardships, threats and agony to the people. Some people have moved to Colombo and other safe places. Some others have taken refuge in foreign countries like India, Australia, Canada, France, Netherlands, Belgium, U.K and U.S.A. These refugees have sacrificed their properties including homes and their loved ones and how can we expect them to feel at home although they have found new homes, new houses, new neighbours and new ways of living?

Sanctuary seekers are nobody's people

Worst affected are the members of unprivileged groups who cannot afford to go abroad or to move to safe areas within the country. They are forced to flee their homes for increasingly complicated and inter linked reasons including violence, death threats, and mobilization of their children and the ethnic clearance of certain areas by the terrorists. In spite of precautionary measures taken by the government children and women in refugee camps are not safe. They are in constant fear of the threat from the terrorists. Women and girls are under the threat of sexual abuse. The relief provided to them is not at all sufficient. Education of children is badly affected. They do not get sufficient food and have no way of learning. The sanitary conditions in most of these refugee camps are not at all satisfactory. Some of them are not provided with safe drinking water. Most of them are exposed to communal diseases. They have no way of social and community development. Some of the refugees cannot go back to their homeland even after the establishment of peace in those areas as they have no way of claiming their households which have been destroyed by the terrorists. Some refugees complain that the relief provided by the government, welfare organizations including foreign countries and international agencies does not reach the target groups. Some of the refugees are with frustrated hopes having lost all or most of their possessions including their loving ones. Most of them are in constant fear. So how on earth can they feel at home in the refugee camps?

There is historical evidence to the fact that even mighty kings in our country and those in other countries worldwide had to live the lives of refugees. King Walagamba and king Wijayabahu who had threats internally and from India had to take refuge in forests, caves and in disguise. Even king Dutugemunu and his brother, Tissa had taken refuge in disguise at times of uncertainty. King Kassapa and his brother Mugalan also can be cited as examples.

There are occasions when people take refuge in unseen phenomena. As Buddhists we take refuge in the Triple Gem, Buddha, His doctrine, Dhamma and His disciples, Sangha, (Sarana seela) Similarly, Hindus take refuge in God Siva, Katharagama Deiyo, God Vishnu, God Sumana Saman, God Vibhishana, Pattini Deiyo Goddess Lakshmi and goddess Kaliaamma. Believers in other religions too take refuge in their respective Gods.

This is done not because of fear, threats or any other cause but for better prospects in this life and in the next birth.

The refugee challenge in the twenty-first century is changing rapidly. People are forced to flee their homes for increasingly complicated and interlinked reasons. More than forty million people worldwide are uprooted by violence and persecution and it is likely that the future will see more people on the run as a growing number of push factors compound one another to create displacement.

Today people flee not only because of persecution but also because of injustice, exclusion, environmental pressures, competition, and scarcity of resources and all the miserable human consequences of dysfunctional states.

This worldwide problem existed even in the past. As an expression of solidarity with Africa which host the most refugees and which traditionally has shown them great generosity, the General assembly adopted Resolution 55/76 on December 4, 2000. In this resolution the General assembly noted that 2001 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 commission relating to the status of refugees and that the Organization of African unity (O.A.U.) had agreed to have that from 2001 and June 20 would be celebrated as World Refugee day.

The task facing the international community in this new environment is to find ways to unlock the potential of refugees who have so much to offer, if they are given the opportunity to regain control over their lives.

There are three ways of providing opportunities for refugees to regain control over their lives: Firstly, shelter and health, focusing special attention on the most vulnerable people, particularly women and girls should be guaranteed. Secondly, the capacity of the refugees to fend for themselves once they are able to do so should be built although it is hard to find solutions so that refugees become self sufficient. Thirdly, attention should be drawn to the plight of refugees and money necessary should be raised by persuading the people. The fact that the plight of the refugees is not due to their own fault should be convinced to the people.

The above measures should be taken to solve the worldwide problem of refugees rather than celebrating this day in various ways.

Sanctuary seekers are nobody's people

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OFFICE OF SECRETARY-GENERAL CONDUCTS DAILY PRESS BRIEFING,
JAN. 3

US Fed News

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Body

The United Nations Office of the Secretary General issued the text of the following daily press briefing:

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Mich\xE8le Montas, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Briefing by the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

Good afternoon, all. We have a statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka

The Secretary-General regrets the decision made by the Government of Sri Lanka to terminate the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (***LTTE***). He is deeply worried that the withdrawal from the Agreement comes amidst intensifying fighting in the north and increasing violence across the country, including Colombo.

The Secretary-General urges all concerned to ensure the protection of civilians and enable humanitarian assistance to be provided to affected areas. He underlines the urgent need to end the bloodshed in Sri Lanka through a political solution.

Security Council

The Security Council, in its consultations today, discussed its programme of work for the month of January. It also discussed which ambassadors would chair the Council's main committees over the coming year.

These consultations were the first to include the five new members of the Security Council, which are Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Libya and Viet Nam. After this briefing, the Security Council President for January, Ambassador Giadalla Ettalhi of Libya, will talk to you in this room about the Council's work over the coming month.

In today's consultations, Council members will also receive a briefing on the sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from the Chairman of that sanctions committee, Ambassador Marcello Spatafora of Italy.

Kenya

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We have a humanitarian update on the situation in Kenya. The UN and the Kenyan Red Cross Society estimate that at least 100,000 people require immediate humanitarian assistance in the northern Rift Valley alone. Many of them are stranded without food, shelter, water, fuel, essential medicines or protection. The World Food Programme (WFP) is providing enough legumes and oil for 100,000 people for one month, initially in the Rift Valley.

Meanwhile, it is unclear how many Kenyans have crossed the border into Uganda, but the number appears to be relatively small. A joint mission between the UN and the Government of Uganda is visiting the area today to determine the number of arrivals and their needs.

We have a press release on that upstairs.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) has intensified efforts in recent days to improve security in the Kivus ahead of the upcoming Goma peace conference.

MONUC has transported several battalions of the national army, or FARDC, by helicopter in the past week to North Kivu. Those battalions will provide security at the peace conference, which is scheduled to begin on Sunday. MONUC has also supplied isolated units of the army, and evacuated the wounded to Goma.

Meanwhile, several dissidents loyal to General Laurent Nkunda have surrendered at MONUC bases in North Kivu. They are being sent to brassage, the process by which ex-combatants are retrained to become part of the national armed forces.

MONUC has also intensified its joint patrols with Government forces in South Kivu in order to improve security for the local population and help humanitarian support reach the displaced.

We have more information upstairs.

Sudan

On Sudan, the Secretary-General, in his latest report on the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, known as UNAMID, says that the progress made towards having a mission that can have a positive impact on the lives of Darfur's people remains modest.

He notes that the Mission continues to lack critical aviation capabilities, and that it has, at its start, essentially the same assets on the ground as the previous African Union Mission, AMIS. He also warns that the Sudanese Government does not appear to have fully embraced the fact that a robust and effective UNAMID will contribute towards Darfur's long-term stability.

The Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to Member States for support in accelerating the deployment of selected units and filling outstanding gaps in force composition.

Kosovo

The Secretary-General's latest report on the UN Mission in Kosovo is now out on the racks. In it, he says uncertainty and a loss of momentum in the future status process could lead to a risk of instability, both in Kosovo and the wider region. He urges the parties to reaffirm and act upon their declared commitments to refrain from any actions or statements that could endanger peace, incite violence or jeopardize security.

The Secretary-General also notes the readiness of the European Union to play an enhanced role in Kosovo, and says that the EU's growing commitment in Kosovo is important.

Timor-Leste

Over in Timor-Leste, the United Nations Police Drug Taskforce, the Dili District Police, and the Timorese National Police conducted a joint operation Wednesday night at bars in the capital, Dili, as part of a crackdown on activities

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related to illegal immigration, the sale of drugs, and possible human trafficking. Police found evidence of drug usage and arrested people in relation to the investigations into the trafficking of women and prostitution.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Timor-Leste, Atul Khare, congratulated UN and local police for the operation, adding that it is a crucial part of the UN Mission's mandate to ensure public security.

Iraq/Syria

The World Food Programme today launched an emergency, one-year operation to feed more than one million displaced Iraqis, both within Iraq and in Syria. Iraq is facing a growing humanitarian crisis, WFP says, because of the continued violence that is preventing increasing numbers of displaced people from meeting their basic food needs.

As part of the \$126 million programme, WFP will supply packages of wheat flour, white beans and vegetable oil to some 750,000 people. This most vulnerable segment of the population is unable to get food rations from the Iraqi Government because of, among other reasons, difficulties in transferring their ration cards to new residences.

In Syria, WFP will provide monthly rations of rice, vegetable oil and lentils to up to 360,000 people.

We have more information upstairs.

Indonesia

On Indonesia, following the severe floods and landslides that recently hit Java, UNICEF has provided hygiene kits, water purification supplies and water storage equipment, which will help 10,000 survivors in Central Java to fulfil their daily water requirements.

For its part, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided kits for pregnant women, babies and mothers who have just delivered.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme has just completed assessments in East Java and is looking at the possibility of providing aid through food-for-work activities.

Western Sahara

Since many of you have asked, we wanted to give you an update on the latest round of talks on Western Sahara, which will take place from the 7th through the 9th of January in Manhasset, on Long Island.

As was the case with the previous meetings, and due to the sensitivity of the ongoing discussions, the talks will once again be private. That means there will be no - and I repeat - no arrangements for media access at the site, and the Greentree Estate will only be allowing the parties and UN officials onto its property. So don't say that you were not warned.

Charter

The United Nations, for the first time in history, holds a certified copy of its own Charter. U.S. National Archivist Allan Weinstein made the trip to the United Nations Headquarters yesterday and gave the certified copy of the original document to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General had made the request to Dr. Weinstein last October when he saw the original Charter, at the U.S. National Archives in Washington. As you know, the U.S. National Archives were designated by the Charter itself to be the custodian of the original document, signed on 26 June 1945 by the 51 initial Members of the Organization. Each of the 51 signatories has a certified copy. The Organization itself now has one.

And this is all I have for you. Any questions?

Questions and Answers

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Question: Yesterday you were asked several questions about the investigation into the Algiers bombing. One of them was about the memo. Do you have any update on that?

Spokesperson: The memo?

No, what was mentioned were letters written by staff members. This we don't have any confirmation of. And those were not received by UN Headquarters. I checked yesterday. What they had was probably given to the person in charge of security there, Mr. Babacar N'Diaye. As you know, Mr. N'Diaye lost his life during the bombing. As far as we know, there had been no threats, which explains why the alert level was at level one. There were no threats justifying increasing the threat level.

Correspondent: That is not what the Interior Minister said. He said that there were threats to international organizations, including the UN.

Spokesperson: Well, these were not transmitted to the United Nations. That's what I'm saying.

Question: As for the need for - or no need for - an independent investigation?

Spokesperson: As I said yesterday, there will be a report this month by Mr. Veness, who went, as you know, on the ground to survey right after the bombings. And we will have, definitely, a follow-up to this and there will be an investigation. I cannot at this point tell you what the nature will be and who will be in charge. This has not been decided yet.

Question: Regarding Western Sahara, the Security Council in numerous resolutions has asked the parties to adopt confidence-building measures, including the exchange of families, etc. Does the Secretary-General think that the call to resume armed struggle violates the spirit of these resolutions?

Spokesperson: At this point, we will not comment on talks that will be taking place soon. Whether what was done by one side or the other violates the agreement is something to be discussed among the parties when they meet in Greentree.

Question: On the UN official that was a persona non grata out of Afghanistan over the holidays, Marvin Patterson, do you have any update on whether he's going to be returned, if efforts are under way to return him?

Spokesperson: I don't have any update on that. We have been trying to get some information. We don't have it yet.

[The Spokesperson later said that discussions were currently ongoing with the Afghan authorities to rectify this situation. The Spokesperson added that the UN hoped that this matter would be resolved swiftly to enable its staff member to return and continue the vital work of securing peace, stability and progress for the people of Afghanistan.]

Question: I understand the dispute has been whether he's been speaking to the Taliban or not. Can we get a description of what his function has been for UNAMA? Because there were a couple of years where he was listed as on leave without pay but he's listed as also working for the UN there.

Spokesperson: You know it's part of the United Nations work. And United Nations officials have a duty to be speaking to all parties. This is part of our mandate.

Correspondent: I know that, absolutely. But there they've denied it. They've said we do not speak to the Taliban - full stop.

Spokesperson: I'm just saying that this is part of his mandate, to be talking to all the parties.

[The Spokesperson later clarified that the staff member in question had been talking to local authorities and community representatives - not the Taliban.]

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Question: Can I just ask, today, at the stakeout, China's Ambassador Wang had said that he hopes to see the Secretary-General in the coming year do similar reforms as he did to peacekeeping in the economic and social sphere. Does Mr. Ban have plans in this year either to restructure DESA or somehow increase posts or funding? What are his plans?

Spokesperson: There is a reorganization plan being discussed right now on not only DESA but on other economic actors in the UN system.

Question: Will that plan be presented in the 5 March committee? What's the timeline?

Spokesperson: At this point, only a preliminary one will be submitted in March. I don't know exactly what the extent of the report will be. It's not done yet. It's being worked on.

Question: There are reports, and the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, has also indicated, that there are discussions between Israel and Hamas through the intermediary of the Swiss authorities. Is the Secretary-General aware of this and is he supporting these efforts?

Spokesperson: I cannot confirm that he has been informed of that.

Question: Benazir Bhutto's husband has requested a United Nations investigation into her assassination. Do you know whether anything is being done on that?

Spokesperson: I'm trying to check whether we've received a formal letter asking for this. As you know, as I mentioned yesterday, the Hariri case in Lebanon was a special case that was decided upon by the Security Council. Any request of that sort would have to go through a similar process. And you know, I said also yesterday, that any intervention by the United Nations should also come from the national Government inviting us in.

Question: But they're not asking you to do that?

Spokesperson: Right now there is a format, I understand, some international involvement into the actual investigation, but not the UN.

Question: Do you have any information about a new envoy for Afghanistan?

Spokesperson: Not yet, but it should be coming.

Question: Regarding the statement on the Kosovo issue, it's not quite clear where the position of the Secretary-General is. Does he call for new negotiations? Does he still believe in the Ahtisaari plan?

Spokesperson: We said it before earlier and I'll say it again. He still maintains that a negotiated, compromise solution, to be endorsed by the Security Council, represents the best way forward. We've said it before. We're saying it again. And he feels also very strongly that any failure to resolve Kosovo's future status within the framework of the UN would have serious repercussion with the UN system. That I also have said before.

Question: These are just two kinds of end-of-the-year things. There were two deadlines missed. One was North Korea had said in its process of denuclearization that it was going to fully disclose its nuclear facilities by the end of the year. And apparently they didn't meet the deadline. Does the Secretary-General or the Secretariat have any response to that? Do they think that's unfortunate? Fortunate?

Spokesperson: You are talking about nuclear facilities. This is in the hands of the IAEA. There will not be a reaction on our side unless we get a report from the IAEA.

Question: And the other one was on South Sudan. Supposedly by the end of the year Khartoum was supposed to withdraw its troops from South Sudan and now it's said that they have not. Can the Secretariat confirm that or do they have any response to that?

Spokesperson: I'll get some information on that for you.

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Question: Regarding the prisoner swaps between Hizbullah and Israel and the UN mediator. What is he doing? Because I understand that yesterday there were reports that it has reached a deadlock.

Spokesperson: I don't have that information.

Question: Can you find out for us?

Spokesperson: I can find out for you where the mediation is. Are you talking about the mediation between the parties?

Question: Yes, and the role the UN is playing between Israel and Hizbullah.

Spokesperson: I'll get more information for you.

[The Spokesperson later said that UN facilitation was still ongoing. The Spokesperson added that the Secretary-General could only emphasize the imperative need to proceed decisively in full responsiveness to the humanitarian urgency of the cases and in compliance with resolution 1701.]

Any other questions? Well, we'll leave the room for the President of the Security Council. He will be here shortly.

For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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The renewal of GSP+ concessions

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Colombo, July 10 -- The European Union (EU) is now reviewing the General Special Preferences - GSP+ scheme for renewal subject to the implementation of 27 UN treaties on human rights, labour rights, human security and the protection of the environment. GSP+ concessions allow importation of garments (65%) and other products such as footwear, ceramics and fish products (35%) to the EU without import tariff002E

Hence, the renewal of GSP+ concession is an important matter for politicians, diplomats, businesspersons, and above all, for poor garment factory workers as their livelihood can be seriously affected.

Professor Thomas Frank has described UN treaties as the "bones and sinew of the global body politic". It provides states to move through compromise to solemn commitment. Dr. Palitha Kohona has said that it connects Sri Lanka to the world and confers extensive benefits while imposing obligations with which we need to comply.

In this article, the implementation process at national level is dealt by reference to (a) promotional measures (b) protection measures and (c) enforcement measures. These measures are the responsibility of states, but inter-governmental or non-governmental organizations or individuals can assist the state actors in this process.

However, legislative techniques relating to the transformation of UN treaties into national legislation and interpretative rules, although important, are not dealt in this article due to lack of space.

In dealing with the aforementioned measures, it is proposed to outline some of the legal, technical and practical problems encountered in Sri Lanka. It is intended to illustrate these difficulties, so that the EU can make a balanced technical evaluation in regard to the renewal of GSP+ concessions.

Implementation at National Level

At the national level, the implementation of UN treaties is undertaken by many actors. In his monumental book on Law of Treaties (1961), Lord Arnold McNair observed that implementation involves all three organs of the state, namely the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary.

He also said that the implementation process differs considerably from one legal system to another. Hence, in dealing with the implementation process it is wrong for anyone to recommend implementation modalities followed in different legal systems without understanding the difficulties.

Promotional measures

The renewal of GSP+ concessions

In regard to implementation, States are under an obligation to promote the content of UN treaties to target groups. It is done through advocacy programs such as ministerial speeches, seminars, workshops, colloquia and round-table conferences.

In the absence of promotional measures, implementation becomes ineffective and inefficient, due to lack of knowledge of the content of these UN treaties by target groups. In Sri Lanka, there is a surfeit of ministerial speeches propagating treaty concepts by the relevant ministers.

Promotional measures are sometimes undertaken with the assistance of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. After the establishment of a Directorate for human rights and humanitarian law at the Sri Lanka Army Headquarters (1999), many dissemination programmes were conducted with the assistance of the ICRC to field commanders and security forces.

In the year 2000-2003, the ICRC intensified the dissemination programmes to Field Commanders in the north and the east and I travelled with Generals from UK, South Africa and India to teach IHL to top army, navy and air force personnel. It can be said today that the Sri Lankan Army, Navy and Air Force are more professional in the use of force and dealing with the scourge of terrorism.

Promotional measures are enhanced by the grant of developmental assistance. For example, President Carter made human rights the cornerstone of his foreign policy and development assistance was provided to such states. It is something which Sri Lanka cannot afford to forego.

State parties have also considered precautionary/preventive measure as part of promotional measures. Hence, precautionary measures in regard to nuclear non-proliferation, global warming and sea-level rise are important, as they constitute threats to international peace and security.

Unfortunately, USA has not yet ratified the 1997 Kyoto Protocol despite scientific evidence of an impending disaster. Likewise, EU proposal to the Republic of Iran to suspend uranium enrichment is considered an important precautionary measure in dealing with nuclear non-proliferation.

Protection Measures

The protection measures constitute the kernel of the implementation process. In Sri Lanka, there is a heated debate in regard to the adequacy of the protection measures in relation to human rights treaties.

It is important to analyze the protection measures undertaken in Sri Lanka by reference to legislative, executive and judicial organs of the state. It is only then that the implementation measures can be evaluated in toto.

At the Legislative level, it is essential to transform UN treaty standards and norms into national legislation. Unless these standards and norms are transformed with penal sanctions, it is difficult to enforce UN treaties at national level. It is also necessary to establish institutions by law to protect these standards and norms.

In Sri Lanka, legislation giving effect to UN treaties is not accorded the status of a higher law and is treated in the same way as ordinary legislation. Since certain human rights standards are incorporated into the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka as fundamental rights, these provisions prevail over any other law to the extent of any inconsistency.

In this context, constitutional compliance in regard to draft legislation and executive decision-making can be judicially reviewed by the Supreme Court with reference to fundamental rights. Numerous cases referred to the Supreme Court evince that Sri Lanka is not a "basket case", but a "laboratory" in which human rights issues are argued and determined on a daily basis.

Recently, Sri Lanka enacted legislation giving effect to ICCPR (1966) by Act No. 56 of 2007. This Act was referred to the Supreme Court (SC) by the President of Sri Lanka to determine its adequacy. The SC confirmed its adequacy. In the SC, one of the arguments related to the right to self-determination.

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It is a right which applies in a colonial context and therefore its non-incorporation into the aforementioned Act is justified. However, it would have been useful if the ICCPR (1966) was listed in a schedule to this Act for information and promotional purposes.

Sri Lanka has also enacted legislation giving effect to narcotic drug trafficking, money laundering, environmental protection and labour rights. At present, she needs to enact a climate change response legislation, bio security legislation and legislation to give effect to the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (2001) and the UN Convention Against Corruption (2004) with respect to new legal concepts introduced by the above Conventions, but not dealt in the existing laws.

At the Executive level, the executive arm of the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) must act in conformity with international standards and norms enshrined in UN treaties. It is an extremely difficult issue if the Executive is confronted with war, terrorism and social unrest.

In the USA, the events that led to the Guantanamo Bay, Abu Graib Prison and the enactment of national legislation now culminating in the restriction of privacy laws in regard to telephone tapping clearly demonstrate the difficulties encountered in dealing with the scourge of terrorism.

Nonetheless, international norms and standards relating to human rights and humanitarian law must be protected in dealing with terrorism as enunciated by the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan in his five-point plan at the Madrid Summit on terrorism (2004).

Under protection measures, executive action should initiate projects and programs at national level to achieve the objectives of UN treaties in regard to human rights, humanitarian law, terrorism, trafficking in narcotic drugs, irregular migration, refugees, IDPs, protection of environment, trade facilitation and the fight against corruption and transnational organized crime.

In this respect, access must be given to the ICRC, so that protection of the civilians and the conduct of hostilities by the Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE fighters are monitored in accordance with IHL standards. It is not necessary to have UN Monitors, so long as the ICRC is provided access to areas affected by the conflict.

It is also necessary to ensure coordination of these projects and programmes relating to UN treaty implementation with CSOs and NGOs. In this respect, Sri Lanka must learn to live with NGOs and accept when criticism is justified and refuse such criticism if they are biased and made with an ulterior motive. In this regard, Sri Lanka must be as flexible as it is firm.

The Judicial role is as important as legislative and executive roles with respect to protection measures. It includes the interpretation of legislation giving effect to UN treaties and the reviewing of executive/administrative decisions vis a vis fundamental rights.

In recent times, the Sri Lanka's Judiciary has displayed activism on human rights. In recent cases, the SC has struck a delicate balance between human rights/national security and environment/development. In regard to labour rights, the SC has stood by international standards in many landmark cases.

Unlike in some developing countries, the members of the Judiciary in Sri Lanka are not removed from office for taking a robust stand against the Executive or the Legislature on these important issues.

It is an important factor that makes Sri Lanka's implementation process very different to many developing countries. In this sense, the renewal of the GSP+ concession can be justified solely on the role played by the Judiciary in Sri Lanka in relation to the implementation of the 27 treaties.

Enforcement Measures

Nonetheless, enforcement at national level is "the Achilles heel" (weak spot), as there are many legal and practical problems pertaining to implementation.

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On the legal side, Judges are restrained, as the rules relating to the interpretation of implementing legislation are archaic in Sri Lanka, as extrinsic aids cannot be used fill any gap in the legislation or to deal with ambiguous or unreasonable provisions. Enforcement is further weakened, as the concept of locus standi limits legal action in regard to global issues.

On the practical side, enforcement at national level requires international cooperation especially in regard to criminal matters. Recently, Sri Lanka has entered into many mutual assistance agreements in criminal matters. Such cooperation is extremely important to deal with persons who are engaged in terrorism, terrorism financing, money laundering, repatriation of assets and trafficking in narcotic drugs.

National institutions dealing with enforcement measures require additional funds. It is certainly a constraint for effective implementation. E.A. Landy after thirty years at the ILO listed practical difficulties which are very relevant to Sri Lanka on the implementation of ILO standards.

International compliance and control measures

International dimension is relevant regarding the implementation of 21 UN treaties listed by the EU, as international compliance and control measures can improve the implementation of UN treaties at national level. Under these measures, the implementation of UN treaties is reviewed, verified and recommendations are made for effective and efficient implementation.

In this context, any statements, criticisms or recommendations made by states, UN or INGOs should not be construed as an intervention into the internal affairs of the state, since the ratification of UN treaties per definitionem limits state sovereignty. Unfortunately, there is a reluctance by many to accept the changing nature of state sovereignty.

UN treaties have also established treaty regimes. Krasner (1983) has defined the term "treaty regime" as a set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which stakeholders converge in a given issue area of international relations.

It has also led to the formulation of a regime theory by Professor Volker Rittberger and others in preference to Hans Morganthau's Realism and David Mithrani's Functionalism in dealing with the theoretical underpinnings in the conduct of international relations. The efficacy of the regime theory is limited as illustrated in the subsequent paragraphs.

Against this backdrop, it is appropriate to deal with international compliance and control measures undertaken through UN treaty regimes.

Reporting Process

Almost all UN treaties require states to provide initial and bi-annual reports with respect to implementation of UN treaties. These reports are scrutinized by treaty bodies or committees established for such purposes. The review process differs from one treaty body to another.

In many instances, the NGOs and CSOs also participate and contribute to the review process. These treaty review conferences require states to comply with the standards set out in the UN treaties by way of recommendations. Sri Lanka lags behind in the submission of reports and in follow-up action.

In regard to international compliance control measures, it is necessary to undertake verification, as reports submitted by state-parties are inadequate in certain circumstances. In this regard, treaty bodies despatch fact-finding missions and rapporteurs to investigate violations with respect to UN treaties.

Recently, Sri Lanka has been visited by many high ranking officials of the UN system. These include Allen Rock, Sir John Holmes, Phillip Alston, Manfred Novak and Louis Arbor. Some parties in Sri Lanka took a confrontational approach with these international personalities instead of dealing with them in a friendly manner.

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Enforcement

At the international level, enforcement measures are undertaken by way of recommendations, sanctions and the use of force by the Security Council. The Security Council has never imposed sanctions or used force on Sri Lanka.

Treaty bodies such as Committee on Torture, Committee on Child Protection, Human Rights Council and Committee on Discrimination against Women have made recommendations to Sri Lanka.

Under the 1976 Optional Protocol, the Human Rights Committee has expressed certain views to the government of Sri Lanka on individual applications. Unfortunately, these views have not been implemented fully due to legal and practical problems.

In my view, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, late Lakshman Kadirgamar should not have initiated the ratification process to the Optional Protocol without taking into account the implementation difficulties. In many Commonwealth countries, there is an emerging constitutional practice to enact legislation on such complex treaties before they are ratified by the Executive.

Sri Lanka lost her seat in the Human Rights Council. It happened not because Pakistan has a better human rights record. It happened due to other reasons which are too numerous to mention in this short article.

Some allege that the GOSL is involved with abductions, disappearances and extra judicial killings in violation of human rights standards. This is a phenomenon associated with the escalation of war and suicide bombing. Hence, the EU needs to verify any such GOSL involvement through diplomatic efforts, as any determination without solid evidence or intelligence can cause embarrassment to Sri Lanka and to the EU.

In this context, the EU should make a fair evaluation on the implementation of 21 UN treaties independently. In my view, UN treaty regimes display unfairness and duplicity with respect to small and weak states. Once, I accompanied a foreign Minister of a small island state to a UN conference and he said that there is no need to change the legislation, as it is in conformity international standards and norms.

He said that he has the support of a large number of small island states with respect to legislation. In this instance, he said laughingly, "Microbes can kill a mighty whale". The UN meeting ended and the microbes did not kill the whale and the legislation had to be amended accordingly.

This anecdote illustrates that "Strong states do what they can and weak and small states must suffer what they must". Almost 2,500 years ago, Thucydides writing on the history of the Peloponnesian wars said "Rights, as the world goes, is only in question between equals".

It is a stark reality despite the equality provisions of the UN Charter. Hence, our envoys need to understand this reality and refrain from criticizing powerful states, unless it is very necessary in our national interest.

Against this background, the EU has an important responsibility to evaluate the implementation process pertaining to 27 UN treaties in a balanced manner.

On the one hand, it must take into account the millennium development goals and on the other hand the scourge of terrorism. I am sure the EU will take into account the plight of the poor garment factory workers in the same way as they recognized the plight of the banana workers in the Caribbean region.

The writer has served as UN Legal Expert/Draftsman in several countries. He was also Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Vienna.

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The renewal of GSP+ concessions

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**DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON FOR
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

US Fed News

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Body

The United Nations Office of the Secretary General issued the text of the following daily press briefing:

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Marie Okabe, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon. I am sorry I am late today. I was trying to get the latest from the Secretary-General, who is having a busy day today.

****Secretary-General in Afghanistan**

As you know, the Secretary-General made a surprise visit to Afghanistan earlier today, to underscore the priority the United Nations is placing on its work in the country. During that brief trip, he met with President Hamid Karzai and with his Special Representative for Afghanistan, Kai Eide. In the Secretary-General's meeting with the President, they discussed the security situation, social and economic development and upcoming elections.

Speaking at a joint press conference with the President afterward, the Secretary-General said, "For the United Nations, Afghanistan remains a key priority in 2009." He stressed the need to ensure that the elections scheduled for this August proceed as smoothly as possible. And, in response to questions, the Secretary-General reiterated his concerns about civilian casualties in Afghanistan. He stressed the need for close military coordination to ensure that civilian casualties do not occur in the course of military operations. We have press releases upstairs with more details on his visit to Afghanistan.

****Secretary-General in Pakistan**

The Secretary-General then arrived a few hours later for his first State visit to Pakistan. He met shortly after arrival with Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani. He also witnessed the signing between the United Nations Country Team and the Pakistani Government of a comprehensive programme, called the "One Programme Document", which develops a framework for the United Nations system's development work in the country.

The Secretary-General then spoke to reporters, telling them about United Nations support for Pakistan as it deals with the threat of terrorism and with serious economic and financial constraints. He said that he had discussed with the Prime Minister the importance of maintaining and strengthening the rapprochement between India and Pakistan that has taken its own momentum in the last several years. And, regarding the 2007 assassination of President

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Benazir Bhutto, he said that, on the basis of extensive consultations with the Pakistani Government and members of the Security Council, he intends to establish very shortly an independent Commission of Inquiry. I can confirm that a letter from the Secretary-General has been sent to the Security Council President, informing him of his intention to establish a three-member Commission of Inquiry, looking into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

And this evening, he is meeting with President Asif Ali Zardari, and that's happening right now.

** Gaza

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has condemned in the strongest terms the confiscation of its aid supplies by police personnel in Gaza yesterday afternoon. The seizure took place after UNRWA staff had earlier refused to hand over the aid supplies to the Hamas-run Ministry of Social Affairs. The police subsequently broke into the warehouse and seized the aid by force.

The aid, which included more than 3,500 blankets and over 400 food parcels, was to be distributed to 500 families in the area. UNRWA has demanded that it be returned immediately. UNRWA has a strict system of monitoring aid delivery and ensuring that its assistance reaches only the intended beneficiaries. In this case, the agency's officials were on the ground overseeing the delivery and taking all possible steps to prevent its diversion. We have more on that upstairs.

**United Nations Development Programme on Gaza

Meanwhile, also on Gaza, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that more than 14,000 homes, 68 Government buildings and 31 non-governmental organization offices were either totally or partially damaged during the latest conflict. As a result, some 600,000 tons of concrete rubble will need to be removed. Once funding is secured, UNDP will clear rubble; demolish and clean up sites of damaged buildings; and identify and remove unexploded ordnance. This project will generate 200,000 workdays for unemployed Gazans. We have more on that upstairs in the Spokesperson's Office.

** Darfur

The African Union-United Nations mission in Muhajeriya today reports that firing continued throughout the day in the area. In addition, Government of the Sudan forces were allegedly observed conducting patrols around the town, approximately 500 metres from the UNAMID [African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur] camp. An unidentified aircraft flew over Muhajeriya today and dropped three bombs, approximately one kilometre from the UNAMID camp. There were also reports of ongoing shooting, which led to the converging of civilian population towards the UNAMID camp.

The humanitarian community in Darfur reports that an influx of internally displaced persons has arrived in North Darfur following the recent fighting in Muhajeria. So far, the Al Salaam IDP [internally displaced persons] camp has received 520 new arrivals and the Zam Zam camp, also housing the internally displaced persons, received 1,400 persons. Ninety per cent of the new IDP population consist of women and children. UNAMID has provided some tents to assist the humanitarian community in North Darfur.

Meanwhile, the Joint Special Representative, Rodolphe Adada, travelled to Chad today, where he is expected to hold consultations with the leader of the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Khalil Ibrahim, on the current situation.

** Sudan

The Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on the Sudan is out as a document today. With a little over two years of the interim period remaining, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement has reached a critical juncture, it notes. While progress in its implementation needs to be recognized, daunting challenges still lie ahead. Key benchmarks, including census results, elections, border demarcation, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and preparations for referenda and popular consultations now need to be achieved within a tight time frame with very little flexibility for further delays.

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The Secretary-General writes that the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement are yet to present a convincing case for unity to the people of Southern Sudan. The Secretary-General calls upon the parties to use the remaining two years to explore all options available to make unity attractive, as stipulated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

The International Criminal Court's actions have had a major impact on Sudanese political dynamics and have diverted much attention at a time when outstanding issues related to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement require the parties' cooperation and renewed commitment, the Secretary-General notes. He says that, while he is encouraged by the assurances of continued support by the Government, he is also concerned about remarks by some of its officials that the Government may redefine its relationship with UNMIS [United Nations Mission in the Sudan] should an arrest warrant be issued against the President.

The Secretary-General calls upon the Government to fulfil its obligations to ensure the safety of United Nations staff and of nationals of the State Members of the United Nations in the Sudan. The Security Council is scheduled to take up this report tomorrow.

** Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) says that it has repatriated 335 former Rwandan Hutu fighters and their dependents to Rwanda in the past month alone. During the same period, the Mission has also transferred 120 Rwandan civilians to the United Nations refugee agency for further consideration as potential refugees in the Congo. As of today, another 219 Rwandan nationals are awaiting repatriation at United Nations-run facilities in north-eastern Congo. The Mission says the number of former Rwandan Hutu fighters willing to go back home to Rwanda continues to increase daily. It adds that its doors remain open to those willing to join the process.

Meanwhile, the Mission welcomes the increasing number of children leaving the ranks of ethnic Mayi Mayi fighters since the start of the accelerated integration of armed groups into the national army. During the past week, the Mission's section of child protection separated 195 children from these groups in the province of North Kivu.

** Sri Lanka

On Sri Lanka, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that heavy shelling and aerial bombardment of the hospital area in the north-eastern Mullaithivu District continued yesterday. For its part, the World Food Programme (WFP) is continuing to negotiate for an adequate window that would allow a food convoy into the Vanni region. WFP has been told that the earliest possible window would be this Friday. The last batch of food aid to the area in question went in on 29 January.

** Food and Agriculture Organization

A top Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) crop expert, speaking at an international farm congress in New Delhi today, urged the world's farmers to quickly switch to conservation agriculture, in order to feed a growing world population. Conservation agriculture does away with regular tilling in favour of permanent soil cover and diversified crop rotation. Besides preventing environmental damage, this promotes healthy soil, which retains more water and requires less irrigation.

Meanwhile, an FAO team of experts has visited areas of Liberia affected by the caterpillar plague. The insects are not armyworms, as previously thought, but a different type of moth species. This has experts cautiously optimistic, since this type of insect makes cocoons above ground, where it is easier to get rid of them. And we have more about that in an FAO press release upstairs.

** Commission for Social Development

And finally, the Commission for Social Development opened its forty-seventh session this morning, here at United Nations Headquarters. The President of the Economic and Social Council, Ambassador Sylvie Lucas of Luxembourg, and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Sha Zukang, opened the meeting.

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Social integration is the priority theme for the Commission's 2009-2010 review and policy cycle, which will take up the relationship between poverty eradication, full employment and decent work for all. The Commission will also address the impact of current global crises on development as an emerging issue. The Chair of the Commission is Ambassador Kirsti Lintonen of Finland.

****Press Conference**

And at 2 p.m., we'll have a briefing on this item by Wim Kok, Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands; Ambassador Kirsti Lintonen of Finland; and Bience Gawanas, Commissioner for Social Affairs at the African Union. And they will discuss social integration - the theme of this Commission for Social Development session.

This is what I have for you. Anything for me?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Can you confirm to us from UNAMID whether the JEM fighters have actually pulled out of the city of Muhajeriya? The United States Ambassador said that yesterday after the Security Council meeting.

Deputy Spokesperson: Yes, according to our spokesman there, I don't think they have been able to independently confirm that, but I will keep you updated on that. What we have is the situation on the ground, as reported from the UNAMID contingent on the ground, in Muhajeriya today.

Question: So it's possible that they are still there.

Deputy Spokesperson: I just can't confirm the press reports, and neither can our people on the ground at this moment.

Question: Medecins Sans Frontieres says that MONUC has failed to protect civilians in the Congo from the Lord's Resistance Army - do you have any reaction to that?

Deputy Spokesperson: Yes, we do. The MSF's [Medecins Sans Frontieres] charge of "inaction" by MONUC to protect civilians in Haut Uele under attack by LRA is totally unfounded. MONUC says it has provided the maximum possible support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to deal with this situation. Since early 2007, the Mission has been working with FARDC to establish a presence in this remote area and contain the threat of LRA. Primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with the Congolese Government, which MONUC is mandated to support for this purpose. MONUC says it has increased its presence in the area by deploying an additional Moroccan infantry company, as well as elements of the Guatemalan Special Forces company to provide for rapid response.

As you know, the Security Council has called on MONUC to give the "highest priority" to addressing the crisis in the Kivus. The Mission has concentrated its efforts on the Kivus, but continues to carry out actions on three fronts simultaneously - in the Kivus, in Ituri and in Haut Uele province.

And finally, to date, MONUC has transported Congolese troops to different points in the region to protect the population and deter attacks. MONUC is sustaining 2,200 of the 3,400 Congolese troops in the area by providing rations, fuel and essential logistical support, such as casualty evacuations, as well as aerial reconnaissance to support protective deployments by the FARDC. MONUC has also closely supported FARDC troops, including in November in Dungu by conducting combat air patrols. And I think all of this is available for you upstairs, if you want to pick it up.

Question: Medecins Sans Frontieres specifically said that on 1 November UN peacekeepers stayed inside their base, while the town of Dungu was attacked. Does your categorical denial say that the UN peacekeepers actually went out and tried to defend civilians.

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have anything specific on that particular allegation that you are referring to, but I think this has a very comprehensive overview on what MONUC has been doing.

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Question: There is also a figure of 900 dead by the LRA since the beginning of this, but the UN seems to have a different number, which is Does the UN also reject this number by MSF?

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have the precise number of those killed, but that OCHA and other UN officials - the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict - they have been flagging those killed, the casualties that are ongoing there and their concern. And, of course, they are trying to do whatever they can in humanitarian terms.

Question: Just a follow-up on this - the report, that you are saying the UN categorically denies, the report also says that the UN should use its helicopters to remove the wounded from that area, which it does elsewhere around the world, and it has not done there. Why doesn't the UN, in fact, remove the casualties from that area?

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have anything specific on the evacuation, but I did mention to you right now that casualty evacuation is part of what MONUC is mandated to do there.

Question: I just wanted to make sure I understand this diversion of supplies episode in Gaza correctly. Do I understand correctly there was a supply depot of UNRWA, and there were UNRWA personnel distributing supplies, and some Hamas fighters came there, seized and diverted the supplies and took them elsewhere. Is that correct?

Deputy Spokesperson: George, I don't want to read the update again. So why don't you pick it up upstairs and look at it, and we can follow up with UNRWA if there are further questions.

Question: To follow up on that, in this general area, this raid by Hamas police on the beach facility raises the question, in the appeal for \$613 million that Ban Ki-moon declared at Davos and John Holmes repeated in some detail, is there a line-item budget for armed protection of warehouses? And if not, are they now considering adding armed protection of warehouses in Gaza to the amount needed to run the relief operations in Gaza?

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have the details of the humanitarian appeal launch, so I would suggest that you talk to Catherine Bragg in OCHA. She can probably give you an interview on the exact status of what the appeal is looking at.

Question: In view of these serious allegations in Gaza against Hamas, why do you think is Mr. Ging not available for this Q and A - has he been asked not to talk anymore to correspondents?

Deputy Spokesperson: No, absolutely not. The other day, we had a request, and we brought him on immediately the day after. So if you want him to come again, we'll put in a request. I'm sure he will be glad to join us.

Question: Now, about this investigation, is it true that the Secretary-General is about to order the UN's own investigation? Or is he going to wait for the Israeli investigation to end? Because you never know when it is going to happen?

Deputy Spokesperson: No, the Secretary-General has himself announced that he will be establishing an independent investigation, and we hope to have that soon.

Question: (talkover) I know last week he said he will have an investigation - are we days, weeks, months away from that, at least in announcing the structure of it?

Deputy Spokesperson: Days, I hope.

Question: This investigation commission that he is going to establish on Benazir Bhutto's assassination - do you have any bios on these three people selected by the Secretary-General?

Deputy Spokesperson: As far as I know, the Secretary-General has not yet announced the composition of the commission. He has, as I mentioned to you, he has written to the Security Council with his intention to establish this commission of inquiry, and he announced it himself just a short while ago in Islamabad, but as far as I know, before I came down here, he had not announced the composition as he was about to go and speak with the President.

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Question: That composition will be announced, when he comes back - is that what it is?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, if he announces it there, I'll, obviously, pass the names on to you.

Question: (inaudible) about Benazir Bhutto she was killed, possibly with Western assistance - we are not sure - a year ago in December. It's been a year and two months, and one has to wonder if there is some caution about whether or not the West, even the United States, might have been involved in it. Is there some reason why it takes that long to investigate a very prominent citizen, who was the daughter of an assassinated Prime Minister, I guess, he was who was trying to bring democracy to Pakistan?

Deputy Spokesperson: The Secretary-General mentions in his remarks, in his press conference, that this has followed extensive consultations with the Government and the Security Council. And when the letter comes out, if you can take a look at it, and it'll explain the background to it.

Question: You mentioned at the outset that the Secretary-General paid a surprise visit to Afghanistan. Was he particularly concerned about his personal security?

Deputy Spokesperson: For security reasons, we could not previously announce the visit. I hope you can understand that.

Question: In Sri Lanka, it said that the Foreign Minister today said that the UN has apologized for alleging that cluster munitions were used in the attack on the hospital. Is that true? What's the UN's current understanding of the use of cluster munitions by either side in Sri Lanka? And also, does Ban Ki-moon join the call by the US, the UK and some others for a ceasefire between the Government and the Tamil Tigers?

Deputy Spokesperson: You had two questions? What is your second question?

Question: Had Ban Ki-moon called for a ceasefire? What was the meeting he had with a senior adviser of the President did he convey what was said about this attack? I guess, it seemed strange has he called for a ceasefire or is he letting it run its course?

Deputy Spokesperson: On your question about the cluster munitions, some of the UN staff on the ground reported today that cluster munitions had been used close to their positions. These reports have not been confirmed. The United Nations has received assurances from the Government of Sri Lanka that they do not procure or use cluster munitions. So that's all I have for you on that. The Secretary-General's position has been outlined in his recent statements that he has made - I have nothing beyond that.

Question: Has he called for a ceasefire?

Deputy Spokesperson: Matthew, I have nothing beyond what we have said loud and clear on this issue in the last few days.

Question: Poland has announced that it was pulling its peacekeepers out of three missions - Chad, UNIFIL and Golan Heights - saying that its priorities are no longer UN peacekeeping. In Chad, it is the second largest contributor. What's the response of the UN to? Has Ban Ki-moon spoken to the Polish leadership? What does he think of them saying that the UN is not their priority?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, as you know, the Secretary-General currently is in a meeting with the President of Pakistan. We are aware of the report, and we are in contact with the Polish Government to clarify their intentions, and we will update you in due course.

Question: There are reports suggesting that Benjamin Netanyahu believes that Israel has pulled out of Gaza too soon and that if he is elected next week, that they have no choice but to topple the Hamas regime. Does the Secretary-General have a response to this comment and is he looking at this situation?

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Deputy Spokesperson: The Secretary-General's comments his position on Gaza is well known. I don't have an immediate reaction to this press report that you are referring to.

Question: Marie, is there a specific date set for the Secretary-General's press conference next week?

Deputy Spokesperson: Yes, we are aiming for 10:30 on Tuesday.

On that note, have a good afternoon.

For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATES ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES AND MECHANISMS

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Body

The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this morning concluded its general debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention in which it heard from a series of non-governmental organizations about violations of human rights in countries around the world. It then held its general debate on human rights bodies and mechanisms in which it statements concerning the Advisory Committee, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Forum on Minority Issues, and the Social Forum.

At the beginning of the meeting, the President of the Council, Ambassador Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi, said that the Council this morning held a private meeting under its Complaints Procedure during which they discussed the situation of human rights in Turkmenistan. As a result of the meeting, the Council decided to discontinue the consideration of the situation in Turkmenistan under this procedure. In conformity with the confidentiality of the procedure, he said members of the Council should make no reference in the public debate to the confidential decision and material concerning this country.

Speaking in the general debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention were the following non-governmental organizations: Society for Threatened Peoples, in a joint statement with Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, International Educational Development, Franciscans International, in a joint statement with Pax Romana, International Youth and Student Movement for United Nations, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, Union de l'action feminine, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Agir Ensemble pour les droits de l'homme, Centrist Democratic International (CDI) Cercle de recherche sur les droits et les devoirs de la personne humaine, Action internationale pour la paix et le developpement dans la region des Grands Lacs, in a joint statement with Comite international pour le respect et l'application de la Charte africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples, World Vision International, Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development, Liberation, International Peace Bureau, Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), Reporters without Borders - International, and International Committee for the Respect and the Application of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Speaking in right of reply were Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, Japan and China.

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The Council then held a general debate on human rights bodies and mechanisms. Last week, the Council had heard presentations by representatives of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Forum on Minority Issues. Under this agenda item, the Council is also considering the work of the Social Forum.

In the general debate, with regard to the Advisory Committee, one speaker said the Advisory Committee should endeavour to finish the work that had been started by the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Another said that the Advisory Committee was a think tank and its main task was to provide specialized knowledge on the requests of its superior body. It could not be a body that had its hands tied. One speaker said that there was no general derogation by the Council to the Advisory Committee to undertake initiatives on any matter within the mandate of the Council - the only latitude permitted on an issue of substance was that, within the framework of a reference already made, it could propose further research proposals. The Council could not automatically adopt the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, a number of speakers said. There had to be space to debate and amend the recommendations in a transparent manner prior to their adoption by the Council.

On the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a delegation wished to propose themes which could be studied by the Expert Mechanism, including violence against indigenous women and indigenous children under guardianship. Another delegation said that it considered that a thoroughly inclusive and participatory approach was paramount if a country wished to establish an educational policy which was answerable to the needs of indigenous peoples and which truly reflected their differentiated circumstances and expectations. There were serious concerns about the Expert Mechanism's lack of financial resources to implement inter-sessional activities, as this would hamper the implementation of its mandate and seriously hamper its work and expectations. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations should ensure it had the funding to carry out its mission.

On the Forum on Minority Issues, a speaker said denial of the right to education for minorities led to denial of civil and political rights, including rights to freedom of movement and of expression, and limited their meaningful participation in economic, social and cultural affairs. More attention should be paid to the possibility of the use of minority language for instruction, as reduction in the use of mother tongues would foster unequal social opportunities in countries. One speaker said that the situation of a number of minorities around the world was not satisfactory, and the protection of minorities and adequate resources provided to them needed to be ensured.

Regarding the Social Forum, a speaker appreciated the commitment and the ongoing efforts which had been geared towards the eradication of poverty and the furtherance of human rights, and hoped that given the recent global trends, the issues covered by the Social Forum would be further elaborated upon and a normative framework established to resolve many of the challenges faced. The Social Forum was an extremely important forum, open to States and other stakeholders, including civil society, to discuss social issues, but in particular to discuss poverty, which was not just an economic and social issue but also a security issue.

Speaking in the general debate was the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union, Egypt on behalf of the African Group, Chile on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Cuba, Switzerland on behalf of the Group on Education and Human Rights Training including Costa Rica, Morocco and Italy, India, Chile, Nigeria, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Argentina, Brazil, Russian Federation, Bahrain, China, Slovenia, Mexico, Kuwait, Morocco, Austria, Finland on behalf of the Nordic Countries Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland, Iran, Greece, Australia, Hungary, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United States, Algeria and New Zealand.

The following non-governmental organizations also took the floor on the agenda item on human rights bodies and mechanisms: Irish Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International, Europe-Third World Centre, Soka Gakkai International, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education, Indian Council of South America, France Libertés: Fondation Danielle Mitterand, Lutheran World Federation, OCAPROCE International, Cercle de la Recherche sur les Droits et les Devoirs de la Personne Humaine, Liberation, Action Canada for Population and Development, International Movement and Fourth World, International Work Group for

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Indigenous Affairs, Arab Commission for Human Rights, Universal Esperanto Association, Indian Movement Tupaj Amaru, and International Institute for Peace.

The Council is meeting today in back-to-back meetings from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., including the closed meeting from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. When the Council holds its afternoon meeting at 3 p.m., it will follow-up on the Special Session which was held in January on grave violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the recent aggression of the occupied Gaza Strip.

Continuation of General Debate on Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention

TENZIN KAYTA, of Society for Threatened Peoples, in a joint statement with Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, said with regard to Tibetan independence from China, at the last meeting of Chinese and Tibetan officials, the Dalai Lama had presented a document, as requested by the Chinese, which was rejected by Chinese because it was calling for at least half independence or full independence. The international community should continue encouraging the Chinese to enter into honest negotiations. Even Nobel peace prizewinners had lent their voices to the fight for independence and were dismayed about the results that had been achieved so far.

KAREN PARKER, of International Educational Development, said the lack of attention given to the situation in Zimbabwe left the international community to help prevent mass starvation. In Sri Lanka, the Tamils had been suffering in the country since 1948. In February 2009 at the invitation of the United States Senate, the speaker had made a statement on Sri Lanka. There was now support by Senators to address the need for humanitarian assistance for the Tamils, and that they not be driven by Sri Lankan authorities into concentration camps. The Council could not afford to abate genocide. The Council was urged to hold a special session in this regard.

GOTZON ONANDIA-ZARRABE, of Franciscans International, in a joint statement with Pax Romana, said there was concern about the human rights situation and the increasing instability in Madagascar, where political tension and a series of violent incidents had led to the death of more than 130 people, and instability continued to increase. All actors should respect international human rights obligations and engage in a dialogue to find a solution. The situation in Sri Lanka continued to deteriorate, and the number of victims was increasing. According to local sources, the condition of civilians in Vanni was desperate. The Human Rights Council should hold a special session on Sri Lanka. The two provinces of West Papua and Papua also remained areas in need of the Human Rights Council's attention. Intimidation of human rights defenders continued.

Mr. M'HAMED, of International Youth and Student Movement for United Nations, said that all human rights were indivisible, interdependent and universal. The right to self-determination required particular attention in the region of the Western Sahara. The people there were oppressed and human rights defenders were especially targeted and paid with their lives. Several dozens of such prisoners were in Moroccan prisons and those that emerged were marked for life. Peacekeeping missions in that region should have a human rights aspect. The Western Sahara was the last colonized region in Africa.

TENZIN NORGAY, of International Fellowship of Reconciliation, said during the past decade the International Fellowship reported regularly to the Human Rights Council concerning the Chinese reparation campaign in Tibet. They were alarmed by the aftermath of the protests that took place in May, in which the Chinese authorities launched a crack down on Tibetan monks. The taking of one's life was one of the most severe sins within the Tibetan beliefs. The International Fellowship urged China to seize pressures in Tibet, including the issue of religious freedom, and urged that the Council to engage with China to ensure that the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion made a visit to the country.

MAJID TRAMBOO, of International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, said that the Association had to bring to the Council's attention the gross human rights abuses that occurred regularly in Indian-held Kashmir as a matter of routine. A recent report released by local NGOs had highlighted the number of deaths and disabilities caused by land mines in Indian-held Kashmir. Seven hundred civilians had suffered some kind of disability due to landmines in Kashmir in the past decade. Disappearances were also continuing in India, in 18 villages in the Uri

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District in Kashmir alone 940 graves had been discovered. India consistently refused to hold an independent and impartial investigation into this matter.

EL MAGHNAOUI FATIMA, of Union de l'action feminine, said the people of Western Sahara were suffering a consistent violation of their human rights with the cooperation of those responsible for Algerian security. In the Tinduf camps, human rights were not respected, the Saharawi population lived in terrible conditions, subjected to the most inhuman methods, denied their fundamental freedoms, deprived the right to freedom of movement and information. Thousands had died under torture. Many women and children suffered from malnutrition, which led to serious illness. Infant mortality had risen in the camps, and most humanitarian aid was diverted to the personal needs of Algerian leaders. The Council should demand that the Government cease this, and put an end to the three generations of suffering. While a political solution was sought, there was a human drama that was unfolding.

DEKYI DOLKAR, of Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, said with regard to the events in March 2008 in Tibet, a joint communication to China by the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, concerning reports of violence during demonstrations in the Tibet autonomous region and surrounding areas in China, spoke of killings of an unconfirmed number of people and arrests of hundreds of demonstrators, which reflected immediate concern in the wake of violence in Lhasa on 14 March 2008. NGO reports documented over 130 incidents of protests across 52 countries by Tibetans since last March. Peaceful protests continued as this Council met. Furthermore, Amnesty International had reported, based on China's own public statements, that the fate and whereabouts of over 100 Tibetan detainees remained undisclosed.

VO VAN AI, of Agir Ensemble pour les droits de l'homme, said there was great concern for Viet Nam's continuing incomppliance with its human rights commitments. The Communist Party controlled the people. The Party passed laws that were in violation of human rights, including decrees forbidding demonstrations and restraining the freedom of the press and expression. The Party legalised arbitrary detention, and decided, against the views of the population, to exploit natural resources causing environmental degradation. The Human Rights Council should press the Government to issue an open invitation to the Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders, freedom of expression, and religious freedom.

SEMLALI AABADILA, of Centrist Democratic International (CDI), said that there were numerous situations that required the Council's attention. This should not hide the situation of the people kept in the Tindouf camps. The humanitarian assistance was destined for the sequestered people but it was stolen from them. The International Democratic Center called on Algeria to lift their state of siege so that the people could benefit from their right to free movement.

BELL HILAIRE, of Cercle de recherche sur les droits et les devoirs de la personne humaine, proposed that the Council consider adopting a universal declaration on the rights and duties of the individual. Studies showed that 89.9 per cent of violence in Cameroon against men was carried out by women. Human rights were also violated by peoples, and not just by Governments. There should be an elaboration of the duties and responsibilities of people. The Research Circle said they did not object that the duties and obligations of protecting and promoting human rights lay with States, but this could only be carried out if the duty of individuals was reinforced and elaborated as part of the process. The Research Centre recommended that the Council adopt a resolution to condemn violence against men by women, and to appoint a Special Rapporteur on violence against men.

MAURICE KATALA, of Action internationale pour la paix et le developpement dans la region des Grands Lacs, in a joint statement with Comite international pour le respect et l'application de la Charte africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples, said despite the resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the Security Council, a joint military operation by the Democratic Republic of Congo-Rwanda had been launched in secrecy to track down the militiamen of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda. This had not reached its goal. Rwanda was mentioned in a recent United Nations report as a support country for the armed groups carrying out heinous acts in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. New attacks had been noted in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with an outflow of civilians. The updating of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Democratic Republic of the Congo was urgent, as the current crisis was spreading.

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JENNIFER PHILPOT NISSEN, of World Vision International, welcomed the continuing attention of the Human Rights Council to the critical human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. World Vision highlighted the great need to address the situation of sexually exploited children. Children, especially those who were orphans, displaced, or refugees, were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, many being forced into prostitution to survive. The exponential increase in displacement and violent killings since August 2008 had drastically increased the number of extremely vulnerable children. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's Government as well as local and international actors should immediately develop and robustly support programmes aimed at the prevention, recovery and the integration of child victims of sexual exploitation.

THEODOR RATHGEBER, of Catholic Organization for Relief and Development, said in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in particular in Kivu, people wanted to recover from the war that had lasted over 10 years. All the combatants were perpetrating acts of sexual violence, and the human rights situation was so alarming that even the justice system did not know how to deal with, among others, the cases of rape where women and girls were victims. The Catholic Organization said that transforming commitments into actual action was necessary to address the crisis. The re-establishment of the Independent Expert on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would also contribute greatly in this regard, by shedding light on sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, and the situation of internally displaced persons, among other things. The culture of impunity needed to be stopped, stressed the Catholic Organization for Relief and Development.

ANEZKA PALKOVA, of Liberation, said human rights were indivisible, interdependent and universal, applying in all situations and to all races without discrimination. The nations in the north eastern territories of South Asia suffered from denial of their fundamental rights. The human rights defenders who dared to raise their voice for the voiceless victims of torture in the north-eastern territories had also been subjected to torture, harassment and disappearance. The Council had the obligation to pay attention to torture, extrajudicial killings and detentions and disappearances in the north-eastern territories of South Asia currently held by the Indian Government.

ANNIGNA GENG, of International Peace Bureau, said that the Rohingya was a Muslim minority from North Arakan State which was systematically excluded and discriminated against by the Myanmar regime. Deprived of citizenship, the Rohingya were not allowed to travel from one place to another without permission and traveling beyond North Arakan was forbidden. They were subjected to forced labour, extortion, arbitrary taxes and land confiscation. Only their community had to apply for permission to marry which was only granted in return for high bribes and a declaration that the couple would have no more than two children. The Peace Bureau called on the Council to urge Myanmar to immediately end its policies of exclusion and discrimination against the Rohingya and to repeal the 1982 Citizenship Law.

ARUN KHOTE, of Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), said over 300 million Dalits remained deprived of their most fundamental rights including the right to education and other economic, social and cultural rights. In addition, they were frequently subjected to torture and arbitrary detentions. In Tamil Nadu last month, two Dalit young men were beaten to death for entering a high caste temple for worship. Dalit women were frequently raped and killed. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women should also write a special report on the situation of Dalit women and children, 80 per cent of whom suffered from persistent denial of their right to education. Democracy should not be for flaunting political credentials and those who were violating the rights of the people through illegal killings, torture and enforced-disappearance should be made accountable.

GEORGE GORDON LENNOX, of Reporters without Borders International, said it expressed its shock in November last year at the seven-year jail sentences handed down to the editor and manager of a privately-owned newspaper in Myanmar. The two were only the most recent of a long list of journalists and bloggers, poets and activists silenced by the Government and now languishing in prison. The Council, the High Commissioner and the Special Procedures concerned, as well as other stakeholders, should add their voices to all those clamouring for freedom and democracy in Myanmar.

MALUZA WASILUADIO, of International Committee for the Respect and Application of the African Charter on the Human and Peoples' Rights, said that the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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continued to be extremely worrying. Despite the appeasing efforts made by the Congolese Government, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FDLR) still continued to bring horror over the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In a recent report, Rwanda was cited to be the aggressor by giving military support to Laurent Nkunda. Total impunity continued to be enjoyed by the heads of the military. In these circumstances, what credibility could one attach to the joint military campaign carried out by Rwanda in the east of the Congo? Mr. John Holmes had said that the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was worse than that in Darfur.

Right of Reply

SAMIRA SAFAROVA Azerbaijan, speaking in a right of reply, referred to the statement made by the United States last week on freedom of expression and freedom to access information in Azerbaijan during the general debate on issues requiring the Council's attention. Azerbaijan regretted that the United States did not take the opportunity to engage with it during the interactive dialogue and exchange which took place last month during the Universal Periodic Review. Azerbaijan also suggested that the United States refer to the report of the Working Group on freedom of expression and freedom to access of information with respect to Azerbaijan. The Government hoped that the approach States took to address matters was a cooperative one and not a confrontational one. Azerbaijan said they had listened in the past weeks with concern regarding several cases on killings and disappearances of reporters and journalists in the United States.

YASANTHA KODAGODA, of Sri Lanka, speaking in a right of reply, said the speaker for International Educational Development had continued to utter complete falsehoods regarding the prevailing situation in Sri Lanka - this organization only supported the LTTE, which was now going through its final round of terrorism. The LTTE lobbying was not uncommon at the Council. The situation in Sri Lanka, as clearly observed by the United Nations coordinator on humanitarian affairs, was an exceptional one. There was no genocidal situation - the Government was engaged in a legitimate humanitarian and military operation aimed at liberating its own people from LTTE terrorists, who did not even spare the people they falsely claimed to represent, and were abusing the humanitarian gestures of the Government. It had positioned itself inside the no-fire zone that was observed by the Government of Sri Lanka and was attacking the security forces who were fast approaching the shrinking territory. The LTTE was using people as a human shield. Sir John Holmes had personally visited the villages being administered by the Government, in which persons were being sheltered and ensured decent conditions of living. It was a complete falsehood to refer to these shelters as detention camps.

AKIO ISOMATA, (Japan), in a right of reply, said that the abduction of innocent people was one of the extreme cases of grave violations of human rights, and merited a serious discussion in the Human Rights Council. Justification of such grave human rights violations based on a groundless assertion regarding Japan's attitude towards the events of the past was unacceptable. Japan agreed upon the overall objectives and concrete modalities of the investigation on the abduction issue in August last year, but no concrete action had been taken by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to date. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea should move forward in making good on this promise by establishing an authorized investigation committee and commencing investigation, as agreed, without further delay.

QIAN BO (China), speaking in a right of reply, said China rejected the statements made by the Society for Threatened Peoples and other organizations that made similar statements on Tibet. Those organizations, China said, made groundless accusations and distorted information with respect to the situation in Tibet. China stressed that the issue of Tibet was a separatist issue, and was not linked to religion, culture, ethnicity or human rights issues. The Chinese Government would continue to safeguard national integrity and sovereignty. If those non-governmental organizations were truly concerned about the human rights situation in Tibet, they should acknowledge the democratic process established over 50 years ago in Tibet, and what the Chinese Government had contributed to that effect.

General Debate on Human Rights Bodies and Mechanisms

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TOMAS HUSAK, (Czech Republic), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said General Assembly resolution 60/251 clearly stated that the common commitment of the Human Rights Council was to strengthen the United Nations' human rights system, with the aim of ensuring the effective enjoyment of human rights by all. The Human Rights Council should have at its disposal all necessary tools and mechanisms in order to be able to shoulder this comprehensive mandate. The European Union traditionally attached great importance to the Council's system of Special Procedures, which were at the core of the United Nations Human Rights Council machinery. Thematic procedures provided valuable conceptual analysis, while country procedures could give a voice to those victims who could not speak up for themselves. The Advisory Committee had finished its initial year of work - its suggestions could provide inspiration to States for their work on the Council, but it should be up to States to decide whether and if to take their work forward. It was of utmost importance for the effective work of the Council to enhance dialogue with the outside world, and there were a variety of ways in which this difficult task could be achieved.

AMR ROSHDY HASSAN, (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the African Group highly appreciated the work of the Advisory Committee. The African Group understood that the Committee might propose any suggestions to the Council within the scope of their mandate and that the Council could then provide further information to the Advisory Committee. The African Group encouraged the Advisory Committee to continue its work. The Advisory Committee should endeavour to finish the work that had been started by the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

CARLOS PORTALES (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, said with regard to education in the field of human rights, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries said this education was essential for the realization of all rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights education contributed significantly to promoting equality and preventing conflict and violations of human rights. Education also promoted participation and democratic processes, and helped societies develop without difference of any kind. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries observed that education facilitated the different elements necessary to live among human beings, and to favour education was necessary to promote the understanding of different groups. Using formal education as a tool to integration was necessary. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries urged States to encourage a draft declaration on the right to education, and called on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue support and training on human rights, through the technical cooperation programme for countries that had requested so.

IMRAN AHMED SIDDIQUI, (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that education was a basic human right for all and yet in all regions of the world, minority children continued to suffer disproportionately from unequal access to quality education. Denial of the right to education for minorities led to denial of civil and political rights, including rights to freedom of movement and of expression, and limited their meaningful participation in economic, social and cultural affairs. Education should serve the dual function of supporting the efforts of communities to self-development in economic, social and cultural terms while opening pathways by which they could function in the wider society and promote social harmony. The Organization of the Islamic Conference welcomed the Expert Mechanism on Indigenous People's expression of support to the Durban Review process. The Organization of the Islamic Conference also welcomed the hard work done by the Advisory Committee. The Council should carefully consider the recommendations and suggestions made by the Committee, and provide guidance for further course of action on these issues. The Committee should be able to suggest additional issues for the consideration of the Council - it should complete the outstanding work initiated by the Sub-Commission on Human Rights.

MARIA DEL CARMEN HERRERA (Cuba) welcomed the fruitful work of the Advisory Committee in its first year of work. It had been a particularly intense phase in which the Committee had dedicated a large part of its time and effort to its own institution building on the basis of the mandate given to it by the Human Rights Council. The Advisory Committee was a think tank and its main task was to provide specialized knowledge at the request of its superior body. The character and function of a think tank did not require further discussion. It could not be a body that had its hands tied. It was a subsidiary body to the Council. The Council had presented recommendations that were of interest, the Council should now consider each of these recommendations.

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MURIEL BERSET (Switzerland), speaking on behalf of the Group on Education and Human Rights Training, which included Costa Rica, Morocco, Italy and Switzerland, said many activities had taken place in 2008, and 2009 was the International Year for Human Rights Training. Switzerland recalled that with regard to the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris in December 2008 held a round table discussion on human rights education and training which aimed towards implementation of human rights training. Switzerland highlighted the active role played by civil society, among others, in this regard. Before the next session of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee in August this year, the group on education and human rights training would present its report. On the draft declaration on human rights education and training, Switzerland said that it would be finalized in December 2009. Switzerland urged members of the Council to give their views on the initial phases of the World Programme. The World Programme and the draft declaration on human rights education and training were two strong messages, and would contribute to ending violations of human rights.

ACHAMKULANGARE GOPINATHAN (India) said India attached importance to the work of the Advisory Committee as a think tank of the Council working under its directive and guidance, and the Council should ensure that its initial steps were in the right direction and did not stray from the provisions of the institution-building package of June 2007, which defined the function of the Advisory Committee as providing expertise to the Council. There was no general derogation by the Council to the Advisory Committee to undertake initiatives on any matter within the mandate of the Council - the only latitude permitted on an issue of substance was that, within the framework of a reference already made, it could propose further research proposals. The Advisory Committee should be advised that in future it should give its expertise only upon a specific request by the Council. The report of the Advisory Committee on its first session should only be taken note of, and its other recommendations made in response to specific Council resolutions should be considered separately under the relevant agenda item. It was imperative that the Advisory Committee, in the nascent stages of its existence, should not repeat the mistakes of the former Sub-Commission which finally led to its being wound up.

CARLOS PORTALES (Chile) said that the Advisory Committee did important work as a think tank. There was room to strengthen their work and coordinate with the Council. Concerning the right to food, other bodies were not taking specific arguments into account, in particular agricultural subsidies or tariffs. Chile thought that it was important and essential to call on developed and industrialized countries to take measures to eliminate distortions. This had not been sufficiently stressed by the Council. Another element was human rights and human rights education which had been mentioned by the Swiss representative. The means to facilitate had to be strengthened to ensure a greater participation of civil society to complementing the work on the guidelines of poverty and human rights, which were very important. Concerning the Committee's recommendations on poverty, Chile pointed to its national programmes to fight poverty.

IFEANYI NWOSU (Nigeria) commended the report submitted by the Advisory Committee which was in line with its mandate. The Advisory Committee, within the context of the institutional-building text, exercised the right to propose suggestions as well as make recommendations to the Council. Nigeria noted that almost all the draft recommendations of the Committee to the Council, including its agenda of work, were adopted without a vote. This "consensus approach" to their work gave room to objective and substantive concerns by all stakeholders. The Council, Nigeria believed, stood to gain from the expertise and work of the Advisory Committee. Nigeria was of the view that the Advisory Committee should continue to perform its functions in accordance with the institutional-building text, including its recommendations to the Council.

DANIEL ULMER (Canada) said with regards to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Canada was delighted to have co-sponsored the resolution which led to its establishment, and for having participated in the opening meeting of the Expert Mechanism. The Council was clearly aware of the ongoing need to pay attention to the rights and needs of indigenous peoples wherever they may be, and the need to take protective measurements where necessary. Canada had recently submitted its data on education for indigenous peoples so that the Expert Mechanism could consider this as it analysed best practices, looking for lessons learned. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, the Permanent Forum and other United Nations bodies and programmes should ensure maximising output without

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overlapping and repeating work. Canada wished to propose themes which could be studied by the Expert Mechanism, including violence against indigenous women, and indigenous children under guardianship.

INDAH NRUJA SAVITRI (Indonesia) reiterated the need for the Advisory Committee to stay focused on the issues assigned to it as requested by the Council and as stipulated in the institution-building package. Furthermore, the institution-building package clearly specified that the Advisory Committee should not adopt resolutions or decisions. It was necessary to stress the need to avoid drifting back to the modus operandi of the erstwhile Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of the Council. The Advisory Committee should function effectively and efficiently as the new think tank body of the Council. Regarding the Social Forum, Indonesia appreciated the commitment and the ongoing efforts which had been geared towards the eradication of poverty and the furtherance of human rights. Indonesia hoped that given the recent global trends, the issues covered by the Chairperson would be further elaborated upon and a normative framework established to resolve many of the challenges faced.

AKIO ISOMATA (Japan) said Japan appreciated the work of the members of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee thus far. They had been actively working on the tasks with which they had been entrusted by the Human Rights Council. Japan expected that the Advisory Committee would continue to make a useful contribution to the Human Rights Council by working effectively on a variety of human rights issues, in keeping with resolution 5/1 of the Human Rights Council, taking into full account the structural change from the Human Rights Commission Sub-Commission to that of the Advisory Committee of the Council now. Japan had addressed the issue of discrimination against persons with leprosy and their family members at great length in the Human Rights Council and had gained cooperation from many countries on this issue. Japan expressed its gratitude to all the members of the Advisory Committee, and extended its sincere appreciation to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for compiling the information of stakeholders and for convening this January the consultation on discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.

SEBASTIAN ROSALES (Argentina) said the Advisory Committee was thanked for its work and its first report. Argentina supported the establishment of a body to support the work of the Council and to a certain extent replace the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Argentina wished to stress the importance of the issue of disappeared persons, which was in the report of the Advisory Committee. The Council should not set aside previous work which had been done on this, and it should be taken into account in the work done, in order to avoid duplication and a weakening of standards. There should be clear maintenance of the difference between disappeared persons and forced disappearances, as these were not the same. Existing standards on disappeared persons should be maintained and considered. The Sub-Commission worked on this subject in a very positive and constructive way. The Advisory Committee should take account of precedence in this field, and carry out a study that would give importance to the issue of disappeared persons. The right to truth was an important issue, and the Advisory Committee should take into account resolutions adopted with regards to this right, which was applicable in times of peace and war when there was violation of international humanitarian law.

MURILO VIEIRA KOMNISKI (Brazil) said Brazil wished to comment on the contents of the study under preparation by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples concerning the right to education. Much had been done to promote access to education to indigenous peoples in Brazil. Specific legislation and programmes had been enacted and implemented. Data from the 2006 school census showed that enrolment of indigenous children in basic education increased over 48 per cent between 2002 and 2006. Despite the progress achieved in recent years, the provision of education for indigenous communities was, nonetheless, far from comprehensive in terms of coverage at the national level. That was why Brazil considered a thoroughly inclusive and participatory approach to be paramount if Brazil wished to establish an educational policy which was answerable to indigenous peoples needs and which truly reflected their differentiated circumstances and expectations.

EVGENY KASHAEV (Russian Federation) said the Russian Federation appreciated the work of the Advisory Committee, as the Committee was an expert mechanism which did important work. The Russian Federation urged the Council to make greater use of the potential of the Advisory Committee. The Social Forum and the Expert Mechanism on Minority Rights were also important bodies to address, as the topicality and relevance of subjects

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chosen by those bodies in combating extreme poverty and the indigenous peoples rights to education were of particular interest. Moreover the work of the Independent Expert on minority issues provided a good basis for a good quality and detailed study of this issue. The Russian Federation urged the Council and other relevant bodies to pay greater attention to the possibility of the use of minority language for instruction. The Russian Federation was convinced that the reduction in the use of mother tongues would foster unequal social opportunities in countries, among other things.

ABDULLA ABDULLATIF ABDULLA (Bahrain) said the Social Forum was an extremely important forum, open to States and other stakeholders, including civil society, to discuss social issues, but in particular to discuss poverty, which was not just an economic and social issue, but also a security issue. Bahrain appreciated debate in the Social Forum to discuss the issue of poverty and raise awareness on the issue, in particular regarding international cooperation to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The fact that Bahrain had received a prize at the Fourth International Urban Forum held on 6 and 7 November 2008 for its work with UN-HABITAT was a demonstration of Bahrain's commitment in this area.

CHEN YINGZHU (China) said that the Advisory Committee and the Social Forum had carried out various thematic studies which had enriched the work of the Council. China expressed its gratitude to their work and appreciated the efforts made over the last one and a half years. It hoped that the Advisory Committee would play a greater role in the work of the Council. Poverty was a very important issue which needed the cooperation of countries around the world. China supported the recommendation of the creation of a solidarity fund. Regarding indigenous peoples, China supported the effort to enlarge the scope of the task of the United Nations voluntary fund, which would support the indigenous peoples in its work with the United Nations. Minority groups around the world all faced the challenge to further their right to education. China supported the Independent Expert in this regard and looked forward to concrete recommendations.

ANDREJ LOGAR (Slovenia) commended all who made the United Nations inaugural Forum on Minority Issues a success. The Human Rights Council needed to deal with ethnic or linguistic minorities as previous bodies addressing minority rights had been abolished. The situation of a number of minorities around the world was not satisfactory. Experts, representatives of minorities, States and other stakeholders had to be a part of the discussion on minorities. The protection of minorities and the provision of adequate resources provided to them had to be ensured. Furthermore, Slovenia said that preserving language, among others, required access to education and in particular education in the mother tongue.

MARIANA OLIVERA WEST (Mexico) welcomed the expert mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, on the one hand, as advisory bodies specialized in the promotion and protection of human rights with a focus on economic, social and cultural rights, but also as privileged spaces for dialogue among civil society, States and other interested parties on issues of essential importance for human rights. Mexico was particularly pleased that education was one of the principal crosscutting focuses of those mechanisms. Mexico had often stressed the primordial role of education as the backbone of development in society, as well as to counter underdevelopment and poverty, some of the biggest obstacles to human rights. In that context, Mexico was eagerly awaiting the report on human rights education to be prepared by the Advisory Committee, which emphasized the human rights of groups with the least access to education, such as migrants, indigenous persons, disabled persons, minorities and children affected by armed conflict.

JAWAHER AL-SABAH (Kuwait) said concerning the Social Forum that Kuwait agreed that poverty was one of the fundamental issues facing the world today. Assistance and cooperation at the international level were vital in combating poverty. Kuwait continuously extended assistance to developing countries. For example, soft loans were extended. It was extremely important to alleviate poverty. Kuwait had also established a fund to help alleviate poverty, including for countries that had been hit hard by the world food crisis.

OMAR RABI (Morocco) said Morocco attached great importance to the subject of human rights training and education. The draft declaration on human rights training and education was crosscutting in nature as it touched on economic, social and cultural rights. Morocco welcomed that Costa Rica and Italy joined the group. Morocco

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echoed Switzerland's call for the organization of a seminar in which all interested stakeholders were invited to participate, and of which the outcome would be a fundamental step in realizing the draft declaration on human rights training and education. The seminar would also help the Advisory Committee to identify needs and measures to be addressed in this regard.

CHRISTINA KOKKINAKIS (Austria) said Austria was convinced that the system of Special Procedures was the backbone of the Human Rights Council. They were the "eyes and ears" of the Council, in particular owing to their capacity to undertake country visits, and the Council had to make every effort to keep them healthy and active. The extension of open invitations to all Special Procedures should be the goal of all States, in particular Member States of the Council. The Council also had to find a way to deal with States that had a longstanding refusal to accept such visits.

HANNU HIMANEN (Finland), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that they welcomed the dedicated work of the Expert Mechanism on Indigenous Peoples on education. All countries still had a lot to do in this regard. On cooperation, important work had been carried out in the field of education. A few months ago, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a comment on indigenous children. The right to education covered many areas and the broad perspective of the Expert Mechanism was a good approach. Attention should be given to the difference in urban and rural situations. Finland asked the Expert Mechanism to give guidance to the Council how Member States could assist in the follow-up. Finland also asked what the Expert Mechanism's role would be in this regard.

Mr. ANSARI (Iran) welcomed the establishment of the Forum on Minority Issues based on the Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 28 September 2007 in order to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on minority issues. Iran congratulated the convening of the inaugural session of the Forum in December 2008 to provide concrete and tangible outcomes in the form of thematic recommendations of practical value to all stakeholders. The 20 year Economic Outlook and the National Development Plan of Iran paid special attention to the promotion of education as the basis of the development of the country in all areas.

YANNIS PLOTAS (Greece) thanked the Independent Expert, Gay McDougall, for her work with regard to minority issues, and more particularly for her report on the first Forum on Minority Issues held last December. That session had produced thematic recommendations of practical value to many stakeholders. Greece had appreciated the thematic focus given to that session on minorities and the right to education, in which Greece had participated with extensive comments. Greece reiterated that it deemed it of the utmost importance to promote the integration of persons belonging to minorities into the societies they lived in while respecting their particularities and agreed with the Independent Expert when she said that education should serve the dual function of supporting the efforts of communities to self-development in economic, social and cultural terms while opening pathways by which they could function in the wider society to promote social harmony.

However, at the inaugural session of the Forum, a few stakeholders had intervened with political declarations, rather than contributing to the discussion by commenting on the draft recommendations. Greece believed that that kind of disorientation of the discussion did not help the purpose of the exercise.

HENRY WINTER (Australia) welcomed the report of the first session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Australia welcomed the practical focus of the Expert Mechanism and looked forward to further engagement with this body on issues that would advance the promotion and protection of indigenous rights. Australia was especially pleased to have been able to contribute to the study on lessons learned and the remaining challenges in achieving the implementation of the right of indigenous peoples to education. Australia considered that this was an important field in which Australia had considerable experience. It welcomed the opportunity to share its knowledge with other countries.

ISTVAN LAKATOS (Hungary) expressed its gratitude for the tireless work of the Independent Expert, Gay McDougall, and congratulated her on the very positive outcome of the first Minority Forum dealing with the topic of minority education as its first thematic issue. Hungary was proud that Ms. Viktoria Mohacsi, a minority politician of Roma descent, was chosen to chair the very first session of the Minority Forum. The remarkable professional

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achievements of Ms. Mohacsi were credible proof that someone's origins did not necessarily predestine a whole life, and also demonstrated the great importance of adequate education. Hungary wished to emphasize again that the right to education should be guaranteed to everyone, regardless of his or her national or ethnic origin, religion or mother tongue.

GEORGI AVRAMCHEV (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) praised the Council for establishing the Forum on Minority Issues and commended the Independent Expert on minority issues, Gay McDougall, for her work during the preparatory process, and welcomed the unprecedented cooperation between the Forum and other United Nations bodies, as well as the recommendations emerging from the Forum, which required only the minimum necessary to ensure minority access to education. Access to education was essential for integration of citizens. In their country, education was free and compulsory. The country's education programmes for its minority communities aimed to fulfil the criteria set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UNESCO conventions in this area, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among others.

MELANIE KHANNA (United States) said that the United States had listened with interest to the discussion regarding the Advisory Committee. This session was a critical opportunity for States to give feedback to the Committee on its early work. Decision 5/1 mandated the Committee to "provide expertise to the Council in the manner and form requested by the Council." It was stipulated that such expertise was to be rendered only upon the latter's request. The United States shared the concerns of those who believed that much of the substance of the work of the Committee to date was less research-based and more advocacy-oriented than envisioned in Decision 5/1 and that the form of the work, often styled to resemble resolutions and presented as recommendations, was not fully consistent with the parameters set out by the Council. The United States was concerned about both the substance and the form of the Committee's output and requested the Committee to take these concerns into account in its future work. The United States was further concerned by proposals that the work of the Committee should be put to the Council automatically as recommendations for adoption. The research and expertise of the Committee should be available upon the Council's request to be taken up for consideration by the Council or its members when they so choose.

SELMA MALIKA HENDEL (Algeria) expressed Algeria's full appreciation for the way in which Mousa Burayzat led the first session of the Social Forum, and for the variety of questions that were examined. On the Advisory Committee, Algeria thanked the members of the Advisory Committee for their work, and in particular thanked the work of Miguel Alfonso Martinez. Algeria said that the Council needed to give more support to the Advisory Committee in order for it to continue to pursue its work, and could also suggest future work of the Committee by transmitting topics sent to it. Algeria further stressed that it was important for the Advisory Committee to complete the work started by the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of the former Human Rights Commission.

WENDY HINTON (New Zealand) said New Zealand supported previous speakers in respect of the need for the Council to consider the recommendations of the Advisory Committee prior to their adoption. In New Zealand's view, the recommendations of the Advisory Committee could not automatically be adopted by the Council. There had to be space to debate and amend the Advisory Committee's recommendations in a transparent manner prior to their adoption by the Council. Recommendations could be considered and incorporated into the corresponding thematic resolution in the Council, as was already the case with some of the Advisory Committee's recommendations. In some cases, it might be appropriate to act upon the recommendations through a presidential decision. In respect of the Advisory Committee's recommendations on gender integration, New Zealand appreciated the commitment of the Advisory Committee to integrating a gender perspective and supported its efforts in that regard. New Zealand would see the Advisory Committee's recommendations on gender integration as being more appropriately discussed and acted upon in the relevant thematic resolution on the integration of a gender perspective in a future session of the Council.

KATHARINA ROSE, of Irish Human Rights Commission, supported the elaboration of a declaration on human rights education and training. The Irish Human Rights Commission submitted a report to the Advisory Committee in

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the response to its questionnaire to the national human rights institutions. A declaration on human rights and education and training needed to clearly include the important role of the national human rights institutions in this area. Further, it needed to establish the parameters of the subject in relation to other value education such as citizenship education, education of sustainable development, etc. A declaration should address the question of why human rights education as opposed to any similar education was independently important, or what distinct value an explicit human rights element could bring to related education's pedagogy, content, philosophy, etc.

PETER SPLINTER, of Amnesty International, in a joint statement with Lutheran World Federation and Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, said that human rights bodies and mechanisms depended on cooperation with individuals and organizations to fulfill their mandates. At this session, the Council heard about the tragic killings of three persons. Edwin Legarda was shot dead on 16 December 2008 by members of the Colombian armed forces shortly after his wife, Aida Quilcue, had been active at the third session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group in connection with its review of Colombia. Amnesty International condemned those killings, and looked forward to the completion of the investigations into their killings and the prosecution of those persons responsible.

MALIK OZDEN, of Europe-Third World Centre, in a joint statement with several NGOs¹, said, with regard to the Advisory Committee, that although its members had been elected scarcely a year ago, that body had already done some remarkable work. In fact, the Advisory Committee had made progress on issues referred to it by the Council, notably on education, on human rights training and on the right to food. The Advisory Committee had called for a study on the food crisis, the right to food, agricultural subsidies and the rights of farmers. That was a topical issue given the current context of starvation and malnutrition in the world and the monopolistic power of transnational corporations. Violations of the right to food undermined the right to life. Respect for that right required sufficient production of food and foodstuffs. In that context, small farmers were marginalized when they were pushed off their land. The violations of the rights of farmers could be one way to tackle that issue in the Human Rights Council.

KAZUNARI FUJII, of Soka Gakkai International, in a joint statement with several NGOs², said that human rights education contributed to the promotion of gender equality, the rights of the child, women, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, elders, migrants, and all other vulnerable groups. The organizations called on Member States to ensure that the proposed United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training incorporated a broad definition of human rights education; accountability by reference with duty bearer and rights-holders; linkages between the declaration and treaty bodies, special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review; and the important role of civil society actors and non-governmental organizations. With this in mind, the organizations supported the recommendation in the progress report of the Advisory Committee on holding an informal seminar in Geneva.

CLAUDIA NEURY, of International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL), in a joint statement with several NGOs³, said human rights education was an essential agenda for all nations, and was a sustainable approach to all human rights issues and a lifelong process, irrespective of people's age. Children, women indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, elders, migrants, and all other vulnerable groups, as well as officers of Government, law enforcement and judicial systems were relevant to the implementation of human rights education. All Member States should not fail to take the necessary steps to ensure the final evaluation as provided for by the Plan of Action of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, and should assist and collaborate with all stakeholders, particularly non-governmental organizations, for gathering information relevant to the first phase, making the evaluation process accessible and transparent, as well as providing feedback on the final evaluation to all stakeholders.

TOMAS CONDOR, of Indian Council of South America, said that more than 30 years had passed since the first indigenous delegates had come to the United Nations to obtain full and official recognition of indigenous nations of the Western hemisphere by the United Nations as well as the full recognition of the treaties and other agreements between the indigenous nations and States in accordance with international laws and principles. Those had been the proposals of the delegates of the six nations and the Lakota nation at the international conference of non-governmental organizations in 1977. That recognition would mean a special representative status within the United Nations. But what had been offered was the acceptance of consultative status by some nations as non-

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governmental organizations, treating indigenous peoples as if they were a sector of civil society that needed special attention, such as children, women and religious minorities. Despite many years of debate and the fact that they now had a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Matters, and other forums, the demand for international recognition of the sovereignty of indigenous people had never really been taken into account.

PAULINE LAVAUD, of France Libertes - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, said that during the last 25 years France Libertes had been approached repeatedly by indigenous peoples to fight on their behalf for their right to self-determination and their right to dispose of their wealth. Once again, France Liberte repeated their rights and stated that although each of these indigenous peoples had their own realities, all made claims of the same rights. Indigenous peoples had the right to own, dispose of and use the lands they lived on. For example in the Amazon, indigenous peoples were often denied access to their lands because of patents. The organization called on Governments to take effective measures and to fully guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples.

FRANCESCA TRAGLIA, of Lutheran World Federation, said the issue of the completed and submitted studies from the former Sub-Commission on Human Rights was still outstanding. The referral of the completed studies was not addressed in the institution-building package, and it was high time that the issue was properly dealt with by the Council, to avoid losing some of the valuable completed work of the Sub-Commission. It was up to the Council to take an initiative to avoid losing this work - and the Council should address this matter, which was purely procedural in nature, by publishing the completed and submitted studies as United Nations documents and sending them to the Council for its consideration, as it could then consider them on their merits and determine the appropriate response according to its programme of work.

SANULLAH BALOCH, of Organisation pour la communication en Afrique et de promotion de la cooperation economique internationale (OCAPROCE International), urged the Special Rapporteur to undertake a fact-finding mission to investigate the recent atrocities in Balochistan. This statement was ruled out of order.

BELL HILAIRE, of Cercle de recherche sur les droits et les devoirs de la personne humaine, thanked Switzerland and Morocco for their constant support in the drafting of the declaration on human rights education and training. If the correlation of rights and duties were not taken into account, the Research Circle was concerned about the impact of the declaration. It asked: How did they teach their children the right to health if they did not know how to ensure public health? How did they teach dignity, if they did not teach children to respect others and their parents? It had to be made clear that rights and obligations had to be included. The NGO would like to join the Committee in the elaboration of the declaration.

ANEZKA PALKOVA, of Liberation, said it was evident that indigenous peoples across the world continued to be the most isolated and oppressed peoples, and the Council should note the situation of those in the north-east region of India, where they had been reduced to microscopical minorities in their own lands.

SANDEEP PRAS, of Action Canada for Population and Development, in a joint statement, brought to the Council's attention Advisory Committee recommendation 2/4, which requested the Human Rights Council to give the Advisory Committee a mandate to look at gender mainstreaming within the Council and all other United Nations organs. They were pleased that the Advisory Committee would like to take up in earnest that issue, but were concerned about the proposed scope suggested, i.e. to look at the issue in all other organs of the United Nations system. Other United Nations entities also had the responsibility for gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system, and many had also developed guidelines for integrating a gender perspective into their work.

JANET NELSON, of International Movement and Fourth World, in joint statement, said that the Social Forum was very useful and allowed to compare the views of different stakeholders. The organizations supported the establishment of a fund in order to allow non-governmental organizations to participate in future deliberations. The first condition was to go out and find the poorest. A repeated error was not to integrate the poor in decision about measures to combat poverty. Assessments needed to be made based on field experiences to correct negative effects of globalization, while taking into account the efforts that had been made by persons living in extreme

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poverty. While the international community could create global policies they also had to protect people from falling into extreme poverty when crises occurred.

THEODOR RATHGEBER, of International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, said the mandate of the Expert Mechanism on Indigenous Issues provided unprecedented opportunities for the United Nations and indigenous peoples to work together towards the realisation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and for the mainstreaming of indigenous issues in the United Nations' work and framework. The fulfilment of the Expert Mechanism's mandate would only be possible if Governments participated actively and there was a political commitment to implementing the necessity to ensure the realisation of indigenous rights on the ground. The Expert Mechanism's recommendation to include the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a separate item in the programme of work was endorsed. There were serious concerns about the Expert Mechanism's lack of financial resources to implement inter-sessional activities, as this would hamper the implementation of its mandate and seriously hamper its work and expectations. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations should ensure it had the funding to carry out its mission.

ABDEL WAHAB HANI, of Arab Commission for Human Rights, welcomed the progress made by the Advisory Committee in its work, in particular with regard to a declaration on human rights education and training. Particular attention should be accorded to highlighting the positive aspects of all cultures and religions without falling into that cultural relativism, so dear to certain repressive States. The universality of human rights was not a diktat of any particular nation, but the result of a mutual enrichment among nations, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a work that had continuing meaning and was not fixed in time. In that regard, the Arab Commission recalled the importance of teaching the historic process of development of the body of international human rights law. Often Western media and their booklets talk about the role of Eleanor Roosevelt or Rene Cassin in the drafting of that fundamental text, but often forget the role of the Lebanese, Charles Malik, or the Iranian, Fadhel Jamali, not to mention other Arabic drafters. Presenting the Universal Declaration as a work of a group of Westerners was not only contrary to historical reality, but also counterproductive in this time of international crises and identity clashes.

STEFANO KELLER, of Universal Esperanto Association, said that it worked to promote the respect for language rights. It believed that this right was an inherent human right. The President ruled the statement out of order.

LAZARO PARY, of Indian Movement Tupaj Amaru, said the report of the Advisory Committee was welcome - the Committee had put forward three important issues: absolute poverty in developing countries and the indigenous peoples and minorities; the need to look in greater depth to the causes of the food, environmental and financial crises; and the need to examine the right to self-determination. The Council should authorise the study on the right to self-determination by the Advisory Committee, in particular the rights of indigenous peoples to freely determine their existence. In terms of cause and effect, the food crisis and speculation on basic foodstuffs was a violent infringement of those living in extreme vulnerability, and was a result of the economic liberalisation and anarchic and unequal distribution of wealth, and was very sad to see.

STEPHAN CICCOLI, of International Institute for Peace, said that the Internet revolution, which had created the global market, also undermined the affiliations of citizens to their States. It fell to the United Nations to help civil society to regulate and mitigate the effects of the Internet on the poorer countries. In the current system, the third world stood to be marginalized more than ever. Yet, decisions to take over the Internet to increase prices, such as oil, affected people throughout the world. One of the paradoxical effects of the Internet on the poor countries was to increase their need to access to credit. With regard to minority issues, the International Institute welcomed the work of the Forum on Minorities and the Independent Expert on minorities. Certain minorities in South Asia, such as the Baloch in Pakistan, needed to be the focus of case studies in the future.

¹Joint statement: Europe-Third World Centre; Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples; International Association of Democratic Lawyers; African Association of Education for Development; **Women's** International League for Peace and Freedom; AND International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements.

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2Joint statement on behalf of: Soka Gakkai International; Pax Romana; International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL); International Federation of University **Women**; CIVICUS - World Alliance For Citizen Participation; International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD); Worldwide Organization For **Women**; Al-Hakim Foundation; International Alliance of **Women**; International Catholic Child Bureau; World Federation of United Nations Associations; and World Student Christian Federation.

3Joint statement on behalf of: International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL); Soka Gakkai; Pax Romana; CIVICUS - World Alliance For Citizen Participation; International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD); Al-Hakim Foundation; International Alliance of **Women**; International Catholic Child Bureau; and World Student Christian Federation.

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MEETING IN PROGRESS: GENERAL ASSEMBLY GENERAL DEBATE

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NOTE: FOLLOWING ARE SUMMARIES OF STATEMENTS MADE TODAY TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY GENERAL DEBATE. A COMPLETE SUMMARY OF TODAY'S GENERAL DEBATE WILL BE AVAILABLE AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE AFTERNOON MEETING AS PRESS RELEASE GA/10751.

Background

The sixty-third session of the General Assembly met this morning to continue its annual general debate.

Statements

MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA, President of Sri Lanka, said the global food crisis had become a frightening actuality, and had the potential to intensify if the international community failed to take urgent and collective action. His Government was investing more in agriculture, research, shared technologies and best practices to bolster the rural empowerment that was so essential in a developing nation like Sri Lanka, whose people depended on agriculture for their livelihoods. Achieving food security would require strengthening and revitalizing the agriculture sector, and this called for the empowerment of small and midsize farmers. Sri Lanka had introduced measures, such as fertilizer and fisheries subsidies, to provide an effective social safety net.

He went on to stress the importance of finding equitable and pragmatic solutions to the energy crisis, which included transferring new technology to developing countries. The United Nations and its agencies needed to take the lead in developing a framework for international cooperation, so vulnerable developing countries had access to the energy benefits of the so-called "nuclear renaissance" at affordable rates. He also cautioned against the rush to biofuels, which had contributed to high food prices.

On the issue of terrorism, President Rajapaksa said the Sri Lankan Government was ready to address the causes of terrorism, and had effectively implemented political and constitutional solutions to meet the aspirations and rights of all communities. He stressed that the Government would not and could not let an illegal and armed terrorist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (***LTTE***), hold a fraction of the country's northern population -- a part of the Tamil community -- hostage, and deny their democratic rights of dissent and free election.

The Government had declared a policy of engaging in dialogue and discussion with the Tamil community's leadership, and successive Governments had tried to resolve the problem for more than 25 years. The Sri Lankan Government would only be ready to talk to this illegal armed group when it was ready to commit itself to

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decommissioning its illicit weapons, dismantling its military capability, and returning to the democratic fold. The Government would not permit the undermining of Sri Lanka's sovereignty, or the division on any part of its territory. The complex situation in Sri Lanka needed to be resolved through an appropriate process of deterrent actions to ensure law and order, and patient political efforts at consensus building.

This Assembly session was a good opportunity to gauge the progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals worldwide. It was regrettable that many factors, such as the global economic slowdown, financial turmoil and rising food and fuel prices had become obstacles to their achievement. Urgent and collective action, on both a short- and long-term basis, was needed to realize the agreed development goals, he said.

Invoking the aims and values of the Charter and Millennium Development Goals, VICTOR YUSHCHENKO, President of Ukraine, expressed the need for "common and good will" to face recent tragedies in the Caucasus. "The principal challenge that stands before us is the neglect and undermining of the standards of the international law and foreign affairs," which included sovereignty, territorial integrity and firmness of the state boundary, he said.

He expressed condolences to Georgians, Ossetians and Russians, and condemned all acts of aggression in the region. He stipulated that Ukraine "vigorously denounces" the violation of Georgian territory, but did not recognize the independence of the self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, citing Ukraine's attainment of commonwealth status in a "legitimate and acknowledged way". He went on to condemn the illegitimate and separatist affirmation of statehood of any territories. He urged the Security Council -- whose balanced decisions and effective actions were needed -- to strengthen its role in global peace and security.

On its part, Ukraine pledged support in continued peacekeeping activities and efforts to settle protracted conflicts following the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights and freedoms. Ukraine would also work with the international community in solving the food and energy crisis, with emphasis on ecology. He proposed an initiative to develop a framework binding agreement -- a "World Environmental Constitution" -- and to establish a structure for ecological protection in conjunction with the United Nations.

In closing, Mr. Yushchenko remarked on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Great Famine (Holodomor) in Ukraine, saying that national tragedies should be commemorated jointly in order to prevent any future repetitions.

FERNANDO LUGO MNDEZ, President of Paraguay, said the United Nations was a place where the world Powers wrote history, and in which States should move beyond lofty political rhetoric to "become tools for eliminating hunger". Paraguay, after 61 years of single-party government, had seen a party come to power through the vote. Paraguay is part of the winds of democratic change in the region," he declared. This year, citizens had voted for greater social justice to halt massive destruction of the environment, as well as to combat corruption. The new administration represented "the end of the transition to democracy". Political and economic stability were not more important than social stability, and he was committed to applying policies that would combat extreme poverty.

Two weeks ago, Paraguay began its war against illicit Government management, he said. The new Government, which came to power on 15 August, had responded to defend democratically elected Governments, such as in Bolivia. Carrying out economic relations through the "market mechanism", which had indebted Latin America, had proven to be a mistake, and today, the world was seeing a crisis that had resulted from "immoral speculation", prompted by the desire for greater wealth.

He said Paraguay supported strengthening the General Assembly, adding that, as the most representative United Nations body, it must become "the true parliament of the world". Regarding climate change, the irony was that the poorest people -- those least responsible for climate change -- had suffered the most from its consequences. Paraguay underscored the need to "turn pledges into action", and called for recognizing shared but different responsibilities.

The same was true in determining economic and political responsibility for the global economic deterioration. In many regions, citizens were not involved in decision-making processes, he said, strongly calling for respecting indigenous peoples. Not doing so would be an "intolerable attack" on civilizations.

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Paraguay had begun an unprecedented process of transparency, in which the media was proactive in combating corruption. He called for working towards a more just world. States would fail if they were unable to "draw a smile" on young people, or help women who had been relegated to low social positions. On food security, he called for greater international assistance for agricultural production, without destroying the environment.

Continuing, he said the unique issues faced by landlocked countries were important to Paraguay's foreign policy, and the global community must recognize special treatment for those countries. The Government was prioritizing using renewable resources, which would complement efforts to create opportunities for work, and reducing poverty. On financing for development, Paraguay hoped that the global community would mobilize resources for supporting development in smaller economies. That was a priority for international financial institutions and developed economies.

He called on States to be guided by humanitarian ideals, and welcome his country's migrants who were today dreaming of having a decent life, and finding a solution to the new and dramatic fallout from globalization. To achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, he called for strengthening combined efforts, and by increasing official development assistance (ODA), notably for the most vulnerable economies.

In Latin America, poverty had reached 44 per cent of the population. In Paraguay, 35.6 per cent suffered from that scourge, 20 per cent of whom lived below the extreme poverty line. That situation was unacceptable, and called for a "radical change". The international community must ensure that resource mobilization become a priority for finance organizations and developed economies.

The word "love" was not used frequently in politics, but there was no other way to rebuild a world full of "hate", he said, adding that States must not forget individuals with special capacities. Paraguay believed in friendship, which was why it had set 30 July as a Day of Friendship, which he hoped would resonate around the world.

ANBAL ANTÓNIO CAVACO SILVA, President of Portugal, said guaranteeing peace, security and sustainable development was a shared responsibility. How the world achieved those goals would determine its common destiny. Global challenges implied collective responsibility, and the United Nations was the forum which best embodied that collective duty. In a globalized world, only strong multilateral institutions could promote the fundamental values of peace, democracy, human rights and sustainable development, and Portugal was committed to supporting effective multilateralism.

Actions must be made on clear assumptions, he asserted, saying first that States must make every effort to ensure the United Nations had the means to fulfil its mission. Second, greater representation in the United Nations bodies must be ensured, and actions must be more transparent. He asked whether it was reasonable to have a Security Council without reforming its working methods, in which countries like Brazil and India had no permanent seats, and Africa was not represented with that status. Third, States must guarantee fulfilment of human rights declarations, bearing in mind that the ultimate beneficiaries of doing so were all the world's peoples.

Portugal had been committed to that common effort, notably through involvement in peacekeeping operations. He paid tribute to all Blue Berets, who had made the ultimate sacrifice for the ideals of the United Nations Charter. On Africa, he said the continent deserved urgent attention, a belief that had led Portugal to hold the Cairo and Lisbon Summits with its African partners. Portugal also supported African efforts to achieve the goals of peace, sustainable development, access to health and education, and integration into the global market.

In that context, he congratulated the Angolan people for the "civic way" in which the recent electoral process had been carried out. He welcomed the political agreement in Zimbabwe, and congratulated Guinea-Bissau on the anniversary of its independence. That country was a member of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), and had undertaken increasing duties as an operational partner in the regional organizations to which it belonged.

On terrorism, he noted that, although much had been done, implementation of the United Nations Global Strategy was fundamental for success against that scourge, and respect for both human rights and freedom was crucial. On the equally destructive "common enemies" -- hunger and extreme poverty -- Portugal reiterated firm support for the

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Millennium Development Goals, and was directing most of its development aid to Africa. He was pleased at the creation of a high-level working group on the global food crisis, and called for working together on challenges posed by climate change. The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was a landmark in the promotion of human rights.

"We are the United Nations, and the Organization's destiny is in our hands," he said. He hailed the Assembly's consensus on Security Council reform, and Portugal had had the honour of being directly linked to its result, having submitted its candidacy to a non-permanent membership for the 2011-2012 biennium. Its candidacy must be read in light of the United Nations values that States had long defended. "We stand for an equal representation of States", as that was the best way to guarantee justice.

JOHN AGYEKUM KUFUOR, President of Ghana, said the world was in a state of flux, with challenges that were befuddling all nations, both strong and weak, rich and poor. But at the same time, there were also tremendous opportunities, and there had been tremendous progress in a range of areas, from medicine to engineering and bioscience technologies. Those opportunities were diffusing power around the globe, and the primary challenge was how the many peoples of the world would promote common humanity as the primary factor behind their endeavours.

He said the United Nations was the only Organization with the potential to command respect around the globe, and under its auspices, the strong and rich nations showed greater tendencies towards sharing resources, such as knowledge and finance with the poor. That echoed the same moral streak embedded in the United Nations that had motivated various regional blocks around the world, including Africa. Dramatic improvements had been made in Africa over the last 15 years, and the African Union's Peer Review Mechanism demonstrated African nations' great resolve to adhere to the rule of law and good governance. It was noteworthy that most African Union members had signed up for review, and many more of the continent's leaders were using the ballot box to assume power.

Under the auspices of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Africa was trying to pool resources among its members and players outside the continent, to exploit the potential to develop its resources, including in energy, telecommunications, transportation and agriculture. That was the way to solve the many problems of the continent such as poverty, illiteracy, disease, ignorance and conflicts.

While acknowledging the support of its development partners, President Kufuor said there was still room for improvement. Various forms of assistance were uncoordinated and insufficient to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 target date. As noted in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) XII's Accra Accord, the goal of aid was to empower beneficiary countries to become effective partners in the global market.

He noted that poor economic conditions in 2001, the year he assumed power, had forced Ghana to sign up for the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC). Ghana had subsequently achieved the HIPC Completion Point quickly to earn a debt forgiveness of about \$8 billion from bilateral and multilateral creditors. That success had led to increased inflows of domestic and foreign investment, which had allowed the Government to initiate many social services and improve its infrastructure. Those policies and others had laid the groundwork for Ghana to attain its ambitious vision of a middle income status by 2015. It showed that accelerated national development and good governance, including respect for human rights, were not mutually exclusive, and good governance should hasten development.

MICHELLE BACHELET JERIA, President of Chile, said the world had changed tremendously since the Assembly had adopted the Millennium Declaration. The world now faced increasing problems, such as climate change, terrorism and the food crisis, while at the same time, economies and communications had become more interdependent. Those changes had created more opportunities, as well as more risks and inequities. While progress had been made towards the Millennium Development Goals, there had been regrettable setbacks. The optimism that began in a century called the "millennium of hope" was dissipating. More than 100 million people had fallen into extreme poverty because of the food crisis. The global financial crisis could make matters worse. All of these crises impacted the world's poorest people, and it was crucial to review the Goals.

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The international community needed to expand its notion of progress and freedom. It could not squander the improvements in science and technology that could, for the first time, assure the welfare of all humanity. The current financial crisis showed how greed and the irresponsibility of a few could plunge the world into uncertainty.

Without a clear course of collective action by States and civil society, none of the current problems could be tackled, nor could agreed development goals be achieved. She called for the support of emergency measures to deal with the food crisis, and an urgent commitment to multilateralism and reform of international institutions, such as the United Nations, to make them more democratic and representative. It was also necessary to achieve an accord at the Doha Round of World Trade Organization talks and obtain concrete results at the follow-up Conference on Financing for Development. Member States should also work to achieve success at the upcoming Copenhagen conference on climate change in 2009.

President Bachelet noted that Chile was on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals ahead of the 2015 target date, proving it was possible to eradicate poverty in an environment of democracy and freedom. The country had made social investments and advanced in many areas, including health, education and quality of life, as it provided broader gender opportunities.

She pointed to the growing power of democracy in her region, and said South American nations had worked together recently to establish a dialogue and find a peaceful solution to the political crisis in Bolivia. That had shown the strength of democracy and human rights, and the region's desire to leave its dark history behind.

She went on to say that national policies were not enough, and international agreements needed to be forged to govern globalization, while extending democracy and social rights to citizens everywhere. She noted the upcoming sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and how that instrument had advanced humanity by helping to end centuries of death, torture and abuses of power. It had opened the door to further advancements in the area of human rights. She hoped the same would occur with the Millennium Declaration, which needed to be transformed into an ethical and political imperative for Governments around the world.

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**COUNCIL CONTINUES INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH EXPERTS ON
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND
INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES**

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The Human Rights Council this morning continued its interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, who presented their reports to the Council on 2 June.

Sri Lanka, speaking as a concerned country on the report of Walter Kalin, the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, said that Sri Lanka felt that some clarification of facts might be useful. Drawing attention to some recent developments in the country, he said that the situation in Sri Lanka was improving. Elections had been held for the first time in 20 years in the Eastern Province, which was the scene of most of the displacements with which the Representative was concerned. The success of the recent democratisation process had much to do with the willingness of a wing of the **LTTE** to abandon terrorism and to engage in political activity. Assistance was being provided to resettling persons with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees.

The Philippines, speaking as a concerned country on the report of Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, expressed deep disappointment over the outcome of the visit. The Philippines believed that the report and recommendations of Professor Alston were inaccurate, highly selective and biased. The Philippines, on its own initiative, had taken resolute and concrete steps to address allegations of extrajudicial killings. The Government concluded that the allegations of extrajudicial killings had been exaggerated for political purposes. The extensive End Notes in Appendix C had convinced the Government that Mr. Alston's report was not impartial in the conduct of his mission and the implementation of his mandate.

Brazil, speaking as a concerned country, said that many of the shortcomings cited in the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had been recognized by Brazil. In responding to the report, Brazil highlighted two important initiatives. The first was the national programme of public security and citizenship. It included capacity building and improving the public security sector, with improving penitentiaries and reducing police corruption among other tactics. Brazil also offered housing opportunities for police officers to improve standards of living. The second initiative was the improvement of a unified system of public security to link local, provincial, and federal authorities.

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Afghanistan, speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said that Afghanistan wished to see the final report before giving their comments. Not all views contained in the preliminary report were shared. Afghanistan fully intended to respect human rights. The country was going through a difficult period; they were engaged in a fight against terrorism and were grieving deeply over the death of their citizens. Protection of the life of Afghanistan's citizens was important to the Government. The recent decision by the President to establish an appropriate mechanism against police corruption showed the willingness of the Government to address problems.

The presentations of the three Experts can be found in press release HRC/08/55 of 2 June.

During the interactive dialogue, delegations said that commissions of inquiry must be strong and transparent and must follow a minimum level of independent inquiry. Concerning capital punishment, this was not prohibited by any international norms and fell unequivocally within the jurisdiction of a State. It did not contradict any of the universally recognized human rights. In accordance with the United Nations Charter, States had the sovereign right to determine their own social and political system. On internally displaced persons, these persons continued to be among the most vulnerable. Yet, too often their plight was not well understood. The Representative's efforts to promote and disseminate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were welcomed. Also, Mr. Alston was required to provide clarification as to the meaning of his statement that vacuum existed merely by the refusal of sovereign States to allow for an official visit by mandate holders. Further, it was felt that he was not entitled to give such comments. The Code of Conduct of the Special Procedures clearly stated that visits should be carried out with the consent of States.

Speaking in the interactive dialogue were the delegations of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Mexico, Indonesia, Qatar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, Egypt, the Russian Federation, the Netherlands, Canada, China, Austria, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Sudan, Singapore, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, Belgium, Italy, Hungary, Iraq, Japan, Ireland, Armenia, Cuba, the Maldives, Nigeria, Brazil, the Philippines, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Algeria and Ecuador.

Also speaking were representatives of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines; Asian Legal Resource Centre; Pax Romana; North-South XXI; Interfaith International; Colombian Commission of Jurists; Society for Threatened Peoples; Amnesty International; and France Libertés - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand.

The Council is scheduled to conclude its interactive dialogue when it next meets this afternoon at 3 p.m., and to hear concluding remarks by the three Experts, before listening to the presentation of reports by the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations.

Statements by Concerned Countries

RAJIVA WIJESINHA (Sri Lanka), speaking as a concerned country on the report of Walter Kalin, the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, said that Sri Lanka felt that some clarification of facts might be useful. Drawing attention to some recent developments in the country, he said that the situation in Sri Lanka was improving. Elections had been held for the first time in 20 years in the Eastern Province, which was the scene of most of the displacements with which the Representative was concerned. The success of the recent democratisation process had much to do with the willingness of a wing of the **LTTE** to abandon terrorism and to engage in political activity. The Special Representative in his report was drawing attention to continuing tensions because of fear of violence, but Sri Lanka felt that they were light years away from the problems of a year ago. Assistance was being provided to resettling persons with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. It was appreciated that the Special Representative had noted that the Government was acting on the need to find durable solutions for the long term displaced, since the **LTTE** had tried to cleanse the North of the

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country from the Muslim population. Dealing with these problems was even more difficult than the problems of the recently displaced.

The Government had already prepared a draft that would clarify policy with regard to the Special Representative's recommendations. A bill of protection and an Ombudsman for displaced persons was being planned. Further, progress had been made in all the other areas where the Special Representative had made recommendations. Sri Lanka urged the international community to support its efforts to eradicate the terrorism that inhibited ready fulfilment of the ideals the Representative had enunciated and which Sri Lanka shared.

ERLINDA F. BASILIO (Philippines), speaking as a concerned country, expressed thanks to Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, who in his report acknowledged the full cooperation extended by the Philippine Government on his mission. The Philippines expressed deep disappointment over the outcome of the visit. The Government also regretted the final report as it did not take into account the comments to the draft report it had submitted to the Special Rapporteur. The Philippines believed that the report and recommendations of Professor Alston were inaccurate, highly selective and biased. The Philippines, on its own initiative, had taken resolute and concrete steps to address allegations of extrajudicial killings. The Government concluded that the allegations of extrajudicial killings had been exaggerated for political purposes. Such a case was noted with the 836 alleged cases listed by the group Karapatan as of May 2007; only 14 per cent were found to be probable extrajudicial killings. In that case, 28 killings were attributed to the communist rebels and only 13 to military or paramilitary elements.

The Philippines had carefully studied Professor Alston's report. The extensive End Notes in Appendix C had convinced the Government that his report was not impartial in the conduct of his mission and the implementation of his mandate. Specifically the Philippines believed that Professor Alston was unduly selective, readily accepting information from specific leftist groups while easily dismissing information provided not only by Government agencies but also from other human rights defenders and government critics who did not fall under the persuasion of his favoured group-the Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army, National Democratic Front (CPP/NPA/NDF). It was noted that Professor Alston's partiality, selectivity and double standards were fully demonstrated in End Note no. 46 of his report. The Government found it convenient that Professor Alston did not provide details of the End Note no. 46 when he had been profuse elsewhere in describing the activities of his favoured group. The Government remained concerned on a number of recommendations described in Professor Alston's report.

MARCIA MARIA ADORNO C. RAMOS (Brazil), speaking as a concerned country, thanked the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Phillip Alston. It was a great honour for Brazil to receive him. The Special Rapporteur visited three cities that had security challenges. Many of the short comings cited in the Special Rapporteur's report had been recognized by Brazil which was aware that it must improve salaries for police and improve training and opportunities for prosecutors and judges. In responding to the report, Brazil wished to highlight two important initiatives. The first was the national programme of public security and citizenship. It included capacity building and improving the public security sector, with improving penitentiaries and reducing police corruption among other tactics. Means included scholarships for police to attend human rights training. Brazil also offered housing opportunities for police officers to improve standards of living. These initiatives would pave way to high standards. Further information would be sent to the Special Rapporteur. Brazil had been invited by some countries to brief them on its programmes. The second initiative was the improvement of a unified system of public security to link local, provincial, and federal authorities. Brazil thanked the Special Rapporteur for the open and frank dialogue and for recognizing that despite the many problems, there were many forces for good.

NANGUYALAI TARZI (Afghanistan), speaking as a concerned country on the report of Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said that on his visit to Afghanistan, Mr. Alston had had an opportunity to meet with several officials and ministers. These contacts indicated and confirmed the Government's determination to promote human rights in their country. On the arbitrary and summary executions in Afghanistan cited by the Special Rapporteur in his report, they wished to see the final report before giving their comments. Not all views contained in the preliminary report were shared. Afghanistan fully intended to respect

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human rights. All the major Conventions had been ratified by the Government. The country was going through a difficult period; they were engaged in a fight against terrorism and were grieving deeply over the death of their citizens. Protection of the life of Afghanistan's citizens was important to the Government. The recent decision by the President to establish an appropriate mechanism against police corruption showed the willingness of the Government to address problems. Twenty-eight years of war, including five under the ruling of the Taliban, and terrorism had affected the population that had been living under complete denial of the most basic rights. However, the Taliban were only referred to in two paragraphs of the report. The Special Rapporteur was asking to bring the Taliban into a dialogue in order for them to respect human rights. But one should remember that against all appeals by the international community and the United Nations they had destroyed the Buddha statues. The international community was asked to help Afghanistan develop its country and to establish democracy and human rights.

Interactive Dialogue on Reports on Internally Displaced Persons, Extrajudicial and Summary Executions and Independence of Lawyers and Judges

MARGHOOB SALEEM BUTT (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that the Organization of the Islamic Conference appreciated the thematic work carried out by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in highlighting the themes of national commissions on inquiry, right to seek pardon or commutation of death sentence and the need for States to avoid delegation of authority in managing prisons.

Guiding principles and the enumeration of problems encountered in relation to commissions of inquiry were quite thorough and exhaustive. A commission of inquiry must be strong and transparent and must follow a minimum level of independent inquiry. The Organization of the Islamic Conference agreed with the Special Rapporteur's views that minimum standards of investigation were needed to enable a commission to genuinely investigate reported cases. The procedural guarantees on article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights should be followed. The Organization of the Islamic Conference agreed that country visits were an important part of the Special Rapporteur's mandate. Many countries had proceeded with plans for the Special Rapporteur's visit.

Regarding the Special Rapporteur's recommendation on Darfur, the Organization of the Islamic Conference agreed that the work of the Special Rapporteur should be limited to his mandate, i.e. reporting on situations of extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions. It would be advisable to refrain from commenting on decisions by the Council which had been taken by consensus.

JOSE GUEVARA (Mexico) thanked the three Experts. The report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers illustrated perfectly the inefficacy of the death penalty. Mexico called on States which had not yet done so to enact a moratorium on capital punishment, before totally abolishing it. All Special Procedures related to the death penalty should help States to respect their international obligations. Also, what measures could the Council take to impact on States the dangers of states of emergency on human rights.

GUSTI AGUNG WESAKA PUJA (Indonesia) said that on the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Indonesia was of the view that the situation of internally displaced persons was very much a country-specific one. It also depended if it was the result of natural disasters or through internal conflicts. On the report on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the Special Rapporteur had developed a clearly disquieting perspective on the situation in a number of countries which did not necessarily present an equitable picture of the situation on the ground. Further, quoting the obsolete report of a previous Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions was seen as over-simplistic and misleading since it failed to reflect the dynamics and the current situation in Indonesia. Mandate holders were expected to fulfil their mandate while respecting certain principles. Concerning the capital punishment, this was not prohibited by any international norms and fell unequivocally within the jurisdiction of a State. Indonesia carried it out exclusively for specific and often heinous crimes. The Special Rapporteur was required to provide clarification as to the meaning of his statement that vacuum existed merely by the refusal of sovereign States to allow for an official visit by mandate holders. This accusation was not true, and Indonesia had never refused outright such a request by a mandate holder. A visit by a Special Rapporteur should be efficient and well arranged.

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FAISAL ABDULLA AL-HENZAB (Qatar), speaking on the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said that Qatar agreed with the recommendations made by Philip Alston concerning the documents on internally displaced persons. Professor Alston had shed light on the ongoing conflicts, including most recently the food crisis. On the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Qatar believed that the international community had left the issue of many internally displaced people without focus. The Government of Qatar was deeply concerned about this phenomenon. The needs of internally displaced persons should be addressed and they should be alleviated from their suffering, which could only be met by the international community. With the general principles related to the Representative's mandate and during the 2005 conference, Heads of State and Government had accepted the principles to provide assistance to these peoples. Walter Kalin had underlined that assistance was needed to promote the human rights of internally displaced persons.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh) thanked the three Experts for their presentations. Bangladesh questioned the comment in the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions that some countries were not forthcoming when he requested visits which created a vacuum. This was not helpful in building the relationship between the Special Rapporteur and Governments. A delay in responding to requests for a visit may be caused by many reasons. Countries may have more pressing issues and priorities. Also, if the Special Rapporteur had preconceived views and conclusions, then cooperation would not be forthcoming. Bangladesh had received several Special Rapporteurs in the past and would receive them in the future, taking into account the country's capacity at the time of the request. Their visits and reports had to be meaningful and objective. Bangladesh would cooperate with all Special Rapporteurs in the future with this in mind.

MARGHOOB SALEEM BUTT (Pakistan), speaking on the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said Pakistan had received five communications from the Special Rapporteur, among them two related to the death sentence, two to legal orders to control specific law and order situations and one regarding an anti-terror operation. Pakistan had responded to two of them in detail. The Special Rapporteur had mentioned only one of the answers. Pakistan hoped that this inaccuracy would be corrected. Further, the death penalty was an issue of the criminal justice system. It did not contradict any of the universally recognized human rights. In accordance with the United Nations Charter, States had the sovereign right to determine their own social and political system. Pakistan recognised the death penalty under a specific number of serious crimes. This penalty was imposed only when a court of law gave a final verdict, after due process of law. Pakistan attached supreme importance to the supremacy of the rule of law.

RAJIV KUMAR CHANDER (India), speaking on the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said that in paragraph 11 of his report, Philip Alston listed names of countries which had failed to respond affirmatively to the request for a visit. The Special Rapporteur's conclusions and recommendations to the Council was that it was a serious concern for States listed to have the ability to refuse his request for a visit, when serious concerns over extrajudicial executions had been identified. India said that this was a sweeping conclusion made without any basis. It did not take into account the effective institutional mechanisms that India already had in place to address violations of human rights, including extrajudicial executions. The approach of the Special Rapporteur was not in line with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Special Procedures. India constructively engaged with the United Nations human rights machinery. India would continue to receive Special Rapporteurs and other Special Procedures mechanisms of the Human Rights Council taking into account their capacity, the priority areas of the country as well as the need for adequate preparation for such visits.

EVA TOMIC (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union, thanked the three Experts for their reports. The European Union asked the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to further explain and expound upon the major gap in the rights of detainees. The right to seek pardon was clearly stated in international law. The Special Rapporteur said in his report that this right was becoming increasingly difficult to secure. Had these challenges increased more in recent years? In prisons run by prisoners, had he encountered problems with children, gays, lesbians and transgender in particular? The European Union noted that the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons had emphasized the need for economic potential and opportunities and asked for elaboration on the possible monitoring mechanisms and best practices.

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After reading the addendum to the report based on missions, the European Union said it would appreciate learning further about the measures to be adopted that the United Nations could offer to governments to assist and protect internally displaced persons. The European Union welcomed the excellent report by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. How could interference be eliminated and how could it be assured that human rights violations committed by the military were tried in civil courts?

OMAR SHALABY (Egypt) welcomed the efforts of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons in collaborating with the African Union. Could he shed more light on the implication of natural disasters in his future work? On the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, concerning arbitrary detentions, Egypt suggested that a specific Working Group on detention could replace the Working Group on arbitrary detentions. Also, it would be appreciated to hear the position of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on brutal killings carried out by private security agencies. These agencies were involved in many conflicts around the world and their actions went unpunished.

Egypt regretted that the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers was only available in Spanish, which prevented many delegations from reading it. Reports should be available in all the official languages of the United Nations. Further, Egypt was of the view that having three Special Rapporteurs presenting their reports at the same time sometimes led the discussions in different directions. There was a downside to the time-saving aspect of this practice, as many Special Rapporteurs were often not able to stay for the whole interactive dialogue.

MARINA VIKTOROVA (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation had carefully studied the reports presented by the three Experts. Timely reports had to be available in all the official languages of the United Nations. Specifically, there had been a lack of documents in the Russian, English and French languages.

The Russian Federation said that the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had provided a range of problems with respect to private custody of prisons. The Russian Federation did not support establishing a new mandate on rights of detainees. The increase in monitoring procedures would not alleviate the problems but would duplicate the work.

On the proposal of the Representative of the Secretary-General on creating a monitoring mechanism to ensure the respect for the rights of internally displaced persons, the Russian Federation wanted some clarifications on this issue. The Russian Federation also wanted to know how the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers would deal with the issue of guaranteeing a judicial process in the languages of ethnic minorities.

ROBERT-JAN SIEBEN (Netherlands) asked questions on the mission of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2007. The Netherlands believed that the independence of the judiciary was essential. Given that Mr. Despouy had said that the judiciary in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had come under the influence of the Government, the Netherlands asked if this was the main cause of the lack of independence of the judiciary. Had there been any improvement in the situation? Would the law on the organization of the High Council of the Judiciary be passed soon? What other measures could the Government take to reduce sexual violence, other than educating judges? Did the Special Rapporteur foresee cooperation between himself and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women in monitoring the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? What efforts had been made on his recommendation for a law to adopt the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to ensure the transfer of some trials from military tribunals to civilian courts?

SUE BUTCHART (Canada) expressed Canada's support for the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. These persons continued to be among the most vulnerable. Yet, too often their plight was not well understood. The Representative's efforts to promote and disseminate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were welcomed. He was encouraged to redouble his efforts to secure the universal recognition and implementation of this important normative framework. His ongoing role in mainstreaming

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internally displaced persons' issues with key United Nations partners was welcomed. His concerns with regard to safe and unhindered access of humanitarian workers to internally displaced persons were shared. On the report on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Canada had studied the Special Rapporteur's report on his mission to the Philippines with interest. His recommendations were supported and the Philippines was urged to promptly implement them. Canada remained concerned by the lack of prosecution and conviction of those committing extrajudicial killings and the resulting culture of impunity.

QIAN BO (China) thanked the three Experts on internally displaced persons, extrajudicial and summary executions and on the independence of judges and lawyers. China appreciated the dialogue on the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. China had been trying to improve and enhance the solutions to problems faced by internally displaced persons. In addition to national efforts to help internally displaced persons, China attached importance to help from the international community in assisting to tackle this problem. China had started reconstruction plans after the earthquake.

China welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and hoped he would continue to work in his objective manner. On the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, China had implemented a new law on the judiciary, which had come into force. The new law presented guarantees for lawyers and ensured the legal interests of clients were protected. China encouraged the Special Rapporteur to continue dialogue with China on this matter and with a continued spirit of openness and cooperation.

MICHAEL SCHOISWOHL (Austria) thanked the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons for his report. This was a complex problem that existed in many parts of the world and Austria encouraged Dr. Kalin to continue his work and the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Austria asked him to elaborate further on the challenges arising from displacement in the context of peace-making and peace-building and the measures which were necessary to address them. Austria asked for further information on the nature of a mechanism for the restitution of property to internally displaced persons and shared best practices in this regard. Finally Austria asked for further explanations on how challenges related to persons displaced by natural disasters and climate change could be addressed within existing human rights frameworks and about the difficulties likely to arise.

SEBASTIAN ROSALES (Argentina) thanked the three experts for their reports. Concerning the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Argentina noted that access to justice was important. It was particularly important to take into account the particular situation of vulnerable groups. The planned United Nations database on good practices was welcomed. Argentina asked how they would work. Appropriate training of judges was also seen as important. Concerning the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, he had highlighted important aspects with regard to inquiry commissions.

ALMA VIVIANA PEREZ GOMEZ (Colombia) welcomed the reports of the three Experts. On the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, in paragraph 42, he addressed the question of the inadequate protection of witnesses. The Government of Colombia was interested in updating the information in the report which dated back to 1989. In the case of Lawachela, Colombia recognized its responsibility in the trial. The Government's recognition was commended by the international court on May 11 2007. In addition Colombia stated that the General Prosecutor had convicted three additional people involved in the crime to be added to the original eight convictions passed down earlier. An investigation had started concerning four others. Colombia agreed strongly with the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur which were important for Colombia and especially its efforts to combat impunity.

Colombia said that the issue of extrajudicial executions was important to the nation. The Government was paying close attention to these issues in the national territory. The human rights office in Colombia would be sending an expanded explanation in three days to further provide details on this subject.

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CARLOS PORTALES (Chile) thanked the three Experts for their reports. Speaking on the report by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Chile said that the report showed that commissions of inquiry were vital for the fight against impunity. Chile agreed with the report's recommendation that commissions of inquiry should not act as a method to distract the international community. Chile appreciated the section on the right to ask for a pardon and commute a penalty and stated that this right was essential. Chile also appreciated the paragraph on prisoners running prisons. Chile found the recommendation that a Special Rapporteur on the rights of detainees be appointed very interesting. Chile congratulated Mr. Despouy for his report and agreed with him that there could be no sustainable democracy without justice. Access to justice should not be thought of as needed upon entry into a court, but should be through the entire process. Citizens must have confidence in the system.

OMER DAHAB FADOL MOHAMED (Sudan) said that a persisting problem in the Human Rights Council was the use of subjectivity when looking at different situations around the world. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had presented a 30-page-long report; logically the conclusions had to be reflective of what was elaborated in the report. However this had failed to materialize. In his conclusions, the Special Rapporteur had called for the reversal of a resolution that had been adopted in the present Council and had called for the revival of the Expert Group on Darfur. Further, he was short on pinpointing those who were most responsible for the situation. Armed groups had hijacked humanitarian assistance vehicles. They had used extrajudicial killings against civilians, but the Special Rapporteur failed to highlight these facts in his report. Compliance with the Code of Conduct of mandate holders had to be shown. Sudan hoped that the practice of demonizing would come to an end. Also, Sudan noted that the African Union United Nations hybrid force was late in entering into force because the international community was late in providing financial support.

TAN YORK CHOR (Singapore) said that Singapore categorically rejected the assertions of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions that there were serious concerns over extrajudicial executions in Singapore. There were no extrajudicial executions in Singapore. The death penalty was provided for in Singapore as part of the judicial process. Singapore recognized that the death penalty was a severe penalty which should only be imposed for the most serious crimes. The integrity and transparency of Singapore's legal system were well-known and highly rated by many international surveys.

This was not the first time that Singapore had been subject of a misleading portrayal on the part of this Special Rapporteur on events concerning the death penalty. The Government concluded that the Special Rapporteur's request to visit Singapore would serve no meaningful purpose based on previous exchanges. Mr. Alston provided an interesting illustration of how he had extrapolated his mandate to cover and report on prisons and his recommendation that a Special Rapporteur be appointed on the rights of detainees. In doing so he had detracted attention and resources from addressing the real cases of extra-judicial, arbitrary or summary executions which were the core *raison d'être* for his appointment.

MICHAEL MCBRYDE (New Zealand), speaking also on behalf of Australia, thanked all three Experts for their reports. On the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, New Zealand and Australia were concerned by the lack of response by the interim Government of Fiji to respond to the United Nations' repeated requests to engage. The domestic situation in Fiji was a concern for many in the international community. New Zealand and Australia renewed the call to the interim Government of Fiji to respond positively to the ongoing efforts by the international community to engage. They noted comments by Fiji's interim Government that it would be extending an invitation to the Special Rapporteur and asked if he had any further information. They

asked what more the international community could do to encourage the visit.

BEATE STIRO (Norway), speaking on the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, said the report was a stark reminder that the number of internally displaced persons were not diminishing, nor were its root causes. This year marked the tenth anniversary of the Guiding Principles. It would be appreciated if the Special Rapporteur could share his ideas on how the Guiding Principles might be implemented more effectively. On the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, could the Special Rapporteur elaborate on the possible ways through which the international community could better

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monitor the independence and effectiveness of national commissions of inquiry? Norway agreed that States were responsible for the protection of the human rights of their detainees.

ALEXANDRA RUPPEN (Switzerland) fully supported the mandates and reports presented by the three

Experts. Switzerland congratulated the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons on his extensive and detailed report. Switzerland reiterated its support and contribution to the activities of the Representative, especially concerning the promotion and protection of human rights in cases of natural disasters, as well as in the adoption of durable solutions for the problems of millions of internally displaced persons. There was an interdependence between the consolidation of peace and taking into account the needs of internally displaced persons. The lack of a resolution of the cause of displacement could endanger stability, which in its turn could threaten restoration of peace.

ISABEL FROMMELT (Liechtenstein) said that Liechtenstein had followed the work of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons with great interest and thanked him for the report. The number of activities he had undertaken was impressive. Liechtenstein asked him to elaborate on the manual for lawmakers and politicians for the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement which would be published in the autumn of 2008. Liechtenstein also asked about the operational guidelines on human rights and natural disasters established in 2006 and on the conclusions of his report regarding the systematic difficulties which humanitarian workers faced when trying to access internally displaced persons. Liechtenstein asked if the Representative could provide an example of when these guidelines were successfully implemented.

RAJIVA WIJESINHA (Sri Lanka) welcomed the continuing concerns expressed on the situation in Sri Lanka. Having listened to the presentation of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Sri Lanka believed that his academic approach was appreciated but it felt that his references were sometimes left unchecked. Sri Lanka was particularly sorry that his follow-up report had been issued without prior consultations with the Government of Sri Lanka. This morning, Sri Lankan newspapers were full of excerpts of Mr. Alston's report. His unresponsiveness to several communications was a further example of the slowness of United Nations democracy. Further, if the challenges in other countries like Afghanistan were understood, why were they still misunderstood with regard to Sri Lanka? Some of the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur in past reports had been very well received by the Government and Sri Lanka hoped that the spirit of collaboration would prevail.

MARIA LOURDES BONE (Uruguay) expressed thanks to the three Experts. Uruguay welcomed the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers which were of high calibre and drew attention to safeguarding. The report focused on the issue of easy access for disadvantaged groups to the justice system. Uruguay said that legal services had been available throughout the country free of charge for the past 40 years. Uruguay recommended that this point be included in the next report by the Special Rapporteur. Work had been done to remove obstacles to the access of justice, fair trial and due process in Uruguay.

BART OUVRY (Belgium) welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers. Belgium was pleased to note that the Democratic Republic of the Congo was cooperating with the Special Rapporteur. Belgium noted with satisfaction that some of the recommendations, such as on a high council of judiciary, had been implemented. It also noted that a draft proposal to set up a committee on human rights was being considered. The comments on the limits on military jurisdiction were noted. Belgium supported effective justice in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Only effective justice could combat sexual violence and corruption. At the seventh regular session, the Human Rights Council had renewed its commitment to improve conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Belgium asked if Mr. Despouy had recommendations on follow up on this resolution of the Council. Belgium also welcomed the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons and asked how he planned to follow up on the resolutions of the seventh session of the Council regarding internally displaced persons.

ROBERT NOCELLA (Italy) said the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons provided a very comprehensive overview on activities and on missions undertaken to date. How did the

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Representative intend to enhance cooperation in the coming years with relevant stakeholders, especially with the Council of Europe? How would an independent monitoring mechanism for displaced persons that wished to return to their home concretely work? On the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, could he elaborate more on his intention to carry out an in-depth examination of the impact of states of emergency on human rights?

ORSOLYA TOTH (Hungary) thanked the three Experts for their presentations. On the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Leandro Despouy, Hungary thanked him for participating in this dialogue. Hungary thanked Mr. Despouy for the important work he had carried out over the past year, specifically the report submitted on his visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo. One of the most significant achievements of the new Constitution was setting up the national council of magistrates. She stated that the law on the organization and functioning of this council had however not been adopted, and without it, the national council was not functional. Hungary re-stated a recommendation regarding the plan of action for the reconstruction of the judicial system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and that it should be elaborated and implemented by the Ministry of Justice. Hungary asked if there was a possibility for the Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide technical assistance and expertise in this regard? Had such technical assistance been requested by the Democratic Republic of Congo? Hungary welcomed the preliminary observations contained in the Rapporteur's press release about the visit to the Russian Federation, and looked forward to the report to the Council.

OMER BERZINJI (Iraq) presented Iraq's condolences to the people of China and Myanmar. Iraq welcomed the reports of the three Experts. Iraq was interested in the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons because of the conflict and violence in the country. The Government was trying to play its role in encouraging the return of all the Iraqis who were displaced. All those operating outside the law would be brought to justice. More work was needed from neighbouring countries and international organizations. It was for this reason that a conference was needed to encourage more support and coordination between neighbouring countries and international organizations to help Iraqis inside and outside the country. Iraq reaffirmed its commitment to an independent judicial system. The judiciary simply applied the law. Iraq currently applied capital punishment, but hoped to end this practice. It hoped to obtain prosperity and peace in the country.

AKIO ISOMATA (Japan) said that, on the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, among the issues of particular importance referred to in the report, the issue regarding the role of national commissions of inquiry was of particular interest to Japan. Drawing upon 26 years' experience in the study and analysis of commissions of inquiry, the report provided good guidance on how to assess their establishment. Japan shared the view of the Special Rapporteur that such commissions needed to be independent and impartial. Japan was interested in the situation in the Philippines. The number of extrajudicial executions had been decreasing since last year. The various measures implemented by the Philippines Government were encouraging and appreciated.

MICHEAL TIERNEY (Ireland) said that the thematic analysis by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on national commissions of inquiry was very helpful in flagging the common legal and practical issues that States were likely to encounter. His report highlighted the issue of non-cooperation as a serious impediment to the work of the Special Rapporteur, and pointed to examples of States refusing or failing to answer. Ireland asked what advice could the Special Rapporteur offer on how States might be encouraged to better engage with the mandate. The report emphasized the primacy of the criminal justice system and the problem of national inquiries being used to avoid accountability. Ireland asked if Mr. Alston agreed that perhaps national inquiries could play an important commentary role for issues wider than those involving traditional criminal justice. Mr. Alston's report also suggested that a more active role be taken for international scrutiny of national inquiries by means of an international monitoring mechanism. Ireland asked if Mr. Alston could elaborate further upon the structure of such a mechanism.

ZOHRAB MNATSAKANIAN (Armenia) said that Armenia had read carefully the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Walter Kalin, in particular on his mission to Azerbaijan. Armenia

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recognised the work of Dr. Kalin and his deep understanding of the situation in the region, especially after his visit to Armenia last year. Armenia underlined the primary duty of national authorities in dealing with the rights and plights of displaced persons. The Armenian Government had taken on such duties without delay. Armenia noted that the report stated that the Government of Azerbaijan had given required attention to internally displaced persons. It noted that without a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the problem would continue. Armenia was committed to the peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict.

YURY GALA (Cuba) said that on the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Cuba believed that it was relevant that the report included a section on prisons run by prisoners. This phenomenon was often seen in developing countries and such situations often led to extrajudicial killings. Cuba wished to have a special section on the issue of the right to life that certain States did not respect in armed conflicts. Many people were killed because they were termed as enemy combatants. There was no control over such actions and impunity seemed to prevail. The Special Rapporteur should address this issue. On the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, access to justice was of vital importance. The right to a fair trial had declined in recent years, with several emergency courts and military courts being used in the frame of the fight against terrorism. In the case of the five Cubans who had been held unjustly for years in the United States, there was proof of political manipulation in the trials that had taken place in Miami. The Working Group on arbitrary detention had concluded that the rights of these individuals had been violated. The Special Rapporteur was asked to tackle these issues in his next report.

ABDUL GHAFUOR MOHAMED (Maldives) welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and attached great importance to the mandate and its extension. The Maldives had taken important steps towards the separation of powers and establishing credible institutions to strengthen the judiciary. Significant progress had been made in implementing the Special Rapporteur's recommendations. One of the steps taken was the revision of the Constitution that once adopted would set up an Office of Prosecutor General. Further, the Maldives had also set-up a Supreme Court and a Judicial Service Commission. The Maldives was committed to strengthening the judiciary and the legal profession and the Government valued the recommendations made by Mr. Despouy. The Government of the Maldives also stated the great importance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Procedures.

MARTIN IHOEGHIAN UHOMOIBHI (Nigeria) commended the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston. Nigeria had instituted a consistent policy of cooperation with Special Rapporteurs and encouraged regular visits from Special Procedures. It had had only two days to comment on the report. Nigeria welcomed the acknowledgement of Mr. Alston that Nigeria had made progress since 2005, especially in setting up inquiries to examine allegations of killings by police. On the issue of Sharia, practiced in 12 of 36 states, the Constitution clearly spelled out the relationship between State and Federal judicial systems. Press reports of executions under Sharia law were fabrications. No executions had taken place after death sentences had been passed. It was not correct that Nigeria imposed the death penalty for offences such as adultery and sodomy. Nigeria reaffirmed that it stood ready to engage with the United Nations.

MARCIA MARIA ADORNO C. RAMOS (Brazil) expressed its concerns over the death sentences elaborated by the High Criminal Court in Iraq. It was also important to conduct a thorough investigation and to create a group to look into the attack against the United Nations building in Baghdad in 2003. Brazil supported the recommendation made by the Special Rapporteur to investigate this heinous attack.

RICARDO R. BLANCAFLOR (Philippines) wished to bring the attention of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to two recent cases related to extrajudicial executions. In six months, 48 cases had been investigated and an army soldier had been arrested for killing a syndicate member. Another soldier had been implicated in another case. The Philippines respected the rule of law. The investigation team welcomed non-governmental organizations, civil society and the media to ensure the transparency of the process.

LIBERE BARARUNYERETSE, of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, said the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons had addressed important issues relevant

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to all countries, especially when dealing with internally displaced persons in the context of natural disasters. The Organisation valued the notion that concerned States should develop mastery of the relevant language in providing judicial services in minority languages, according to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers. The Organisation noted the training taking place in Italy for the purpose of training judges and court officers from countries like Togo, Rwanda, the Central African Republic Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal, among others. The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie was taking part. It welcomed the attention given by the Representative on internally displaced persons to the issue of internal displacement, especially in French speaking countries in Africa that had long been neglected because capacity building courses had only been available in English. The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie was willing to raise awareness within its organization and among its membership.

IDRISS JAZAIRY (Algeria) said that concerning the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Algeria was shocked by his systematic denunciation of national commissions of inquiry which he charged were responsible for providing impunity for those who carried out extrajudicial killings. This denunciation was done without taking into account the deep seated realities of countries. The Special Rapporteur had also proposed the creation of the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the rights of detainees. But resolution 5/1 provided the possibility that the areas that were not covered by Special Procedures could be tackled by expanding already existing mandates. The rights of detainees were already taken into account in the frame by the Special Rapporteur on torture, the Working Group on arbitrary detention and the International Committee of the Red Cross. On the Special Rapporteur's comments that the Council should consider the gaps that resulted from the fact that some countries were not answering requests for visits, Algeria underlined that he was not entitled to do so. The Code of Conduct of the Special Procedures stated that visits should be carried out with the consent of States

JUAN HOLGUIN (Ecuador) thanked the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers Leandro Despouy for his presentation and reports which presented a wide range of issues and clear recommendations. Ecuador agreed with the opinion of the Special Rapporteur when he underlined that the objective of his mandate was to defend the independence of the judiciary and that his visits did not hamper in any way ongoing judicial processes nor existing judicial structures. In the case of Ecuador, the work of Mr. Despouy had contributed to the Constitution and the integration of the Supreme Court of Justice. With active and efficient action, the Special Rapporteur had helped Ecuador to overcome one of the most serious institutional crises in the country. Ecuador congratulated Mr. Despouy for his integrity, his objectivity and his impartiality in his functions as Special Rapporteur.

CECILIA R. V. QUISUMBING, of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, said that the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines was an accredited National Human Rights Institution. It expressed appreciation for the work and constructive comments of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, including his recognition of the role that non-state actors had played in extrajudicial killings. The Government of the Philippines had taken several steps to address the issue. It reached the same conclusions as Mr. Alston that no State policy existed in the Philippines that approved or encouraged these killings. But the Government was urged to increase its efforts to ensure that the killings be stopped. The rule of law must be respected. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines had noted a drop in incidences and hoped that this trend would continue.

MICHAEL ANTHONY, of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, said, concerning Sri Lanka, there had been no related convictions of persons who carried out extrajudicial executions in the past few years. This had resulted in a grave prevalence of impunity. There was also a lack of witness protection. The Asian Legal Resource Centre shared the concerns of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions about the continuing impunity related to the extra-judicial killings that remained ongoing in the Philippines. There had also been cases of death in custody in the south of Thailand. No progress had been made in the investigation of these cases.

JEYABALAN CROSS, of Pax Romana, said that as a Catholic Priest of the Diocese of Mannar in Northern Sri Lanka, he wanted to tell the Council that war continued to rage, as it had for more than three decades between the Government Forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. He had witnessed numerous civilians getting caught in the crossfire. He spoke on behalf of the Mannar people where the daily reality had been destruction of property, curbs on vital fishing and farming, arbitrary arrests, torture, forced conscription, killings and disappearances. He

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sought the views of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on how to address these issues in line with international standards. He urged the Council to make these pleas its own and further address the urgent needs of the displaced in Mannar.

NIRAJ KUMAR PABARI, of North South XXI, expressed gratitude to the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers for bringing attention to the situation of the judiciary in Iraq, especially the Iraqi Special Tribunal that continued to function in violation of international law. Many had condemned the work of the tribunal. North South XXI strongly supported the idea mentioned by the Special Rapporteur to create an expert mechanism on the rights of detainees. It asked Mr. Despouy what more must be done to end the tribunal and the human rights violations in Iraq. North South XXI noted that the approaches of the Special Rapporteur to the Government of Iraq had had little impact and asked what must be done to end the violation of human rights and the killings. Mandates must not stop at fine words; they must provide advice to end human rights violations.

DEIRDRE MCCONNELL, of Interfaith International, said that the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions provided an analysis of the reasons why national commissions of inquiries set up to investigate killings had failed in several countries. Sri Lanka was a good example. More than 100 massacres of Tamil civilians had been committed by government forces. Sri Lanka had the highest number of disappearances in the world, according to the United Nations. Practically all the Special Rapporteur's recommendations had been disregarded. Sri Lanka was a country which paradoxically used national commissions of inquiry to deflect criticism rather than address impunity. Since impunity was one of the contributing factors to the conflict situation, this was a very serious matter.

ISABELLE HEYER, of the Colombian Commission of Jurists, said that from July 2006 to June 2007, 230 extrajudicial execution cases in Colombia had been identified. The Colombian Commission of Jurists agreed with the recommendations on measures to combat impunity and to protect the right to life which were made by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. In connection with the case of 21 February 2005 where eight people were massacred, the public prosecutors office this year had ordered a number of soldiers to be convicted in connection with this case. The recommendations of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons further stressed the importance that Governments should align on this issue. There continued to be serious violations of the right to life in Colombia.

TENZIN S. KAYTA, of the Society for Threatened People, agreed with the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers that indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups especially suffered institutionalized forms of criminalization of their activities, discrimination and miscarriage of justice. The Society for Threatened People wanted to raise the plight of lawyers in China. The Society then quoted the Special Rapporteur when he stated that he would welcome further information from China to ensure that lawyers were able to freely practice in China. The Society asked the Special Rapporteur how he was monitoring the situation.

PETER SPLINTER, of Amnesty International said that the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and his predecessors had often talked about military tribunals and their use to try civilians. This was incompatible with fair trial principles. Persons had the right to an impartial tribunal. A number of States continued to use military tribunals; the situation in Egypt was of particular concern. What were the views of the Special Rapporteur with regard to this situation?

STEWART WATTERS, of France Libertés - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. France Libertés remained concerned about situations where, as a result of repressive government policies, there was a total absence of independent monitors, human rights defenders and/or independent civil society organizations. They were concerned by the extent to which such conditions had enabled acts of impunity by authoritarian regimes.

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**DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY OFFICE OF SPOKESPERSON FOR
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The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Mich?le Montas, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon, all.

**** Afghanistan Statement**

We have a statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan:

The Secretary-General condemns in the strongest possible terms the attack against the Serena Hotel in Kabul yesterday, which killed at least eight people and injured a number of others, both Afghans and internationals. Among the victims were Afghan security guards and hotel staff, whose bravery prevented the death toll from being much higher, as well as members of the international community who were assisting development efforts in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General offers his deepest condolences to the families of those killed and his best wishes for a swift recovery to those injured. He stresses that the attack will not diminish the commitment of the international community to Afghanistan, and that efforts must be redoubled to bring stability to the country and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice.

Still on Afghanistan, the Secretary-General's Acting Special Representative in Afghanistan, Bo Asplund, today also condemned the attack that took place yesterday on the Serena Hotel in Kabul, saying it represents "a deliberate targeting of foreign guests and Afghan civilians working together in support of Afghanistan".

We have his statement upstairs.

And the Security Council President issued a press statement today that condemned the attack, noted the Taliban's claim of responsibility and underlined the need to bring the perpetrators to justice.

****Secretary-General in Spain**

The Secretary-General arrived early this morning in Madrid, where he opened the first ever Alliance of Civilizations Forum. He was joined in that launch by the leaders of the two countries that had initiated the Alliance -- Prime

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Minister of Spain Jose Luis Rodr?guez Zapatero and Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdo?an -- as well as the High Representative for the Alliance, Jorge Sampaio.

"You may have different backgrounds and perspectives, but you share a common conviction that the Alliance of Civilizations is an important way to counter extremism and heal the divisions that threaten our world," the Secretary-General told the audience.

He commended the Alliance for playing a catalytic role in forging links with civil society, foundations, the media and business leaders, and he urged them to keep working together as a broad range of partners following the Madrid forum. "Fostering dialogue will not produce change overnight. It is not the fast way," he said. "But it is the sure way. It is the enduring way".

We have his remarks upstairs.

The Secretary-General welcomed several high-profile initiatives launched on the Forum's first day, including major projects aimed at promoting understanding among cultures in the areas of media and youth.

The Secretary-General is holding a number of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the two-day Forum, including those today with the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, and with European Union High Representative Javier Solana. He also met with the Prime Minister of Malaysia and the Presidents of Finland and Slovenia. He is also planning to have an audience this evening with King Juan Carlos I of Spain.

He is expected back in New York tomorrow.

**** Algeria**

There were a lot of questions raised during the briefing yesterday about the investigative panel dealing with security in Algeria. What I can add today is that we are consulting internally, and with Member States, on the work of the independent panel. We expect to be able to announce its composition and more detailed terms of reference early next week.

**** Sudan**

On Sudan, the Joint African Union-United Nations Special Representative for Darfur, Rodolphe Adada, met yesterday with an Under-Secretary at the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Mutrif Siddiq. They agreed that the top military leadership on both sides should meet.

As a follow-up to that decision, a meeting took place today between the military leadership of the UN-AU Hybrid Operation, UNAMID, led by General Martin Luther Agwai, and the Chief of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Ismat, to discuss pending issues regarding the deployment of UNAMID. The Sudanese Government expressed its commitment to facilitate the deployment of UNAMID, and to avoid misunderstandings in the future, by keeping the channels of communication open through regular meetings.

Adada met yesterday with the Special Envoys dealing with the Darfur peace process, Jan Eliasson and Salim Ahmed Salim, to review progress, and they all agreed that the current tension could negatively affect the deployment of UNAMID and the distribution of humanitarian assistance in Darfur.

****Security Council**

The Security Council today unanimously adopted a resolution extending by six months the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI).

The Council then held consultations to discuss the format of a meeting that will take place tomorrow on the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). It will be an open meeting followed by a private meeting.

****Democratic Republic of Congo**

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The Conference on Peace, Security and Development in the Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued today in Goma, with the participation of Alan Doss, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General in that country. Addressing the delegates at the Conference, Doss stressed the need for participants to acknowledge the sufferings of women, who endure various acts of wartime sexual violence, and children drafted against their will into the ranks of armed groups. He called on both rebels and Government troops to take disciplinary measures against those among them who abuse the rights of women and children. The Conference continued with thematic workshops, including presentations by various commissions and local armed groups.

Meanwhile, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that more than half a million people have been displaced in the past 12 months in the DRC, in the largest wave of displacement in the country since the end of the civil war in 2003. This is mainly due to fighting between the army and rebel groups and widespread human rights violations by all sides. The provinces of North and South Kivu have been particularly affected, with a steep increase in internal displacement since August, which raised to 1.5 million the number of people who received humanitarian assistance last year.

**** Kenya**

On Kenya, food aid for 77,000 people from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Kenyan Government, was distributed today in Nairobi's slums following the recent post-election violence.

For its part, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) yesterday began a second distribution of basic supplies to some 3,000 displaced people in Narok, which is 140 kilometres from Nairobi. In addition, UNHCR trucks carrying sanitary supplies for up to 20,000 girls and women were dispatched yesterday from Nairobi to major towns in Kenya's Rift Valley Province.

In neighbouring Uganda, the number of people who have crossed the border from Kenya has now reached more than 6,100, according to the Ugandan authorities. UN agencies are doing what they can to help these new refugees. For example, World Food Programme food aid was distributed today at the border town of Busia to 2,000 Kenyans.

We have more information upstairs.

**** Malawi**

Turning to Malawi, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warns that the floods that are affecting a huge part of Southern Africa are threatening the entire April harvest and endangering 1 million people, in a country that is already among the world's poorest.

UNICEF is launching an appeal for nearly \$2.5 million to address urgent needs in Malawi.

There is more information in the Geneva briefing notes today.

**** Sri Lanka**

High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour has reminded the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of their obligations under international law to respect human rights. Her statement comes in light of the fact that Sri Lanka's ceasefire agreement is due to end tomorrow.

Arbour noted that, among other things, international law forbids the recruitment and deployment of children as soldiers. She also warned that human rights violations by any party could entail individual criminal responsibility under international criminal law, including for those in positions of command.

In previous dialogue with the Sri Lankan Government, Arbour has stressed the critical need for independent, public reporting on the human rights situation in that country and the readiness of her office to assist in that area.

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We have more on this upstairs.

**** Thailand**

The UN refugee agency is calling for the release of 149 Lao Hmong refugees who have been held at a detention centre in Thailand for more than a year. The refugees were rounded up for deportation in Bangkok in November 2006 and later transferred to a detention centre on the border with Laos.

UNHCR says there is no basis for their detention; the refugees have been recognized as in need of international protection and have received offers from several countries to leave Thailand.

**** Economic and Social Council**

On ECOSOC, Ambassador Leo Meror?s of Haiti was elected as the sixty-fourth President of ECOSOC yesterday. In his statement, Ambassador Meror?s stressed the importance of the new functions of ECOSOC, the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum. Ambassador Meror?s also announced the upcoming High-Level Symposium, which will take place in Cairo on 19-20 January.

The Council also elected four Vice-Presidents to serve in 2008.

****Press Conferences**

At 11 a.m. tomorrow here in Room 226, Kemal Dervis, Administrator of the UN Development Programme, will brief on UNDP's development priorities for 2008.

And our guest at noon tomorrow will be John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, who will launch a flash appeal for Kenya.

This is all I have for you. Questions?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Mich?le, yesterday the Secretary-General said the Norwegian Foreign Minister had been targeted in the Afghan attack, and yet the Norwegian Prime Minister, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other commentators have all said that the hotel itself was the most likely target, not the Foreign Minister. I wonder if the Secretary-General had any specific information on why he believed that the Foreign Minister was targeted?

Spokesperson: Well, it was based on the preliminary information he had had. There was really no additional information he had. It was obvious -- and we got the confirmation today -- that what the people targeted was the international presence and that's why the Serena Hotel was targeted. The Secretary-General did not have any special information at that time. However, the fact that the Foreign Minister was present in the hotel led him to believe that maybe it was a targeted attempt against his life.

Question: Mich?le, who will attend the meeting on Kosovo tomorrow, please?

Spokesperson: The Security Council will tell you. I think they announced it today.

Question: There were requests yesterday by the President of Serbia and the Prime Minister of Kosovo. Have their requests been accepted?

Spokesperson: Those are questions that should go to the Security Council. I think it was announced today, earlier.

Question: No, it was not announced. He did not say anything about those two officials. Can you find out for us, because it's almost impossible to find what the Security Council has decided on that meeting tomorrow?

Spokesperson: Okay, we'll get you more information on that.

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[The Spokesperson later added that, according to info received from the Security Council President, President Tadic of Serbia is expected to speak during the open meeting, and Prime Minister Thaci of Kosovo can speak under Rule 39 during the private meeting.]

Question: Last month several statements said that Mr. [Ibrahim] Gambari [Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs] plans to go back to Burma this month. Any date yet? What's the status of that?

Spokesperson: We don't have any specific date yet. As I said, he will first be going to India and China before he goes to Myanmar.

Question: Do you expect him to go to Burma or did he not receive a vis'

Spokesperson: No, he has a standing invitation.

Question: So do you expect him to go?

Spokesperson: We expect him to go as soon as he is done doing what I call the "proximity visits" that he was doing in the area.

Question: In January?

Spokesperson: We don't know yet. I'll give you an exact date when I have it.

Question: I have two questions. One has to do with Cote d'Ivoire. There's been a request by President Blaise Compaore [of Burkina Faso] or his committee that the United Nations lower the threat index, or security index in Cote d'Ivoire. How is that kind of request handled? Is it under review? What's the response of the UN system to that request by the mediator??

Spokesperson: I can get the information for you. I don't have it at this point.

Question: On that, I was wondering whether the Special Representative of the Secretary General Choi [Young-jin], if he's going to do a stakeout or if there will be any ability to ask him since he's in New York.

Spokesperson: Well, we did ask him. There were some difficulties yesterday with his schedule, but we have a standing request to him.

Question: The other thing I wanted is unrelated. Before Christmas there was this letter that went out from the Secretariat, saying that any gifts from Member States should be either returned to Member States or given to the 38th Floor. Now it's been confirmed that this Eveline Herfkens, the United Nations Millennium Campaign chief, took \$280,000 in rent subsidies from the Dutch Government over six years. I'm wondering what's the next step: is she going to return it to Holland? What's the UN going to do now that this has been acknowledged by the Government itself, that UN rules were broken in this way?

Spokesperson: Well, I think you know that Eveline Herfkens said herself that she did not know it was against UN policy. As you know, she has hosted the Millennium Campaign since 2002 when she was appointed as Coordinator of the campaign by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The United Nations Development Programme is currently looking into the circumstances of the housing subsidy. She obviously received that subsidy from the Dutch Government through the end of 2005. I think UNDP will be able to answer additional questions about what will be done about her contract. Those additional questions should be directed to UNDP.

Question: But just generally, I see that she said that she didn't know the rule. Is it the Secretary-General's position that that's the rule?

Spokesperson: It is the rule. It is the rule that no staff member should receive, as I said yesterday, any subsidies from their own Government. Yes, Benny?

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Question: As far as you know, is there anybody else in the Secretariat at high levels who receives housing subsidies from their Governments?

Spokesperson: As far as I know I don't have that information. They assured me that all senior officials who requested were told that there was no way that the UN would accept exceptions and that there would be no subsidies to be accepted by UN staff members, whatever the level. Yes, Edie?

Question: Michelle, I noticed today outside the cafeteria that several pictures from that Holocaust exhibition were on the ground. I was told by a UN staffer that this was the third or fourth time that this had happened and this staffer believed that it might have been deliberate and that this was taking place right by the security guards that are at the exit near 42nd Street. I wondered whether you could check into this.

Spokesperson: I will check into this, definitely.

[The Spokesperson later added that she was aware of no reports of vandalism. Apparently, the materials involved were rather lightweight and were originally positioned right under an air vent; hence, they kept falling down. They have since been moved back closer to the wall in hopes they will stay up, she said.]

Question: On the Secretary-General's statement yesterday on the attack in Kabul, you just said that further information received today confirmed that it was the international presence at the hotel that was targeted?

Spokesperson: From the information we got today, yes.

Question: What information is that?

Spokesperson: It was information that we got from our Mission in Afghanistan.

No other questions? Okay, I wasn't asked but I will tell you anyway that we have received information from former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan that, while on his way to the airport in Geneva this morning, he was taken ill with a severe case of the flu. On the advice of doctors, he has postponed his mission to Nairobi for a few days.

Mr. Annan very much regrets this delay but he is in touch with other members of the Panel of Eminent African Personalities. The team will proceed to Nairobi as soon as feasible. As you know, the other members of the team include former South African/Mozambican First Lady Graca Machel and former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa.

So, you didn't ask me, but I gave you the information.

Question: Just to dot all the i's and cross all the t's on yesterday's issue, do you have anything further on whether David Veness [Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security] actually looked into allegations that were made by the widow of the Senegalese person and also by the Algerian Government that they knew anything?

Spokesperson: I'm not going to add anything more to what I said. As I said yesterday, the independent panel will work to ascertain those facts. The questions are legitimate questions. Certainly Mr. Veness did do his part in trying to find out all the information he could get. Now the panel will ascertain the facts that you're asking about. Those are legitimate questions, of course.

Question: Will the panel rely on Veness' report?

Spokesperson: No, they will do their own work.

Question: Would Veness be one of its sources?

Spokesperson: I don't know at this point how the panel will work. How they will work will depend on them.

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Question: Does Kofi Annan have some official relations or titles with the UN, aside from the fact that he's a former Secretary-General?

Spokesperson: As I said earlier, when it was announced by the African Union that he was going to be asked to be the person who will be the focal point of any discussion on the issue of Kenya, I said that the Secretary-General had called him and assured him he could get some support on the part of the UN. But as you know, it's not a UN mission.

Question: It's an AU mission rather?

Spokesperson: Yes, the African Union asked him to do that, and asked the team of African leaders to do it.

Question: And this was the flu, nothing more serious, God forbid?

Spokesperson: No, he was taken to the hospital, but as far as we know, it was diagnosed as the flu. He hopes to go to Kenya as soon as he can.

Thank you very much.

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SECRETARY-GENERAL, SPOKESPERSON FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY
PRESIDENT**

US Fed News

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Body

The United Nations Office of the Secretary General issued the text of the following daily press briefing:

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Mich?le Montas, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, and Enrique Yeves, Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly.

Briefing by Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

Good afternoon all.

**** Guest at Noon Today**

As you already know, our guest at the noon briefing today will be John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He will provide you with an update on the situation on the ground. He is already with us via video conference link from Gaza.

Since there were some technical problems yesterday with the video conference link, we have established an audio line backup so even if we can't see John Ging on the screen, we will be able to hear his voice and he will be able to hear us as well. So I hope we won't have the problems we had yesterday.

**** Secretary-General's Middle East Trip**

The Secretary-General this morning travelled to Ramallah, in the West Bank, where he met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, and discussed efforts to obtain a ceasefire in Gaza, as well as the humanitarian situation there.

Speaking to reporters after those meetings, he emphasized once more that the fighting must stop now, saying, "We have no time to lose." He said that "a unilateral declaration of a ceasefire would be necessary at this time," and that he would exert his utmost efforts to realize that goal. He stressed his full support for President Abbas' leadership.

Last night, he met in Jerusalem with Israeli President Shimon Peres, telling reporters afterward that the Israeli Government will make an important decision on a ceasefire and that he hopes that decision will be the right one,

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and that Israel will show to the world that it is a responsible member of the United Nations, abiding by Security Council resolutions.

The Secretary-General has since travelled to Ankara, the Turkish capital, where he is to meet with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul. He is to tell them that he has come determined to work with the Turkish Government to help find solutions to the terrible crisis in Gaza.

He will then travel this weekend to Lebanon and Syria, to meet with Government officials in both countries about the violence in Gaza and southern Israel, before going to Kuwait to attend the Arab Economic Summit there next Monday. We will keep you informed through the Internet over the weekend.

**** Gaza**

The UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Max Gaylard, issued a statement today, saying that the situation for hospitals, medical workers and the injured in Gaza is alarming and deteriorating. He stressed that hospitals must be protected and remain neutral areas under any circumstances. Civilians and the injured must have access to medical care, he added.

The Humanitarian Coordinator noted that 16 health facilities have been damaged and 16 ambulances have been also damaged or destroyed since the start of the Israeli military operation on 27 December. In addition, 13 health workers have been killed and 22 have been injured. Medical relief workers face extremely dangerous conditions when trying to reach injured Palestinians in combat zones or areas made inaccessible by the Israeli army, he said. We have his full statement upstairs.

Meanwhile, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) reports that a total of 69 truckloads of goods, including 39 for aid agencies, were allowed entry into Gaza from Israel today through the Kerem Shalom crossing. These included 26 trucks for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) - which contained flour, blankets, rice and bread - and one truck of medical supplies for the World Health Organization (WHO).

UNSCO adds that, at the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, nearly 15 truckloads of food and medical and relief supplies passed through today. In addition, 18 medical cases were evacuated, and five doctors and five journalists were allowed into Gaza. UNSCO also notes that the fuel pipelines and the Karni grain conveyor belt, both between Israel and Gaza, remained closed today.

For its part, the World Food Programme (WFP) reports that, in addition to its regular caseload, it has delivered canned meat and high-energy biscuits to 13 Gaza hospitals, enough for 6,000 patients and staff for up to one month. WFP is also distributing ready-to-eat food to overcome the scarcity of cooking gas. As an additional emergency response, WFP is now planning to distribute ready-to-eat meals to 16,000 people in UNRWA shelters and 7,000 people in hospitals for up to 12 days.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes that a key challenge for the people of Gaza is their inability to access food due to the security situation. That inability extends both to farmers trying to get to their fields and civilians trying to go to shops. Also, the lack of banknotes means the population is unable to pay for the limited food stocks on the markets.

This is our general overview. Of course, John will have more details in a few minutes.

**** Security Council on Somalia**

In other news, the Security Council this morning adopted a resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that renews for up to six months the authorization of African Union Member States to maintain a mission in Somalia. The Council expressed its intention to establish a UN peacekeeping operation in Somalia as a follow-on force to the African Union Mission, subject to a further decision of the Security Council by 1 June.

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The Council also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report for a UN peacekeeping operation by 15 April and to develop recommendations in that report on the mandate of such an operation.

Just for your information, we have upstairs a statement from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on reports that Somali armed groups opposed to the peace process are occupying key areas recently vacated by Ethiopian troops.

**** Security Council on Nepal and Central Africa**

Ian Martin, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Nepal, briefed the Security Council for his last time in that post about the work of the UN Mission in that country.

Speaking in an open meeting, he warned that, for all of the important achievements of Nepal's peace process, he fears that there is now a danger that the fundamentals of the process are being challenged and eroded. Martin stressed the need for a political consensus required for completion of the peace process and the drafting of a new constitution and for an end to impunity.

He said that, during his time in Nepal, the demand by the country's people for peace, for change and for inclusion was unmistakable. "I hope that their political leaders will not let them down," he said. That open briefing was followed by consultations, also on Nepal.

Then, later in its consultations, the Council expects to hear from Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes about the humanitarian consequences of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Central Africa. So you understand that Mr. Holmes will not be able to come to the briefing later today, but of course we'll have John Ging.

**** Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The UN Refugee Agency says that a UN team travelling under the protection of peacekeepers was able to visit the village of Duru in north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Duru was the scene of repeated attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Last week the LRA killed 4 residents of Duru and caused the survivors to flee into the bush, leaving behind what UNHCR calls a "virtual ghost town."

The agency says that survivors were however able to meet with the UN team and describe their acute need for immediate food aid and other life-saving help. UNHCR estimates that LRA attacks have claimed more than 560 civilian lives in north-eastern DRC since September.

**** Sri Lanka**

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, in a statement today expressed increasing concern for the well-being of tens of thousands of civilians caught up in the conflict raging in the northern Vanni area of Sri Lanka.

The humanitarian chief said that while the civilians have had access to basic food, in large part due to the Government and the UN assistance transported through the lines of fighting, they lack reserves. The conditions of their basic shelter, water and sanitation are increasingly inadequate as many have been displaced multiple times over the past months.

In accordance with international humanitarian law, the United Nations calls upon the LTTE to allow civilians to be able to move freely to areas where they feel most secure and for the Government to receive newly displaced people according to internationally agreed principles.

The UN also calls for civilians to be protected from the fighting and for civilians to continue to have access to basic humanitarian assistance.

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**** Cyprus**

On Cyprus, the Cypriot leaders met today in Nicosia under UN auspices. After their meeting, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alexander Downer, spoke to the press. He said today's meeting had focused on deadlock-resolving mechanisms and that the leaders would meet again on 28 January to discuss the issue of property.

Downer stressed that the leaders' meeting had been "very good." In response to questions, he said that there was a real possibility of reaching a settlement and that he remained "cautiously optimistic." He also noted that it wouldn't be helpful to the negotiations to impose a timeline on them. We have the full transcript upstairs.

**** International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia**

Stanislav Galic, a former senior Bosnian Serb army commander, was transferred yesterday to Germany to serve his life sentence for war crimes committed in Sarajevo during the war in the Balkans.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) says that Galic was initially sentenced to 20 years in prison in December 2003 for murder, inhumane acts and acts of violence on Sarajevo's civilian population. But after both the prosecution and defence appealed the verdict, the ICTY appeals judges ruled in November 2006 that Galic deserved no less than life imprisonment. There is more in a press release upstairs.

**** Economic and Social Council**

Ambassador Sylvie Lucas of Luxembourg was elected yesterday as the 65th President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), making her the second woman to lead that body.

Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro congratulated Ambassador Lucas, and told her that, in the face of multiple global crises, ECOSOC's work will be especially challenging in the months ahead. The effects of the recent financial turmoil continue to reverberate around the world, she said, adding that years of painstaking efforts hang in the balance. We have her statement upstairs and on the web.

**** Zimbabwe**

On Zimbabwe, UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman is in Zimbabwe on a three-day visit to see firsthand the impact of the current humanitarian crisis on the country's children. During her visit, she will meet with Government officials, the UN Country Team, non-governmental organizations and donors, as well as talk to children and women.

Ms. Veneman will brief media on return to South Africa about her impressions and provide an update on education, nutrition, health and child protection.

It may be possible to set up one-on-one interviews in New York on Sunday. If you're interested, please contact UNICEF today. We can provide you with more information, of course, upstairs.

And this is all I have for you in terms of information today.

**** Press Conference Today**

Later today, at 3 p.m., David Nabarro, Coordinator of the Secretary-General's High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, will hold a press conference on the upcoming High Level Meeting on Food Security for All, which will take place later this month in Madrid.

I will take your questions briefly. I don't want to have John waiting too long. Before we have John, we'll go to Enrique. As you know the special emergency session is still going on in the General Assembly. I'll briefly take your questions.

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**** Questions and Answers**

Question: Concerning the cut-off of gas to millions of European homes, the European Commissioner, Barroso, said he was considering some kind of legal action against the Russian monopoly and Ukrainian companies. Has the Secretary-General expressed any opinion on this situation and will the UN get involved or is this strictly a European Union issue?

Spokesperson: It's a European Union issue, and if there's a legal pursuit of the situation, I think it will be done by the European Union.

Question: Now that Israel has rebuffed the Secretary-General's proposal for a unilateral ceasefire, apart from having bombed the UN headquarters while he was in the area, does the Secretary-General have any new ideas to end this conflict?

Spokesperson: The Secretary-General is pursuing his goal. His goal is to get to that ceasefire. Regardless of any public statements that are made by leaders in the region or elsewhere, the Secretary-General will continue his mission.

Question: Are there any details available yet about which UN officials will be playing a role or taking part in the World Economic Forum in Davos later this month?

Spokesperson: Yes, we have the information. I can give it to you upstairs, of course.

Question: This is sort of a compound question. There were a series of UN- OIOS reports that were released on a site called Wikileaks. One of them concerns the Congo and reports 217 allegations of sexual abuse - only one of which the UN was able to corroborate - but it doesn't say what happened to that person. So I wanted to ask about that particular report. Is it possible to know what happened to the individual the UN felt it had proof against? And does the Secretary-General feel that this type of release is a good thing and could lead to more accountability? What does the Secretariat say? I understand that he's busy.

Spokesperson: We've been made aware of the presence of what is purported to be confidential UN documents on the Wikileaks.org website. Those are reports that are publicly available to Member States, at their request, to ensure transparency in our own work. Many of the allegations in these reports have already been well documented publicly. At least one Member State has already placed a majority of them on its own UN mission website in the past. So it is really nothing new. The one you are referring to is not a new report. What is not in the Wikileaks apparently, is what was done afterward. I think that you should be pursuing this with the UN Secretariat, because in every single one of these cases the recommendations were followed through and remedies were taken. I'm not going to answer each one separately. But you can certainly, Matthew, follow up on this.

Question: When you say the UN Secretariat, that's why I'm asking it here. Who should I ask?

Spokesperson: I will let you know. Because in the case of sexual misconduct in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there were a number of measures that were taken, in particular preventive measures, so that this would not occur. And these preventive measures, if I remember correctly, included a curfew, a list of out-of-bounds establishments, recreation facilities and continued training and awareness-raising on the UN's zero tolerance policy. I think we had already a briefing on this.

Question: We had it on the preventive one, but what we didn't have was what actually happened to the peacekeeper that in this report the UN felt there was sufficient evidence that they should be prosecuted at home. Were they, in fact, and what was the sentence?

Spokesperson: Yes, you'll be free to follow that.

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Question: Has the Secretary-General received sufficient answers from his perspective to the bombing of the UNRWA compound in Gaza yesterday? Is he satisfied with it? What is the significance, on his behalf, that the same day he arrives there that this bombing takes place? What kind of message does he think Israel is sending him?

Spokesperson: I will repeat what I said earlier about whatever the message was that was to be sent to him. I don't know what the message was. The Secretary-General has pursued the accountability issue as well as a number of other issues, including a ceasefire as soon as possible. He has already expressed very strongly how he felt about the attack on the compound and I'm sure we'll have some update about what was done on the ground on the operational level, with John a little later. In terms of the Secretary-General, he has already expressed to Prime Minister Olmert how he felt about what had happened. In terms of pursuing this and having an investigation, of course we have asked for one. But, it occurred yesterday, so we don't have the answers yet. Of course not.

Question: Israel has used phosphorous gas, that's being alleged at this point, on the civilians. Has there been any documentation on how many civilians have been killed and the impact on the civilian population in Gaza? Similarly, Israel had also, in the war in Lebanon, used 500 cluster bombs to kill several people and still continues to do so. Is there going to be international accountability for Israel at this point in time, or at any further point in time?

Spokesperson: What I'm going to do is give the floor to John in a few minutes. He has been raising the accountability issue every since he has been coming to our noon briefing. And, of course, about the white phosphorous, your question was answered yesterday by Mr. Holmes saying that white phosphorous is not a banned weapon in terms of existing international conventions.

Question: In civilian areas it is banned.

Spokesperson: In heavily populated areas, yes.

Question: What about the cluster bombs?

Spokesperson: We have already talked about cluster bombs over and over again. If you want, Masood, we can return to that subject later on because I would like to give the floor to Enrique, who is going to talk about the special emergency session taking place now, and to John, who has been patiently waiting for us and who has really a lot to tell us. As you know his briefings have been really helpful and unique for us.

Please, Enrique.

Briefing by Spokesperson for the General Assembly President

Thank you, Mich?le. Good afternoon. I will try also to be very quick because I want us to go to Gaza as soon as possible. But I only wanted to give you some practical information about what's going on. As you know, the special session on Gaza is going on right now. There are around 45 speakers for today who have requested to intervene. We are now at number 15. We had 27 speakers yesterday. We hope that the session will end later today. It is expected that a resolution will be passed. At the request of several Member States, as you know, the President of the General Assembly was requested yesterday to draft a resolution. That resolution has been circulating among the Member States and they are discussing whether to adopt it this afternoon.

That is basically it. Unless we have an urgent question, I would like to give the floor to John.

**** Questions and Answers**

Question: Just a quick one, can we see a copy of the draft?

Spokesperson: Yes, it's an official document. It's online. But I'll give you a draft immediately.

Question: Was there any outcome of the inquiry which the General Assembly President asked for on the threat on his life by the Israelis on the Internet?

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY OFFICES OF SPOKESPERSON FOR SECRETARY-GENERAL,
SPOKESPERSON FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT

Spokesperson: I didn't hear your question. Question: I see, so the investigation is still going on.

Spokesperson: No, I didn't hear your question.

Question: About the threats against the GA President?

Spokesperson: No, we don't have any further information on that.

Question: Is that investigation still going on or is it closed?

Spokesperson: I understand that it's still going on.

Question: I was told that there are some European amendments to the copy of the draft resolution prepared by the PGA. I was wondering if you can update on that and whether there is a still a door open for amendments to the resolution?

Spokesperson: The different groups are still discussing. So I wouldn't say that there's an agreement right now. They are discussing - the Europeans, the G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement. We hope to have an agreement. But, you know how the procedure works. It's up to the countries to decide. From the President of the General Assembly's perspective, what is important is that we finish today, that we don't delay a decision until the weekend or Monday. We need to send a very strong message to the people in Gaza and the parties in the area by the international community requesting an immediate ceasefire, among other things.

Question: Just recently, in his speech, Alejandro Wolfe of the US, the Deputy Perm Rep, ended with this call on the PGA to do consultations to try to reach consensus. Is he going to do those types of consultations? Does he or you view that as sort of a stalling tactic? Can those consultations be held and still you have a vote today?

Spokesperson: Sure. The nature of this Organization is about negotiations. You have different positions and people try to get an agreement. Sometimes the parties who are negotiating, like in this particular case, request the services of the President of the General Assembly to try to facilitate that dialogue. It is part of the normal political discussions that are always taking place. I don't see any difference from the past.

Question: If there's a sense that some countries are trying to somehow delay action, as some in the PGA's office seem to think, can you just say why you think they would be delaying it?

Spokesperson: The bottom line is many, many countries want to participate, which is fair and normal in this particular case given the gravity of the situation. We have a limit. We have the weekend in the middle of the General Assembly session. The President would like that we take action as soon as possible. In his opening remarks this morning, he asked them please to be quick and speedy in taking a decision. What that decision is will be up to the Member States to decide.

I'm not going to take any more questions because I think we've already kept John waiting for a long time.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL HOLDS INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON RIGHT TO EDUCATION, EXTREME POVERTY AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this afternoon held an interactive dialogue on the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council concluded its interactive dialogue on the reports on the independence of judges, internally displaced persons and extrajudicial killings.

Vernor Munoz Villalobos, Special Rapporteur on the right to education, said that the right to education for all children who had lost all options for education because of natural disasters should not be denied. In that regard, there was an increasing interest to include an education response to humanitarian assistance. Natural disasters had been on the increase and affected everyone. One frequently found that education was not treated as a basic human right. It was delayed and denied during periods of reconstruction. Bombings and disasters in schools had increased, and the report showed that 27 million girls and boys have been denied that access as a result of violence and natural disasters, and that had had devastating impacts for the future of States.

Speaking as a concerned country on the Special Rapporteur on the right to education's report on his country visit in 2006, Morocco said that the Moroccan Parliament had passed a law in 2002 declaring education for children between the ages of 6 and 15 mandatory. Various measures were specified in the law, including support for poor children and those living in rural areas. The education of children with disabilities was part of a strategy to continue their development and education and their integration into society. Morocco acknowledged that there were still difficulties in integrating those children.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, said that they remained committed to progress on the right to education and strongly supported this Special Procedure mechanism. The right of children to education was legislated in Articles 28, 29 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Bosnia and Herzegovina was a State party. Bosnia and Herzegovina had an education reform plan to address long-term processes and progress in that area, with a set of objectives to be reached by 2010.

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Magdalena Sepulveda, Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, said that her report was actually the report of her predecessor, Arjun Sengupta that could not be presented at the seventh session of Human Rights Council. He had also provided various recommendations. One of the achievements he had made was a better understanding of the link between human rights and extreme poverty. That work required further elaboration, and she would make it a priority. The working definition of extreme poverty was a combination of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion. That definition emphasized that no measure to reduce poverty could succeed without addressing the consequences of social exclusion. Furthermore, the elimination of extreme poverty required not only domestic action, but international action as well. Also, extreme poverty was a problem for all countries, but especially for developing countries.

John Ruggie, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, presenting his final report, said that it provided a succinct mapping of current standards and practices governing corporate responsibility and accountability in relation to human rights, a rapidly changing field. The overall problem in his view was that these measures constituted unrelated fragments of responses. His current report therefore identified a conceptual and policy framework for consideration by the Council. It was organised around three foundational principles: the State duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including businesses; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; and the need for more effective access to remedies. The framework itself did not constitute a solution by itself, but it provided all parties with a common baseline from which to achieve greater coherence and guidance.

During the interactive dialogue, delegations thanked Mr Ruggie for his conceptual framework; it had enabled work to move forward in this complex area. The realisation of the right to education was believed to be important, especially during natural disasters and in conflict and post conflict reconstruction contexts. This issue deserved greater attention. On extreme poverty, it was felt that its eradication was an urgent task, as it systematically led to human rights violations. The main instrument in combating that phenomenon was sustainable development and the redistribution of income locally and internationally. Without that, any efforts done by human rights instruments would be vain.

Also speaking this afternoon in the interactive dialogue were the delegations of India, Norway, Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, France, Luxemburg, Indonesia, the Russian Federation, Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, China, Egypt, Italy, Qatar, Algeria, Malaysia, Argentina, Republic of Korea, Portugal, Thailand, Peru, Bangladesh, Chile, Cuba, the United Kingdom, Venezuela and Nigeria.

Speaking in right of reply were Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Colombia and Thailand.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council concluded its interactive dialogue on the reports on the independence of judges, internally displaced persons and extrajudicial killings.

In concluding remarks, Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said on the proposal for a Special Rapporteur on the rights of detainees, there was an historical irony here, as the standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners was probably the very first really detailed substantive human rights code elaborated by the United Nations in the 1950s. Since that time detainees had been forgotten about. Existing mandates could look at one or other dimensions, but did not cover the issue fully. Whether there should be a new mandate was for the Council to decide, however.

Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, in concluding remarks, said that, concerning what was said by Egypt on the matter of translation and the submission of reports, it would be useful if Special Rapporteurs could know before hand when they were to make their presentations before setting the date for submission of reports. He had taken note of all the statements and, as had been said by some delegations, he agreed that it was especially important to draft a document on best practices, to include all sectors of the judiciary. With regard to the Optional Protocol on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Mr. Despouy thought that that would have an impact on those rights.

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Speaking in the interactive dialogue on independence of judges, internally displaced persons and extrajudicial killings, at the beginning of the meeting were representatives of CAPAJ and the World Council of Churches.

When the Council resumes its work, at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 4 June, it is scheduled to conclude its interactive dialogue on the right to education, extreme poverty and transnational corporations, before considering the High Commissioner's reports.

Reports by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

The Council has before it the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Vernor Munoz Villalobos (A/HRC/8/10 and Add.1-4). [Available in Spanish only]

A first addendum contains summaries of communications to and from Governments. During the period under review, the Special Rapporteur transmitted 14 communications to the Governments of 12 countries: Colombia, Czech Republic, Iran, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Nigeria, Peru, Poland, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. At the time of submitting the present report the Special Rapporteur has received responses from the Governments of China, Colombia, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Three were responses to these communications and four were replies to communications transmitted by the Special Rapporteur over the past years. The Special Rapporteur regrets that some Governments failed to respond.

A second addendum contains the Special Rapporteur's report of his mission to Morocco. [Available in French only]

The Special Rapporteur's findings of his mission to Malaysia are contained in a third addendum. [Not available]

The report of the Special Rapporteur's mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2007 is contained in a fourth addendum, which notes that the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is highly fragmented; there are 14 ministries of education. The Special Rapporteur analyses the obligations of the State with regard to the enjoyment of the right to education using four criteria: availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. The Special Rapporteur then comments on two main issues that he identified as affecting the enjoyment of the right to education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the excessive fragmentation and politicization of the education system; and the segregation between ethnic groups and assimilation processes based on ethnic motives.

Report by the Former Independent Expert on the Question of Human Rights and Extreme Poverty

The Council has before it the report of the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, Arjun Sengupta (A/HRC/7/15), in which the Independent Expert defines extreme poverty as the combination of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion. Attention should be focused on the intersection of these three components of poverty when social consensus on poverty reduction strategies are formulated. On this basis, the Independent Expert notes that European Union policies are based on the same conceptual understanding of poverty as he has proposed. In this context, European Union programmes promoting social inclusion are discussed. In the report, the Independent Expert emphasizes the importance of international cooperation, which is enshrined in international human rights law. In order to examine the effectiveness of international cooperation in eradicating extreme poverty, he makes some observations on past experiences on poverty reduction strategy papers in Africa. He concludes the report by emphasizing the need to recognize that extreme poverty is a denial of human rights, and suggests that guiding principles on extreme poverty become legally binding.

Reports of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises

The Council has before it the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, John Ruggie (A/HRC/8/5 and Add.1-2), which presents a conceptual and policy framework to anchor the business and human rights debate, and to help guide all relevant actors. The framework comprises three core principles: the State duty to protect against human rights

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abuses by third parties, including businesses; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; and the need for more effective access to remedies. The three principles form a complementary whole in that each supports the others in achieving sustainable progress. The root cause of the business and human rights predicament today lies in the governance gaps created by globalization. These governance gaps provide the permissive environment for wrongful acts by companies of all kinds without adequate sanctioning or reparation. Some stakeholders believe that the solution lies in a limited list of human rights for which companies would have responsibility, while extending to companies, where they have influence, essentially the same range of responsibilities as States. But businesses can affect virtually all internationally recognized rights. Therefore, any limited list will almost certainly miss one or more rights that may turn out to be significant in a particular instance. Finally, the United Nations is not a centralized command-and-control system that can impose its will on the world - indeed it has no "will" apart from that with which Member States endow it. But it can and must lead intellectually and by setting expectations and aspirations. The Human Rights Council can make a singular contribution to closing the governance gaps in business and human rights by supporting the proposed framework, inviting its further elaboration, and fostering its uptake by all relevant social actors.

A first addendum to the report contains the summary of five multi-stakeholder consultations that convened to assist the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in developing his conceptual and policy framework. The consultations addressed the following issues: the role of States in effectively regulating and adjudicating the activities of corporations with respect to human rights; business and human rights in conflict zones; the role of home States; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; accountability mechanisms for resolving corporate-related human rights complaints and disputes; and improving the human rights performance of business through multi-stakeholder initiatives. Each of the consultations was co-convened with a non-governmental organization. The main goal of one of the consultations was to generate ideas concerning the legal and policy dimensions of home and host State duties. Most participants agreed that States had a duty to protect against abuses by corporations within their jurisdiction but that many States either did not fully understand or were unwilling to fulfil that duty. Participants also agreed that home States should exercise at least some degree of due diligence before encouraging "their" companies to operate in conflict zones.

A second addendum summarizes the scope and patterns of alleged corporate-related human rights abuse found in a sample of 320 cases posted on the Business and Human Rights Resource Center web. An initial coding of cases showed that all industry sectors were alleged to impact human rights, and impacts were alleged to occur in all regions. Environmental harms were also noted as they were often connected to claims of negative impacts on human rights. Allegations of corruption were recorded, recognizing that corruption can impede realization of all rights. Findings include that corporations are alleged to impact the full range of human rights, including civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and that labour and non-labour rights were both impacted.

In a companion report entitled, Clarifying the Concepts of "Sphere of influence" and "Complicity" (A/HRC/8/16), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises explains how both concepts fit into the corporate responsibility to respect rights. It establishes due diligence, a process whereby companies not only ensure compliance with national laws but also manage the risk of human rights harm with a view to avoiding it. He then examines how the concepts of sphere of influence and complicity have potential implications for the scope of due diligence.

Presentation of Reports of Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

VERNOR MUÑOZ VILLALOBOS, Special Rapporteur on the right to education, said that he had engaged in numerous working meetings with Governments, multilateral bodies, students, national human rights institutions, and many more around the world in each region. The right to education for all children who had lost all options for education because of natural disasters should not be denied. In that regard, there was an increasing interest to include an education response to humanitarian assistance. Natural disasters had been on the increase and affected everyone. People involved in emergency situations and cases differed, however, and it should not lead to the suspension of national and international rights. Those disasters could occur in any region, and the civilian

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population was the main victim. The security of schools, specifically the physical security of schools should be a right included in education. States should come up with effective protective measures.

One frequently found that education was not treated as a basic human right, Mr. Munoz Villalobos said. It was delayed and denied during periods of reconstruction. Bombings and disasters in schools had increased, and the report showed that 27 million girls and boys have been denied that access as a result of violence and natural disasters, and that had had devastating impacts for the future of States. Education made it possible to enjoy cognitive and social aspects of life and to increase the quality of those lives. It provided structure, normalcy, and hope during times of instability. Recognition of articles 4 and 20 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child had not been fully and clearly translated into reality by the international community. The implications had been made clear, and if States were not able to show or prove a right to education they should be denied funding requests. Minimum standards should be met and the international community should step up its efforts to achieve that. Here he recalled that only 1.5 per cent of total humanitarian commitments were actually allocated to education.

In his 2007 visit to Morocco, Mr. Munoz Villalobos said he had familiarized himself with the challenges faced by that country and what the more vulnerable groups had at stake. Despite those challenges, great progress had been made in the legislation and institutional sectors. Morocco viewed education as a right and had increased literacy to 93 per cent by 2007, as opposed to 43 per cent in 1960's. Some of the challenges Morocco faced were basic living requirements such as access to drinking water and electricity, which had been major challenges for the country especially in rural areas.

Presentation by the Independent Expert on the Question of Human Rights and Extreme Poverty

MAGDALENA SEPULVEDA, Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, said that her report was actually the report of her predecessor, Arjun Sengupta, that could not be presented at the seventh session of Human Rights Council. During his tenure, Mr. Sengupta had prepared various reports that shed light on links between human rights and poverty. He had also undertaken two trips as Independent Expert: to the United States in 2005 and to the European Commission Offices in Brussels in 2007. He had also provided various recommendations. One of the achievements he had made was a better understanding of the link between human rights and extreme poverty. That work required further elaboration, and she would make it a priority.

There are four main issues in the report: the definition of extreme poverty; social exclusion; international assistance and cooperation; and the draft Guideline Principles on the Rights of the Poor. The working definition of extreme poverty was a combination of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion, Ms. Sepulveda said. That definition emphasized that no measure to reduce poverty could succeed without addressing the consequences of social exclusion. Furthermore, the elimination of extreme poverty required not only domestic action, but international action as well. The report emphasized the importance of creating a mechanism that allowed for the monitoring of international assistance. The draft Guiding Principles were another important step towards the recognition of the multifaceted problems faced by those living in situations of extreme poverty.

Ms. Sepulveda noted that extreme poverty was a problem for all countries, but especially for developing countries. Human rights existed as a centrepiece in many United Nations documents and declarations from the United Nations Charter to the Millennium Development Declaration and Goals. In spite of all the commitments and the initiatives launched and the great economic growth in many regions, inequalities had grown larger and poverty continued to threaten the rights and dignity of people in all regions of the world. A human rights approach to poverty eradication had never been needed more urgently than now. Supported by the most important international treaties and by a range of legal instruments at national level, a human rights approach shifted discussions on the fight against poverty from the realm of charity to the realm of rights and consequences. States had certain legal obligations relating to people living in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty was a great human rights challenge. It was crucial that the Council gave high priority to the suffering of millions of women, men and children living in extreme poverty around the world.

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Presentation by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises

JOHN RUGGIE, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, presenting his final report, said that during their short journey they had already covered a lot of ground: they had analysed nearly 400 public allegations against companies, they had followed dozens of court cases and he had met personally on private site visits with victimized indigenous peoples' groups, with workers in supply chains and with labour leaders whose colleagues had been killed by paramilitaries protecting company assets. Fourteen multi-stakeholder meetings had also been held, addressing both the nature of the challenges and also the full array of possible solutions. They had conducted some two-dozen research projects and had produced more than 1,000 pages of documentation. His last report had provided a succinct mapping of current standards and practices governing corporate responsibility and accountability in relation to human rights, a rapidly changing field. The overall problem in his view was that these measures constituted unrelated fragments of responses. Every stakeholder had expressed the urgent need for a common framework of understanding during their consultations.

His current report therefore identified a conceptual and policy framework for consideration by the Council, Mr. Ruggie said. It was organised around three foundational principles: the State duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including businesses; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; and the need for more effective access to remedies. The State duty to protect was critical because it lay at the very core of the international human rights regime. The framework itself did not constitute a solution by itself, but it provided all parties with a common baseline from which to achieve greater coherence and guidance. On the State duty to protect, it was often stressed that Governments were the most appropriate entities to make the difficult balancing decisions required to reconcile different societal needs. But in the area of his mandate, his research raised questions about whether Governments had the balance right. Often human rights concerns were kept apart from other policy domains that shaped business practices. Governments needed to actively encourage a corporate culture that was respectful of human rights. On the second component, corporate responsibility to respect human rights, that was recognized in a number of soft law instruments, including the International Labour Organisation Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises. But relatively few enterprises had systems in place to know if they were respecting human rights. Accordingly, his report outlined a due diligence process for companies to manage the risk of human rights harm with a view to avoiding it.

Statements by Concerned Countries

OMAR RABI (Morocco), speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on his country visit in 2006, said the report gave a thorough description of the state of education in Morocco. The Moroccan Parliament had passed a law in 2002 declaring education for children between the ages of 6 and 15 mandatory. Various measures were specified in the law, including support for poor children and those living in rural areas. The education of children with disabilities was part of a strategy to continue their development and education and their integration into society. The level of disabled children attending school was currently 32 per cent. Morocco acknowledged that there were still difficulties in integrating those children. For that reason, a new agreement has been concluded between all the relevant ministries committing the Government to increase the number of disabled children to be educated to 70 per cent. The allotted budget for educating children ages 6 to 18 was 31 billion dirhams.

DRAGANA ANDELIC (Bosnia and Herzegovina), speaking as a concerned country, expressed appreciation Mr. Munoz Villalobos for the work done during his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina last year and for his report to Council. Bosnia and Herzegovina remained committed to progress on the right to education and strongly supported this Special Procedure mechanism. The Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina coordinated the role of education in the country, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees monitored the implementation of international conventions and other documents in the field of human rights. The right of children to education was legislated in Articles 28, 29 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Bosnia and Herzegovina

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was a State party. Bosnia and Herzegovina had an education reform plan to address long-term processes and progress in that area, with a set of objectives to be reached by 2010.

Interactive Dialogue on Reports on the Right to Education, Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, and Human Rights and Transnational Corporations

RAJIV KUMAR CHANDER (India) said that the definition of extreme poverty put forward by the previous Independent Expert on extreme poverty, which defined it as a combination of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion, was a comprehensive one. A human rights approach to tackle this issue entailed certain obligations for Governments at the national and international levels, as recognized in the Declaration on the Right to Development. On Mr. Ruggie's report, the conceptual framework he had put forward in his last report held promise. The step-by-step approach followed by the mandate holder had been successful and had enabled work to move forward in this complex area. However, the individual elements of this three-legged framework needed to be defined in more precise terms or further developed.

VEBJORN HEINES (Norway) thanked Mr. Ruggie for his report. Norway commended his constructive and practical approach, and agreed with him that a key challenge was to narrow and bridge the governance gaps that provided the permissive environment for wrongful acts by companies. Norway supported the policy framework of "protect, respect and remedy". The next logical step was for the mandate holder to further develop the framework with a view to contributing in concrete terms to a more coherent and systemic response to the challenges at hand. Norway asked what further steps should be taken to provide actors with clarity on the corporate responsibility to respect.

ZIVA NENDL (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union, thanked the Special Rapporteur on the right to education for his report. In particular, it welcomed the methodology used in the preparation of the report, which entailed a questionnaire sent to Governments, United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and Independent Experts. The European Union believed that the realization of the right to education in emergency situations - whether man-made or natural disasters - deserved greater attention and that further efforts had to be made by all relevant stakeholders to ensure that right both in times of crisis and in post-conflict peace-building or reconstruction contexts. In this connection, the European Union asked the Special Rapporteur what measures should be taken to enhance coordination and prevent education from being interrupted in emergency situations. Further, what role should national authorities have in seeking and channelling international aid to the fulfilment of the right to education?

Turning to the complex issues surrounding human rights and businesses, the European Union welcomed the excellent work done by Mr. Ruggie since the creation of the mandate in 2005. Importantly, the report had focused on both the roles of States and the role of corporations in seeking to develop a framework that aimed to ensure protection of human rights. The European Union asked if the Special Representative could provide further details on what steps he envisaged could be taken to build most effectively on his work to date. Agreeing with Mr. Ruggie that human rights were at particular risk in conflict zones, the European Union asked what action could be suggested within the United Nations system to gather more information on that area?

JEAN-BAPTISTE MATTEI (France) asked the Independent Expert on extreme poverty, how could poor people be involved in the drafting of policies relating to them? As they were often deprived of their most basic human rights, was it not often the cause and the reason for their extreme poverty? On transnational corporations, the Special Representative's observations and conclusions were fully endorsed. Also, international financial institutions should develop a monitoring system for their loans as well as a complaint mechanism. France asked the Special Representative to respond on how that could work in practice.

JEAN FEYDER (Luxembourg) said Luxembourg attached great importance to implementing the Millennium Development Goals, and that all organizations in the United Nations system that dealt with development in one way or another should use them as a point of reference for their own work and should seek to implement them. All of their efforts had to be consistent. The strategy offered by the Millennium Development Goals was not immutable, however, in Luxembourg's view. In that connection it had welcomed the multidimensional definition of extreme

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poverty that had been offered by the Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty, as compared with the strictly economic one described in the Millennium Development Goals - that of a living on less than \$1 a day. Luxembourg therefore asked the Independent Expert how she would suggest that the United Nations system create a single definition of poverty that could be generally accepted.

DICKY KOMAR (Indonesia) said that Indonesia considered the eradication of extreme poverty to be of vital importance for many developing countries and less developed countries, allowing them to go beyond their socio-economic limitations and more effectively and efficiently establish long-term inclusive policies. The multifaceted nature of extreme poverty required that it be addressed at all levels including education, employment and socio-economic strata, to be effectively eliminated. Moreover, States had to be enabled through their national policies and international agreements to meet increasingly urgent developmental commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals before 2015. On the issue of human rights and transnational corporations, Indonesia said that it was important to encourage businesses to adapt strategies that flowed in line with human rights norms. The principles of due diligence should apply to countries as well as to national enterprises. Further, closing governance gaps that might exist between human rights and business practices was essential.

ALEXEY GOLTYAEV (Russian Federation) said that Russia agreed on the conclusion drawn by the Independent Expert on extreme poverty that extreme poverty systematically led to human rights violations. The main instrument in combating that phenomenon was sustainable development and the redistribution of income locally and internationally. Without that, any efforts done by human rights instruments would be vain. On transnational corporations, it was noted that they had virtually no responsibility to society, particularly in the States in which they operated, because they were practising corruptions of the elite. They tended to become a State within a State and that could lead to massive violations of all rights. It was felt that recognizing the responsibility of non-State actors deserved further study. On the report of the right to education, armed attacks on educational institutions were deeply condemned.

SYED ALI ASAD GILLANI (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, thanked the Independent Expert for the report on human rights and extreme poverty and welcomed the definition of extreme poverty. He recalled that the Organization of the Islamic Conference had welcomed the Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. They provided a workable framework, which could be further developed. Just formulating guidelines was not enough. It would require a strong political will and a multi-pronged and multi-dimensional approach at all levels to make extreme poverty part of history. The question of eradicating extreme poverty on a sustainable basis was difficult without addressing the question of development and security. The Organization of the Islamic Conference appreciated the Framework proposed by John Ruggie, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations. The framework was a work in progress. The approach suggested by the framework required serious thought by all delegations. Formulating guidelines regarding basic responsibilities of States and companies was a challenge. Without internationally agreed and mandatory minimum corporate social responsibility standards it would be difficult to address the issue from the human rights perspective in totality.

KE YOUSHENG (China) thanked the three Experts for their reports and especially appreciated the work done on the right to education. China said that education was a basic human right and that the Government paid close attention to this right. The State had achieved universal education for children and extended this right past the age of 15 for an additional eight to ten years. The Government supported the Council in continuing work on this issue in an objective and impartial manner.

China said that as a developing country, it appreciated the work done on eliminating poverty. All human rights were interrelated. China hoped that the Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty would work closely with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food in eradicating poverty.

China had taken note of the three principles noted in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations and extended thanks to Mr. Ruggie for the clarifications

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given. China asked if there are any priorities set for the principles, and how could the business community see the three principles in order to enhance human rights.

OMAR SHALABY (Egypt) welcomed the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations to include corporations in the human rights debate. On the issue of corporate abuses in conflict zones, it was noted that transnational corporations were involved in actions like killings done by security agents of private enterprises or building works in occupied territories. Transnational corporations were engaged in the most flagrant violations of human rights worldwide. Specific policies had to be developed when applying the Special Representative's framework.

NICOLETTA PICCIRILLO (Italy) reiterated its full support to the promotion and protection of children's right to education. Italy asked the Special Rapporteur on the right to education about his recommendations to improve security at schools. Which United Nations agencies should be responsible for strengthening education in an emergency? Italy appreciated the level of analysis in the report by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations and put its trust in the framework he had proposed. Italy asked for concrete examples of policies concerning harmful corporate involvement in conflict situations. It also asked what leverage Professor Ruggie thought a company had over other actors that were causing harm and how he thought that leverage could be used to avoid human rights abuses.

FAISAL ABDULLA AL-HENZAB (Qatar) thanked the Special Rapporteur on the right to education for his work. Education was neither a service nor a privilege, rather it was a social, economic and cultural right and this right extended to the linkage of the whole in enjoying human rights. Every person must be able to receive this right free of charge. Armed conflicts created one of the most difficult situations as well as natural disasters. The international community should remove all the impediments to the right to education. Vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities should be given more assistance. Qatar believed that the goal set for 2015 could only be reached if the international community and States concentrated on the marginalized groups and people with disabilities first.

IDRISS JAZAIRY (Algeria) said on the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and extreme poverty that the problem did not lie in any deficiency from those suffering from it, but rather in economic, social and international institutions. The fight against extreme poverty should be made an obligation for States. A conceptual framework was suggested, that would differentiate between the material and non-material aspects of extreme poverty. These elements would be used as guidelines for targeted action in this area. Further, each State should report to the High Commissioner on the criteria adopted on the ground.

The Representative of Malaysia thanked the Special Rapporteur on the right to education for his report. Education was indeed a crucial and integral element for the nation-building of all countries irrespective of development status and time. Malaysia was pleased to have hosted the Special Rapporteur during his visit to the country in February 2007. It had been looking forward to engage with the Special Rapporteur at this session of the Human Rights Council. It regretted that the Special Rapporteur's report on Malaysia was not ready for discussion at the Council. It hoped that the Human Rights Council would ensure technical resources would be made available soon to resolve the matter. Malaysia stated its appreciation on the efforts of the Special Rapporteur.

SEBASTIAN ROSALES (Argentina) thanked the three Experts for their reports. Argentina was pleased with the information included in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations, which was compiled after a number of consultations. The report was inclusive and the Expert had collected the information from many parts of the world. It was the responsibility of all States to provide protection and provide support for businesses. Argentina had been an integral player in the work on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises since the mandate began in 2005.

KIM PIL-WOO (Republic of Korea) found that the framework proposed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations had rightly identified all the challenges faced today. It put forward a set of coherent and concerted policy solutions involving both States and corporations. The Republic of Korea fully ascribed to the basic idea of the framework and assigned responsibilities to relevant actors.

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A growing number of activist groups had joined the force to put pressure on businesses to be respectful of human rights. This often put enterprises in the position of being more aware of their diminishing status in the public perception. The enterprises came to learn that benefiting from abuses would not be profitable in the long term.

RAQUEL TAVARES (Portugal) reiterated the appreciation of Portugal for the work of the three Experts. The statement would deal solely with the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education. Portugal was a strong believer that it was imperative that the right to education be fully enjoyed by all persons. It expressed full support for the Special Rapporteur's mandate. The issue of education during an emergency was clearly an issue which deserved to be given a higher priority by all relevant stakeholders. Portugal asked the Special Rapporteur what measures he would suggest in order to integrate education into humanitarian response to conflicts and natural disasters and to ensure that efforts were coordinated.

LADA PHUMAS (Thailand) said that Thailand fully supported the continuation of work on the right to education and eliminating extreme poverty in the Council. Integrating the right to education in all strategies was a step towards enjoying full human rights. The report of the Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty must be looked at from a development and human rights framework to ensure effective implementation. It had an impact on human dignity which impacted everyone. Dialogue was important and should be part of the regional and international agenda to address this issue. Programmes of technical assistance and humanitarian aid were essential in advancing human rights in the region and the world.

ALEJANDRO NEYRA SANCHEZ (Peru) said that Peru supported the definition of extreme poverty proposed by the Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty. The definition highlighted a human rights approach. The consultations that had taken place on the guiding principles on extreme poverty were welcomed. Did the Independent Expert believe that these guiding principles could be developed further into a future international instrument? On transnational corporations, did the Special Representative think that it was possible to establish an early warning system that could react to flagrant human rights violations?

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh) thanked the three Experts on their reports. On the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations, multinational companies were playing an increasing role in the development of countries. Some of these companies enjoyed impunity. It was difficult to hold companies accountable for human rights abuses, especially if they took places in weak States. Bangladesh agreed with the framework proposed by Professor John Ruggie. On the former Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty, Arjun Sengupta, Bangladesh had high expectations for his work. Poverty was a violation of human rights. There was a moral responsibility to fight poverty. It was the view of experts that not all countries could fight poverty. Bangladesh supported the recommendation to draft a global legally-binding instrument to eliminate poverty. The Human Rights Council should not get bogged down in defining a specific definition. Bangladesh wished the new Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty well in her work and hoped she would begin where Dr. Sengupta left off.

CARLOS PORTALES (Chile) said Chile attached great importance to the right to education and particularly in emergency situations. Chile referred to the area in the south of the country that had recently been affected by the eruption of a volcano that caused 8,000 inhabitants to be evacuated and relocated, including students who had been relocated to other education institutions. The right to education in emergency situations should be part of the integral part of humanitarian aid.

Chile thanked the former Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty Arjun Segupta for his contribution in clarifying the conceptual relationship between human rights and extreme poverty, and congratulated Ms. Maria Sepulveda on her assumption of the mandate. Chile fully supported the Independent Expert in carrying out these tasks and agreed that they should be carried out in combination with human rights principles. The Government had set a priority in providing social protection systems to its citizens by 2010. The systems would create opportunities and a social benefits network. Chile said that it had undertaken the responsibility to convey all experiences in the country in order to eradicate poverty.

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RAFAEL GARCIA COLLADA (Cuba) said that with regard to the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations that Chile was pleased to see that there was an inclusion to promote and protect human rights. What was his opinion with regard to origins of transnational corporations and what measures should be taken so as to avoid that corporations got involved in human rights violations during their operations? On the right to education, Cuba underlined that armed conflicts, including military occupation, had devastating impacts on education and access to education. Cuba attached great importance to the enjoyment of this right. It was suggested that in further reports, the Special Rapporteur should also take into account the impact of coercive measures imposed by other States.

KATE JONES (United Kingdom) said the comments of the United Kingdom would focus on the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations. The United Kingdom congratulated John Ruggie for his work and noted that he had broadly consulted stakeholders. The United Kingdom broadly supported the framework he proposed. It agreed that building upon existing standards of corporate responsibility was an important step in tackling human rights abuses. The United Kingdom also agreed with his recommendation on not elaborating a binding international mechanism at this time.

ENZO BITETTO GAVILANES (Venezuela) said that Venezuela agreed with the statements and concerns in the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education and the Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty. Venezuela appealed to the international community to respect the international humanitarian and human rights law in these efforts. All international actors should participate to ensure that the full effort was put forth to eradicate this problem.

The line separating poverty and extreme poverty may not be clear and thus the Government of Venezuela supported the continuation of work in this regard. Culture was not a reason to reject a human rights approach to tackling poverty and extreme poverty. States of origin of transnational corporations should adopt procedures to avoid situations occurring abroad.

OSITADINMA ANAEDU (Nigeria) welcomed the conceptual framework proposed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations, which focused on the State duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including businesses. This three-way approach allowed for complementarities that ensured each supporting the other in achieving sustainable progress. Nigeria believed that the international community was on the right path towards adapting the human rights regime that would be equipped to provide the much-desired effective protection to individuals and communities against corporate-related human rights abuses. The Special Representative's call on the Human Rights Council to support this framework as endorsed.

Right of Reply

AZAD CAFAROV (Azerbaijan), speaking in a right of reply, took exception to the comments that the representative of Armenia made in the morning meeting. Azerbaijan had to face the huge humanitarian challenge and address the needs of almost one million of its own people who had become displaced and refugees in their own land. It should be clear to all present in the hall that Azerbaijan would never agree with Armenia. It would continue to work on its development as a successful, economically strong, democratic and genuinely free State that would spare no effort to restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Armenians had been used as pawns by their own government. Azerbaijan continued to believe that those ethnic Armenians who lived in Azerbaijan would realize that their best hope and their children's best hope lay in peace and peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijanis and their host government. The price they paid was too high to afford.

RAJIVA WIJESINHA (Sri Lanka), speaking in a right of reply, noted with sadness the emotional and misleading statement given by Interfaith International. The situation in Kalimoddai was certainly not the garden of eden, but it was infinitely preferable to the LTTE controlled areas. The claim that over 100 civilians had been massacred by government forces was breathtaking in its effrontery. The representative had clearly not read through the original report of the Special Rapporteur that had been categorical in its condemnation of the LTTE.

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OMER BERZINJI (Iraq), speaking in a right of reply to the statement by North South XXI, said the justice system in Iraq was an independent body and in fact they were surprised that there were allegations made in the Council to note otherwise. There had been many steps taken to ensure that the judiciary and executive were separate. Iraq said that the system of the Government was based on a democratic model. The Government had attempted to combat crimes within the system and guaranteed to condemn all who committed such crimes.

ALMA VIVIANA PEREZ GOMEZ (Columbia), speaking in a right of reply on the statement made by the Organisation of Columbian Jurists, said Columbia had adopted a number of measures, including endorsing the order of the investigative body housed in the office of the Attorney General to investigate activities of the military, changing the criteria of unit and officials, supporting the creation of a special sub unit investigating human rights abuses by the military, and transferring cases from military courts to civilian courts. Columbia cited a number of cases which were currently being investigated by the Attorney General involving alleged human rights abuses. The Ministry of Defence has a policy of zero tolerance for human rights abuses.

PITCHAYAPHANT CHARNBHUMIDOL (Thailand), speaking in a right of reply, thanked the representative of the Asian Legal Resource Center for his remarks. The Government however wished to reiterate that it was strongly opposed to extrajudicial killings. Every such act conducted by law enforcement officers had to be prosecuted. Several cases had been brought to justice. On the allegation that no progress had been made in certain cases, the Government reiterated that progress was under way.

Continuation of the Interactive Dialogues with the Special Procedures on Extrajudicial and Summary Executions, Internally Displaced Persons and Independence of Lawyers

TOMAS ALARCON, of Comisi-n Jurdica para el Autodesarrollo de los Pueblos Originarios Andinos (CAPAJ), said that on the independence of judges, the Special Rapporteur had put forward indigenous people as a vulnerable group. He had indicated that in the justice system, their customs were not taken into account in conflict resolution. That situation had to be remedied, especially in the light of the newly signed Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The international seminar on administration of justice and indigenous people, organized by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, had confirmed that the justice systems of indigenous people were efficient, and the Special Rapporteur was requested to take note of the recommendations of that seminar.

AMARYLLIS ENRIQUEZ, of Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, in a joint statement with Asian Legal Resource Centre, and International Association of Democratic Lawyers, said that the information provided by Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, was fully supported and commended. Mr. Alston had correctly and succinctly concluded that the State security forces in the Philippines had been involved in many of the killings of left-wing activists, indigenous leaders, trade union and farmer leaders and civil society organization members. The military remained in a state of denial over those killings. The World Council of Churches urged the Council to thoroughly review the record of the Philippine State in upholding the rights of its citizens. They also reiterated the call for the Council to continue to pursue the Philippine Government to stop the extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations by adopting and genuinely carrying out the recommendations made by Mr. Alston.

Concluding Remarks by the Experts on Extrajudicial and Summary Executions and on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

PHILIP ALSTON, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said he was very gratified by the level of engagement and the extent to which delegations had read, reflected on and commented on his reports. The delays in sending the follow-up reports to both Nigeria and Sri Lanka were regretted. With regard to the Philippines, he said he was actually much more encouraged than might be expected. The level of response within the Philippines had been very significant. He noted in particular the comments of the incoming President of the Philippines Human Rights Commission that she would return to the issues raised in his report and the comment by the incoming Chief of the Defence Forces that he would give priority to human rights issues, and the Special Rapporteur believed that the exchange he had had with the Government of the Philippines had contributed

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significantly to major reductions in the number of Killings. In relation to Nigeria, he said he appreciated the clarifications made and looked forward to a reply to his communications relating to the seven hangings alleged to have taken place in 2006. In relation to Afghanistan, he looked forward to further discussions.

On the proposal for a Special Rapporteur on the rights of detainees, Mr. Alston noted an historical irony here, as the standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners was probably the very first really detailed substantive human rights code elaborated by the United Nations in the 1950s. Since that time detainees had been forgotten about. Existing mandates could look at one or other dimensions, but did not cover the issue fully. Whether there should be a new mandate was for the Council to decide, however. Concerning the death penalty, it should be emphasized that, even though countries had sophisticated constitutional courts, there was still a role for international monitors to review the approach taken, just as there was on other issues, such as torture. Finally, on private military contractors, that was an issue he would be taking up in the future and which he would address during his visit to the United States in two weeks' time.

LEANDRO DESPOUY, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, in concluding remarks, said that, concerning what was said by Egypt on the matter of translation and the submission of reports, said that it would be useful if Special Rapporteurs could know before hand when they were to make their presentations before setting the date for submission of reports. He had taken note of all the statements and, as had been said by some delegations, he agreed that it was especially important to draft a document on best practices, to include all sectors of the judiciary.

With regard to the Optional Protocol on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Mr. Despouy thought that that would have an impact on those rights. Concerning the situation in Fiji, following the coup d'etat he had tried several times to visit that country, but had not been allowed to visit the country. Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he thanked the Government for their cooperation and the information he had received on follow-up to recommendations that he had received. The creation of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary had been a key to many reforms within the judiciary, as was the establishment and implementation of the Rome Statute (of the International Criminal Court) in a country that had witnessed some many crimes against humanity, and the ranking civil justice above military justice. He also noted the constant concern shown on the matter of crimes against women and the use of rape as a weapon of war. Justice was the cornerstone for the rule of law and was the front door to the defence of human rights.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL HOLDS GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS REQUIRING ITS ATTENTION

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this afternoon held a general debate on human rights situations that require its attention after concluding its interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan.

In the general debate on human rights situations requiring the Council's attention, States expressed concerns over the situation of human rights in a number of countries, including Sri Lanka, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Zimbabwe, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Belarus, Somalia and Uzbekistan. Concerns were also expressed about the situation in Georgia and in European Union countries, Canada and the United States.

Speaking in the general debate on human rights situations requiring the Council's attention were France on behalf of the European Union, Chile on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, the Russian Federation, Pakistan, Japan, Ghana, Switzerland, Canada, Bolivia, Cuba, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Georgia, the League of Arab States, Latvia, Ireland, Yemen, Romania, the United Arab Emirates, Poland, Belgium, Lithuania, Estonia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Belarus, Venezuela, Iran and Uzbekistan.

Also speaking were representatives of Europe Third World Centre and the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council concluded its interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan.

Sima Samar, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan, in concluding remarks said that the Government of Sudan had to take stronger action to stop the culture of impunity. In order to support these efforts, the United Nations should support the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur (UNAMID). This was necessary especially to protect humanitarian aid workers and to facilitate access to the vulnerable ones in Darfur. Also, her mandate should not be stopped. She called on the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference Member States to help the Sudanese Government to overcome the culture of impunity. The United Nations and the international community should continue to provide technical assistance and support.

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In the interactive dialogue on Sudan, States expressed concern over arbitrary detentions, restrictions on freedom of speech and the use of child soldiers, as well as the frequent and continuous attacks on civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers. But it was also noted that the Sudanese Government was attaching importance to the question of human rights and this could be seen in the unprecedented collaboration of Sudan with the Council. The best means for achieving peace and development was through a peaceful solution and dialogue. Sudan continued to carry out every effort to contain the humanitarian crisis and continue on the path to peace. Those efforts deserved the full support of the international community. Others also underscored that the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur could not carry out its mandate without the technical assistance of the international community.

Speaking in the interactive dialogue on Sudan were the delegations of Switzerland, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Tunisia, Australia, Uganda, Qatar, Malaysia and Iran.

Also speaking were the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, Human Rights Watch, International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International and Femmes Africa Solidarite.

When the Council reconvenes at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 17 September, it is scheduled to conclude its general debate on human rights situations requiring its attention before hearing the presentation of oral reports from the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee and the Social Forum. It will also hold a general debate on human rights bodies and mechanisms.

General Debate on Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention

JEAN-BAPTISTE MATTEI (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the promotion and protection of human rights was today a priority and it was important that each State examined its own record and accepted it was examined by other States. Certain human rights situations required particular attention and urgent action on behalf of the victims.

In Burma, the population remained confronted with an extremely difficult situation, worsened by the cyclone Nargis. Political prisoners, including Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, whose health had deteriorated, and the lack of transparency around their arrests and detentions were points of concern. The European Union encouraged the efforts of the Secretary-General and called again on the Burmese authorities to implement the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur and the latest resolution of the Security Council.

The European Union remained concerned about the human rights situation in Sudan, particularly Darfur, where violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continued. The European Union reminded that the fight against impunity should be the priority for the Government of Sudan. The European Union said the International Criminal Court played a key role in the international justice system and invited the Government of Sudan to cooperate with the Court.

There were no improvements in the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the European Union noted. The violations of civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights continued, while the humanitarian situation remained precarious. The European Union was particularly worried about the refugees from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and called on host countries to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The European Union expressed its concern over the internal conflict in Sri Lanka as it offered a fertile ground for deterioration of human rights and violation of international humanitarian law: numerous violations had been committed, such as forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and extra-judiciary executions. The European Union was particularly concerned about the humanitarian situation in the north of the country.

The European Union congratulated the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their cooperation with the International Criminal Court that permitted the arrest and transfer to The Hague of the third warlord accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The European Union deplored the continuing violations of

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human rights in the country and was very concerned about the massive and systematic sexual violence, particularly in the East.

The European Union was concerned about the human rights violations committed in Iran, including the execution of minors and sentences to death by lapidation. The situation of ethnic and religious minorities was a point of concern too.

The European Union expressed its concern about the continuation of violence against civilians in Zimbabwe, including massive displacement, beatings and assassinations. The Government had to put an end to all the violations. The European Union noted that the legitimacy of the elections was closely related to respect for principles of democracy and transparency recognised by the international community.

The European Union was very concerned about the human rights situation in Somalia and other countries in the Horn of Africa. In Somalia the violence continued regardless of the Djibouti cease-fire agreement. In Georgia, the recent developments opened the door to violence and insecurity. The European Union was particularly concerned about the allegations of the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the parties and also worried about the great number of refugees and internally displaced persons. The European Union expressed its support to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the joint call issued to the Russian and Georgian authorities to fully cooperate.

CARLOS PORTALES (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, expressed their solidarity for the democratic progress in Bolivia. On behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, they wished to express their deep concern over the massacre which had happened on 11 September in the department of Pando. It must be ensured that this massacre did not go unpunished and that impunity should not prevail. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries reiterated their appeal for an immediate halt to actions linked to violence and appealed for dialogue in order to overcome the current state of affairs, with full respect of human rights. The request of the Government of Bolivia for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue to monitor the situation in the field was supported by the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries.

VALERY LOSHCININ (Russian Federation) said that it was inadmissible that some States were being portrayed as rogue States and persistent violators of human rights, while gross violations of human rights were deliberately concealed in other States for the sake of economic or geopolitical interests. A clear example of such an attitude was the one towards Georgia. Ignoring the lawlessness in Georgia had just strengthened this country leadership's sense of impunity and finally led to the military aggression against South Ossetia. This happened 40 days ago from August 7 to August 8. The name of the Georgian military operation 'The Clean Field' spoke for itself and revealed the ultimate objective: physical destruction or expulsion of the Ossetian people from the lands of its ancestors. The military aggression became a logical consequence of Tbilisi policy vis-à-vis South Ossetia and its people. Only through military measures could a full-scale genocide and ethnic cleansing of South Ossetian people be prevented.

The Russian Federation further reminded the Council that everything was forgiven to M. Saakashvili. After the presidential elections in January, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe presented in Vienna a report on the outcome of the May parliamentary elections in Georgia. The report was full of evidence of the authoritarian nature of the regime in Georgia.

The Russian Federation was fulfilling in bona fide the obligations assumed as a result of negotiations between the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev and the President of France Nicolas Sarkozy and had started withdrawing the remaining troops. Finally, the Russian Federation thought it was ironic that at the same time a meeting was held in Tbilisi between Georgia and NATO where the NATO Secretary General cynically spoke of the illegitimacy of Russia's action against the aggressor. It seemed that some countries of this bloc learned no lesson from the August events on South Ossetia. That was not surprising since killing of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan had become business as usual for the coalition forces. The Russian Federation suggested that the Council consider restoring the mandates of Special Procedures on Afghanistan and Iraq.

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IMRAN AHMED SIDDIQUI (Pakistan) said that the right to self determination was essential to the enjoyment of the many other human rights and was contained in many of the United Nations declarations and conventions. The Human Rights Council had an obligation to protect and promote this right and remind States to refrain from violating this right. The people of Jammu and Kashmir were denied this right and suffered many violations of their rights by the Indian occupation forces. Peaceful and non-violent protests in Kashmir had been countered with extreme counter-measures by the Indian forces. International human rights organizations and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had expressed their concern over the violent reaction of India in Kashmir. Pakistan requested an investigation in the killings.

India had to be reminded of its obligations under the human rights and international humanitarian laws. Pakistan was committed to peace in Jammu and Kashmir, which was essential to the stability in the region. The dialogue had led to several confidence-building measures, what was needed now was a genuine solution to the Jammu and Kashmir issue, including the right of their people to self determination. Peace and prosperity depended on the enjoyment of this fundamental right. Pakistan expressed its hope that the Human Rights Council would play its role in alleviating the suffering of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

MAKIO MIYAGAWA (Japan) said that, concerning Myanmar, the Government of Japan had consistently assisted the development and unification of Myanmar since its independence. During Myanmar's hardship in past decades, Japan had been sending signals of encouragement to the Government and the people of Myanmar to improve their internal and external situation. While some progress had in fact been perceived, concerns remained. The visit of the Special Rapporteur to Myanmar was welcomed. Japan hoped that his continued efforts would help to improve the human rights situation.

Concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it had so far not exhibited signs of improvement. Japan urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to cease its persistent refusal of the visit of the Special Rapporteur and to commence cooperation with the international community. Turning to Sri Lanka, Japan had been encouraged by the recent positive steps taken by the Government. As for the past human rights violations, now under investigation before the Sri Lankan President's Commission of Inquiry, it appeared significant to present the output at the earliest possible time. On Zimbabwe, Japan welcomed the achievement of the agreement on power sharing. However, Japan was still concerned about the situation in the country and hoped the agreement would lead to a swift solution to the issues involved.

MERCY YVONNE AMOAH (Ghana) said that there was progress to be noted in Sudan, for example the finalized Child Act and the employment of police forces. There were also grave human rights violations being reported. Ghana was concerned that many recommendations had not been implemented. Also, not even UN personnel could be sufficiently protected by African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur. Ghana called on the Sudanese Government to double its efforts to bring perpetrators to justice. The international community had to play its part in the assistance for the elections in 2009.

ROBERTO BALZARETTI (Switzerland) noted Switzerland's concern over the human rights situations in Burma, Sri Lanka and Sudan, and the lack of progress and improvement since its previous address to the Human Rights Council on the topics of human rights situations of concern. Switzerland was concerned about the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which it described as dramatic. Insecurity and violence prevailed in some provinces, pushing people into displacement. Switzerland reminded the Council of the recommendations of the Expert Group on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the area of consolidation of peace and the fight against impunity and noted that these recommendations were as relevant today as they were at the time they were just issued. It also recalled the United Nations Secretary-General's report on the Democratic Republic of the Congo of May 2008 and noted that the Special Rapporteur on the violence against women should pay another visit to the troubled east of the country. Switzerland called on the Government of Zimbabwe to adopt measures to improve the human rights situation, including freedom of speech and press and to stop arbitrary arrests and extra judiciary executions.

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Switzerland noted that Kenya was a country where the human rights situation had evolved in a positive direction since February 2008. Switzerland encouraged Kenya to continue its reforms and take into consideration the important role that civil society played in the process. Kenya deserved full support from the international community in order to ensure that the efforts bore fruit.

TERRY CORMIER (Canada) said that the Human Rights Council had a special responsibility in human rights emergencies. The humanitarian and human rights situation in Sudan, particularly in Darfur, required the Council's attention. Canada called on the Council to continue to address the situation.

The agreement between ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe was welcomed by Canada. Still, Canada recalled that between the elections of March and June, more than 170 people had been killed and thousands needed medical treatment. An entrenched leadership had used the coercive powers of the State to safeguard their rule and privileges. Canada called on the new Government to implement policies which would improve human rights in Zimbabwe.

In light of the recent conflict in Georgia, Canada believed that it was imperative that Georgia and Russia both worked to ensure respect for the human rights of internally displaced persons. All parties were called on by Canada to ensure free and unhindered access by international humanitarian workers.

In Iran, respect for human rights was deteriorating. Confirmed instances of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment remained. Women's rights were suppressed. On the situation in Belarus, Canada had expressed its serious concerns about the human rights situation there since the presidential elections of March 2006. Canada noted the release of a number of prominent political prisoners, as well as the Belarus' agreement to allow observers under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to observe parliamentary elections this September. Canada was further disturbed by the recent reports of increased pressure on journalists, unlawful killings, disappearances and arbitrary arrests in Sri Lanka. Canada called on the Government of Sri Lanka to take further action to end human rights abuses.

ANGELICA NAVARRO LLANOS (Bolivia) said that there had been an attempted coup d'etat in the department of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando. In the department of Pando, the groups under the command of Leopoldo Fernandez did not give access to humanitarian aid or let families bury their dead family members, directly violating human rights. For this reason, the Government of Bolivia had sent a mission including representatives of the High Commissioner, of the Red Cross and others in the zone of conflict to help the families to bury their family members. Bolivia called on the Human Rights Council, the international community and non governmental organizations to condemn this coup d'etat.

JUAN ANTONIO FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) hoped that the debate on the human rights situation of concern to the Human Rights Council would follow the new path opened by the Human Rights Council and characterised by respect and cooperation. Cuba appealed to certain parties to reconsider their conduct. Cuba was concerned about the human rights in the rich industrialised North, with xenophobia, racism, disrespect for the minorities, and illegal and secret prisons.

The situation in Bolivia was complex and had its origins in the activities of the minorities associated with the oligarchy. The violence generated by those groups resulted in the death of dozens of peasants and indigenous peoples. The situation in Bolivia had to be resolved with respect to the constitutional order and territorial integrity of the country. The international cooperation had to respect the rules of non-interference in the internal affairs of Bolivia. Political, economic and media pressures threatened the integrity of the country. Cuba reiterated its solidarity with Bolivian people and expressed full support to the legitimate Morales Government.

SUSANNA TERSTAL (Netherlands) said that the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlined the importance of human rights and their responsibility. The Netherlands was deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They continued to receive reports on widespread sexual violence against women and girls. Impunity prevailed. A long term solution called for extra efforts from all parties involved. The Netherlands urged all parties involved to make sure that the Special

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Rapporteurs could visit the country as soon as possible. The Netherlands also expressed the hope that the agreement reached in Zimbabwe would pave the way for a constructive cooperation aimed at restoring the rule of law. Further, Sri Lanka should take further steps to combat impunity and improve the human rights and humanitarian situation. The Netherlands remained concerned over the humanitarian situation in the north as fighting between Government forces and the LTTE had escalated over the past weeks. Safe access of humanitarian aid workers had to be ensured.

Turning to Iran, the Netherlands remained concerned about the executions and urged Iran to respect its obligations under international human rights law. In Somalia, the human rights and humanitarian situation remained critical. Finally, the Netherlands remained deeply concerned about the freedom of expression in Uzbekistan.

PETER GOODERHAM (United Kingdom) said the United Kingdom was concerned about the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It encouraged third countries to treat emigrants as refugees in accordance with UNHCR rules. Regarding Sudan, the United Kingdom was concerned about the violence. There could be no impunity and those accountable must be brought to justice. The United Kingdom was also concerned about the high number of executions in Iran. Iran executed more juvenile offenders than any other country. The United Kingdom also urged Iran to release the Baha'i leadership that had been detained. Concerning Georgia, international observers should be allowed access. The United Kingdom supported a proposal for a United Nations fact finding mission. Regarding human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Kingdom was concerned about rape and sexual and gender based violence, arbitrary arrest and appalling prison conditions. The United Kingdom promoted judicial reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, the United Kingdom urged Burma to comply with recommendations set up by the Special Rapporteur. After a point of order raised by Myanmar, in which it urged the delegations to call the country Myanmar and not Burma, the United Kingdom said that the democratically elected government referred to it as Burma.

TOMAS HUSAK (Czech Republic) expressed deep concern at the deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation in Darfur and said the Czech Republic was particularly alarmed by the sexual violence, including against children. The Czech Republic called on all parties to the conflict to end the suffering on the ground and to bring those responsible to justice.

The human rights situation in Iran was not encouraging either, on the contrary. Despite the Government's declarations on the inhuman execution by stoning, there was no guarantee that such punishment would stop in practice. The Czech Republic renewed the appeal to the Government of Iran to start cooperating with relevant Special Procedures of the Council.

People in Burma/Myanmar continued to suffer in dire poverty and insecurity. The practice of child soldiers, forced labour and attacks on civilians were frequent. Democratisation remained an empty promise, political opponents remained imprisoned, including the winners of the 1990 elections. The Czech Republic called on the leaders of the country to stop the massive violations of human rights of their people and to start a real reconciliation process and dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic and minority leaders.

The Czech Republic was also preoccupied by the situation in Georgia which was acquiring an important human rights dimension. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons were a cause of concern.

The Czech Republic was pleased it could welcome the release of all internationally recognized political prisoners in Belarus, which represented an important step towards fulfilling the universal human rights standards.

GIORGI GORGILADZE (Georgia) said that Georgia was deeply concerned over the international armed conflict that had broken out in their territory. Georgia had had to defend itself against the Russian aggression. Georgia fully agreed with the European Union that the peace process required the full realisation of the peace plan. Georgia deplored all loss of civilian lives and underlined the obligation of Russia to grant free and unhindered access to humanitarian workers. Ethnic cleansing of Georgians was taking place on a massive scale. Those facts had to be analyzed through an international inquiry.

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SAAD ALFARARGI (League of Arab States) said that the Government of Sudan had made serious efforts to promote human rights. At the economic level, with the help of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Sudan had built bridges and roads. The Council of the Arab League held a week ago in Egypt had encouraged Sudan to hold peace talks and carry on with its efforts to promote human rights, especially in Darfur.

JANIS MAZEIKS (Latvia) said that the military conflict which recently took place in separatist regions of Georgia resulted in the loss of human life, suffering of the population and in a large number of displaced persons and refugees. There had been allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Latvia noted with deep concern the reports on attacks, abductions and killings of civilians as well as looting and burning of ethnic Georgian villages both during and after the armed conflict.

Latvia believed that it was of crucial importance to ensure that the internally displaced persons and refugees could return home as soon as possible and to guarantee their safety. In this context, the announcements of de facto authorities that they would not allow large-scale return of ethnic Georgians to Abkhazia were worrying. Latvia invited all concerned parties to ensure free access of humanitarian aid to all the population of South Ossetia affected by the conflict. Latvia considered that the protection of nationals abroad should not be used as a basis for disproportionate use of force and reaffirmed its full support for the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Georgia.

DAITHI O CEALLAIGH (Ireland) said that Ireland was deeply concerned about the continuing conflict in Darfur and condemned the excessive, disproportionate use of lethal force by Government forces against the Kalma internally displaced persons camp this August. All parties were urged to work towards a peaceful settlement. Ireland also urged the Zimbabwean authorities to ensure a complete cessation of violence and restoration of the rule of law. Ireland was also deeply concerned about the human rights and humanitarian situation in Myanmar. They had seen no evidence whatsoever that the military Government of Burma had done anything to improve the human rights situation. The authorities were urged to release all political prisoners. Ireland also remained deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and deplored the effects on the civilian population of both terrorist acts of the LTTE and other rebel groups. There could be no military solution to the problems that divided the country.

IBRAHIM SAIED MOHAMED AL-ADOOFI (Yemen) said that Yemen welcomed the developments achieved by the Government of Sudan. It was crucial to respect the sovereignty of Sudan. It should not be undermined by the politicization of international principles. The African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur (UNAMID) should be enabled to fully carry out its mandate in Sudan.

DORU ROMULUS COSTEA (Romania) said Romania firmly believed that the humanitarian and human rights situation of refugees and internally displaced persons caused by armed conflicts was a matter of concern for this Council and the allegations of human rights violations under these circumstances should be addressed by this body.

Romania expressed its deep concern about the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons who fled due to the armed conflict in Georgia and joined other delegations in calling on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to take action and investigate the allegations.

Romania was particularly worried about the consequences of the humanitarian situation in Georgia, more so as the winter was approaching. Romania urged all parties to cooperate with the international community to ensure humanitarian access to those in need. The Romanian Government had already provided humanitarian aid to the internally displaced persons and refugees through the programmes of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

ADEL ESSA HUR AL MAHRI (United Arab Emirates) said that, on the situation of human rights in Sudan, the United Arab Emirates considered that the Government was making notable efforts. Sudan and its Government had spared no efforts in restoring peace and security in the region, as shown by the signing of the Peace Agreement. Sudan had also collaborated with all United Nations mechanisms and had accepted to receive the joint African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur on its territory. The United Arab Emirates hoped that these valuable

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efforts would be appreciated by the international community. The Human Rights Council was called upon to place its confidence in the Government of Sudan.

ANDRZEJ MISZTAL (Poland) welcomed the recent release of all political prisoners by the authorities of Belarus. It also hoped that the upcoming parliamentary elections in September would be carried out in line with international standards. Poland called on all sides in the conflict in Georgia to strictly observe international human rights and humanitarian laws. Poland urged a prompt and impartial international investigation on human rights violations in the course of the conflict and called on all concerned parties to cooperate fully with relevant organizations.

ALEX VAN MEEUWEN (Belgium) noted that when the Council was created it received an explicit mandate to consider the situation in countries where necessary and it was important that the Council exercise this dimension of its mandate to respond in a credible manner to human rights violations everywhere.

Victims of the violations of human rights were usually among the most vulnerable parts of the population. In Iran, it was women, students, journalists, human rights defenders, and religious and ethnic minorities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo women were the victims of the most atrocious violations. Sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had reached dramatic proportions. Belgium supported efforts to improve coordination between the national Government and the United Nations, to better respond to the needs of the victims. In Iraq and Afghanistan civilians were the victims of violence that continued to reign in these countries. The absence of the State was often the principal cause of the human rights violations.

Belgium noted that the work had to focus on the victims and the response to their plight and thus the fight against impunity had to be one of the priorities.

EDUARDAS BORISOVAS (Lithuania) said that Lithuania had long supported the view that the human rights situation on the ground was the main goal of all human rights activities. Lithuania had noticed that recent changes in Belarus could be seen as positive signals. The release of political prisoners was one of the welcome steps, as well as the cooperation with foreign election observers. Unfortunately, in other parts of the region, events had dangerously developed and left them particularly concerned. Actions of the Russian Federation in Georgia left them in a position where they could not but condemn them. The unilateral recognition by the Russian Federation of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not only violate the territorial integrity of Georgia, but was at the same time a step that furthered the complicated human rights situation by artificially creating territories out of the international legal system. Lithuania also did not see steps facilitating the implementation of the right to return for internally displaced persons. This situation should be of particular concern for the international community. There was an urgent need to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground.

TONIS NIRK (Estonia) was very concerned about the humanitarian situation of the civil population in Georgia. Humanitarian assistance had to be delivered to persons in all the conflict zones throughout Georgia. Access to all areas affected by the conflict had to be guaranteed to international humanitarian organizations. The humanitarian situation and granting safe return to internally displaced persons must remain a priority.

SEBASTIEN MUTOMB MUJING (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that peace was a fundamental right inherent to any human community. Certain groups had taken advantage of aspirations to break this modus vivendi and were feeding negative tendencies by providing weapons. Such was the case of the circulation of small weapons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It represented the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law and was the cause of the deteriorating situation of economic and social rights in the east of the country.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo had suffered for a few years from the embargo on the import of arms, while armed groups in the east had been supplied by arms and in complicity with some arm manufacturers. The situation in the east was the result of the indulgence of the international community that usually spoke opposite of its actions.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo invited the members of the international community and the States that had influence on the movement of small arms to assess the impact of the trade on the peace process.

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AMANZHOL ZHANKULIYEV (Kazakhstan) said that concerning the situation in Southern Ossetia, these events were a severe alert for the future of the security of the region. Any action further aggravating the situation should be avoided. The use of force had led to many civilian victims and the death of peacekeepers. Kazakhstan expressed its deep concern and appealed to all parties to resolve the issue through dialogue. The active role of Russia in assessing peace in the region was noted by Kazakhstan. One of the prior objectives was an urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance and the return to normal life for civilians. The international community had to take effective measures to normalize the situation and to reduce tension in the region. Kazakhstan also supported the agreements achieved by the parties and was prepared to take part in the negotiation process of the parties concerned.

MUKTAR DJUMALIEV (Kyrgyzstan) said that the conflict in South Ossetia had shown the danger of resolving conflict by force. Kyrgyzstan supported the active role of the Russian Federation to ensure peace and stability in this region. Kyrgyzstan approved of the cessation of hostilities and the beginning of a dialogue.

OMER BERZINJI (Iraq) said that Sudan had been making continued efforts to strengthen human rights by cooperating with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan. Some examples included the authorisation of the deployment of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur that made it possible to strengthen stability and peace and protect civilians. In addition there was the Abuja Peace Agreement that reflected the wish of the Government of Sudan to promote human rights. Iraq said that the international community must be reminded to respect its obligations to Sudan in the form of technical and financial assistance, in addition to the assistance needed to the Hybrid Force to enable it to fulfil its mission.

EVGENY LAZAREV (Belarus) expressed the concern of Belarus at the gross violations of human rights in South Ossetia, after the aggression launched by Georgia. They also could not understand the irresponsible campaign in the western media to support the aggressor. Further, Belarus supported a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

GERMAN MUNDARAIN HERNANDEZ (Venezuela) said that the Government of Evo Morales had recently been endorsed by a large majority of the Bolivian people. Now, the Government was being harassed, all with funding from foreign powers. Recently, acts of violence were committed with the intent of pinning the blame on the Government. The groups accountable did not want an indigenous person in power. Venezuela condemned the absurd killing of their Bolivian brothers and called on the Council to ensure that there was no impunity for the perpetrators.

MOHAMMAD REZA GHAEBI (Iran) noted its concern about the human rights situation in the European Union Member States, vis-à-vis the general situation and the situation of ethnic, racial and religious minorities in particular. Islamophobia had become a prevailing phenomenon and incitement against Islam was being transcended into political ideologies. The increase in racist violence and xenophobic ideas in the political circles and public sphere had led to the denial of the rights of immigrants and foreigners. Using some of the European Union airports as transit points for so-called rendition flights of persons to countries where they risked being subjected to torture or ill treatment also represented a point of concern.

In France there were a number of serious concerns over discriminatory practices, especially against minorities, and concerns over the situation of terrorist suspects in custody. The French Government carried out a series of discriminatory acts to limit the social and professional freedoms of the Muslims residing in France. Serious cases of violations of human rights occurred in the United Kingdom. The erosion of human rights in the United Kingdom under counter-terrorism legislation and the extension of the maximum period of detention without charge was a matter of serious concern. Canada's human rights record revealed a series of systematic abuses and violations, including social exclusion policies, police brutality, racial discrimination against aboriginal people and harassment of religious minorities. The United States had a very poor record of human rights both at home and abroad. The failure of the Government to stop the use of torture and other forms of degrading treatment was indicative of its unwillingness to comply with international human rights norms and standards.

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BADRIDDIN OBIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that in resolution 60/251, establishing the creation of the Human Rights Council, members had expressed the wish that future debates would take place under the principle of dialogue and non-selectivity. Uzbekistan was thus quite surprised by the statements of the Netherlands and Ireland and did not see the logic behind them in the absence of any human rights violations in Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan legal reforms had taken place which ensured civil and political liberties and a sound civil society. Uzbekistan underscored that in the Netherlands and Ireland, there were many cases of xenophobia and violations of the rights of migrants.

MALIK OZDEN, of Europe-Third World Centre, in a joint statement with Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples; World Federation of Trade Unions; and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, drew the attention of the Council to small farmers in Turkey where trade unions of small farmers had been established. This had been ruled as unconstitutional by the Turkish judicial system. The organizations had been outlawed and peasants were treated as criminals. Turkish authorities were failing to comply with international obligations and the Centre called on the Council to remedy this situation.

XAVIER CORNUT, of International Humanist and Ethical Union, in a joint statement with Association for World Education; et Centre for Enquiry, said that Darfur required particular attention from the Council. Heavily armed Sudanese forces attacked a village in Darfur in August 2008, killing 64 persons, mainly women and children. This attack represented a flagrant violation of the Darfur Peace Agreement. International Humanist and Ethical Union was moved by the words of the new High Commissioner on the prevention of genocide. The situation in Darfur would get worse and future generations would be haunted by it, like they were haunted by Rwanda. The reputation of the Human Rights Council depended on how it managed the crisis in Darfur.

Continuation of the Interactive Debate with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Sudan

MURIEL BERSET (Switzerland) said Switzerland was concerned about arbitrary detention, restrictions on freedom of speech and the presence of child soldiers, among other issues in Sudan. It was the civilian population which suffered. There were also frequent attacks against humanitarian actors. It was important to put an end to all attacks against civilians. The recent report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan referred to positive steps, such as legal reforms. To encourage these positive signs, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur should be renewed. Switzerland supported the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur and would like to know what she saw as major challenges under the human rights perspective for the upcoming elections in 2009.

BASHAR ABU TALEB (Jordan) welcomed the positive developments concerning the human rights situation in Sudan, all the while acknowledging the many challenges that still remained. The implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the promulgation of the Elections Act, and the establishment of the national Human Rights Commission were a few examples of the work of the Sudanese Government. Jordan noted that further positive developments, such as deployment of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur, had taken place on the ground in Sudan, which helped in consolidating the human rights situation. Jordan believed that a transparent dialogue and cooperation with the concerned countries that willingly cooperated with the human rights mechanisms was a positive approach and it would be beneficial to build on the cooperative attitude adopted by the Government of Sudan.

ABDULWAHAB ABDULSALAM ATTAR (Saudi Arabia) thanked the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan for her report. The Sudanese Government was attaching importance to the question of human rights and this could be seen in the unprecedented collaboration of Sudan with the Council. Sudan had asked for a fact-finding mission to take place and had requested the deployment of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur (UNAMID). This was clear proof by Sudan that it was willing to collaborate with the international community. The international community had to give support to the UNAMID in order for it to be able to conduct its mission. The best means for achieving peace and development was through a peaceful solution and dialogue. Saudi Arabia welcomed the Sudanese Government's efforts to protect and promote human rights.

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ABDULLA ABDULLATIF ABDULLA (Bahrain) welcomed the positive developments in Sudan following the signature of the Abuja agreement. Peace and development needed political support. Bahrain supported the efforts of the Sudanese Government in its undertakings to ensure that all Sudanese could enjoy freedom and human rights.

ALI CHERIF (Tunisia) thanked the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan for her statement and the contents of the report. Tunisia stressed the need for further efforts to strengthen the path to peace. It encouraged and thanked the Government of Sudan for its engagement on the promotion and protection of human rights and the continued peace process on Darfur. The violence against civilians confirmed the need to step up civilian protection and Tunisia called on the international community to deliver on its obligations and to strengthen the efforts to date, in cooperation with regional organizations.

GUY O'BRIEN (Australia) noted the serious ongoing problems in Sudan as mentioned in the Special Rapporteur's report, including the ongoing impunity. Her call to address this issue was highlighted. Australia also noted the fact that the Special Rapporteur had not had access to all parts of the country; Sudan was called to ensure her access to all areas. Attacks on peacekeepers and humanitarian workers were unacceptable. All parties were called to work towards a peaceful and endurable solution. It was crucial that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the north and south be fully implemented.

CISSY HELEN TALIWAKU (Uganda) said that the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur could not carry out its mandate without the technical assistance of the international community. The commander of the force lamented "We are here to keep the peace but there is no peace to keep". That statement was an expression of a commander of a force that was in a state of hopelessness. Uganda said that more efforts were needed to address the security, political as well as economic concerns of the people in Darfur, especially those living in camps for internally displaced persons.

ABDULLA FALAH ABDULLA AL-DOSARI (Qatar) said that Qatar had examined the report on the human rights situation in Sudan and had followed closely developments on the ground, especially since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had been signed. Qatar noted the steps taken by the Government of Sudan to implement the peace agreements. Qatar appreciated the cooperation of the Government of Sudan with the international community, particularly on the deployment of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur, which should help in curbing the violence. Sudan continued to carry out every effort to contain the humanitarian crisis and continue on the path to peace. Those efforts deserved the full support of the international community. The Government of Sudan had also made tangible progress in the protection of the civilian population and the protection and promotion of human rights, under very difficult conditions, which had to be recognised and acknowledged. The international community had to fulfil its commitments in offering its support to Sudan and remembering that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur had to be terminated once the work had been accomplished.

JOHAN ARIFF ABDUL RAZAK (Malaysia) said that Malaysia was encouraged to note that the Government of Sudan had extended cooperation to the United Nations mechanisms, in particular the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur. Some of the progress achieved by Sudan in the area of the protection and promotion of human rights was welcomed. The Special Rapporteur in her report had stated that some initial steps had been taken by the Government of Sudan to implement the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Darfur. Malaysia acknowledged the manifold challenges faced by Sudan. Relevant United Nations bodies and agencies were called to provide funds to assist Sudan to improve the human rights situation in the country. Given the already significant presence of the United Nations on the ground in Sudan, what was the view of the Special Rapporteur concerning the consolidation of those existing activities?

ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran) noted with interest that the Sudanese Government had increased its cooperation with the United Nations. Iran encouraged Sudan to further facilitate humanitarian assistance to affected populations. Iran welcomed the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur to continue supporting the implementation of the peace agreement.

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SIMIA AHMADI, of International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), in a joint statement with World Organization against Torture, expressed its concern for the situation in Sudan, where violence and violations of human rights continued. Human rights defenders and civil society activists continued to be targeted. Courts set up under the terrorism law violated national and international standards. Darfur remained a region with massive violations of human rights. To achieve peace, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had to be fully implemented, justice restored and human rights respected. Sudan needed to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and ensure accountability for the crimes committed in Darfur.

JULIE DE RIVERO, of Human Rights Watch, said that Human Rights Watch remained gravely concerned over the situation of human rights in Sudan and strongly urged the Council to maintain the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. As the Special Rapporteur had noted in her report, many challenges remained in the country. One of the most important challenges to human rights protection in Sudan continued to be the lack of justice and accountability for serious crimes. Civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers had repeatedly come under attack by armed actors. However, no charges had yet been brought in any domestic court in relation to a single major atrocity in Darfur. Meanwhile, the still-nascent Southern Sudan police and justice system had little reach into the provinces and lacked staff and resources. The Council should not consider any further downgrading of its attention to Sudan.

LUKAS MACHON, of the International Commission of Jurists, said there were new outbursts of violence against women, children, humanitarian aid workers and others in Sudan. To work towards the respect of basic humanitarian law principles the International Commission of Jurists called on the Council to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. It asked how the Special Rapporteur could support the substantive legislative reform that was taking place in Sudan. The Commission also asked the Rapporteur to explain how she cooperated with the Expert Group on Sudan. Finally, it wanted to know more about the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820.

CLARA PALLANCH, of Amnesty International, said that the human rights situation in Sudan in general and Darfur in particular remained of a great concern. Violations of civil and political rights continued and violations of the right to a fair trial were endemic. Individuals were arbitrarily arrested by the Government forces and held incommunicado for a long period of time in illegal detention centres, where torture had been reported. Newspapers suffered from excessive censorship. The situation in Darfur was characterised by systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all the parties to the conflict. Attacks on the civilian population by the Government forces and the militias continued.

The Human Rights Council must renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur who should continue to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Darfur Group of Experts by the Government of Sudan. Amnesty International wanted to hear more from the Special Rapporteur about the measures taken by the Government of Sudan to bring to justice those who had committed crimes in Darfur and the measures it was taking to ensure freedom of the press.

BINETA DIOP, of Femmes Africa Solidarite, said that they valued the findings of the Special Rapporteur, it showed the need for partnership between all stakeholders and the ratification of all remaining human rights international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The efforts to consolidate peace in Darfur should include a gender perspective. The women were demanding peace, security and justice.

Concluding Remarks by the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Sudan

SIMA SAMAR, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Sudan, said in her concluding remarks that with regard to the Special Court for events in Darfur that was established in 2005 and then recently they tried to re-establish it again, unfortunately the Court failed to bring the perpetrators to justice. There were a few cases which were tried in normal courts for criminal acts. The Government of Sudan had to commit themselves politically and investigate all the allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. The

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United Nations and the international community should continue dialogue with Sudan. The Government of Sudan had to take stronger action to stop the culture of impunity, in all kinds of crimes, sexual, gender-based violence or other crimes. In order to support the situation of human rights, the international community and the United Nations should support the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Force in Darfur (UNAMID) to be able to fulfill their mandate to provide protection to civilians on the ground in Darfur and especially to protect humanitarian aid workers and to facilitate humanitarian access to the vulnerable groups in Darfur. There was no contradiction between the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and the human rights officers who were on the ground and belonged to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It was very important to keep the mandate in order to give voice to the civilians on the ground. This did not mean that Sima Samar had to be the mandate holder, but the mandate should remain. Any Government, not just Sudan, if they did not have anything to hide, they should not really stop the mandate, which did not harm the situation in the country. It was every human being's responsibility to protect the dignity of all human beings.

Ms. Samar said she believed that the situation of human rights on the ground in Darfur would show improvement of the situation with the implementation of the recommendations of the Group of Experts. The international community and the United Nations had to work with Sudan in order to implement the recommendations of the Group of Experts. She concluded by saying that the human rights situation in Sudan was critical, especially in Darfur. This should not be denied because denial would not help to promote human rights. She called on the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference Member States to help the Sudanese Government to overcome the culture of impunity. The United Nations and the international community should continue to provide technical assistance and support. The international community and the United Nations should also continue the dialogue with the Sudanese Government and should support it technically and financially to promote the situation of human rights on the ground and provide protection to civilians who were in need.

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COUNCIL HEARS FROM EXPERTS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, SUMMARY EXECUTIONS AND INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES AND LAWYERS

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this afternoon heard presentations of the reports of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council concluded its general debate with Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, after she updated the Council on the work of her Office for the last time before she concludes her four-year term at the end of June.

Walter Kalin, Representative of the Secretary General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, presenting his reports, cited many causes that resulted in people being forced from their homes and countries, such as conflicts, post-conflict situations, the lack of durable solutions for resettling displaced people and those displaced by natural disasters. In past months, he had chosen to focus on people displaced by natural disasters. The disasters in Myanmar and China reminded everyone of the vulnerabilities of populations with regards to natural disasters. Despite the growing attention of internally displaced people by natural disasters, people could not forget that people mainly fled their homes due to armed conflict. He spoke on his reports on the situation in the Central African Republic, Sri Lanka and Azerbaijan.

Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said that his report focused on the role of national commissions of inquiry as a response to allegations of extrajudicial executions. Such inquiries were far too often a facade designed to protect impunity. On his visits to various prisons around the world, he said that the experience had been often shocking. Detainees, sometimes not even charged, were kept in conditions dogs would not be kept in. The Council should act urgently and appoint a Special Rapporteur on the human rights of detainees. He also spoke about his reports on the Philippines, Brazil, the Central African republic, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, presenting his report, said that a state of emergency remained the main source of the violation of the right to a fair trial. Access to justice provided the respect of other rights. States had an obligation to guarantee access to justice. Economic barriers had an enormous impact on the access to justice. The impossibility to pay for legal council was affecting many people. Extreme poverty was a problem and constituted a major obstacle to access of justice. Turning to international

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justice, Mr. Despouy noted the launching of the International Criminal Court. He spoke about the situation in Sudan, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Speaking as concerned countries after the presentation of the reports were Azerbaijan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The rest of the concerned countries will address the Council on Tuesday, 3 June.

During the general debate on the High Commissioner's update at the beginning of the meeting, delegations expressed deep appreciation and utmost respect for the leadership and vision which the High Commissioner had displayed in the last four years. For the Universal Periodic Review to be a credible mechanism leading to actual improvements in human rights, effective follow-up measures were imperative. It was hoped that the constructive and cooperative spirit in which the Universal Periodic Review had been conducted would continue. The establishment of the Office's policy on country engagement and the steady increase in the number of field offices had left a strong impact on the protection and promotion of human rights for years to come. Also, the independence of the High Commissioner's Office was a prerequisite for the quality and impartiality of its work.

Speaking at the beginning of the meeting, during the interactive dialogue on the High-Commissioner's update, were the delegations of the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Philippines, Nigeria, Bangladesh, South Africa, the Netherlands, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Algeria, Chile, Tunisia, Ireland, Morocco, Norway, Argentina, Uzbekistan, Thailand, the Maldives, New Zealand, Ecuador and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

Also speaking were representatives of International Service for Human Rights, speaking on behalf of several NGOs¹, Juridical Commission for Auto-Development of First Andean Peoples (CAPAJ); Indian Council of South America; North-South XXI, in a joint statement with Arab Lawyers Union; General Arab Women Federation; and Union of Arab Jurists.

The Council is scheduled to meet again at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 3 when it is scheduled to resume its interactive dialogue on today's presented reports on the human rights of internally displaced persons, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the independence of judges and lawyers.

Reports of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons

The Council has before it the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights of internally displaced persons, Walter Kalin (A/HRC/8/6 and Add.1-4). [Not available in English]

A first addendum contains the Representative's findings on his mission to the Central African Republic in 2007. [Not available in English]

The Representative's report on his mission to Azerbaijan in 2007 is contained in a second addendum, which notes that the Special Envoy's main objective is to study the situation of internally displaced persons in Azerbaijan, including their rights to have access to education, health services, a livelihood and adequate housing, and to engage in dialogue with the Government to discuss past achievements, pending measures and future plans, not least concerning the eventual return of the displaced. The Government's recent efforts to provide adequate living conditions to displaced persons in need are welcomed. Given the magnitude of the displacement problem in Azerbaijan, the Representative is impressed with the results already achieved. He is satisfied that the Government takes its responsibilities under international law to fulfil the political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights of internally displaced persons very seriously.

A third addendum contains the findings of the Representative's mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2008. [Not available in English]

The report of the Representative's mission to Sri Lanka in December 2007, is contained in a fourth addendum which notes that the Representative's main objective was to engage in dialogue with the Government with a view to

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improving the protection and ensuring the full enjoyment of the human rights of the estimated 577,000 persons displaced in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, his assessment identifies key obstacles and conditions necessary to enable internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka to find durable solutions. While this mission focused on those displaced by armed conflict and acts of violence, the Representative recalls those displaced by the devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004. In conclusion, the Representative notes that Sri Lanka's displacement crisis is a challenge because of its size and the range of circumstances in which internally displaced persons live, their immediate needs, and the challenges they face in finding durable solutions.

Presentation by the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons

WALTER KALIN, Representative of the Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced People, reported on his activities since March 2007. Ten years ago the Commission on Human Rights had defined principles to guide authorities in dealing with internally displaced peoples during international humanitarian relief efforts. He cited many causes that resulted in people being forced from their homes and countries, such as conflicts, post-conflict situations, the lack of durable solutions for resettling displaced people and those displaced by natural disasters. In past months, he had chosen to focus on people displaced by natural disasters. The disasters in Myanmar and China reminded everyone of the vulnerabilities of populations with regards to natural disasters. In recent months, floods, earthquakes and storms had displaced hundreds of thousands of victims. The experts of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change had suggested that these phenomena were expected to be more frequent in the future. In the past 20 years it was estimated that more than 200 million people had been affected by natural disasters. The most vulnerable were the ones who suffered the most and the impact of disasters were exacerbated by poverty. Attention tended to focus on providing life saving aid of a humanitarian nature. Little attention was paid to the rights of the victim. The Representative said he had developed with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters and an accompanying manual. While climate change was not displacing people, its manifestation was causing people to flee their homes.

Mr. Kalin stated that despite the growing attention of internally displaced people by natural disasters, people could not forget that people mainly fled their homes due to armed conflict. More than 26 million people had fled from their countries due to conflicts and violence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the eastern regions continued to face complex and important protection and humanitarian crisis. New political developments could open new prospects of stability and possible returns for the displaced. A number of challenges still remained before they could see truly durable solutions to the plight of thousands of displaced persons.

In the Central African Republic, recent reports had shown positive initiatives were being taken to end the violence in the north which was the principal cause of displacement of populations in this country. He urged development actors to assist the Government. The root causes of the crisis related to a large extent to poverty and the marginalization of these populations which seemed not to benefit from an equal distribution of resources.

Mr. Kalin said in December 2007 visited Sri Lanka. He noted the efforts of the authorities to provide assistance to the displaced persons, and bore in mind that fighting continued in some regions. A number of challenges remained for these people in particular.

In Azerbaijan, which he visited in April 2007, Mr. Kalin said that the country was still facing serious situations of displacement, but positive steps had been taken by the authorities in bringing assistance to the internally displaced people. He called on the Government to pursue its efforts and to pay particular attention to the plight of the internally displaced persons living in urban settings and the difficulties of displaced persons to gain access to livelihoods in general.

Reports of Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions

The Council has before it the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston (A/HRC/8/3 and Add.1-4), which details the principal activities of the Special Rapporteur in 2007 and the first three months of 2008. It also examines in depth three issues of particular importance: the role of national

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commissions of inquiry in impunity for extrajudicial executions; the right to seek pardon or commutation of a death sentence; and prisoners running prisons. Since he last reported to the Council, the Special Rapporteur has undertaken visits to the Philippines, Brazil and the Central African Republic. In his report, the Special Rapporteur notes that the duty arising under international human rights law to respect and protect life imposes an obligation upon Governments to hold an independent inquiry into deaths where an extrajudicial execution may have taken place. Also, the State's duty to protect the lives of prisoners is clear. The Special Rapporteur proposes that the Council should appoint a Special Rapporteur on the rights of detainees.

A corrigendum to the report lists States which have so far failed to respond affirmatively to requests for a visit. They are Algeria, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Guinea, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Kenya, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Togo, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam and Yemen.

A first addendum contains a comprehensive account of communications sent to Governments up to 15 March 2008, along with replies received up to the end of April 2008. It also contains responses received to communications that were sent in earlier years.

A second addendum contains the Special Rapporteur's findings on his 2007 mission to the Philippines, where, since 2001, the number of politically motivated killings has been high and the death toll has mounted steadily. These killings have eliminated civil society leaders, including human rights defenders, trade unionists, and land reform advocates, as well as many others on the left of the political spectrum. Of particular concern is the fact that those killed appear to have been carefully selected and intentionally targeted. The aim has been to intimidate a much larger number of civil society actors, many of whom have, as a result, been placed on notice that the same fate awaits them if they continue their activism. One of the consequences is that the democratic rights that the people of the Philippines fought so hard to assert are under serious threat.

A third addendum report tracks the implementation of recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur following visits to Sri Lanka in 2005 and Nigeria in 2006. The addendum notes that the recommendations made in the Special Rapporteur's report on Sri Lanka have not been implemented. Recommendations directed to the Government have been all but completely been disregarded, and in most areas there has been significant backward movement. The same is true of recommendations directed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (*LTTE*). It is imperative that the Human Rights Council addresses this crisis. With respect to the recommendations made to Nigeria in January 2006, very little progress has been made. Nigeria has enacted some reforms in partial fulfilment of the Special Rapporteur's recommendations. For the majority of the recommendations made, Nigeria has failed to make any progress at all. On some issues, the situation has deteriorated.

A preliminary note of the Special Rapporteur's 2007 mission to Brazil, which is contained in a fourth addendum, notes that many of the types of extrajudicial killings that the Special Rapporteur investigated in 2007 have continued in 2008. One issue on which he had focused was killings by police during large-scale policing operations in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. Cities in Brazil face enormous challenges in keeping their residents safe from the violence of gangs involved in drug trafficking, arms trafficking and other organized crime. A key reason for the ineffectiveness of the police in protecting citizens from these gangs is that they all too often engage in excessive and counterproductive violence while on duty, and participate in what amounts to organized crime when off duty. The police in Brazil clearly operate at significant risk to their lives in many situations. The number of police killed is totally unacceptable and all appropriate lawful measures need to be adopted to prevent such deaths.

A preliminary note of the Special Rapporteur's mission to the Central African Republic is contained in a fifth addendum. [Currently not available]

A preliminary note of the Special Rapporteur's mission to Afghanistan is contained in a sixth addendum. [Currently not available]

Presentation by Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions

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PHILIP ALSTON, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said that extended analysis in the report focused on the role of national commissions of inquiry as a response to allegations of extrajudicial executions. Empirical study of experience over the past 26 years showed such inquiries were far too often a facade designed to protect impunity. The conclusion was not that they should be shunned in the future but that certain minimum standards must always be met, that international assistance should be provided where appropriate, and that the critical gaze of the human rights community must not be averted simply because an inquiry had been established.

Mr. Alston said his visits to various prisons around the world and the experience had been often shocking indictment of the inhumanity of the systems which many States had put into place. Detainees, who had often not been convicted, sometimes not even charged, were kept in conditions dogs would not be kept in. While many existing Special Procedures mandates - torture, executions, violence against women, health, etc. - touched upon aspects of the problem, they could not do justice to it. The Council should act urgently to appoint a Special Rapporteur on the rights of detainees.

Concerning his visit to the Philippines, Mr. Alston said the report has been thoroughly scrutinized at the national level and invoked by many at the international level. Figures produced by one non-governmental organization, Karapatan, documented a two-thirds drop in the number of extrajudicial killings since the visit. Not a single soldier had yet been convicted and punished for the any of these killings. Despite the improvement, killings continued. Current efforts to reform the criminal justice system would be judged in part on whether the military was subjected to the rule of law. The report also focused on the killing of over 500 persons in the past decade by the "Davao Death Squad". Most of the victims were suspected of petty crimes, and some were just street kids seen as undesirables.

On his mission to Brazil, Mr. Alston said police accounted for 18 per cent of the killings in the state of Rio in 2007. Rio faced huge problems of drugs, gang violence and general insecurity. Effective policing was chronically needed. Rio's police killed 25 per cent more people in 2007 than in 2006; almost all of these were categorized as "acts of resistance," a category which gave the police carte blanche. In other words, Rio's citizens were less secure and innocent bystanders had been injured and killed in police 'confrontations'. A strategy based on state-sanctioned extrajudicial killings had failed miserably.

With regard to his trip to the Central African Republic, Mr. Alston said recent developments were encouraging. Four weeks ago a ceasefire agreement was signed between the Government and the APRD . The most urgent challenge for the Government was to extend and institutionalize its efforts to respect human rights and to eliminate impunity.

Concerning his trip to Afghanistan, Mr. Alston said despite the armed conflict, large numbers of avoidable killings of civilians had been tolerated. For the situation to improve police killings must cease, widespread impunity within the legal system for killing must be rejected, the killing of women and girls must end, and the international military forces must ensure real accountability for their actions. International forces reportedly killed as many as 200 civilians, often joint operations with Afghan security forces. The information provided by the international forces enabled neither the average Afghan nor the Council to ascertain how many incidents had been 'flagged,' what investigations had been undertaken, or whether any individuals had been punished.

On Nigeria, Mr. Alston said the Government had enacted some reforms in response to the 2006 report. The Government has failed to make sufficient progress or progress at all on a number of other recommendations. Killings by the police remained rampant and impunity reigned supreme.

With regards to Sri Lanka, extrajudicial executions had increased dramatically since his visit at the end of 2005. Given the absence of effective human rights monitoring, reliable statistics were impossible to find. The Government and the LTTE had both engaged in the targeted killing of individuals suspected of collaborating with the other party. Both sides had engaged in shelling that had killed a substantial number of civilians in circumstances that sometimes suggested a failure to respect rules on proportionality and precautions in attack. The Ceasefire Agreement had been terminated, and its monitoring mechanism abolished. The National Human Rights Commission had been

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stripped of its independence. The Government's commission of inquiry had failed to provide accountability for extrajudicial executions. Journalists and human rights defenders faced intimidation or death when they tried to promote accountability. The Government had steadfastly and actively opposed any initiative to establish an international human rights monitoring mission. The international community, including the Council had done little in response.

Reports of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

The Council has before it the report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Leandro Despouy (A/HRC/8/4 and Add.1-2). [Not available in English]

A first addendum reflects specific situations alleged to be affecting the independence of the judiciary or violating the right to a fair trial in 62 countries. Further, it presents any replies received from the Government of the country concerned in response to specific allegations together with the Special Rapporteur's comments and observations.

A second addendum contains the Special Rapporteur's findings on his mission to the Republic of the Congo. [Not available in English]

Presentation by the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

LEANDRO DESPOUY, Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, presenting his report, said that, on the right to a fair trial during a state of emergency, a seminar had taken place in Geneva on this topic last year. Some 15 international experts had met with a view to turning ideas into a single statement to establish international standards in this regard. A state of emergency remained the main source of the violation of the right to a fair trial. On the access of justice, this was a central theme of high importance. It required the attention of Special Procedures. Access to justice provided the respect of other rights. The right to a legal council was also an important right. States had an obligation to guarantee access to justice.

Turning to the barriers to the access to justice, Mr. Despouy noted that economic barriers had an enormous impact on the access to justice. Lack of budget was impeding this right in several countries, as trials had an enormous price. The impossibility to pay for legal council was affecting many people. Extreme poverty was a problem and it constituted a major obstacle to access to justice. Further, many countries made it difficult for someone to be represented by solidarity associations. Economic factors led to social exclusion. Those living in such a situation found themselves in a situation where their rights were not respected.

Cultural barriers including language difficulties constituted another barrier to the enjoyment of these rights. The report also covered the physical barriers encountered, such as the long distances that one had to cover in order to reach a court. The report also looked at special categories of people whose rights were impacted, such as women, indigenous people, migrants and victims of racial discrimination. The special situation of minors was also looked at; they needed special assistance, said Mr. Despouy.

Turning to international justice, Mr. Despouy noted the launching of the International Criminal Court. He was concerned by the lack of cooperation by Sudan. On Iraq, he expressed concern over the High Criminal Court and its use of the death penalty and said that it violated international standards of human rights. The fact that a presumed last terrorist involved in the bombings that had killed Sergio Viera de Mello had been executed was condemned as he could have helped to shed more light on the incident.

Mr. Despouy said that he had conducted visits to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He had gone to Kinshasa and several other regions and had interviewed several parties. The country was undergoing transition but the number of judges and courts in the country was clearly insufficient. It was frequent for people to have no access to justice. There was a lack of resources available. Also, human rights violations were often being committed by the police forces. With regards to the Maldives, he expressed concern with the detention conditions. A good point was that charges against opposition leaders had been lifted. He also looked forward to visiting the country.

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Statements by Concerned Countries

HABIB MIKAYILLI (Azerbaijan), speaking at a concerned country, welcomed the report of Walter Kalin, the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced people. Azerbaijan paid tribute to the efforts of Dr. Kalin and his predecessor in raising awareness of the issue. Azerbaijan shared the Representative's opinion on the need to promote the Guiding Principles and to translate them into the national policies of concerned States. Azerbaijan was satisfied with Dr. Kalin's discussions with relevant international humanitarian actors, including United Nations agencies as well as regional organizations and other stakeholders. It welcomed the inclusive approach in examining the vulnerable segments displaced as a result of man-made disasters and natural disasters.

Azerbaijan took seriously Dr. Kalin's recommendations found in the report on Azerbaijan based on his mission in April 2007. It appreciated the constructive and opened ended discussions he had with all relevant stakeholders. Azerbaijan accepted its primary responsibility in tackling internally displaced people related problems stemming from continuing foreign occupation. The efforts by the Government of Azerbaijan aimed at alleviating the suffering of refugees and internally displaced people were considered as one of the best examples by the United Nations. Azerbaijan had pledged several years ago that all tent camps were be liquidated by the end of 2007 and that internally displaced persons would be moved to new settlements, a few that were close to were some displaced persons had originally lived. After Dr. Kalin's visit, Azerbaijan had adopted Additions to the State Programme on the Improvement of Living Conditions of IDPs and Refugees and their Employment. This document envisaged additional settlements and multiple-story buildings in urban areas, which conformed to some of Dr. Kalin's recommendations.

Azerbaijan stated that it was fully aware of the problems regarding unemployment of internally displaced people living in new settlements and did its best to address these issues through regional economic development proposals. It reaffirmed its commitment to efforts to improve the living conditions of its citizens who had become internally displaced people.

SEBASTIEN MUTOMB MUJING (Democratic Republic of the Congo), speaking as a concerned country, said that the Democratic Republic of the Congo had paid close attention to the recommendations made by the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons. The war was a major challenge facing the Government. The Government was responsible for providing protection to displaced persons residing on their territory, however, waiting for help from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the scale of the phenomenon made it difficult for the Government to make decisions. The country was faced with post-conflict issues which created more challenges in adequately tackling the issue. An invitation was extended to Walter Kalin to identify the scale of the issue. The Government would like to pay attribute to all the non-governmental organizations which had contributed efforts. At the Goma Peace conference the Government's hope was to establish solutions for peace and security in the region. Their focus was peace building in the eastern part of country through the use of dialogue, to seek an end to insecurity in that region and end population distribution.

The Special Rapporteur visited the country from 15 to 21 April 2008. The Government recently established legitimate institutions and a constitution that guaranteed fundamental principles of human rights and freedoms for their citizens. The country's history was dominated by authoritative regimes and conflict, and as such the Government recognized the permanent need for the role of justice in ensuring order and law. A draft law was adopted in the national assembly recently. The statue of Rome was considered by the national assembly as well.

Combating impunity and human rights was a priority for the Government; a bill criminalizing torture was submitted to the Council. The Government launched a campaign promoting awareness and providing information about violence against women. The efforts mentioned were all clear demonstrations of the commitment to build a system based on the rule of law through a justice system.

General Debate

COUNCIL HEARS FROM EXPERTS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, SUMMARY EXECUTIONS
AND INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES AND LAWYERS

LEE SUNG-JOO (Republic of Korea) expressed deep appreciation and utmost respect for the leadership and vision which the High Commissioner had displayed in the last four years. A great deal had been accomplished. This had been a revolutionary period for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations system as a whole. OHCHR had made considerable progress under her leadership. The Universal Periodic Review was the key determinant in whether the Human Rights Council represented an improvement over the former Commission. For the Universal Periodic Review to be a credible mechanism leading to actual improvements in human rights, effective follow-up measures were imperative. The participation of all relevant stakeholders in this process was strongly encouraged. While the Republic of Korea believed reaching consensus in the work of the Council was desirable, they also shared the High Commissioner's concerns over the negative aspects that could arise in the course of the pursuit of consensus.

The Republic of Korea had also repeatedly expressed its strong support for a broader field presence of OHCHR. This would enhance the Office's capacity in terms of enhancing human rights protection and promotion. The situation throughout the world called for additional field presence. The planned regional office for Central Asia was welcomed. On the relation between OHCHR and the Human Rights Council, it was believed that the independence and the integrity of the Office as a part of the United Nations Secretariat had to be respected. The efforts to enhance equitable geographical representation in the composition of the Office were welcomed, but the current situation was still a source of concern.

RAJIVA WIJESINHA (Sri Lanka) expressed Sri Lanka's sympathies to the people of China and Myanmar. Assistance provided by Sri Lanka was prompted by the fact that this was the duty of governments, as mentioned by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Sri Lanka wished the High Commissioner well for her future and thanked her Office and various other mechanisms which worked in association with the Office for the advice and assistance they provided. The establishment of the Universal Periodic Review demonstrated the international commitment to a comprehensive approach. Support for balance in reporting to ensure less restricted perspective of the world at large was expressed.

Sri Lanka was particularly perturbed about the suggestion that recent attacks made against Roma settlements represented a policy in Italy, which may have arisen from careless drafting. Sri Lanka had benefited from Italy encouraging migration, and welcoming workers from Sri Lanka in a non-racist approach that they wished was replicated elsewhere. Sri Lanka expressed its gratitude to the two Special Procedures that visited Sri Lanka during the last year. They had presented helpful reports. The spirit of engagement should never be abandoned.

KARIM MOHD YUSOF (Malaysia) thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her commitment and dedication and for her statement. The contribution of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was crucial to the work of the Universal Periodic Review's Working Group during the two meetings in April and May. Malaysia looked forward to a further strengthened and streamlined interrelationship between the Human Rights Council and OHCHR based on their institutional foundations, believing that it was essential for a clear and cohesive approach towards human rights promotion and protection world wide. One critical element in this regard was the Human Rights Council's oversight of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Strategic Framework and Malaysia looked forward to the circulation of this document. Malaysia appreciated the continued emphasis by the High Commissioner for Human Rights for a unified approach to the interdependence of all human rights. The right of development, Malaysia stated, could not be overemphasized, as economic development was an essential prerequisite to the enjoyment of all human rights. Finally, Malaysia stated that there were numerous challenges that required constant vigilance and active response, such as the defamation of religions, and incitement to racial religious hatred. Malaysia agreed with the High Commissioner for Human Rights that a better understanding of the permissible limitations to freedom of expression must be developed.

ERLINDA F. BASILIO (Philippines) thanked the High Commissioner for her outstanding tenure. She had worked very hard in the past four years. Her leadership had come at a critical time of reform of the United Nations human rights system, with the establishment of the Council. Only when States were working closely together in concerted partnership could human rights promotion be truly effective. As one of the first countries to undergo the Universal Periodic Review, the Philippines shared the High Commissioner's positive assessment about the impact and value

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of the new mechanism. The Philippines hoped that the constructive and cooperative spirit in which the Universal Periodic Review had been conducted would continue. The High Commissioner's concerns on the situation of migrants and women were shared. These remained key areas of interest for the Philippines. The convening of the Council's first thematic Special Session was welcomed. Poverty remained one of the greatest challenges to the full realization of human rights. Countries hit by large-scale natural disasters needed special assistance, and the international community had to take into account their urgent and special needs in this regard.

MARTIN IHOEGHIAN UHOMOIBHI (Nigeria) commended the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her dedication and for her Office which continued to provide strong support for the work of human rights. Nigeria shared the optimism on and significance of the Universal Periodic Review. The effectiveness of the review mechanism would depend largely on the commitment of States to advance the process. There was great confidence in the Special Procedures mechanism as an invaluable tool in advancing common objective to promote and defend human rights. The review, rationalization and improvement of mandates had been conducted with satisfaction. The Council should continue to study all options available on the table with a view to establish new mandates necessary to fill identified gaps. Flexibility, open-mindedness and dynamism should be guiding principles in the collective effort in this direction, to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh) thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her statement and views and expressed gratitude for her efforts and work. Bangladesh acknowledged the work done by the High Commissioner in bringing her Office and the Human Rights Council closer together. Bangladesh welcomed the suggestion of the High Commissioner to demarcate the legal contours between the freedom of expression and hate speech, particularity in relation to religion. It was moved by the support which the High Commissioner had shown for the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Bangladesh echoed the confidence of the High Commissioner in the Universal Periodic Review mechanism as it had the potential to change the culture in dealing with human rights issues. Bangladesh commended the High Commissioner for voicing the position that it was the right of victims of natural disasters to expect humanitarian assistance. Bangladesh stated that there were two omissions in the statement by the High Commissioner for Human Rights when it came to human rights: poverty and the negative impacts of climate change.

GLAUDINE J. MTSALI (South Africa) said that the Council's first thematic Special Session in the context of the global food crisis had ensured that the human rights dimension of this problem remained at the core of the Council. South Africa was pleased to note that greater prominence was being accorded to economic, social and cultural rights in the Council. One of the main achievements of the Council this year was the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. South Africa had been one of the first States to be reviewed. In general during the review, some countries had focused on economic, social and cultural rights, while others had focused primarily on political and civil rights. South Africa recalled that the Vienna Declaration stated that all human rights were universal, indivisible and interdependent and the international community was called to treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner. South Africa had also condemned the violent attacks in their country on people from other countries. They were resolved to bring the full weight of the law on those who had perpetrated these criminal acts. South Africa could not allow a few individuals to reverse and undermine their historical achievements.

BOUDEWIJN J. VAN EENENNAAM (Netherlands) expressed gratitude to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for all that had been achieved during her term. The results achieved were highly appreciated during sometimes difficult circumstances. The establishment of the Office's policy on country engagement and the steady increase in the number of field offices had left a strong impact on the protection and promotion of human rights for years to come. The independence of the High Commissioner's Office was a prerequisite for the quality and impartiality of its work. The Netherlands rejected the suggestion that had been made by other delegations that the High Commissioner's Office should be accountable to the Council or follow its instructions. The discussion should take place in New York to avoid breach of the authority of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the General Assembly.

MARCIA MARIA ADORNO C. RAMOS (Brazil) thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her presentation to the Council and for her work and efforts during her tenure as well as for her journey to Brazil last

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December. Brazil agreed with the view of the High Commissioner that the Universal Periodic Review and the treaty bodies should work together to strengthen the United Nations human rights system. Brazil committed itself to the activities regarding the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. Brazil commended the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the support and focus on the national protection systems. It welcomed the priority that the High Commissioner had shown to the fight against hunger and poverty and to a human rights approach to poverty reduction strategies. Brazil would host in June the Regional Conference for the preparation of the Durbin Review Conference and it thanked the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the assistance in developing the Conference. The Human Rights Council was also reminded that Brazil would host the third annual World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in November.

PETER GOODERHAM (United Kingdom) said that the High Commissioner had presided over her Office that had expanded both in size and in the quality of its output. She had earned the respect of all for her tireless pursuit to see ordinary people better able to exercise their human rights. Her energy, dynamism and personal standing were a loss to the United Nations and human rights community as a whole. Careful consideration would be given to her proposal for the Council to increase its focus on gender-based discrimination. The United Kingdom believed freedom of expression to be a vital component of any society that wished to promote and protect human rights. It was at the heart of the international human rights framework and a key building block of democracy. On Somalia, the United Kingdom as President of the Security Council had called for a resolution on Somalia which called for greater coordination of international efforts. It was important that the Council heard from a range of different sources about situations on the ground. The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the High Commissioner were a valuable source of information.

PROSPER VOKOUMA (Burkina Faso) congratulated the High Commissioner for her efforts and achievements during her term of office. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was created 15 years ago to help efforts in work on human rights. Burkina Faso was pleased with the achievements in the period considered, and those related to the expansion of the Office's presence in the field, specifically in Dakar. Resources should be allocated to ensure effectiveness in the area. With the creation of the Universal Periodic Review, the High Commissioner owed it to OHCHR to continue support to the States that had expressed needs for resources. The work of the Universal Periodic Review and the African mechanism for evaluation should continue as major efforts to protect and promote human rights.

DINESH BHATTARAI (Nepal) said on May 28, Nepal was declared a federal democratic republic, which brought to an end the 240 year old monarchy. Nepal reminded the Human Rights Council that the peace process begun in 2006 had demonstrated Nepali leaders' rare inclination, courage and commitment towards negotiation, tolerance towards dissenting voices and respect for minorities' views. This had resulted in the culture in the country to resolve all problems through talks and dialogue and to consult with people whenever needed. The Constituent Assembly election was a major milestone in the peace process. The Assembly was an exemplary mix of eminent personalities who had long fought for human rights. Nepal was set on a firm course towards peace, democracy and development to create a better environment and infrastructure on the ground for the respect of human rights and their promotion and protection at all times. It believed in the indivisibility of all rights, civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

IDRISS JAZAIRY (Algeria) expressed deep appreciation to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her work for the United Nations human rights machinery. Algeria hoped that the geographic distribution of staff inside the Office would soon be redressed with regard to the African representation. The High Commissioner's view on thematic special sessions which were bringing out the interdependence and complementarities between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights was shared. The Office's continuous support to the Durban Preparatory Committee was welcomed. Algeria hoped that the review would provide an opportunity to assess implementation gaps and devise the required set of actions to forcefully and collectively combat emerging new forms of racial discrimination. Algeria requested clarification about the creation of an inquiry procedure through an Optional Protocol to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on early warning about situations degenerating into genocide. With regard to the planned regional office for North Africa, Algeria believed that the expansion of field presence should involve prior consultation of the Council.

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CARLOS PORTALES (Chile) expressed thanks to the High Commissioner for her work and dedication. The Universal Periodic Review was extremely important and the scrutiny of standards and rights was universally important. Chile applauded the process, especially the High Commissioner's efforts to include special bodies and non-governmental organizations. This did not replace the Council's need to act in emergency situations. The efforts of the Council were needed for ongoing violations of human rights. Chile attached importance to the Council's fight against discrimination, which would be further discussed at the Durban Review conference. The work had been conducted in a constructive way with a view to eliminating of all forms of discrimination, especially against women.

Preventing violence against women and improving the alarming situation of migrants in regions of the world went hand in hand with prejudices, and the international community should play a role in improving this situation. Chile commended the High Commissioner for her courage and for the independence of her Office.

ALI CHERIF (Tunisia) aligned itself with the statements of Egypt on behalf of the African Group and Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The High Commissioner for Human Rights was thanked for her statement and her efforts during her tenure. The Universal Periodic Review was an essential part of human rights development and a milestone of the Human Rights Council in recognizing the dignity of all. Tunisia believed that the Universal Periodic Review, under which it had been among the first countries to be examined, was a very important tool to evaluate the situation of human rights and to help States detect lacunae in their protection systems.

MICHEAL TIERNEY (Ireland) congratulated the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the way she had been working to protect human rights. Ireland was the third biggest donor country to the Office. Their experience with the conflict in their country had pushed them to engage in the Office's work. In situations where there was a deep rift between people, the principles of human rights gave guarantees of justice and equality for all. Ireland was convinced that the expert technical work done by the Office's staff had to be carried out without interference. The independence of the Office was important for it to conduct its mission successfully. It was action and not the fruit of action which counted. The High Commissioner had earned their respect.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) expressed thanks to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her guidance, efforts and integrity throughout her term, especially for her help with the work of the Universal Periodic Review. The Universal Periodic Review could be more effective in a number of areas already identified. Morocco agreed with the High Commissioner on the necessity to permissible limitations to the freedom of expression to determine the limits of freedom of expression and expressions of hate, defamation and intolerance. The world food crisis reminded all of the demand of basic rights of health and food, and placing these rights on par with political and civil rights was imperative. Morocco wished the High Commissioner the best for the future and hoped the efforts she had established continued to reflect international action, going beyond fear and meeting needs.

HILDE SKORPEN (Norway) called the High Commissioner for Human Rights a devoted and courageous advocate for human rights for all. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had been strengthened, the funding had been increased, and the promotion of human rights had become a core objective of the whole United Nations system. Norway noted attempts to weaken the independence and integrity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Norway reconfirmed its obligation to respect, promote and protect the human rights of all individuals and stated the importance to ensure that the Human Rights Council became a success, making a difference to people all over the world. It asked for the advice of the High Commissioner in what Member States could do to better assist the role of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

ALBERTO J. DUMONT (Argentina) highlighted and expressed Argentina's appreciation for the work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights during the last four years. The work of her Office had been very important for the protection of human rights. The support given on the ground by the regional offices, the support given to the Council and the particular attention given to the fight against impunity, transitional justice, and discrimination in all its forms were some of the remarkable achievements of the Office. As the High Commissioner had said it was important to strengthen the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. Argentina believed that the work of her successor should continue under the same premises.

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BADRIDDIN OBIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that Uzbekistan supported the Secretary-General in declaring a day of human rights and had sought to coordinate such a day within their country. It was important to have a fast approach to human rights issues and it was agreed that regional representation was needed. All States should agree through consensus with respect to representative offices in South East Asia. It was important to note that the two centres being discussed should have consensus from all Member States for effective functionality in the region. Uzbekistan agreed with proposals to discuss and consider the strategic activities and issues of opening regional offices.

LADA PHUMAS (Thailand) thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her efforts and dedication. Thailand was pleased with the outcome of the seventh Special Session of the Council on the global food crisis. Thailand placed great importance on the issue of food security and strengthening international cooperation to resolve the current global food crisis. It believed that food security and human security were interrelated. Thailand had made significant progress in achieving the development goals under the Millennium Development Goals directly linked to human security. It paid particular attention to MDG-8 on the promotion of a global partnership for development.

It recognized the challenges of the threat of natural disasters and expressed its condolences to the Governments of the People's Republic of China and Myanmar. Thailand was particularly pleased to see the cooperation between the Government of Myanmar and the international community in assisting the victims of Cyclone Nargis, especially the ASEAN-UN Partnership.

ABDUL GHAFUOR MOHAMED (Maldives) said that the Maldives shared the High Commissioner's view that the Universal Periodic Review process was vitally important for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The Maldives had been heartened by the constructive and cooperative spirit in which the first group of reviews had been undertaken. This certainly bode well for the future. The success of the Universal Periodic Review would be judged by the degree to which recommendations were taken onboard and acted upon on the ground. Freedom of expression, when properly protected and sensibly enjoyed was an extremely powerful means of reducing hate and misunderstanding. Yet, when used irresponsibly it had the potential to polarize and create fear. The High Commissioner was thanked for her tireless efforts to strengthen the enjoyment of human rights.

DON MACKAY (New Zealand) expressed New Zealand's appreciation for the High Commissioner for Human Rights' leadership and commitment for defending fundamental human rights, especially when Governments had taken too long to act and respond. The frank and objective manner in which the High Commissioner highlighted human rights violations demonstrated what could be achieved at a high level. New Zealand also appreciated the momentum on existing issues and Ms. Arbour's use of the High Commissioner's independent mandate to push and highlight reform on a number of other important issues. The High Commissioner's guidance of field officers in a number of States, such as Somalia and Kenya, was admirable. New Zealand further expressed appreciation for the High Commissioner's support on human rights in the negotiation of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

JUAN HOLGUIN (Ecuador) expressed gratitude for the report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and congratulated her for her efforts on strengthening the Human Rights Council and the rights for all human beings. Ecuador was concerned about the High Commissioner's statement on attitudes of countries towards migration of people and reminded the Human Rights Council that it was not long ago that many migrated to Ecuador and were welcomed in the spirit of brotherhood.

LIBERE BARARUNYERETSE, of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, paid tribute to the High Commissioner for the ongoing commitment she had shown throughout her term for the promotion and protection of human rights in the world. She had shown a remarkable professionalism. Her actions were based on an ethical system that was a fundamental belief in humanity and in the dignity of every person. One had to recognize that during her term of office, she had provided vital and necessary support during creation and throughout the first years of Council. The cooperation with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie was also welcomed. The High Commissioner was further thanked for all her actions and for her availability to the Francophone world.

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ISABELLE SCHERER, of International Service for Human Rights, speaking on behalf of several NGOs¹, commended the High Commissioner for her strong personal commitment to strengthening the international human rights system and to the fundamental principle of universality and interdependence of human rights, which was demonstrated through her outstanding leadership as a human rights advocate. Her vision and dedication had increased momentum towards achieving the common goal of the full implementation of human rights standards.

The High Commissioner's leadership and the profile of human rights as one of the fundamental pillars of the United Nations and of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as a crucial part of the United Nations Secretariat had been raised. Ms. Arbour's work to consolidate her Office's protection and technical cooperation mandates was of essence. The establishment of national protection systems through country engagement strategies was significant to the Office.

JORGE TAFUR, of Juridical Commission for Auto-Development of First Andean Peoples (CAPAJ), said that the right to food was essential. The economic and social situation of populations was becoming extremely precarious. The true discovery of America was happening now with the recognition of the human rights of the Pueblos Originarios Aninos. The Juridical Commission was working zealously to document and denounce non-compliance with human rights standards in the field. It came to the Human Rights Council to recognize the work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in attending the claims and to listen and grapple with the problems of the communities.

RONALD BARNES, of the Indian Council of South America, commended the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the work she had achieved during her term. The Indian Council agreed that the Universal Periodic Review would be enhanced by the addition of an Independent Expert and a more structured follow-up mechanism. The existing draft of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights would deliberately exclude the consideration in the communications to hear violation of indigenous group rights. This was evidence of politization and selectivity in the area of standard setting activity. It would inevitably create an historic imbalance for the economic, social and cultural rights of ingenuous people. It was unacceptable. The exclusion of indigenous people and colonized people simply gave the colonizers the free reign.

CURTIS DOEBBLER, of North-South XXI, in a joint statement with Arab Lawyers Union; General Arab Women Federation; and Union of Arab Jurists, expressed appreciation for the efforts of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to lead efforts in the field of human rights. The human rights situation in Iraq had not been given the focus within the Council that it deserved. The situation in Iraq was one of the most serious in the world today and should be addressed. North South XXI further expressed appreciation for Ms. Arbour's efforts in establishing reviews and mechanisms to protect and promote human rights. The Durban Review conference was of specific importance as it addressed the issue of combating all forms of racial discrimination.

¹Joint statement on behalf of: International Service for Human Rights; Action Canada for Population and Development; Amnesty International; Asian Legal Resource Centre; Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA); Association for the Prevention of Torture; Baha'i International Community; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies; Canadian HIV/Aids Legal Network; Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions; Colombian Commission of Jurists; Conectas Direitos Humanos; Franciscans International; Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers); Human Rights Watch; International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Rights and Democracy); International Commission of Jurists; International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH); Latin American Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM); Lutheran World Federation; and Pax Romana.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL OPENS TENTH REGULAR SESSION

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this morning opened its tenth session. After hearing opening statements from the President of the Council and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Council began its High-Level Segment, hearing from a range of high-level dignitaries from Colombia, Maldives, Brazil, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sri Lanka on the promotion and protection of human rights.

Speaking to the Council, Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said poverty, impunity, armed conflict and authoritarian rule continued to undermine the well-being and human rights of countless victims. The imperatives of fairly managing migration and combating terrorism within the parameters of human rights and the rule of law were also of pressing concern. All these long-entrenched factors challenged the international community's capacity to cope in an environment of compassion fatigue and shrinking resources. At the same time, new threats, such as climate change, scarcity of food, and the global economic crisis exposed the most vulnerable to additional risk. It was the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms and eradicate inequality and discrimination. Narrow, parochial interests and reflexive partisanship must be cast aside in the interest of a greater common good - a failure to do so might reverberate negatively on the full spectrum of human rights work and mechanisms for years to come.

Martin I. Uhumoibi, President of the Human Rights Council, said in the past few months, the Council had been able to accomplish some tasks of great significance. Among others, considerable progress had been made on the review, rationalisation and improvement of the mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the former Commission on Human Rights. However, some additional work needed to be done, and a few mandates still needed to be further discussed to determine their status and future. In the Council's endeavour to defend and entrench respect for human rights in the international system, dialogue and cooperation remained indispensable - tolerance and respect for different viewpoints would not dilute the intensity of the engagement and commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights.

In the High-Level Segment, Francisco Santos Calderon, Vice President of Colombia, said the Government of Colombia reiterated its conviction of and commitment to the Universal Periodic Review, as this mechanism made it possible to review good practices in the field of human rights, as well as being an opportunity to assess activities of the Government at every level in all fields of human rights. Furthermore, the Government of Colombia hoped that the result of the review made it possible to review the effective security system in Colombia to protect against all human rights violations. Colombia stood by all the treaty bodies and the Office of the High Commissioner to further

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the enjoyment of human rights in the country. The Government of Colombia extended its commitment to the Special Rapporteurs, and human rights defenders to visit the country, in keeping with its international commitments.

Mohamed Waheed, Vice President of Maldives, said the new Government of Maldives was single-mindedly focused on the rights-based path to an entrenched democracy - its challenge was to ensure that the fruits of democracy would be enjoyed for generations to come. An increasing threat to Maldives was climate change, which had significant negative implications for the full enjoyment of human rights in Maldives and for millions of people in vulnerable countries in other Small Island States as well as among already vulnerable population groups. The Council should send out a strong signal to the international community - global warming undermined human rights and any international response should be premised on fully promoting and protecting those rights.

Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi, Minister for Human Rights of Brazil, said the international community must avoid that the economic and financial crisis became an acute political crisis. The increasing of unemployment did not only lead to material shortages for the affected persons, but also to challenges emerging in the protection of civil and political rights. History had shown that intolerance and discrimination increased in times of crisis. Brazil, a country that had welcomed millions of immigrants that were today integrated in society, was particularly concerned about the situation of their migrants. Today, the world was facing a global crisis: the financial and economic crisis was not only a crisis of the developing countries. It affected all.

Abdelwahad Radi, Minister of Justice of Morocco, said the Kingdom of Morocco attached great importance to the protection and promotion of human rights. This was closely linked with a climate of peace and security around the world. Morocco had been taking stock of the efforts to promote these rights - the Kingdom was determined to enforce its commitment to human rights instruments. This year being the international year for training in human rights, Morocco had launched a national action plan for democracy and human rights. The aim was to coordinate all State actions and programmes to improve awareness and knowledge of human rights pursuant to the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action of 1993 for the promotion of human rights.

Sven Alkalaj, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, said the work in the Human Rights Council today was mostly devoted to secure a credible and effective United Nations human rights system. All established mechanisms of the Council helped to continue efforts to strengthen the system and to improve the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world. The principle of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms through strengthening democracy, multicultural dialogue and respect of national, cultural and religious diversities and suppression of all forms of discrimination and intolerance against members of any part of society were the highest priorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which aimed to establish a sustainable system.

Mahinda Samarsinghe, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights of Sri Lanka, said the most intractable problem Sri Lanka had to deal with was terrorism. The conflict which erupted from time to time caused much suffering to men, women and children of every ethnicity and religion and linguistic group which made up the Sri Lankan polity. Sri Lanka's government was conscious that efforts should have been made earlier to resolve what was a political conflict by political means. Sri Lanka was trying to forge a sustainable political solution acceptable to all Sri Lankans. This solution must not only guarantee social equity and fundamental freedoms but also empower every citizen through sharing power between the centre and the periphery, bringing government closer to the people.

The Human Rights Council will resume its High-Level Segment this afternoon at 3 p.m.

Opening Statements

MARTIN I. UHOMOIBHI, President of the Human Rights Council, said this session was unique in more than one respect. It was the first time the Council was holding its regular session in this beautifully renovated room, aptly called the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room. It was the third in the series of main sessions of the Council since its establishment in 2006. With the dedication of the first and second cycles of the Council to institutional building and test-running of new structures and processes, the third cycle was expected to consolidate on these gains to make possible the discussion of all human rights issues without discrimination. One of the more essential tasks during the third cycle was to ensure that the operationalisation of the mechanisms as provided for in

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the institution-building text and to ensure that discussions in the Council and progress on its work were conducted in an atmosphere of decorum and good order, with appropriate respect for different viewpoints and perspectives.

In the past few months, the Council had been able to accomplish some tasks of great significance, such as conducting the third and fourth sessions of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, meeting three times in the context of special sessions, twice on country situations and once on a thematic issue of great significance, and refining its working methods. Considerable progress had been made on the review, rationalisation and improvement of the mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the former Commission on Human Rights, setting the stage for a realistic evaluation of the additional efforts necessary for the fulfilment of the Council's mandate in the coming years. However, some additional work needed to be done, and a few mandates still needed to be further discussed to determine their status and future. One area of positive and outstanding success had been the Universal Periodic Review process. With the completion of the fourth Universal Periodic Review Working Group, the Council had reviewed 64 countries, almost a third of the entire membership of the United Nations, and there had been positive gains achieved in this regard.

The Council would be the first to recognise that human rights defenders around the world and the victims of human rights violations everywhere expected the Council to provide real, effective and prompt remedies to all incidents of human rights violations anywhere and everywhere. That being the case, States should raise the bar and set high targets, not least because the old ways of doing things would never measure up to the expectations of the international community. In its endeavour to defend and entrench respect for human rights in the international system, dialogue and cooperation remained indispensable - tolerance and respect for different viewpoints would not dilute the intensity of the engagement and commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights. Because mutual respect and dialogue promoted a sense of inclusiveness and shared ownership, these could also foster international cooperation, progress and development. These were important human rights goals that should be preserved.

NAVI PILLAY, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that poverty, impunity, armed conflict and authoritarian rule continued to undermine the well-being and human rights of countless victims. The imperatives of fairly managing migration and combating terrorism within the parameters of human rights and the rule of law were also of pressing concern. All these long-entrenched factors challenged the international community's capacity to cope in an environment of compassion fatigue and shrinking resources. At the same time, new threats, such as climate change, scarcity of food, and the global economic crisis exposed the most vulnerable to additional risk. These perils had been starkly illustrated in the course of thematic special sessions on the food emergencies, as well as on the financial collapse and economic downturn, that the Human Rights Council convoked. The latter debate, held last month, highlighted the critical vulnerabilities of the most marginalized members of our global society, those who were likely to bear the brunt of crises, particularly women and children, migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, minorities and persons with disabilities. They stood at the frontline of hardship and were most likely to go hungry, to be exposed to natural disasters, and to lose their jobs and access to social safety nets and services.

Ms. Pillay said that it was important to recognize that the roots of the current crises could only be addressed if the policies and strategies they put into place were participatory, took into account existing inequalities and discrimination, and provided for sound and viable accountability mechanisms. These were the tenets of a human rights-based approach. She urged all those concerned and in a position of responsibility to ensure that these elements informed and underpinned both international and national strategies and remedial action to alleviate the effects of the crises.

Ms. Pillay said that vulnerability was almost invariably related to discrimination and inequality. Combating discrimination and inequality remained a priority for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. She pointed out that this Human Rights Council session preceded a major event, and a crucial opportunity to address some of the most invidious forms of discrimination. She referred to the Review Conference on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance which would begin on April 20 in Geneva. It would evaluate the implementation of commitments governments made eight years ago in Durban to eradicate intolerance, racial hatred and discrimination. Ms. Pillay was aware that the legacy of the 2001 Durban Conference had been tainted by

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the anti-Semitic behaviour of some NGOs at the sidelines of that conference. And now the Review Conference had also been the target of a disparaging media and lobbying campaign on the part of those who feared a repetition of anti-Semitic outbursts. This was unwarranted. As Secretary-General of the Conference, she countered such distortions in order to set the record straight.

Ms. Pillay emphasized that it was the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms and eradicate inequality and discrimination. A persuasive outcome of the review conference and beyond hinged upon the genuine commitment of all States to seek consensus. Narrow, parochial interests and reflexive partisanship must be cast aside in the interest of a greater common good. She underscored that a failure to do so might reverberate negatively on the full spectrum of human rights work and mechanisms for years to come. They needed to prevent the acrimony of the past from encumbering the fight against intolerance which was both of urgent concern and in the best interest of everyone.

Ms. Pillay said that history taught the world that different perspectives, traditions and geopolitical considerations had not impeded progress on human rights. The inherent soundness and universal appeal of human rights standards had made them take root in many countries. They kept spreading, albeit not uniformly, and despite regrettable setbacks. Indeed, they should continue to pursue and build on the progressive affirmation of international human rights that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ushered in six decades ago.

High-Level Segment

FRANCISCO SANTOS CALDERON, Vice President of Colombia, thanked the Human Rights Council for the opportunity on 10 December 2008 for the Government of Colombia to undergo the Universal Periodic Review. The Government of Colombia reiterated its conviction of and commitment to the Universal Periodic Review, as this mechanism made it possible to review good practices in the field of human rights, as well as being an opportunity to assess activities of the Government at every level in all fields of human rights. Furthermore, the Government of Colombia hoped that the result of the review made it possible to review the effective security system in Colombia to protect against all human rights violations.

Recalling an incident that took place in December 2008, in one of the indigenous regions in Colombia, Mr. Calderon assured the Council that the State Prosecutor's Office was investigating the allegations of abuses against the indigenous population in those regions. Further, the Prosecutor's Office had been given all the support necessary on the part of the public authorities in the midst of this complex situation facing the country.

The Government of Colombia stood firm in its conviction against threats facing its democracy. Past and current cases of abductions in the country were a serious threat to security. Recently a total of 21 persons had been freed from the shackles of abduction. Mr. Calderon urged that the international community not forget the hundreds of persons still kept in captivity, and hoped that the international community would stand in alliance with Colombia to combat abductions in the country. In addition, the treaty of anti-personal mines remained a challenge. Mines had killed 146 persons and wounded 563 persons in the last few years. The Government of Colombia also condemned illegal armed groups in Colombia, which were behind the cocaine and trafficking movements in the country.

Further renewing its commitment, the Government of Colombia had taken part in the Durban Review Conference, in an effort to overcome racial discrimination, said Mr. Calderon. Colombia stood by all the treaty bodies and the Office of the High Commissioner to further the enjoyment of human rights in the country in this regard. The Government of Colombia extended its commitment to the Special Rapporteurs, and human rights defenders to visit the country, in keeping with its international commitments.

Mr. Calderon further underscored that abductions of trade union leaders had fallen sharply and consistently over the past six years. In the past, a total of 10 journalists had been murdered, and in the last year not one was murdered. The Government of Colombia recognized its short comings and worked to overcome them, and it was hoped that the review of Colombia would be made with these, among other points, in mind.

MOHAMED WAHEED, Vice President of Maldives, said the international community was to be thanked for compelling the former dictatorship of Maldives, in its last three years, to allow the existence of political parties,

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accept the legitimacy of the international Bill of Rights, ratify a liberal Constitution, and allow for the first multi-party presidential elections. It was, however, only during the last rally before the election in October 2008, when it was felt with certainty that democracy was truly attainable. For many it was unbelievable that change had finally come, after the announcement of the results. What sustained the opposition movement in its adversity and motivated its longstanding peaceful struggle for democracy was the belief of human rights as a fundamental entitlement for the people of Maldives, and a fatal poison for any dictatorial system.

The new Government of Maldives was thus single-mindedly focused on the rights-based path to an entrenched democracy - its challenge was to ensure that the fruits of democracy would be enjoyed for generations to come. This challenge was profound, and the new Government appealed to the international community to continue its support for this endeavour. Human rights needed to be mainstreamed into the system of governance and public consciousness. The judiciary needed to develop basic competencies after decades of abject neglect and absence of justice.

The new Government wished to support the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in promoting and protecting human rights in Maldives. The new Government hoped to be able to expand its cooperation by hosting a human rights workshop in the country and by receiving expert missions to assist with treaty reporting and training. An increasing threat to Maldives was climate change, which had significant negative implications for the full enjoyment of human rights in Maldives and for millions of people in vulnerable countries in other Small Island States as well as among already vulnerable population groups such as women, children, minorities, and the poor. The Council should send out a strong signal to the international community - global warming undermined human rights and any international response should be premised on fully promoting and protecting those rights.

PAULO DE TARSO VANNUCHI, Minister for Human Rights of Brazil, said that in 2008 Brazil commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was Brazil's greatest inspiration for its struggle against all forms of injustice and inequality. Although Brazil was aware of the enormous challenges ahead in making effective the 30 articles all over the country, it wanted to underline the important achievements of the last decades.

Two major events in the international context had marked the end of the commemoration of the Universal Declaration: First, the outcome of the election in the United States brought hope for positive change. For the first time, a man of African descent had become President of the United States. Second, indignation for the explosion of violence in Gaza, at the end of the year, had strengthened the conviction for the necessity to compromise and for the international community to foster negotiations that would lead Palestinians and Israelis definitely to peace.

The international community must avoid that the economical and financial crisis became an acute political crisis. The increasing of unemployment did not only lead to material shortages for the affected persons, but also to challenges emerging in the protection of civil and political rights. History had shown that intolerance and discrimination increased in times of crisis. Brazil, a country that had welcomed millions of immigrants that were today integrated in society, was particularly concerned about the situation of their migrants. Today, the world was facing a global crisis. The financial and economic crisis was not only a crisis of the developing countries. It affected all.

ABDELWAHAD RADI, Minister of Justice of Morocco, said that the Kingdom of Morocco attached great importance to the protection and promotion of human rights. This was closely linked to a climate of peace and security around the world. Morocco had been taking stock of the efforts to promote these rights. The Kingdom was determined to enforce its commitment to human rights instruments. In this vein, the Kingdom of Morocco had recently lifted its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and had ratified the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Further, all the recommendations as a result of the Universal Periodic Review had been accepted and were currently being implemented.

The Government of Morocco was in the process of harmonizing domestic legislation with international norms, underscored Mr. Radi. The age of criminality and legal age for persons to enter the labour market had been raised,

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as part of the national plan for children in the country. In the same spirit, women occupied the same priority in Government actions. With a new approach to furthering women's participation, a gender policy programme was being implemented to ensure the more active participation of women in political and civil life in the country. Morocco had also drafted a national programme to incorporate human rights principles in school curricula, and here pursuant to the General Assembly resolution, this year being the international year for training in human rights, Morocco had launched a national action plan for democracy and human rights. The aim was to coordinate all State actions and programmes to improve awareness and knowledge of human rights pursuant to the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action of 1993 for the promotion of human rights.

Additionally, on 6 November 2008, the King of Morocco had presented a new project which focused on the regionalisation of the country in the Sahara. This project intended to be part of a democratic and participatory approach on behalf of the Government. This project was designed to be a realistic and definitive solution to create an autonomous region in the Sahara. On another note, the recent and tragic events in Gaza were deeply felt by the Kingdom of Morocco, stressed Mr. Radi. Further Morocco was committed to seeing a rapid settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

SVEN ALKALAJ, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, said he hoped that in the course of the session the Council would continue to progressively engage in substantive discussions, interactive dialogues and negotiations in order to achieve the best solutions for all important issues scheduled for the session's deliberations. The work in the Human Rights Council today was mostly devoted to secure a credible and effective United Nations human rights system. All established mechanisms of the Council helped to continue efforts to strengthen the system and to improve the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world.

The Universal Periodic Review was one of the main mechanisms of the Council in relation to promoting the universality, interdependence, indivisibility and inter-relatedness of all human rights. It had become a good mechanism to which States demonstrated willingness to cooperate. The principle of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms through strengthening democracy, multicultural dialogue and respect of national, cultural and religious diversities and suppression of all forms of discrimination and intolerance against members of any part of society were the highest priorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which aimed to establish a sustainable system, particularly in the field of the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Bosnia and Herzegovina fully cooperated with the United Nations Special Procedures mechanisms in an open and constructive manner. In the context of strengthening the international human rights binding system, Bosnia and Herzegovina had taken further measures to ensure effective implementation of all human rights instruments to which it was a State Party, as well as the United Nations treaty body recommendations. The United Nations Human Rights Council, in general, had made significant progress in establishing a more efficient human rights system, as well as the other United Nations bodies. Bosnia and Herzegovina wished to make its contribution to overall United Nations achievements, submitting its candidacy for the United Nations Security Council non-permanent membership for the period 2010-2011.

MAHINDA SAMARASINGHE, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights of Sri Lanka, said that the most intractable problem Sri Lanka had to deal with was terrorism. The conflict which erupted from time to time caused much suffering to men, women and children of every ethnicity and religion and linguistic group which made up the Sri Lankan polity. Sri Lanka's government was conscious that efforts should have been made earlier to resolve what was a political conflict by political means. Despite many attempts by many governments to reach a negotiated consensus towards a durable peace, such negotiations were abandoned continuously by the forces of terrorism. It was only now that they were close to eradicating it.

Hostage taking in a conflict was a clear violation of international humanitarian law. How much more egregious was it when an unlawful belligerent group trapped thousands of people in a small tract of land and actively prevented their flight to safety by the use of arms and cold-blooded murder? Sri Lanka fervently appealed through the Human Rights Council to the world at large to apply pressure on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to permit these civilians to move to safety. Sri Lanka was in no doubt that the civilians, if allowed freedom of movement,

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would escape. Despite the conflict, the Government had not lost sight of its duty to protect and care for its people, the ordinary people who had suffered from the conflict.

Mr. Samarasinghe also presented the next phase of Sri Lanka's plans to win the peace after achieving the military objective of overcoming terrorism. Sri Lanka's national discourse had been dominated for decades by an ethnic issue, which required a political solution. It could not be imposed by force of arms and certainly not be gained by acts of terrorism. Therefore, Sri Lanka was trying to forge a sustainable political solution acceptable to all Sri Lankans. This solution must not only guarantee social equity and fundamental freedoms but also empower every citizen through sharing power between the centre and the periphery, bringing the government closer to the people.

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**SPECIAL PROCEDURES ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, SALE OF
CHILDREN AND TORTURE PRESENT REPORTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL**

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this afternoon heard presentation of reports from the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council concluded its interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights, the Chairperson of the Working Group on arbitrary detention and the Chairperson of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination.

Santiago Corcuera Cabezut, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, presenting his report, said that during the past year, the Working Group had completed a review of its methods of work. A general comment providing a construction of the definition of enforced disappearances had also been adopted. The general comment stressed that any act of enforced disappearance had the consequence of placing the person subjected thereto outside the protection of law.

Juan Miguel Petit, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, introducing his report, said that his report highlighted examples of national policies as well as good practices developed by international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society in assistance and rehabilitation programmes for children victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Positive examples included those from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Honduras, Spain and Turkey.

Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, presenting his report, said that his main report was devoted to exploring the influence of international norms relating to violence against **women** on the definition of torture, the extent to which the definition itself could embrace gender-sensitivity, and discussing the specific obligations upon States which followed from this approach. In this context, and in specific commemoration of International **Women's** Day, which took place two days ago, he drew the attention of the Council to the central yet debilitating role of stigma associated with victims of sexual violence, and the related challenges that **women** faced in terms of access to justice, reparations and rehabilitation.

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Speaking as concerned countries in response to the above reports were Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Indonesia and Paraguay.

Okechukwu Ibeanu, Special Rapporteur on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights, in concluding remarks, said that the right to information would not provide a full solution to the problem of dumping toxic waste, particularly in the receiving countries. Information should be used to educate and not to manipulate people. Information should be complete and not partial. Workers should not be put at risk.

Leila Zerrougui, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on arbitrary detention, in concluding remarks, said, with regard to the detention of migrants, the mandate of the Working Group concerned detention and not the status of the migrant. The Working Group urged governments to be reasonable in the treatment of migrants who were often in a sensitive situation, distressed or seeking asylum. In many countries, there were illegal practices that did not comply with national or international norms and there was a trend for an increasing resort to measures of detention. The Working Group hoped that in future it would receive greater cooperation.

Jose Luis Gomez del Prado, Chairman of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of impeding the right of peoples to self-determination, in concluding remarks, said on the matter of the Convention being outdated, it was still necessary to endorse it on an international level as it could have a positive impact on reducing the recruitment of international mercenaries. With regards to Paragraph 33, all information from witnesses was confidential. Regarding the term unconditional, it was included to draw attention to national authorities for them to deal with the situation accordingly.

Speaking in the interactive dialogue this afternoon on the reports on toxic and dangerous products, arbitrary detention and mercenaries were the Russian Federation, Mauritania, Belarus, the United States, Brazil, Bangladesh, Canada, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, Venezuela, Sudan, Honduras, Switzerland, the Republic of Korea, the African Union and Columbia.

Also speaking were representatives of the Norwegian Center for Human Rights, Federation of Cuban Women, World Organization against Torture, in a joint statement with International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), Human Rights Advocates, Friends World Committee for Consultation (QUAKER), Society for Threatened Peoples, Colombian Commission of Jurists, International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, Canadian HIV/Aids Legal Network, speaking on behalf of several NGOs¹, Interfaith International, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

When the Council reconvenes at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 11 March, it will continue to hear statements from concerned countries on the reports of enforced disappearances, sale of children and torture before starting its interactive dialogue on those topics.

Interactive Dialogue on Reports on Toxic or Dangerous Products, Arbitrary Detention and Mercenaries

ALEXEY GOLTYAEV (Russian Federation) said the Russian Federation believed the Working Group on arbitrary detention was one of the most important mechanisms in the Council's system of Special Procedures, as the subject they dealt with was an integral component of any democratic society. It also supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on toxic wastes and called on him to continue his good work.

With regard to the Working Group on mercenaries, it was extremely important to discuss the important issue of the role of the State as the only entity responsible for preserving its integrity in a conflict. The Russian Federation saw a trend to the privatization of military conflict, often taking place when a State avoided its role to uphold international human rights law and standards. The Russian Federation asked what contribution the Working Group could make to help implement the recommendations by the Secretary-General on the use of private military and security companies with a view to preserving international human rights and humanitarian law. States using these security companies must be held accountable for human rights violations committed by personnel of those companies.

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Moreover, the Russian Federation believed it was important to pay close attention to the threats imposed on the territorial integrity of States with regard to non-State actors operating in the country as security forces.

MOUNINA MINT ABDELLAH (Mauritania) said Mauritania took due note of the preliminary conclusions formulated by the Working Group on arbitrary detention, which had just returned from Mauritania. In authorizing the visit of the Working Group, Mauritania had sought above all to promote cooperation and transparency. The Government also reaffirmed its willingness to implement the Working Group's recommendations and stressed that that willingness was only restricted by the lack of human and material resources at the administration's disposal. Mauritania also welcomed any cooperation, including technical, from other countries.

ANDREI MOLCHAN (Belarus) said that Belarus highly valued the work with the Working Group on arbitrary detention and its visit to Belarus had been very important. High value was attached to cooperation with the Working Group. The latest information had been sent to the Working Group in December. A new law had entered into force ensuring the independence of judges. It was hoped that the Working Group would use that information in its next report.

KEVIN A. BAUMERT (United States) said that by addressing and promoting the Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries in the context of a report on private and military security companies, the Working Group on the use of mercenaries had failed to distinguish between private military security companies and mercenaries. The Working Group had failed to recognize that there was a long history of using contractors in support of military operations, and that there were legitimate reasons why modern military forces required contractor support not only for national military forces involved in defence, but also in peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations. The United States had undertaken numerous steps to strengthen the coordination, oversight and accountability of private security contractors working in Iraq on behalf of the Government of the United States. Procedures had been established to improve communications and cooperation among the United States Embassy in Baghdad, the Multi-National Forces in Iraq, and the Government of Iraq. In addition, the United States was working to enhance the existing legal framework to hold security contractor personnel accountable for crimes committed in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

MURILO VIEIRA KOMNISKI (Brazil) said that in the last 15 years, the Working Group on arbitrary detention had undertaken important country visits to expose the conditions of detainees. In its previous reports it had addressed issues such as counter-terrorism, which currently constituted an important challenge. That was also the case for the present report. Prison and detention centres for asylums-seekers and migrants were an important aspect to examine. Brazil was concerned by the international trends expressed in those reports, particularly with regard to the vulnerability of migrants and the situation of detainees. Brazil also requested that the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants explore the facets of irregular and illegal migration. Brazil reiterated its firm position on counter-terrorism, which had to be implemented under a framework that took into account human rights norms. Brazil believed that the recommendations presented in all three reports would improve public policies for all countries, not only those visited in the context of those reports.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh) said that on toxic waste, the transport and dumping of harmful substances endangered human rights. That practice was taking place too often without any safeguards. People were unknowingly exposed to dangers. They were injured, became sick or even died; it was threatening the right to life and the right to safe water and food. The Special Rapporteur's report had helped creating awareness but it had not changed the situation. Many developing countries were trading in toxic waste. Industrialized countries were exploiting that market, without insuring the safety of workers. There was an ethical and moral issue that needed to be addressed.

DANIEL ULMER (Canada) said Canada was deeply concerned by instances of arbitrary detention in countries around the globe and urged fellow Member States to cooperate with the Working Group on arbitrary detention in addressing the concerns raised by the Working Group in its appeals and opinions. The intimidation and detention of political opposition, journalists and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) without due process was a continuing concern. The Working Group was asked to comment on specific trends related to the arbitrary

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detention of political opposition, journalists and human rights NGOs. Canada was deeply concerned as well about the susceptibility of vulnerable groups to sexual abuse in detention, particularly women and juveniles. Canada also condemned the further abuse of authority that led to the exchange of sexual services for favourable treatment. The Working Group was asked what steps the international community could take to advocate for the importance of well organized penitentiary systems with well trained staff to mitigate against such abuses. Canada was also concerned about detainees who were subjected to sexual violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

JOSE GUEVARA (Mexico) expressed appreciation for the report on arbitrary detention and particularly the fact that it dealt with the deprivation of liberty for migrants and asylum-seekers. Both groups represented the most vulnerable groups in society. In response to the recommendation in the report, Mexico was in favour of organizing a seminar under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the subject of migrants and asylum-seekers who were deprived of their liberties. It was also appreciated that within the report, no migrants were described as illegal. A more correct terminology was "undocumented worker" or "migrant", but it should be noted that a person could not be considered or referred to as illegal.

ABDULLAH AL-ALSHEIKH (Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia was committed to full cooperation with the Working Group on arbitrary detention. In the framework of its fight against terrorism, Saudi Arabia had made sure that there were no contradictions between the counter-terrorism measures it was taking and the respect of human rights. Saudi Arabia was confident in the role of the Working Group and its aims. It was hoped that the Working Group would issue answers to the list of questions Saudi Arabia had sent to it.

HUSSAIN AL-ZUHAIVI (Iraq) pointed out that the Chairperson of the Working Group on mercenaries had already sent a letter dated 25 September 2007 citing a number of actions by the private security company Blackwater operating in Iraq. The letter listed the joint efforts by the Iraqi authorities and posed a series of questions to the Iraqi Government, which had set up a commission to provide replies to those questions. There had been some delays, but the responses should be forthcoming.

The Multi-National Force in Iraq was clearly aware of the work of private security companies in view of their respect for human rights. There was a draft Bill recently submitted to the Iraqi Assembly which would govern the work of private security companies in Iraq under the auspices of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. As to the Working Group on arbitrary detention, the situation of Tariq Aziz was recalled; he was no longer in the custody of the Multi-National Force Authorities.

DOMINIK FRELIH (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed its thanks to the Working Group on arbitrary detention and requested additional information on the implementation of two recommendations. The first was with regard to the detention of non-citizens. On that issue, the Council should organize a seminar to have an in-depth deliberation to seek effective alternatives to prevent migrants and asylum-seekers from violations of fundamental rights. What were some other "effective alternatives" that could be discussed during this seminar? In another question to Ms. Zerrougui, the European Union asked how she analysed the evolution of the use of "unlawful practices" by States and non-State actors and did she identify "good practices" or "good evolution" in that regard?

GABRIEL IGNACIO SALAZAR PINEDA (Venezuela) said, on the use of mercenaries, that Venezuela fully supported the work of the Working Group on that theme. Venezuela was considering becoming part of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. Information should be disseminated on the topic of the Working Group. Moreover, the Working Group should monitor the repercussion of actions by private companies with regard to the enjoyment of human rights and ensure the appropriate follow-up of their recommendations. Such companies should respect human rights. It was noted that the United States had not responded to the question of the Working Group on a specific case; that was not acceptable. The United States had also not responded to Venezuela's extradition request. That was also not acceptable. The United States had to meet its obligations towards the Working Group.

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OMER DAHAB FADOL MOHAMED (Sudan) noted that the report of the Working Group on arbitrary detention revealed the dangerous conditions of non-citizens in countries because of illegal migration or their seeking asylum, among other reasons. Sudan proposed that the Working Group also consider the adverse effects of cultural, linguistic or ethnical differences in the treatment of those detainees and the actions used by the authorities in the asylum countries and places of detention. Those places of detention must be called by their names and not by using misleading terminology. It was noted that Sudan had no political prisoners in the country today.

GRACIBEL BU FIGUEROA (Honduras) said that Honduras had taken due note of the report by the Working Group on arbitrary detention and thought the recommendations had been most useful. Honduras was pleased to announce that, through its legislative procedures, it had passed bill no. 133-2007 on the International Convention on the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. Since 15 December 2007, that Convention was now a part of national legislation.

MARTIN GEORGOS KELEMENIS (Switzerland) said that the Working Group on arbitrary detention had presented an excellent report. Clarification was asked on the subject of the use of military tribunals to judge civilians. The report said that such tribunals could judge civilians if there were objective and serious reasons. What was meant under objective and serious reasons? Also, the Working Group had mentioned concerns that detention during states of emergency could be indefinitely long. Could the Working Group give an order of magnitude for the length of detention generally admissible?

BYONG-JO KANG (Republic of Korea) noted that addressing a follow up letter to the Governments of the countries visited was one of the necessary follow-up measures with respect to the Working Group on arbitrary detention's country visits. The Republic of Korea joined the Working Group in appreciating some Governments' responses submitted in a comprehensive and detailed manner. What was the Working Group's own assessment on the follow-up letter measures, and the Working Group's future plan to develop a more effective follow-up procedure? The Working Group was also asked whether it had or would have a close consultation and exchanges of views with the Special Rapporteur on human rights of migrants or with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, given the Working Group's concerns involving human rights of immigrants and counter-terrorism measures.

KHADIJA RACHIDA MASRI (African Union) said that the threat of mercenaries had had harmful effects on Africa, since the beginning of its independence struggle until today. The creation of the Special Rapporteur mandate in January 1987 and the creation of the subsequent Working Group in July 2005 had proved the international support to combat the threat posed by mercenaries. The use of mercenaries was much more than a human rights issue but shook the foundations of political sovereignty. The African Union continued to see mercenaries a threat to national sovereignty, peace and security. Mercenaries could not be used as a means to overthrow democratically elected governments. At a time when the international community was concerned with terrorism, it must not forget the equally large threat of mercenaries.

ALVARO AYALA (Colombia) said that, concerning the questions in the report of the Working Group on mercenaries, the answers of the Government of Colombia had been sent earlier this year. Also, it was noted that no United Nations personnel were involved in human trafficking or the trafficking of illegal products.

KATHARINA ROSE, of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, speaking with regard to the Working Group on arbitrary detention's visit to Norway, called on the Working Group to encourage the Government of Norway to continue to monitor that practice of imposing restrictions and deprivation of liberty to ensure that it was carried out on a case-by-case basis. The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights recommended that the results of the investigation be taken into consideration or incorporated in the survey as recommended by the Working Group. The Centre also agreed with the Working Group's recommendations regarding the use of the INFOFLYT database, and supported the Working Group's proposal of an independent commission to resolve conflicts of competence between correctional services and health-care authorities.

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OLGA SALANUEVA, of the Federation of Cuban Women, wished to transmit a message on behalf of five Cubans unfairly imprisoned for 10 years in United States jails. Despite the three years that had passed since the Working Group on arbitrary detention had declared the imprisonment of those five Cubans illegal, they continued to suffer from solitary confinement. As the deadliest terrorists in the Western hemisphere, the United States continued to impose its will on innocent victims, as their children became teenagers and adults, far from their fathers' warmth. Even from prison, the five incarcerated persons would not stop their call on the human conscience to awaken and rebel against such impunity.

ALEXANDRA KOSSIN, of World Organization against Torture, in a joint statement with International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), welcomed the renewal of the mandate of the Working Group on arbitrary detention. The Working Group was working on a relevant topic in light of what was happening in the world today. States were persistently preventing freedom in the fight against terrorism, abusing states of emergency or using other derogations. To what extent did the Working Group plan to cooperate with other human rights mechanisms?

ELENA GIL, of Human Rights Advocates, said with regard to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic wastes, the enforcement of the human right to information was paramount in ensuring that everyone took a role in protecting against human rights violations stemming from toxic transfers. Because of inconsistent standards of what constituted an illegal hazardous transfer among States, Human Rights Advocates and Earth Justice saw the need to include illicit and legal toxic transfers in the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. Moreover, inconsistent domestic standards of what constituted a hazardous product actually encouraged a race to the bottom.

RACHEL BRETT, of Friends World Committee for Consultation - Quakers, said that the Committee welcomed the reports of the Working Group on arbitrary detention and on its missions to Norway and to Angola. The Committee appreciated the continued focus on the overuse of detention on asylum-seekers and others crossing borders and also to those particularly susceptible to sexual abuse in detention. It strongly endorsed the Working Group's reminder that juveniles should be separated from adult detainees and women detainees from men. In that context, the Friends World Committee drew attention to the Handbook on Women in Prisons, being published jointly by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva.

TENZIN KAYJA, of the Society of Threatened People, thanked the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants for bringing up the question of detention of non-citizens, in particular asylum-seekers. The illegal detention of asylum-seekers was disturbing, particularly when host countries were handing them over to another country. Nepal was such a country; handing over Tibetan refugees to China. The Working Group was urged to seek clarifications from both Nepal and China.

ISABELLE HEYER, of the Commission of Colombian Jurists, with regard to the Working Group on arbitrary detention, underscored the concerns in their report, including the situation of various vulnerable groups exposed to sexual violence, and arbitrary detentions in the context of efforts to counter terrorism. The Working Group had to remain vigilant in the face of such violations, which were on the rise. In Colombia the situation regarding arbitrary detention continued to be very serious. There was a continuation of such acts with impunity for those responsible. Many victims were killed by paramilitary groups and Government forces. It was important for the Working Group to check for itself into that serious situation and the Human Rights Council should urge Colombia to extend an open-ended invitation to the Working Group to visit the country.

SYED FAIZ NAQSHBANDI, of the International Organization of Islamic Students, said that Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir was one region where illegal and arbitrary detention were part of daily life. Most recent figures showed that more than 4,000 Kashmiris were languishing in jails without trial and in clear violation of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The pattern of impunity found legal justification in laws such as Section 45 and 97 of Criminal Procedure Code of Jammu and Kashmir Disturbed Areas Act. As such, the International Organization of Islamic Students strongly urged the Council to persuade India to accept a visit by the Working Group on arbitrary detention to ascertain the true situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

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SOHA ABDELATY, of Canadian HIV/Aids Legal Network, speaking on behalf of several NGOs¹, asked the Chairperson of the Working Group on arbitrary detention what was being done on the issue of people being imprisoned because of their HIV sero-positive status? That was a clear violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. People had been targeted for arrest and prosecution due to their presumed HIV status. That had happened lately in Egypt and people were still being detained for the sole reason that they were a threat to public health.

ABDESLEM LECHENE OMAR, of Interfaith International, said that today in many regions the practice of arbitrary detention and torture were still frequently reported. Interfaith International was concerned about the situation in Western Sahara, and in particular in the light of political prisoners languishing in Moroccan jails. The speaker noted the case of a human rights defender who had been in prison in Morocco for 10 years, and the ongoing hunger strike regarding his case. Another case of a person arrested after having taken part in a peaceful demonstration in Rabat was also raised. Interfaith International urged the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to publish its report on Western Sahara and called on the Moroccan Government to abide by the laws without impunity.

KIRSTY MCKAY, of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, urged States to inform and consult their citizens before decisions to accept toxic waste or to build weapons complexes or nuclear facilities were taken. Time and again, the precautionary principle had been compromised in favour of short-term profit or in the name of national security. Furthermore, whether in the research or development of weapons, the use of weapons, or in the aftermath of a conflict, a direct link between militarism and toxic pollution had been established. In addition, the League supported the decision of the United States judiciary, granting veterans the legal right to sue the United States Government for exposing them to DU in Iraq and the 170 million compensation package awarded by Italy to its veterans.

Concluding Remarks by Special Procedures on Toxic and Dangerous Products, Arbitrary Detention and Mercenaries

OKECHUKWU IBEANU, Special Rapporteur on the Adverse Effects of the Illicit Movement and Dumping of Toxic and Dangerous Products and Wastes on the Enjoyment of Human Rights, in his concluding remarks, said that the interventions of the delegations had underscored the negative impact on human rights of the use of dumping toxic waste. The right to information would not provide a full solution to the problem, particularly in the receiving countries. Information should be used to educate and not to manipulate people. Information should be complete and not partial. Workers should not be put at risk. On the distinction between illicit and licit waste dumping and the differences on its implication on human rights, there were no differences for human rights. The discussion was becoming intensely blurred on the impact of human rights. It was hoped that the review of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur would help to strengthen it.

LEILA ZERROUGUI, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in response to questions posed to her, said, with regard to the detention of migrants, the mandate of the Working Group concerned detention and not the status of the migrant. The Working Group urged Governments to be reasonable in the treatment of migrants who were often in a sensitive situation, distressed or seeking asylum. It was hoped that a forthcoming seminar would embrace all of these issues. Regarding alternative measures, there were many countries which had developed alternative measures allowing them to avoid using detention to the extent possible. In Canada, for example, detention was hardly used, and in Norway, very few people were held in detention, and, if so, for very brief periods. In many countries, there were illegal practices that did not comply with national or international norms and there was a trend for an increasing resort to measures of detention. Through visits and follow-up the Working Group had been able to achieve results. The Working Group hoped that in future it would receive greater cooperation. Regarding the individual cases, the Working Group was considering them and would reply in its individual opinions in due course.

JOSE GOMEZ DEL PRADO, President of the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Impeding the Exercise of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination, extended his congratulations to Honduras for ratifying the 1989 Convention on the Recruitment, Use and Training of Mercenaries. With regards to the question put forth

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by the delegation of Peru, the Working Group would like to pursue any measures that would provide incentive for the ratification of the abovementioned Convention, even if it needed to be done outside of the United Nations system.

With regards to the comments by Chile, the Working Group was aware of its mandate and intentionally adopted a broad interpretation. Chile did not have any regulations regarding the export of private security forces. On the matter of the Convention being outdated, it was still necessary to endorse it on an international level as it could have a positive impact on reducing the recruitment of international mercenaries. With regards to Paragraph 33, all information from witnesses was confidential. Regarding the term unconditional, it was included to draw attention to national authorities for them to deal with the situation accordingly. Given the lack of time, Mr. Gmez del Prado also stated that he would be in touch with the delegations of Russia and Pakistan to discuss their questions and concerns. Finally, he congratulated the United States for all of the recent measures it had adopted but regretted the lack of efforts it had made on the use of private security forces abroad.

Reports on Enforced Disappearances, Sale of Children, Torture

The Council has before it the report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/7/2 and Add.1-2), which reflects communications and cases examined by the Working Group during its sessions in 2007, during which it transmitted 629 new cases of enforced disappearances to the Governments of Algeria, Bahrain, Chad, China, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Libya, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Thailand and United Arab Emirates. Of the newly reported cases, 84 allegedly occurred in 2007. A summary of activities during the last year is presented in a table for each country, with a detailed text description of the areas of activity.

The first addendum contains the report of the Working Group's 2007 mission to Honduras, which sets out the historical and political context, the applicable domestic legal framework, and the steps taken by the Government to clarify cases of enforced disappearance and to apply the provisions of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It also looks at reports that alleged perpetrators of serious violations of human rights are at large, have not been investigated or convicted, and in some cases occupy public functions. Furthermore, it examines efforts made by the Government to search for missing persons and the right to full reparation, noting praiseworthy efforts in this area. However, it would be advisable to institute a State-run plan or programme for such search efforts, benefiting from the active involvement of civil society. Among other recommendations are the classification of enforced disappearance as a separate offence in the national Criminal Code; and that Honduras become a party to the new International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Addendum two sets out the report of the 2007 country visit to El Salvador, which looks at, inter alia, Government and non-governmental organization efforts to search for disappeared children. It emphasizes the lack of a comprehensive search plan or programme for searching for disappeared persons, including a comprehensive redress scheme. It concludes that the national legal framework might prove to be an impediment to transparency and access to information. The report also notes information received that human rights Ombudsmen and those investigating cases of enforced disappearance are subjected to threats, intimidation and harassment in the course of their work. Among recommendations are that El Salvador ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons of Enforced Disappearance; take effective steps to guarantee and enforce the rights to justice, truth, redress and rehabilitation; and create and implement an effective plan to search for disappeared persons, not limited to the search for missing children.

The Council has before it the report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Juan Miguel Petit (A/HRC/7/8 and Add.1-2), which recapitulates the different issues the Special Rapporteur has focused on since his nomination in 2002, presenting the achievements and accomplishments of the mandate, in particular focusing on assistance and rehabilitation programmes designed for children victims of trafficking and sexual commercial exploitation. It highlights examples of national policies and

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strategies and discusses positive examples of good practices developed by international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the civil society in assistance and rehabilitation programmes for children victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Among key recommendations are that, because of the very nature of the harm done to child victims of sexual exploitation, they are in need of special, separate programmes and facilities catering specifically to their needs; they should not be together with victims of domestic abuse and violence or with adults.

A first addendum contains, on a country-by-country basis, summaries of general and individual allegations and urgent appeals transmitted to Governments in 2007, as well as replies received. During the reporting period the Special Rapporteur transmitted 12 communications to the 11 countries: Cambodia, Chad, France, Guinea, Guatemala, India, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Paraguay and South Africa, for which only two responses were received (from France and India).

Addendum two is the report of the Special Rapporteur's 2007 country visit to Mexico, which analyses the legal frameworks at the federal level and in the States visited. There follows a discussion of the various programmes and policies adopted by government and civil society actors, which the Special Rapporteur considers useful for combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children; measures taken to implement a general national strategy for children; and the authorities responsible for punishing crimes. Among recommendations are that a stronger and more creative approach must be taken to combat child sexual exploitation; legislation must be harmonized, coordination between law enforcement authorities must be improved, and additional resources must be allocated to combat this phenomenon, bearing in mind that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is not an isolated incident and that efforts must be made in conjunction with the fight against impunity and organized crime.

The Council has before it the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Manfred Nowak (A/HRC/7/3 and Add.1-6), which summarizes the activities of the Special Rapporteur undertaken between August and December 2007, including updates on country visits, future visits and pending requests for invitations, and highlights of key presentations and meetings. Chapter II focuses on the protection of women from torture. Chapter III sets out conclusions and recommendations thereon, including the introduction of an additional element into the definition of torture - "powerlessness" - to underline that situations constituting de facto deprivation of liberty may occur in different "private" settings, such as battered wives, victims of trafficking, as well as women prisoners who have been abused. Moreover, rape and other serious acts of sexual violence by officials in contexts of detention or control not only amount to torture or ill-treatment, but also constitute a particular egregious form of it, due to the stigmatization they carry. Forced abortions or sterilizations carried out by State officials in accordance with coercive family planning laws or policies may also amount to torture.

Addendum one contains, on a country-by-country basis, summaries of reliable and credible allegations of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment that were brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur, and were transmitted to the Governments concerned. From 16 December 2006 to 14 December 2007, the Special Rapporteur sent 79 letters of allegations of torture to 51 Governments and 187 urgent appeals to 59 Governments on behalf of persons who might be at risk of torture or other forms of ill-treatment. Government responses received up to 31 December 2007 have been included.

Addendum two contains information supplied by Governments, as well as non-governmental organizations, relating to the follow-up measures to the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur made following country visits.

Addendum three is the report of the Special Rapporteur's visit to Paraguay from 22 to 29 November 2006, which contains a study of the legal and factual aspects of the situation of torture and ill-treatment, and conditions of detention in the country. It concludes that the situation of torture and ill-treatment in prisons and military detention facilities has improved in recent years. Regarding prisons, the excessive use of isolation cells to punish detainees was observed, and the Special Rapporteur received credible allegations of beatings by prison guards. In relation to the military, a few allegations of hazing and beatings of conscripts were received. However, the situation of detainees in police custody is of serious concern. Torture is still widely practised during the first days of police

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custody, in order to obtain confessions, and the main reason for the continuing practice of torture and other ill-treatment in Paraguay is impunity. A final section sets out conclusions and recommendations.

Addendum four is the report of the Special Rapporteur's 2007 mission to Nigeria, which concludes that torture and ill-treatment is widespread in police custody, and particularly systemic in the Criminal Investigation Departments there. Circumstances surrounding the deaths of two persons personally interviewed by the Special Rapporteur - examples of serious torture, disappearance and extrajudicial killing - illustrate and confirm the inability of the current system to effectively investigate allegations, protect victims of serious human rights violations, and bring law enforcement officials in Nigeria to account. Moreover, the conditions of detention in police cells visited were appalling, and corporal punishment, such as caning, and including Sharia penal code punishments (i.e. amputation, flogging and stoning to death), remain lawful. Recommendations include that the absolute prohibition of torture should be considered for incorporation into the Constitution; the highest authorities should declare unambiguously that torture and ill-treatment by public officials will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted; and an effective and independent complaints system for torture and abuse should be established.

Addendum five sets out the report of the mandate holder's official visit to Togo in 2007, in which he finds that, despite considerable improvements since 2005, in most police commissariats and gendarmerie posts visited, there is evidence of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials, which was inflicted mostly during interrogation for the purpose of obtaining a confession. There were also allegations and evidence of several cases of beatings by prison guards and other prisoners as a means of punishment. The Special Rapporteur is very concerned that minors and children are at greater risk of corporal punishment and ill-treatment than adults in situations where they are deprived of their liberty. Among his recommendations, the Government should criminalize torture and fight impunity, improve existing safeguards against torture and ensure that they are implemented, introduce and strengthen restorative justice and non-custodial measures of punishment, and continue efforts to improve the detention conditions.

Addendum six, which contains the report of the Special Rapporteur's mission to Sri Lanka in 2007, notes the important steps taken by the Government to prevent and combat torture and to hold perpetrators accountable, including the system of Judicial Medical Officers. Nevertheless, indications are that torture is still widely practised in Sri Lanka. The absence of an ex officio obligation on law enforcement officials or judges to investigate such cases further aggravates the situation for victims. The Special Rapporteur was particularly shocked by the brutality of some of the torture measures applied to persons suspected of being Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam members. Among others, the Government should ensure that all detainees are given access to legal counsel within 24 hours of arrest; develop proper mechanisms for the protection of torture victims and witnesses; and establish an effective complaints system in prisons for torture and abuse leading to criminal investigations.

A seventh addendum contains the report of the Special Rapporteur's mission to Indonesia. [Not currently available.]

Presentation of Reports on Enforced Disappearances, Sale of Children, Torture

SANTIAGO CORCUERA CABEZUT, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, presenting its report, said that the Working Group had been established in 1980 by the Human Rights Commission and had been the United Nations' first thematic mechanism. Since its creation, it had transmitted 51,763 individual cases to Governments all over the world. During the past year, two prompt intervention communications were sent to two governments regarding the reported harassment of and threats to human rights defenders. The Working Group had also completed a review of its methods of work. A general comment providing a construction of the definition of enforced disappearances had also been adopted. The general comment stressed that any act of enforced disappearance had the consequence of placing the person subjected thereto outside the protection of law. The Working Group maintained strong collaboration with the Special Procedures of the Council, including cooperation during visits. The Working Group had been initially created to address the legacy of disappearances arising from authoritarian ruling in Latin America. However disappearances were currently a global problem. In the context of internal armed conflict, opposition forces had reportedly perpetrated acts that were analogous to disappearances.

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Mr. Cabezut said that, although the Working Group's mandate limited its actions to violations carried out by States or non-State actors, acting with the consent of the State, the Working Group condemned the practise of acts analogous to disappearances. As part of a programme of regional visits to Central America, the Working Group had visited Honduras and El Salvador. Four areas of concern were noted: some countries used the armed forces to undertake police activities, under the excuse that police forces were incapable of coping with the maintenance of public order. In some countries, the investigating authorities themselves were part of the military forces and trials were being held before military tribunals. In some cases investigations had been suspended or closed. Investigations should be able to be conducted for as long as the fate of the victim remains unclarified. Finally, the Working Group reiterated its concern that the enactment of amnesty law and the implementation of other measures had led to impunity. The increasing number of reported cases of disappearances in Sri Lanka was worrying. The Working Group hoped to be able to soon meet with the Sri Lankan Government. A lack of consistency had been noted in the quality of responses provided by States to the Working Group. The adoption of the International Convention to Protect all Persons from Enforced Disappearances was welcomed.

JUAN MIGUEL PETIT, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, noted that in 2007, he undertook a mission to Mexico. Concerning positive developments during the year, 12 more countries had recently ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights to the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. At the regional level, 2007 was marked by the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. At the national level, in 2007 Costa Rica adopted a law against sexual exploitation of children and offences against minors. In 2007, the Special Rapporteur said he followed up the study on violence against children that had been presented in 2006. Less than one year after the study's release, its positive impact was evident in all regions of the world. During the period under review, an extensive questionnaire was developed on the issue of assistance and rehabilitation programmes for child victims of sexual commercial exploitation and was sent to all Member States and to selected inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations working on issues related to children's rights and trafficking.

The report highlighted examples of national policies as well as good practices developed by international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society in assistance and rehabilitation programmes for children victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, the Special Rapporteur noted. After having visited many shelters and reintegration and rehabilitation services for children victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, it was assessed that shelters needed to include at least medical care, psychological assistance, interviews with professionals, education and recreational activities. National strategies of several countries had to be considered as good practices. Positive examples included those from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Honduras, Spain and Turkey. Most States which answered the questionnaire already had some public entities and organizations which provided assistance and protection to victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking. Some States had made efforts to provide specific shelters for children victims of sexual commercial exploitation and trafficking.

With regard to his visit to Mexico, the Special Rapporteur noted that it was important for the State to assume responsibility for the cases of sexual abuse of children in the country, which had serious repercussions and often had correlation to poverty. There was a need for a new system of social protection in Mexico with children being included on the agenda and becoming part of a lasting State policy. Sexual exploitation of children was not an isolated issue in the country and there was a need for a network of support. Moreover, efforts had to be taken to combat impunity and organized crime. There was a need to strengthen educational tools and a need for more programmes to assist victims of sexual exploitation. Among other things, better training was needed in the correctional institutions and efforts had to be made to combat corruption, as this problem still existed in Mexico. There was a lack of information in certain communities regarding child protection measures, including in Ciudad Juarez.

MANFRED NOWAK, Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, said that his main report was devoted to exploring the influence of international norms relating to violence against women on the definition of torture, the extent to which the definition itself could embrace gender-sensitivity, and discussing the specific obligations upon States which followed from this approach. In this context,

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and in specific commemoration of International Women's Day, which took place two days ago, he drew the attention of the Council to the central yet debilitating role of stigma associated with victims of sexual violence, and the related challenges that women faced in terms of access to justice, reparations, and rehabilitation.

Following his visit to Paraguay from 22 to 29 November 2007, Mr. Nowak said he recognized that Paraguay had come a long way in overcoming the legacy of the military dictatorship under General Stroessner and was especially impressed by the efforts of the Truth and Justice Commission to guarantee the victims' right to know about the gross and systematic violations committed by the former regime. However, torture was still widely practiced in Paraguay, primarily during the first days of police custody as a means of obtaining confessions. Moreover, most of the prisons that were visited by the Special Rapporteur were overcrowded and had a high incidence of inter-prisoner violence. In addition, the provision of adequate food and health care was poor, as were opportunities for education, leisure and rehabilitation activities.

In Nigeria, Mr. Nowak recognized the challenges faced by the Government given the sheer size and diversity of the population, the plurality of legal systems, the nature of the federal structure, the high level of crime and widespread poverty. Nevertheless, the conditions of detention in the police cells visited were appalling. All the prisons were characterized by severe overcrowding, typically double or even triple the actual capacity of the facility. In fact, Nigerians themselves have acknowledged the severity of the situation, including President Obasanjo who made reference to the deplorable situation of torture in August 2005.

In his visit to Togo, Mr. Nowak found evidence of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials, most of which were inflicted during interrogations. Beyond allegations by detainees and physical evidence of beatings by prison guards, he expressed his concern that children in particular were at a high risk of corporal punishment and ill-treatment. With regards to the ongoing situation of torture in Togo, he reiterated that torture should be criminalized and impunity addressed as a matter of priority.

Mr. Nowak also visited detention facilities in Sri Lanka in October 2007. Notwithstanding the serious security situation, the Government did not allow the Special Rapporteur to travel to LTTE-controlled areas and as such, he could not report on the situation of torture in this region. While Sri Lanka had taken a number of important legal steps to prevent and combat torture, it was still far from being a torture free State. With respect to LTTE suspects under detention, the majority complained of police brutality. The nature of the torture was particularly shocking, including burning with soldering irons. Finally, concern was expressed about the reported collaboration between the Government and the TMVP-Karuna Group, which has been accused of particularly brutal human rights abuses in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Nowak regretted that Indonesia had not outlawed torture under its criminal legislation. He received reports of ill-treatment in both pre-trial detention houses and prisons. In Jakarta, the prisons were severely overcrowded and while the situation was better outside of the capital, concern was expressed about the standard use of "quarantine cells", which were not in line with international standards.

Unfortunately, the visit scheduled to Equatorial Guinea had been postponed at the Government's request at very short notice, but he had been promised that it would be rescheduled soon. Mr. Nowak also confirmed that the Government of Iraq had accepted his request to visit their detention facilities. While the United Kingdom indicated that the Special Rapporteur was welcome to visit the few detainees it had left in Iraqi detention centres, the United States, however, would not grant similar access. After clarifying a falsified interview with him on the situation of torture in Zimbabwe, the Special Rapporteur concluded by requesting Governments to share information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations.

Statements by Concerned Countries

JOSE DELMER URBIZO (Honduras), speaking as a concerned country, noted that the Working Group had stated in its report that a climate of impunity was prevailing as regards to cases of enforced disappearances in Honduras. The Working Group also said that adequate regulation in cases of forced disappearances was one of the shortcomings in Honduras. The State Prosecutor's Office had asked the National Human Rights Commission to

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work on a preliminary draft to reform the penal code. The draft reform of the code would be sent to the legislative authorities. Honduras needed technical assistance from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Honduras had signed the Convention on Enforced Disappearances and was taking steps to incorporate it into its law. The Attorney General had been assessing cases before the judiciary to look into obstacles obstructing cases. A data base of victims was being built. Civil society was also involved in this process. The aim was to coordinate State activities on this matter.

MARIO ERNESTO CASTRO GRANDE (El Salvador), speaking as a concerned country with regard to the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, noted that the Working Group had been able to carry out its work during its visit to El Salvador and was able to interview representatives of State officials and civil society to deal with question of disappearances during armed conflict. The talks between the State and the Working Group were open, objective and sincere. El Salvador had shown full respect for human rights since the end of the internal armed conflict and no new cases had take place since. This reflected the climate of stability that prevailed in the country. Most of the cases of disappearances took place between 1980 and 1983. This practice was not exclusive to any one party of the conflict. The Government had been making a number of efforts to clarify and close these cases. More than 300 cases had been resolved as a result of the information provided by the Government. El Salvador faced a very difficult situation to get reliable information. Despite this difficulty, among others, tremendous efforts had been made to find missing persons.

The State had established an inter-agency commission to focus on the cases of children who disappeared and had been successful in resolving a number of such cases. The commission had investigated 50 priority cases and number of them had been resolved and had resulted in eight family reunifications. The commission conducted 170 interviews in 2007 and the State had taken 325 measures to address cases of disappearances. Moreover, the Government of El Salvador recognized the importance of the work being done by the Working Group and stood ready to continue its support to the Group. El Salvador would strive to clarify all pending cases of disappearances before it in the shortest amount of time.

ELIA SOSA (Mexico), speaking as a concerned country, said that it was a priority for Mexico to observe and protect human rights. Great importance was attached to the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The sale of children and child prostitution were a matter of national priority, in terms of crime prevention and also in the administration of justice. In keeping with the objectives of the National Development Plan for 2007-2012, Mexico had adopted a law on the sale and trafficking of children, which set out the necessary legal instruments to prosecute perpetrators as well as providing provisions for the protection of victims. The provisions also provided for the setting up of an inter-agency to address the prevention of such crimes, as suggested by the Special Rapporteur.

Additionally, Mexico's Special Prosecutor's Office was working to set up models to give specialized care for survivors of such crimes, in line with the age of the victims and the severity of the crimes. Undocumented child victims were also given the option of obtaining a visa for those who wished to remain in Mexico. Mexico took special note of the Special Rapporteur's recommendations and reiterated its commitment to addressing any and all offences to human dignity.

HARKRISTUTI HARKRISNOWO (Indonesia), speaking as a concerned country, said that, as a member of the Human Rights Council, Indonesia was cooperating with the Council and its Special Procedures. Thus, the reports of Special Procedures should be carried out in good spirit. Indonesia had had 11 county visits by various United Nations Special Procedures. This attested to the great transparency of Indonesia. The country was witnessing a vibrant civil society and a free media, as well as active national human rights bodies. All were playing an important role in the protections of human rights. With so many bodies, it was not unusual that alleged cases of torture were brought up. In its cooperation with the Council, Indonesia focused on strengthening international cooperation and dialogue. The visit of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography to Indonesia was appreciated, but he had been unable to fulfil his mandate to study relevant important documents and reports. It was wondered how this could result in tangible and reliable recommendations. This was very unfortunate

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as Indonesia had had high expectations for his visit. Efforts should not be relaxed. A visit conducted in a manner that strengthened mutual dialogue would be able to produce balanced, fair and tangible recommendations.

RIGOBERTO GAUTO VIELMAN (Paraguay), speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture, said the visit of the Special Rapporteur took place in the context of a standing invitation to all United Nations' Special Procedures by Paraguay. In addition to the measures already being implemented, Paraguay had been stressing the need to lodge formal complaints to punish those responsible for such acts. Among other things, the National Police included human rights as a cross-cutting subject in its curriculum for training police and correctional officers. With regard to prison personnel and detainees, certain challenges remained although a number of changes were being recorded in a number of institutions. Challenges had been benefiting more than 2,000 prisoners, which amounted to one-third of the prison population in the country. Some 288 detained convicted persons had been brought from prisons and had been given the necessary rehabilitation. Moreover, the Truth and Justice Commission was also completing its work and would issue its report in August this year. Its work was helping to eradicate the injustices of the past. Paraguay was working hard to uphold human rights through the strengthening of already existing United Nations human rights mechanisms.

1Joint statement on behalf of: Canadian HIV/Aids Legal Network; Action Canada for Population and Development; Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era; Federation for Women and Family Planning; and Human Rights Watch.

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THIRD COMMITTEE SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN GLOBAL DECLARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION ON GROUND

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The United Nations issued the following press release:

Marking the sixtieth anniversary this year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifteenth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, delegates to the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) raised concerns about how the ideals embodied by those Declarations were being implemented on the ground, including through the Human Rights Council and the monitoring bodies of various international human rights conventions.

"The Human Rights Council now stands at a critical juncture," said the representative of Japan, one of 19 speakers to address the promotion and protection of human rights. She said the Universal Periodic Review, a mechanism that had been established by the General Assembly to review the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments, was expected to become one of the important pillars of the Human Rights Council and, as a member of the Council, Japan had undergone the review in May. If it was impartial, efficient and effective, that mechanism - together with the follow-up measures that were taken - would prove useful to the Council.

In regard to the implementation of specific human rights treaties, the representative of the United States and the representative France, who was also speaking on behalf of the European Union, said the treaty bodies were remarkable guides for implementation of international conventions. Although the General Assembly could play an important role in calling attention to the most serious human rights violations, they said treaty bodies played the most valuable role in strengthening national implementation of international treaty obligations.

Nevertheless, many delegates expressed their concerns over the difficulties those bodies had in effectively assisting countries in implementation, for a variety of reasons, ranging from excessively complicated and heavy reporting mechanisms to a lack of transparency and fairness in dialogues with States parties. For instance, the representative of Algeria, in a question and answer session with the Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ngonlardje Mbaidjol, said that her Government had participated in what had been intended to be a fair and transparent process of dialogue with the treaty-based bodies dealing with torture and on civil and political rights, only to find that the spirit of transparency had not prevailed and the comments made by her country had not been taken into account in the eventual recommendations.

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The representative of the Russian Federation, following up on those remarks, said that, due to poor reporting procedures, his country had found difficulties in preparing its report to one of the Committees, specifically because it had received additional questions too late in the reporting process. Often times, he noted, the treaty bodies, in the absence of a country report, would make

recommendations to countries based solely on information from non-governmental sources, whose reliability had not necessarily been proven. Such recommendations were particularly undesirable, he said, while noting that any efforts to turn treaty bodies into a "super body", charged with quasi-judicial tasks, would only further minimize the effectiveness of the monitoring process.

Mr. Mbaidjol, in response to those concerns, emphasized the independence of the Special Procedures and the treaty-based bodies. He also explained that the Office of the High Commissioner was intended to support those bodies and to assist them logistically, while refraining from influencing the conclusions that they might draw.

Over the course of the discussion, many delegates made recommendations on how to best improve the effectiveness of the treaty-based bodies and their work in connection with the Office of the High Commissioner. The Sudan's delegate said respect for cultural diversity should be at the centre of any attempt to create human rights instruments, since such an approach would help prevent hegemony and a situation in which one group dominated over proceedings, a sentiment that was echoed by the representatives of Iran and the Russian Federation. Representatives from India and China recommended greater efforts to streamline reporting through harmonization of the guidelines, which reduced duplication of work at the national level and helped provide a certain amount of standardization.

Meanwhile, national and regional efforts towards better implementation of international human rights treaties were ongoing. Austria, for example, had organized an international expert conference on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights. Austria's delegate told the Committee that the conference had been aimed at identifying the major challenges in the implementation of international human rights standards from the perspective of local and regional human rights actors. It had made a number of recommendations, including the need to establish national human rights institutions to work in cooperation with international human rights monitoring bodies and the need for greater engagement by local stakeholders, in order to increase local ownership.

Earlier in the day, the Committee concluded its discussion on indigenous issues, with representatives from Ecuador, Nicaragua and Bolivia taking the floor. The three delegates all stressed the importance of ensuring the participation of indigenous peoples in discussions and debates on the protection of their rights at the national and regional levels, as well as at the international level and through the United Nations.

In other business, the Committee heard the introduction of three draft resolutions by the representatives of the Netherlands (speaking also on behalf of Belgium), Antigua and Barbuda (on behalf of the "Group of 77" and China) and Senegal. One draft resolution, on efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, was aimed specifically at ending the culture of impunity that currently existed for acts of violence against women. The two other draft resolutions were on the future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula.

Also speaking on the issue of the promotion and protection of human rights were the representatives of Suriname (on behalf of Caribbean Community (CARICOM)), Algeria, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Republic of Korea, Egypt, Venezuela, Republic of Tanzania, Iran and Syria.

The Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. Wednesday, 22 October, to hear a presentation by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports from a number of human rights special rapporteurs.

Background

THIRD COMMITTEE SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN GLOBAL DECLARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION ON GROUND

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met today to conclude its discussion on indigenous issues and matters relating to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (for background see press release GA/SHC/3923) and to begin its discussion on the promotion and protection of human rights, including the implementation of human rights instruments and the comprehensive implementation of, and follow-up to, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Committee had before it the report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families on its seventh and eighth sessions (document A/63/48). The report summarizes the work of the Committee during its seventh and eighth sessions, at which country reports from Bolivia, Ecuador and the Syrian Arab Republic were considered. Suggestions and recommendations to those countries, all of which are mainly but not exclusively countries of origin of migrant workers, are included in the report. Annexed to the report is a list States that have signed, ratified or acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families as of 25 April 2008, as well as a proposal to the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development concerning Roundtable 1. The proposal describes emerging issues for Governments -- such as reconciling economic pressures to reduce rights-based protections for foreign workers with the need to uphold equality and non-discrimination as guarantors of labour market coherence - and includes a list of suggestions for policymakers, including the formulation of comprehensive national migration policies and the adoption of the Convention.

A note by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (document A/63/137) was also before the Committee informing it of a change in the grant cycle of the Fund, based on a recommendation made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

The Committee also had before it the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (document A/63/220), which describes the recommendations for grants that were adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund during the reporting period, as well as providing information on policy decisions adopted by the Board in implementation of the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The report recognizes the Board's efforts to attain a greater geographical balance in grant allocation and highlights the increase in the level of funding allotted, a 31 per cent increase between 2004 and 2008. In the report, the Board urges regular donors to increase their contributions to the Fund and encourages non-donor countries to contribute.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (document A/63/175), in which the Rapporteur draws attention, in particular, to the situation of persons with disabilities. He says the recent entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol provided a timely opportunity to review the anti-torture framework in relation to persons with disabilities. He also examines the use of solitary confinement and its impact on mental health. Annexed to the report is the Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General submitting the report of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies on their twentieth meeting on the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights (document A/63/280), in which the chairpersons discussed reform of the treaty body system, including harmonization of working methods and the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council, as well as the work of the Council in general. They met with representatives of States parties and the President of the Human Rights Council, who emphasized the complementary role of the treaty bodies and the Council, as well as their mutually reinforcing nature. The report also provides a summary of the decisions and recommendations adopted by the chairpersons at their twentieth meeting, including recommendations to strengthen direct interaction between the treaty bodies and the special procedures and to continue dialogue on the complementary nature of the universal periodic review mechanism and the treaty body system.

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The Committee also had before it the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (document A/63/36), which focuses on the High Commissioner's activities throughout the previous year, as well as on the institution-building phase of the Human Rights Council and treaty body reform. The report anticipates some of the final conclusions that might be reached at the end of the four-year universal periodic review cycle, in particular that the universal periodic review could benefit from some form of independent expertise in the process, in order for it to evolve into an implementation-oriented mechanism with targeted and prioritized recommendations to be addressed to the States under review.

The High Commissioner also addresses ways in which to strengthen her Office's engagement at country and regional levels. She also cites recent developments in strategic thematic areas, including: equality and non-discrimination; development, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals; economic, social and cultural rights; indigenous peoples; minorities; migration and trafficking; rule of law and democracy; the Global Compact; human rights education and training; climate change; and women's rights. The report also highlights the recent entry into force of the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as ongoing efforts to reform and streamline the work of the human rights treaty bodies and OHCHR support for special procedures.

The Committee was also expected to consider the report of the Human Rights Committee on its ninety-third session (document A/63/40 Vols. I and II) and the report of the Committee against Torture on its fortieth session (document A/63/44).

In addition, the Committee had before it the draft text of three proposed resolutions on the advancement of women, including: on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (document A/C.3/63/L.12); on the future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (document A/C.3/63/L.14); and on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula (document A/C.3/63/L.15).

Statements on Indigenous Issues

MARÍA FERNANDA ESPINOSA (Ecuador) said her country had played an active supporting role in helping pass the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the General Assembly. In Ecuador, the National Council of Indigenous Peoples had long participated in crafting the most recent national development plan, a roadmap or guide that would change the trajectory of Ecuador's development to include the concepts of multiculturalism and sustainability. She went on to stress the importance of ensuring the participation of indigenous peoples in the United Nations Sub-committee on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and called on civil society to maintain or increase contributions to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, which was intended to facilitate their participation in the deliberations of the working group.

She said Ecuador had ratified the convention on the elimination of discrimination in general, and, as a result, had reformed its laws with the goal of removing all forms of racial discrimination in national policies and programmes. Ecuador condemned all activities that applied sanctions on people that sought to combat discrimination. Ecuador prohibited racial discrimination through its Constitution, and the State had created spaces to encourage the direct participation of indigenous peoples in the national development process. Those policies pre-dated the Durban conference on racism. Ecuador had a council for the development of indigenous peoples and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples, as well as a Department dedicated to both those communities and an organization at the ministerial level. The country's social agenda for 2007-2010 guaranteed a budget allocation for the protection of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. She ended by voicing support for Guatemala's call for the Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples to present a report on the subject.

MARÍA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua) said that her Government had played an active role within the General Assembly towards the approval of the historic Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As such, Nicaragua supported the full implementation of that Declaration. To do so, the international community would need to ensure strong cooperation among States and with the United Nations. Indigenous persons could not be allowed to continue to be excluded from debates on questions relating to them; instead, they should be placed at the forefront of those discussions. Only in that way could a multicultural society be guaranteed. The Permanent Forum

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on Indigenous Issues was both a space for dialogue for indigenous persons and an advisory body to other entities. Its role in both those regards should be strengthened. It was unfortunate that the Special Rapporteur on the issue had not been invited to participate in Third Committee discussions on the topic and, in the following year, that situation should be reversed.

At the national and regional levels, she said her Government had increased the participation of indigenous groups through various initiatives, such as the Atlantic Coast Development Council and the elaboration of a Caribbean Coast initiative, entitled "The Roots of the Caribbean". Efforts were aimed at promoting the role of indigenous peoples in line with other development goals, such as reducing poverty. Nicaragua was also working to support local communities and municipalities, specifically in terms of strengthening their ability to implement the bilingual education programme and offering support for rural teachers. As well, Nicaragua was developing road and maritime infrastructure and launching property title reforms that would further protect the rights of indigenous persons.

One of the Government's most significant advances in the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples had been the installation of the first indigenous local government, which had been created, through an executive decree, as part of the process of national reconciliation, she continued. Touching briefly on the YATAMA case dealt with by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2005, she noted that YATAMA had been paid the necessary indemnity. In 2007, there was an increase in the number of indigenous and Afro-descendant members in the national assembly, and similar increases had been seen in the autonomous region of the north and south Atlantic. In conclusion, she called on Member States and the United Nations to increase cooperation to end the marginalization that indigenous peoples had suffered from since colonial times.

HUGO SILES-ALVARADO (Bolivia) said that his country had moved to ratify the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples about a year after its passage. The Declaration aimed to guarantee the rights of almost 370 million indigenous people worldwide, who had long been victims of racism, discrimination, marginalization and a lack of protection.

In Bolivia, President Morales had signed the 46 articles of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into law. A new draft constitution, to be presented for public referendum in January 2009, was to incorporate substantive parts of that Declaration.

Among other things, he continued, the text would acknowledge that the indigenous justice system was compatible with "ordinary" justice systems, since both were essentially founded on respect for life. Authorities in Bolivia would be empowered to apply the standards contained in both those judicial systems to ensure that indigenous peoples could benefit from a legal system that had long been biased against them. For example, the law would protect the labour rights of families belonging to the Guaraní community, who, in the twenty-first century, were still living under indentured service, which was incompatible with international labour legislation. In addition, the Government was dedicated to the redistribution of lands and income derived from natural resources, whose benefits must ensure the development of indigenous peoples. He voiced support for the Permanent Forum and the outcomes of its deliberations.

Introduction of Reports on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

NGONLARDJE MBAIDJOL, Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, introduced the reports submitted under agenda item 64 (a), entitled "Promotion and protection of human rights: implementation of human rights instruments". He drew particular attention to the report of the Human Rights Committee (document A/63/40 Vols. I and II), noting that the Committee had adopted concluding observations on 13 periodic reports and had made final and public the provisional concluding observations adopted in relation to one country situation that had been considered in the absence of a report. The Committee had adopted 40 views on communications from past sessions. As well, 6 new communications were declared admissible; 25 inadmissible; and 11 discontinued.

In introducing the annual report of the Committee against Torture (document A/63/44), he said the Committee had considered the reports of 14 States parties to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or

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Degrading Treatment or Punishment and took decisions on 16 individual complaints. 145 States had now ratified the Convention and 35 States had ratified the Optional Protocol.

Mr. Mbaidjol also introduced a number of reports already before the Committee, including: the annual report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (Suppl. 48) (document A/63/48); the annual report of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies (document A/63/280); the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (document A/63/220); and the status of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery -- note by the secretariat (document A/63/137).

Questions and Answers

The representative of Algeria remarked on the working methods of treaty bodies, namely with regard to their recommendations to countries upon submission of country reports. Algeria had participated in such processes in a transparent manner and in complete confidence that whatever was said at the dialogue between the representatives of those treaty bodies and her own Government would be taken into account in the eventual recommendations that were made. However, it was found that, in terms of Algeria's most recent dialogue with treaty bodies dealing with torture and on civil and political rights, that spirit had not prevailed. As a result, Algeria had written two aides-memoires to be annexed to the reports of the Human Rights Council, reflecting those concerns. But, she noted that, to date, those reports had not been circulated. She, therefore, requested that they be made available before the Third Committee took note of them. She asked that the statement she had just made be reflected in official records.

The representative of the Russian Federation, addressing the working methods of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that Office's achievements in servicing treaty bodies were to be commended. However, he felt the Office had not been able to enhance the effectiveness of treaty bodies' actions, particularly after the attempt to join treaty bodies into a sort of "super body" charged with quasi-judicial tasks.

With regard to General Comment 33 of the Human Rights Committee, dealing with violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, he expressed hope that the Sixth Committee (Legal) would draw attention to its legal aspects. The Third Committee, meanwhile, would do well to note that treaty bodies were not legal bodies. Furthermore, there was no legal basis for considering the situation in a State in the absence of such a country report -- for example, using information from non-governmental sources, whose reliability needed to be proven, since that would amount to "legal nonsense". In such cases, he did not welcome recommendations made by treaty bodies and special procedures. Treaty bodies must work in cooperation with States parties to the treaty in question, and should provide technical assistance, if requested. That was especially pertinent given the increasing complexity of procedures facing States parties. For example, the Russian Federation had presented a report to the Committee on the elimination of discrimination, but had found difficulties in preparing and defending the report, since it received additional questions "two months late".

He went on to say that, compared to the situation five or six years ago, the Fund that provided assistance to victims of torture had improved its work. However, he would like to welcome efforts made by leaders of the Fund in finding more ways to cooperate with States in identifying the "real" victims of torture requiring international assistance. He noted that resources were being used for situations that were 20 to 30 years old, while more well-known cases in terrorism were not seen as central.

Mr. Mbaidjol, in response to the comments made by the representative of Algeria, congratulated the Government of that country for its dedication to the promotion of human rights and for having signed seven of the international human rights treaties. In terms of delays in the publication of reports, he suggested that translation issues might be at the root of many of those delays, but said he would convey the concerns of Algeria to the proper persons, as well as Algeria's wish to see specific comments annexed to the reports. He also emphasized the independence of the Special Procedures and the Committees set up to follow-up on the implementation of the treaties.

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In response to the comments made by the delegate from the Russian Federation on the role of the Office of the High Commissioner, he stressed that the Office was intended to support the Committees that had been established and to assist them logistically, for example by dealing with documents they issued, and that the High Commissioner was expected to refrain from influencing the conclusions that the Committees drew from their work. He said that questions regarding the effectiveness of the treaty bodies should be directed to the High Commissioner, and it was at that level that such issues needed to be discussed. The concerns over reporting were legitimate and he pledged to bring those concerns to the High Commissioner.

HENRY MAC-DONALD (Suriname), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), stated that its members were guided by fundamental principles of good governance, the rule of law, and respect for the basic rights and freedoms of all, and welcomed the recent entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a regional contribution towards the advancement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, comprehensive capacity development training would be organized from 8 to 12 December, in conjunction with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The training would enable Caribbean national Governments to better monitor and implement international human rights treaties.

He advised a holistic approach to the three pillars of the United Nations system: development; peace and security; and human rights; noting that the pervasiveness of poverty, the increase in inequities between and within countries, the spread of infectious diseases, armed conflict, and intolerance still stood in the way of "real implementation" of all human rights for all. Despite "notable progress" in the human rights field, particularly in the areas of civil and political rights, he said efforts towards the realization of economic, social and cultural rights by the international community "still fall short". Further, he urged finding a "durable" solution to the debt problems of developing countries, which could all positively advance human rights; creating market opportunities for them, especially small island developing States; and democratizing international financial institutions.

He noted the ongoing work of the Human Rights Council as it worked to fulfil its mandate with Member States in the promotion and protection of human rights for all, and he emphasized the critical importance of universal coverage and equal treatment of all States to periodic review of human rights situations. He urged the Human Rights Council to deliver on expectations to create a more conducive environment in pursuit of its work to advance human rights. In closing, he expressed appreciation for those who had supported the passing of the General Assembly resolution for the creation of a permanent memorial at the United Nations to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and urged continued commitment to finalize its placement, which represents the "very principles and ideals of the United Nations Charter".

PHILIPPE DELACROIX (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, recalled that 2008 was the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which afforded the opportunity to reiterate the importance of that text as the very basis of international policies promoting and ensuring human dignity. That celebration was also cause for reaffirming the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights, and the "equality" of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. But, despite progress on the international human rights agenda, the European Union was aware that the international community needed to redouble efforts to ensure full enjoyment of human rights. In view of issues brought about by globalization and security challenges, universal ratification of important international conventions "must take precedence more than ever before".

He said States that had not yet done so must make additional efforts to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The same call was made with regard to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in the case of reservations to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He remarked that the entry into force of the Convention against Enforced Disappearance would enhance and supplement standard-setting texts already in place.

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He said treaty bodies were "remarkable guides" on how to implement those international instruments. States parties to those instruments should ratify their Optional Protocols, or else submit statements to treaty bodies so that they could "receive individual communications". In that regard, the European Union supported the idea for a complaints procedure in the context of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It was regrettable that there were major delays in the submission of the reports of some States parties, since treaty bodies must be allowed to study the situations in countries and make recommendations within reasonable time frames. He said the European Union viewed Optional Protocols as important adjuncts to international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention against Torture, which sought to establish independent institutions to prevent torture in places of detention, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which committed all States parties to abolish the death penalty.

IDREES MOHAMED ALI MOHAMMED SAEED (Sudan) said his Government was convinced of the need for the promotion of human rights through international and regional instruments that had been adopted. As such, the Sudan was committed to reinforcing human rights by ratifying the relevant international treaties. The universality of human rights and their interdependence and indivisibility required that all rights be given equal status and, as such, human and cultural rights should be given the same importance as civil and political rights. However, though mechanisms had been put in place to reinforce civil and political rights, there were no such mechanisms supporting human and cultural rights. Operational steps were needed to further strengthen human and cultural rights, such as the right to food, the right to development and other social rights.

Cultural diversity should also be at the centre of any attempt to create human rights instruments, since such an approach would help prevent hegemony and a situation in which one group dominated over proceedings, he continued. A reform of the Office of the High Commissioner should help the Office achieve a better balance on its positions and to ensure that certain geographic groups would not be excluded from its work. The Office should study concerns over geographic imbalances, to ensure that it operated in full neutrality and without serving any narrow interest.

The Sudan was cooperating strictly with all human rights mechanisms, because it was convinced of the need for dialogue and communications to deal with the questions of human rights, he said. The African Group in Geneva had presented a draft resolution that had been adopted by the Human Rights Council, inviting them to include that resolution in its mandate for June of 2009. Such efforts underscored the progress made in human rights, which were the fruit of international cooperation and national and regional efforts. Collective action on human rights should be taken through the multiple mechanisms currently in use and should be done without dividing States. There were States that had not yet achieved various goals in the area of human rights. To help those countries meet those goals, all nations should participate in the "global march for the reinforcement of human rights" and work to reinforce the spirit that guided the Human Rights Council in its work.

SALIMA ABDELHAK (Algeria) said, in order to provide the best framework for the protection of human rights at the national level, her Government had implemented a number of judicial reforms that were aimed at aligning national efforts with international norms. Since the protection of human rights was, primarily, the responsibility of States, her Government had undertaken a number of revisions, including revisions to the penal, civil, family and nationality codes. Free and transparent elections were a priority for her Government and enshrined in national law. Now, dozens of political parties were active on the political scene and represented in the national assembly. Algeria also placed the enjoyment of the social, cultural and economic rights of its citizens among its top priorities and had implemented a number of measures to ensure the protection of those rights.

Aware of the fundamental role of women in building a society based on progress and modernity, she said her Government had ensured their full participation in economic, social and political life. For example, a national consultative commission on the promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms had 44 members, 16 of whom were women. That commission was responsible for examining all human rights violations and reported annually to the President. Aware of the interdependence and the universality of human rights, Algeria showed great interest for humanitarian rights as well, since all human rights were essential to the organization of a democratic society, to peaceful domestic relations and to the rule of law.

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NOBUKO KUROSAKI (Japan) said that Japan had ratified six of the principal international human rights instruments and had been implementing them in good faith. Furthermore, in celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Japan would observe a "Human Rights Week" in December to promote respect for human rights and to raise awareness of the importance of the Declaration. Japan recently underwent the Universal Periodic Review and its Governmental report was reviewed last week by the Human Rights Committee. The Government would continue to faithfully implement international human rights instruments and strive to find more effective ways of implementing them through treaty body reviews.

"The Human Rights Council now stands at a critical juncture", she said. Soon it would be possible to determine whether the Council would become a truly effective organization that could meet the expectations of the international community. The Universal Periodic Review was expected to become one of the important pillars of the Human Rights Council and, as a member of the Council, Japan had undergone the review in May. If it was impartial, efficient and effective, that mechanism, together with the follow-up measures that were taken, would prove useful to the Council. Overall, it was essential to make comprehensive efforts in a wide range of areas, including peace and development, to secure human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

MAHINDA SAMARASINGHE (Sri Lanka), Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, noted his country's "strong and vibrant human rights protection system" and shared both the progress and the challenges the country faced in its efforts to promote and ensure human rights. His country was a State party to seven core human rights treaties and several international instruments in the field of humanitarian law. The country's National Human Rights Commission had been established more than a decade ago. Further, the Government had implemented effective policies that laid the foundation of economic, social and cultural rights, among them, a free education system with a resulting literacy rate on par with developed countries, a national health care system, and a national campaign to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The objective of the Government, as pointed out by the President in his address to the General Assembly, was to speed development activities in those areas where there was a heavy presence of terrorists; fast-tracking economic development in the Eastern Province, for example, where former terrorists, having abandoned terrorism and embraced democracy, now served as government officials. Significantly, the restoration of democracy in the east of Sri Lanka had been achieved after less than one year of it being freed.

His country's efforts to promote and protect human rights took place under difficult and trying circumstances, due to the continuing challenge posed by the terrorist group, the LTTE, that still operated in the Northern Province. Despite that challenge, his Government had a policy of open and constructive engagement with the human rights treaty bodies and submitted regular reports. In May this year, Sri Lanka submitted its national Human Rights Report for review under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council, which was reflective of the open engagement by the Government with that process and its belief that openness and accountability through international means could strengthen national efforts. The National Human Rights Commission, operating through ten regional offices, also played a pivotal role in protecting human rights.

As a country affected by terrorism, the Government was committed to the physical safety and security of all civilians, non-combatants, internally displaced persons and humanitarian and development workers. During the conflict, food, medicine, educational supplies and other essential items were sent into the affected areas with the knowledge that a good deal would be seized by the LTTE. However, the Government's commitment to that humanitarian policy was not exclusionary. As a practical example, over the past three weeks the Government had ensured the supply of approximately 2,000 metric tons of food relief to the so-called uncleared areas. The Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance was a high-level coordinating mechanism that brought together the Government, international partners and civil society to discuss and implement policy on humanitarian assistance, and was geared to addressing the challenges that arise when dealing with countering a terrorist campaign.

In keeping with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, he concluded by announcing the recent steps taken to draft a national plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights. Working closely with the United Nations Development Programme and the senior advisor of the United Nations country team, the plan

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promised to expand the capacity of its national institutions and fulfil the objectives shared with the Human Rights Council during its recent Universal Periodic Review.

T. VANCE McMAHAN (United States) said his country was deeply committed to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and took its obligations under human rights treaties very seriously. That commitment, it was hoped, was evidenced by the depth and breadth of its reporting and the extensive consultations held throughout the Government and civil society in preparation for each appearance before a treaty committee. Indeed, implementation of existing human rights obligations should remain a priority for the General Assembly and the United Nations as a whole. Full realization of "human rights for all" was best served by a sharp focus on the implementation of existing instruments, rather than the creation of new ones.

He said that, although the Assembly could play an important role in calling attention to the most serious violations of human rights, treaty bodies were extremely valuable in strengthening countries' implementation of their treaty obligations. While their observations and comments were non-binding, they might prod countries to work on a particular problem area. The overall treaty reporting process itself was useful for compelling States to undertake a Government-wide effort to evaluate their progress in meeting treaty obligations, which often brought about changes in States policies and practices. The United States' most recent treaty body experience was its reporting on the implementation of two Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on children in armed conflict, which helped it to consider a variety of issues.

With regard to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which the United States was not party to, he expressed regret that the Committee tasked with overseeing its implementation often pressed for "legislative changes far beyond the text and spirit of the Convention itself". For example, the Committee took a stance against a draft law in Lithuania that would provide legal protection for unborn children by prohibiting abortion except in certain carefully defined circumstances. Likewise, it strongly criticized the Government of Honduras for its abortion laws, as well as Slovakia's laws allowing conscientious objection for health workers. That focus struck him as being misplaced, since there was no mention of abortion in the Convention. Moreover, the Committee spent "comparatively little time" on the top two measures that could reduce maternal mortality: skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care. The Committee had also used its dialogue with countries to call for the decriminalization of prostitution and to pressure changes in States' definition of family, based on what appeared to be the personal opinion of individual members of the Committee, rather than any relevant text in the Convention.

MOHAMED RIDA AL-HUSSAINI (Iraq) said his Government respected the goals and principles of the United Nations and, as such, his Government was resolved to honour its commitments and harmonize its national laws with international conventions and covenants. More specifically, the Government had completed legislative measures to adhere to the Optional Protocols on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on torture. The situation of migrants and displaced persons was an issue that held a great deal of interest and importance for his Government. As such, Iraq had allotted significant amounts of money to help resolve the situations of displaced Iraqis currently residing both inside and outside of the country. The Government was also focused on improving the living and economic conditions of its citizens through various economic measures aimed at the reconstruction and reactivation of the national economy. Efforts towards that goal had already achieved tangible progress, including a decrease in inflation and unemployment rates. In addition, Iraq had established a social protection network to provide better care to vulnerable groups, and it had embarked on a reform of the health sector to ensure basic health services for all.

The Government of Iraq had also launched a series of legal reforms and an anti-corruption initiative, he said, all in an effort to further protect the rights of its citizens. Iraq was keen to promote a human rights culture within the country, and it had already made significant progress towards that end. It had established a national system for the monitoring of human rights violations and had formed "monitoring task forces", in coordination with other human rights entities. In addition, much had been done to resolve issues surrounding the situation of persons who had disappeared during the war, prisoners of war and the existence of mass graves. The Government of Iraq was also committed to promoting the role of the judiciary in the protection of human rights. In closing, he drew attention to the

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upcoming provincial council elections and reaffirmed his Government's commitment to building an environment conducive to free, fair and democratic elections.

LIU ZHENMIN (China), emphasizing the great importance his Government attached to the role of international human rights instruments in promoting and protecting those rights, highlighted a number of such treaties to which China was a party. Most recently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had been ratified in June and had come into force on 31 August. China earnestly fulfilled its obligations to all treaties to which it was party and to that end had adopted legislative, judicial, and administrative measures towards their implementation. It also attentively submitted periodic reports to treaty bodies and maintained an excellent dialogue with them. Active support had also been given to the Governments of Hong Kong and Macao in protecting human rights.

Noting that this year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he said all countries should stick to the spirit of the Declaration and engage in dialogue on the basis of equality and mutual respect, with view to seeking common ground, narrowing differences and expanding consensus. But, while international human rights instruments had played a positive role overall, their excessively complicated and heavy reporting burden was a problem. The current reporting mechanism and duplication of labour among different treaty bodies was particularly notable. Further, certain treaty bodies often exceeded their mandates in the exercise of their duties. His Government had noted the recommendations by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to harmonize those reporting guidelines. Reform should be aimed at streamlining reporting mechanisms and enhancing efficiency. It was also imperative for treaty bodies to adhere to the principles of fairness, objectivity and neutrality and use caution when it came to unverified information from unreliable sources.

TARIQ ANWAR (India) noted that a few reports relating to today's agenda had been made available only very recently, while some were still not ready. That had denied States adequate time to study them, and so he requested that all reports be made available to Member States well in advance.

He went on to say that the observance of human rights was at the core of any civilized society. Progressive negotiations had brought about institutional mechanisms to handle human rights issues. The establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights rounded out the international "human rights regime", as set forth in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in proceeding texts, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The protection of the civil and political rights of people was equally important to the promotion of their economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. He expressed gratitude to the treaty bodies for their help in helping strengthen domestic policies. He stressed that experts serving on those bodies should handle development, democracy and human rights, which were strongly interrelated to each other, as a single "compact".

He said he welcomed efforts to streamline reporting by revised harmonization of the guidelines, which reduced duplication of work at the national level and helped provide a certain amount of standardization. Treaty bodies and the Office of the High Commissioner should develop the capacity of various Member States who found it difficult to submit their periodic reports due to lack of experience and capability. Strengthening national reporting procedures helped Member States identify gaps in their national policies and find the means to reduce them. For its part, India had consistently supported international efforts to evolve a normative framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. India was also concerned over the delays by various treaty bodies in examining country reports, and agreed, in principle, with the idea of holding Committee meetings in parallel chambers. The Office of the High Commissioner could also explore submitting a suitable proposal to temporarily increase the number of days that the Committee met, at least until the backlog was dealt with. The treaty body system had assisted India greatly in implementing its international obligations with regard to human rights, and it was hoped that all Member States were able to benefit in a similar way.

JO JOO-SUNG (Republic of Korea), noting the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, said significant progress had been made under United Nations leadership, notably in establishing legal frameworks and monitoring mechanisms. Norms, such as the International Covenants on Human Rights, had played a valuable part in contributing to an overall improvement in human rights situations. However, gaps remained between the

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ideals pursued through such norms and reality, as established international human rights conventions had not been fully implemented, and the protection of women, children and minorities, among others, left "much to be desired".

He said States' duty to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms should not be eclipsed by excessive emphasis on the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical backgrounds, as underlined in the Vienna Declaration. He emphasized maintaining momentum for the Universal Periodic Review process, whereby the human rights situations of all Member States were subject to review. His country attached great importance to - and fully supported - that process, as effective follow-up measures within it could lead to actual human rights improvements.

Vienna Declaration

MAX-OLIVIER GONNET (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated countries, said that 2008 not only marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also the fifteenth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the World Conference on human rights. The Vienna Declaration provided the reference framework to overcome obstacles to the promotion and universal protection of those rights. International attention should, therefore, remain focused on that framework and efforts should continue to effectively implement the Programme of Action. Huge progress had been made in promoting and protecting human rights over the last 15 years, including the founding of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Office had significantly raised awareness on human rights issues and had helped spread human rights within the United Nations system and on the ground. As such, it should have all necessary resources at its disposal to undertake its work, particularly in the area of technical assistance, and to independently determine its plan for strategic management. He added that the rules currently governing its budgetary policy and human resources should be maintained and efforts to broaden its activities on the ground, through the establishment of regional offices, should be encouraged.

Over the past 15 years, great strides had been made towards the universal ratification of relevant United Nations human rights conventions and the adoption of new conventions, he said. As well, there had been a worldwide emergence of associations and non-governmental organizations whose primary goal was the implementation of international treaties and the protection of human rights. In addition, the international codification of human rights continued to move forward with the negotiation of new international instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, in practice, too many people continued to be denied the right to fundamental rights and freedoms. In order for the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to be fully implemented and for all human rights violations to be put to a stop, all stakeholders would need to reiterate their commitment to justice, the rule of law, and the fight against impunity. "It is our collective responsibility, in collaboration with international and non-governmental organizations, to lay down conditions which allow human rights to be effectively exercised at a national, regional and international level," he said. Recommendations adopted at the international conference of experts, organized by the Austrian Government in August to discuss how best to strengthen local implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, deserved the Committee's full attention and should be an inspiration for future work.

SERGEI CHUMAREV(Russian Federation) noted that "human rights" was being used by some Members States as a way to advance their political ideology, and a kind of "human rights doctrine" - a major component of "mass political culture" -- was having negative impacts on the cultural and national identities of people and their traditional value systems. It was entirely possible for believers in the human rights doctrine and their democratic bodies to adopt double standards, thereby contributing to the emergence of totalitarian regimes. An example from Europe included the birth of Nazism and xenophobia, including Russophobia. The human rights doctrine was a form of state ideology, exemplified by the return of the police state which interfered in people's private lives. The international community should avoid exporting that human rights ideology through economic circles, which resulted in the commercialization of human rights, in a kind of "market of human rights services".

He said that such a human rights ideology, which claimed to be universal, had not been able to prove its effectiveness in settling intergovernmental and interpersonal conflicts, such as conflicts over religion or the

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implementation of various economic, social and political rights. United Nations agencies involved in advancing the cause of human rights seemed to underestimate the value of holding dialogues among civilizations, and of fostering respect for religious values. It was important for them to look at the interdependence of all categories of rights, and to examine the question of rights from a philosophical angle.

He said the Russian legal tradition gave primacy to the notion of collective rights - an organic unity of rights and duties of individuals in society, as embodied by responsible interactions between people. It was important to adopt a critical view of various attempts to create an ideal society, which was only serving to alienate people from their roots. He ended by stressing that he did not claim to establish an ultimate truth about human rights, but aimed to promote the idea of exploring the idea of "rights" through a dialogue of cultures. He appealed for a fresh look at many human rights dogmas that had led to the "emasculatation" of the profound humanistic content of Universal Declaration and the Vienna Programme of Action.

MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ(Egypt) said the establishment of the Human Rights Council, and the endorsement of its "institutional building package", followed by the launch of the Universal Review Mechanism and the review process of the mandates of special procedures, were among the steps taken by the international community to reformulate the human rights agenda. However, the world was still witnessing attempts on the part of a few who wished to "impose their view" on how certain concepts and internationally agreed standards should be applied, making it necessary to redirect international efforts on a number of key tracks. As a start, the international community should confront certain nations for their "sense of superiority" - in assuming that their values, cultures and social and legal justice systems were superior to others. "We should not be misguided by the attempts to limit the consideration of human rights issues to those related to civil and political rights, at the expense of economic, social and cultural rights," he said.

Headed that full respect for the principles of international law and the complementarity between international human rights law and international humanitarian law would require a simultaneous recognition of "the right to development" as a fundamental right. Giving due attention to the right to development would allow for the provision of better living standards that would contribute to the promotion of human rights, with no attached conditionalities aimed at imposing "controversial concepts" or linking them to development assistance. It would also entail "respecting the institutional balance" between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in supervising the activities of the Human Rights Council and its special procedures and treaty bodies, while ending the use of the Security Council as a tool to politicize human rights questions. Further, there should be a clear commitment not to supersede the Third Committee's mandate as the Assembly's negotiating body on human rights issues. Further, countries should not override the mandate of the Human Rights Council by tabling country-specific resolutions or creating parallel structures in an attempt to strengthen the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, or by appointing people responsible for monitoring human rights situations to the offices of United Nations developmental programmes.

He said the international community must reinforce the notion that "human rights" was primarily the responsibility of national Governments, such as when coming to a comprehensive international understanding of the "responsibility to protect" and on "human security". Also, efforts should be made to correct the geographical distribution in the staffing structures of the Office of the High Commissioner, and in striking a balance between the assessed regular budget and voluntary contributions. The international community should engage in constructive dialogue based on respect for "cultural identities and particularities". Egypt was seeking to improve its legislative framework to encourage the articulation of a communal idea of human rights. Such efforts had led to the adoption of constitutional amendments through a referendum to create a larger degree of balance between the Presidency, the Government, Parliament and the courts.

Mr. CASAL (Venezuela) said, at the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights 60 years ago and at the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 15 years ago, individuals had expressed their hope for the protection and promotion of all human rights, including rights to peace, justice, equality, rule of law, and better living conditions. Yet, despite significant achievements over the past 60 years, including the creation of the Human Rights Council, many of those rights had still not been satisfied. Success now depended on the political will

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to implement the principles of human rights, enshrined in those declarations. International cooperation was the only means to achieve universal respect and compliance with basic human rights, and such cooperation should be based on genuine dialogue, with respect for the social, cultural, and political legacies of different regions.

He expressed his country's deep concern over the apparent neglect by some countries of their international commitments, including their commitment to solidarity and cooperation. Solidarity was closely tied in with human rights and the achievement of collective goals in the field. Countries of the South had launched numerous initiatives, based on the principle of solidarity, which had resulted in concrete examples of success. Consumerism, capitalism that benefited only a few, and financial speculation worked against the notion of solidarity. Turning to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, he said the new High Commissioner should work to remove all obstacles on the path to the achievement of human rights, especially in regards to the promotion and protection of the right to development. A clear and transparent dialogue between the Office and Member States was essential. In closing, he said the poor of the world were calling for a new international order, where human rights would prevail over economic interests.

Introduction of Draft Resolutions

The Committee then resumed its consideration of the agenda item relating to the advancement of women with the introduction of three draft resolutions. The representative of the Netherlands, speaking also on behalf of Belgium, introduced the draft resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (document A/C.3/63/L.12), which reflected the committed and comprehensive response of Member States on the issue. A culture of impunity for acts of violence against women continued to exist throughout the world and, as such, the main theme of the current draft resolution was aimed at ending that culture of impunity, he said. Negotiations on the draft resolution were taking place in an open and constructive manner and contributions on best practices proposed by Member States with a view to ending impunity were being included in those discussions.

Introducing the draft resolution on the future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (document A/C.3/63/L.14), the representative of Antigua and Barbuda, speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said that the draft recognized important contributions of INSTRAW to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its role in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The draft text also acknowledged the Institute's contributions to ongoing efforts on gender mainstreaming, through its research and training outputs involving national gender machineries, academic institutes, regional intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. She invited all Member States to continue to provide assistance and political and material support to the Institute, through voluntary contributions, substantive involvement in the Institute's projects and activities, and by offering unconditional support and co-sponsorship to the draft text.

The representative of Senegal then introduced the draft resolution on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula (document A/C.3/63/L.15), while highlighting the slow progress overall on achieving Millennium Goal 5 on maternal health. Obstetric fistula continued to be a major issue in many developing countries and the condition continued to be the cause of far too many deaths. Its victims were often poor, illiterate and had little or no access to health services. The draft resolution was aimed at raising public awareness of the condition, with a view to prevention. The text did not contain any substantial changes from a similar text that had been adopted at the previous session, but it did contain the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report. On that subject, she noted the late submission of the Secretary-General's report and suggested that, in the future, an earlier submission of the report would facilitate more effective discussions on the issue within the Committee.

Resumed Debate

CHRISTIAN EBNER (Austria), aligning himself with the statement by the European Union, informed the Committee that an international expert conference had

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Body

I AM A partially-sighted, single, and decent Tamil-speaking woman, 34, who has lots of TLC to offer. I am in search of Tamil-speaking men of sober habits and lots of compassion and respect. I seek friendship that may lead to marriage. Respond with contact details.

BLIND DATE

I AM A young, caring and decent single Hindu man, 20, looking for a special woman. I am simple, and am medium in complexion and height. My interests are listening to music, watching DVDs and the outdoors. Those interested can respond with photographs and contact details.

ROLAND

SINGLE and staunch Hindi-speaking man of sober habits would like to meet a similar Hindi-speaking woman aged 29 to 39. His interests are music, movies and walks on the beach. Those envisaging a serious relationship that can lead to marriage may respond with photographs and contact numbers.

PYAAR KA DUNIYA

HINDI-SPEAKING widow, 45, is kind, loving, caring and humble and has lots of TLC to offer. Her interests are walking on the beach and watching movies. She would like to correspond with a Hindu man aged between 48 and 50 years. Those interested may respond with recent photographs and telephone numbers.

AQUARIUS-MG

Hindi-speaking woman, 34, would like to correspond with decent, independent, faithful, sincere, Hindi/Gujarati-speaking professional gentlemen for friendship. They should be of sober habits and good moral values and aged 34 to 39. Hare Krishna devotees are welcome.

LIMITED EDITION

I AM A Muslim man, 28, wanting to correspond with Muslim women aged 25 to 30 years. My interests are movies, boxing, listening to music and enjoying the peaceful things in life. Trustworthy women may respond with recent photographs and telephone numbers.

ZM-PMB

No Headline In Original

I AM A single divorced woman with one child and would love to correspond with decent, honest, professional Hindi-speaking gentlemen aged 42 to 45 for friendship leading to marriage. Respond with recent photograph and telephone numbers. My interests include cooking, socialising and spending time with my friends.

AUM SHANTI AUM

SINGLE, Tamil-speaking gentleman, 54, is kind, loving, caring, honest and hard working with sober habits. He loves cultural pursuits and is financially stable. His interests are running, sport, music and the outdoor life. He would like to correspond with decent women aged 35 to 53 years. Telephone numbers and photographs would be highly appreciated.

FRIEND IN DEED

A single, decent, professional and cultured Tamil-speaking woman, 30, would love to correspond with an honest, professional, simple, caring gentleman between the ages of 31 and 35 years with a view to a lasting companionship. Reply with recent photographs and telephone numbers. My interests include cooking, playing sport and spending quality time with my family.

WAITING FOR THE BEST

SINGLE, Hindi-speaking woman, 49, is in search of respectable Hindi-speaking men aged between 49 and 55 years. She loves reading, movies and the simple things in life. She is in search of an honest, caring, loving and independent partner. Only those who are interested in a serious relationship leading to marriage may respond with recent photographs and telephone numbers.

IMPULSE

ARE YOU in search of someone who will put a smile on your face? Here is a decent Asian woman who would love to hear from you. Those with sober habits and between 50 and 52 years can respond for friendship. Reply with contact details and pictures if possible.

CJ

SOCIABLE, fun, easy-going, 40-year-old Asian gentleman seeks an independent, secure businesswoman between 35 and 45 years for friendship only. Reply with recent photograph and contact details.

SUGAR DADDY

CHRISTIAN widow, 53, is in search of a companion who is humble and caring. She is simple and has lots of TLC to offer the right person. Her interests are listening to Gospel music and reading. Men between the ages of 50 and 60 years can respond with recent photographs and contact numbers. She promises to respond to all letters.

CHRISTIAN WIDOW

PROFESSIONAL gent, 34, would love to correspond with single women for a meaningful relationship leading to early marriage. They should be humble with good morals, a great sense of humour and between 27 and 33 years. He is financially secure and his interests are music and sport.

BEST OF THE BEST

decent Christian woman, 18, from a decent and professional family would like to meet tall Hindu or Christian professional men between 22 and 27 years with a good family background. Must be trustworthy and open-minded. Respond with contact details and photographs. She will respond to all.

DREAM CATCH

No Headline In Original

TAMIL-SPEAKING man with sober habits would like to communicate with similar financially secure women between 43 and 49 years. His interests are music, outdoors, movies, walks on the beach and he also love to promote his culture.

LTTE

TALL and financially secure Christian businessman, 24, of sober habits - don't drink or go clubbing - would like to meet an attractive Hindu or Christian woman between 19 and 24 years and of the same calibre. A decent woman with good family values can respond with contact details and photographs. He will respond to all letters.

MR SMART

CHARMING, Islamically-inclined man, 32, in search of a respectable, jovial, hard working and fun to be with Islamically-inclined woman between 18 and 28 years. She should be homely, sweet, caring, independent and respectful. His interests are candle-lit dinners, fire-place romance and having fun. Women with no children can respond with recent photographs and contact numbers.

SPICY AQUARIAN

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**THIRD COMMITTEE SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT GAP BETWEEN HUMAN
RIGHTS PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN GLOBAL DECLARATIONS AND
IMPLEMENTATION ON THE GROUND**

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The following information was released by the UN General Assembly:

Marking the sixtieth anniversary this year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifteenth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, delegates to the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) raised concerns about how the ideals embodied by those Declarations were being implemented on the ground, including through the Human Rights Council and the monitoring bodies of various international human rights conventions.

"The Human Rights Council now stands at a critical juncture," said the representative of Japan, one of 19 speakers to address the promotion and protection of human rights. She said the Universal Periodic Review, a mechanism that had been established by the General Assembly to review the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments, was expected to become one of the important pillars of the Human Rights Council and, as a member of the Council, Japan had undergone the review in May. If it was impartial, efficient and effective, that mechanism -- together with the follow-up measures that were taken -- would prove useful to the Council.

In regard to the implementation of specific human rights treaties, the representative of the United States and the representative France, who was also speaking on behalf of the European Union, said the treaty bodies were remarkable guides for implementation of international conventions. Although the General Assembly could play an important role in calling attention to the most serious human rights violations, they said treaty bodies played the most valuable role in strengthening national implementation of international treaty obligations.

Nevertheless, many delegates expressed their concerns over the difficulties those bodies had in effectively assisting countries in implementation, for a variety of reasons, ranging from excessively complicated and heavy reporting mechanisms to a lack of transparency and fairness in dialogues with States parties. For instance, the representative of Algeria, in a question and answer session with the Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ngonlardje Mbaidjol, said that her Government had participated in what had been intended to be a fair and transparent process of dialogue with the treaty-based bodies dealing with torture and on civil and political rights, only to find that the spirit of transparency had not prevailed and the comments made by her country had not been taken into account in the eventual recommendations.

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The representative of the Russian Federation, following up on those remarks, said that, due to poor reporting procedures, his country had found difficulties in preparing its report to one of the Committees, specifically because it had received additional questions too late in the reporting process. Often times, he noted, the treaty bodies, in the absence of a country report, would make

recommendations to countries based solely on information from non-governmental sources, whose reliability had not necessarily been proven. Such recommendations were particularly undesirable, he said, while noting that any efforts to turn treaty bodies into a "super body", charged with quasi-judicial tasks, would only further minimize the effectiveness of the monitoring process.

Mr. Mbaidjol, in response to those concerns, emphasized the independence of the Special Procedures and the treaty-based bodies. He also explained that the Office of the High Commissioner was intended to support those bodies and to assist them logistically, while refraining from influencing the conclusions that they might draw.

Over the course of the discussion, many delegates made recommendations on how to best improve the effectiveness of the treaty-based bodies and their work in connection with the Office of the High Commissioner. The Sudan's delegate said respect for cultural diversity should be at the centre of any attempt to create human rights instruments, since such an approach would help prevent hegemony and a situation in which one group dominated over proceedings, a sentiment that was echoed by the representatives of Iran and the Russian Federation. Representatives from India and China recommended greater efforts to streamline reporting through harmonization of the guidelines, which reduced duplication of work at the national level and helped provide a certain amount of standardization.

Meanwhile, national and regional efforts towards better implementation of international human rights treaties were ongoing. Austria, for example, had organized an international expert conference on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights. Austria's delegate told the Committee that the conference had been aimed at identifying the major challenges in the implementation of international human rights standards from the perspective of local and regional human rights actors. It had made a number of recommendations, including the need to establish national human rights institutions to work in cooperation with international human rights monitoring bodies and the need for greater engagement by local stakeholders, in order to increase local ownership.

Earlier in the day, the Committee concluded its discussion on indigenous issues, with representatives from Ecuador, Nicaragua and Bolivia taking the floor. The three delegates all stressed the importance of ensuring the participation of indigenous peoples in discussions and debates on the protection of their rights at the national and regional levels, as well as at the international level and through the United Nations.

In other business, the Committee heard the introduction of three draft resolutions by the representatives of the Netherlands (speaking also on behalf of Belgium), Antigua and Barbuda (on behalf of the "Group of 77" and China) and Senegal. One draft resolution, on efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, was aimed specifically at ending the culture of impunity that currently existed for acts of violence against women. The two other draft resolutions were on the future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula.

Also speaking on the issue of the promotion and protection of human rights were the representatives of Suriname (on behalf of Caribbean Community (CARICOM)), Algeria, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Republic of Korea, Egypt, Venezuela, Republic of Tanzania, Iran and Syria.

The Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. Wednesday, 22 October, to hear a presentation by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports from a number of human rights special rapporteurs.

Background

THIRD COMMITTEE SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN GLOBAL DECLARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION ON THE GROUND

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met today to conclude its discussion on indigenous issues and matters relating to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (for background see press release GA/SHC/3923) and to begin its discussion on the promotion and protection of human rights, including the implementation of human rights instruments and the comprehensive implementation of, and follow-up to, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Committee had before it the report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families on its seventh and eighth sessions (document A/63/48). The report summarizes the work of the Committee during its seventh and eighth sessions, at which country reports from Bolivia, Ecuador and the Syrian Arab Republic were considered. Suggestions and recommendations to those countries, all of which are mainly but not exclusively countries of origin of migrant workers, are included in the report. Annexed to the report is a list States that have signed, ratified or acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families as of 25 April 2008, as well as a proposal to the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development concerning Roundtable 1. The proposal describes emerging issues for Governments -- such as reconciling economic pressures to reduce rights-based protections for foreign workers with the need to uphold equality and non-discrimination as guarantors of labour market coherence -- and includes a list of suggestions for policymakers, including the formulation of comprehensive national migration policies and the adoption of the Convention.

A note by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (document A/63/137) was also before the Committee informing it of a change in the grant cycle of the Fund, based on a recommendation made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

The Committee also had before it the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (document A/63/220), which describes the recommendations for grants that were adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund during the reporting period, as well as providing information on policy decisions adopted by the Board in implementation of the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The report recognizes the Board's efforts to attain a greater geographical balance in grant allocation and highlights the increase in the level of funding allotted, a 31 per cent increase between 2004 and 2008. In the report, the Board urges regular donors to increase their contributions to the Fund and encourages non-donor countries to contribute.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (document A/63/175), in which the Rapporteur draws attention, in particular, to the situation of persons with disabilities. He says the recent entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol provided a timely opportunity to review the anti-torture framework in relation to persons with disabilities. He also examines the use of solitary confinement and its impact on mental health. Annexed to the report is the Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General submitting the report of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies on their twentieth meeting on the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights (document A/63/280), in which the chairpersons discussed reform of the treaty body system, including harmonization of working methods and the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council, as well as the work of the Council in general. They met with representatives of States parties and the President of the Human Rights Council, who emphasized the complementary role of the treaty bodies and the Council, as well as their mutually reinforcing nature. The report also provides a summary of the decisions and recommendations adopted by the chairpersons at their twentieth meeting, including recommendations to strengthen direct interaction between the treaty bodies and the special procedures and to continue dialogue on the complementary nature of the universal periodic review mechanism and the treaty body system.

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The Committee also had before it the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (document A/63/36), which focuses on the High Commissioner's activities throughout the previous year, as well as on the institution-building phase of the Human Rights Council and treaty body reform. The report anticipates some of the final conclusions that might be reached at the end of the four-year universal periodic review cycle, in particular that the universal periodic review could benefit from some form of independent expertise in the process, in order for it to evolve into an implementation-oriented mechanism with targeted and prioritized recommendations to be addressed to the States under review.

The High Commissioner also addresses ways in which to strengthen her Office's engagement at country and regional levels. She also cites recent developments in strategic thematic areas, including: equality and non-discrimination; development, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals; economic, social and cultural rights; indigenous peoples; minorities; migration and trafficking; rule of law and democracy; the Global Compact; human rights education and training; climate change; and women's rights. The report also highlights the recent entry into force of the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as ongoing efforts to reform and streamline the work of the human rights treaty bodies and OHCHR support for special procedures.

The Committee was also expected to consider the report of the Human Rights Committee on its ninety-third session (document A/63/40 Vols. I and II) and the report of the Committee against Torture on its fortieth session (document A/63/44).

In addition, the Committee had before it the draft text of three proposed resolutions on the advancement of women, including: on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (document A/C.3/63/L.12); on the future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (document A/C.3/63/L.14); and on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula (document A/C.3/63/L.15).

Statements on Indigenous Issues

MARA FERNANDA ESPINOSA (Ecuador) said her country had played an active supporting role in helping pass the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the General Assembly. In Ecuador, the National Council of Indigenous Peoples had long participated in crafting the most recent national development plan, a roadmap or guide that would change the trajectory of Ecuador's development to include the concepts of multiculturalism and sustainability. She went on to stress the importance of ensuring the participation of indigenous peoples in the United Nations Sub-committee on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and called on civil society to maintain or increase contributions to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, which was intended to facilitate their participation in the deliberations of the working group.

She said Ecuador had ratified the convention on the elimination of discrimination in general, and, as a result, had reformed its laws with the goal of removing all forms of racial discrimination in national policies and programmes. Ecuador condemned all activities that applied sanctions on people that sought to combat discrimination. Ecuador prohibited racial discrimination through its Constitution, and the State had created spaces to encourage the direct participation of indigenous peoples in the national development process. Those policies pre-dated the Durban conference on racism. Ecuador had a council for the development of indigenous peoples and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples, as well as a Department dedicated to both those communities and an organization at the ministerial level. The country's social agenda for 2007-2010 guaranteed a budget allocation for the protection of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. She ended by voicing support for Guatemala's call for the Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples to present a report on the subject.

MARA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua) said that her Government had played an active role within the General Assembly towards the approval of the historic Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As such, Nicaragua supported the full implementation of that Declaration. To do so, the international community would need to ensure strong cooperation among States and with the United Nations. Indigenous persons could not be allowed to continue to be excluded from debates on questions relating to them; instead, they should be placed at the forefront of those discussions. Only in that way could a multicultural society be guaranteed. The Permanent Forum

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on Indigenous Issues was both a space for dialogue for indigenous persons and an advisory body to other entities. Its role in both those regards should be strengthened. It was unfortunate that the Special Rapporteur on the issue had not been invited to participate in Third Committee discussions on the topic and, in the following year, that situation should be reversed.

At the national and regional levels, she said her Government had increased the participation of indigenous groups through various initiatives, such as the Atlantic Coast Development Council and the elaboration of a Caribbean Coast initiative, entitled "The Roots of the Caribbean". Efforts were aimed at promoting the role of indigenous peoples in line with other development goals, such as reducing poverty. Nicaragua was also working to support local communities and municipalities, specifically in terms of strengthening their ability to implement the bilingual education programme and offering support for rural teachers. As well, Nicaragua was developing road and maritime infrastructure and launching property title reforms that would further protect the rights of indigenous persons.

One of the Government's most significant advances in the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples had been the installation of the first indigenous local government, which had been created, through an executive decree, as part of the process of national reconciliation, she continued. Touching briefly on the YATAMA case dealt with by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2005, she noted that YATAMA had been paid the necessary indemnity. In 2007, there was an increase in the number of indigenous and Afro-descendant members in the national assembly, and similar increases had been seen in the autonomous region of the north and south Atlantic. In conclusion, she called on Member States and the United Nations to increase cooperation to end the marginalization that indigenous peoples had suffered from since colonial times.

HUGO SILES-ALVARADO (Bolivia) said that his country had moved to ratify the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples about a year after its passage. The Declaration aimed to guarantee the rights of almost 370 million indigenous people worldwide, who had long been victims of racism, discrimination, marginalization and a lack of protection.

In Bolivia, President Morales had signed the 46 articles of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into law. A new draft constitution, to be presented for public referendum in January 2009, was to incorporate substantive parts of that Declaration.

Among other things, he continued, the text would acknowledge that the indigenous justice system was compatible with "ordinary" justice systems, since both were essentially founded on respect for life. Authorities in Bolivia would be empowered to apply the standards contained in both those judicial systems to ensure that indigenous peoples could benefit from a legal system that had long been biased against them. For example, the law would protect the labour rights of families belonging to the Guarani community, who, in the twenty-first century, were still living under indentured service, which was incompatible with international labour legislation. In addition, the Government was dedicated to the redistribution of lands and income derived from natural resources, whose benefits must ensure the development of indigenous peoples. He voiced support for the Permanent Forum and the outcomes of its deliberations.

Introduction of Reports on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

NGONLARDJE MBAIDJOL, Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, introduced the reports submitted under agenda item 64 (a), entitled "Promotion and protection of human rights: implementation of human rights instruments". He drew particular attention to the report of the Human Rights Committee (document A/63/40 Vols. I and II), noting that the Committee had adopted concluding observations on 13 periodic reports and had made final and public the provisional concluding observations adopted in relation to one country situation that had been considered in the absence of a report. The Committee had adopted 40 views on communications from past sessions. As well, 6 new communications were declared admissible; 25 inadmissible; and 11 discontinued.

In introducing the annual report of the Committee against Torture (document A/63/44), he said the Committee had considered the reports of 14 States parties to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or

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Degrading Treatment or Punishment and took decisions on 16 individual complaints. 145 States had now ratified the Convention and 35 States had ratified the Optional Protocol.

Mr. Mbaidjol also introduced a number of reports already before the Committee, including: the annual report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (Suppl. 48) (document A/63/48); the annual report of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies (document A/63/280); the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (document A/63/220); and the status of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery -- note by the secretariat (document A/63/137).

Questions and Answers

The representative of Algeria remarked on the working methods of treaty bodies, namely with regard to their recommendations to countries upon submission of country reports. Algeria had participated in such processes in a transparent manner and in complete confidence that whatever was said at the dialogue between the representatives of those treaty bodies and her own Government would be taken into account in the eventual recommendations that were made. However, it was found that, in terms of Algeria's most recent dialogue with treaty bodies dealing with torture and on civil and political rights, that spirit had not prevailed. As a result, Algeria had written two aides-memoires to be annexed to the reports of the Human Rights Council, reflecting those concerns. But, she noted that, to date, those reports had not been circulated. She, therefore, requested that they be made available before the Third Committee took note of them. She asked that the statement she had just made be reflected in official records.

The representative of the Russian Federation, addressing the working methods of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that Office's achievements in servicing treaty bodies were to be commended. However, he felt the Office had not been able to enhance the effectiveness of treaty bodies' actions, particularly after the attempt to join treaty bodies into a sort of "super body" charged with quasi-judicial tasks.

With regard to General Comment 33 of the Human Rights Committee, dealing with violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, he expressed hope that the Sixth Committee (Legal) would draw attention to its legal aspects. The Third Committee, meanwhile, would do well to note that treaty bodies were not legal bodies. Furthermore, there was no legal basis for considering the situation in a State in the absence of such a country report -- for example, using information from non-governmental sources, whose reliability needed to be proven, since that would amount to "legal nonsense". In such cases, he did not welcome recommendations made by treaty bodies and special procedures. Treaty bodies must work in cooperation with States parties to the treaty in question, and should provide technical assistance, if requested. That was especially pertinent given the increasing complexity of procedures facing States parties. For example, the Russian Federation had presented a report to the Committee on the elimination of discrimination, but had found difficulties in preparing and defending the report, since it received additional questions "two months late".

He went on to say that, compared to the situation five or six years ago, the Fund that provided assistance to victims of torture had improved its work. However, he would like to welcome efforts made by leaders of the Fund in finding more ways to cooperate with States in identifying the "real" victims of torture requiring international assistance. He noted that resources were being used for situations that were 20 to 30 years old, while more well-known cases in terrorism were not seen as central.

Mr. Mbaidjol, in response to the comments made by the representative of Algeria, congratulated the Government of that country for its dedication to the promotion of human rights and for having signed seven of the international human rights treaties. In terms of delays in the publication of reports, he suggested that translation issues might be at the root of many of those delays, but said he would convey the concerns of Algeria to the proper persons, as well as Algeria's wish to see specific comments annexed to the reports. He also emphasized the independence of the Special Procedures and the Committees set up to follow-up on the implementation of the treaties.

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In response to the comments made by the delegate from the Russian Federation on the role of the Office of the High Commissioner, he stressed that the Office was intended to support the Committees that had been established and to assist them logistically, for example by dealing with documents they issued, and that the High Commissioner was expected to refrain from influencing the conclusions that the Committees drew from their work. He said that questions regarding the effectiveness of the treaty bodies should be directed to the High Commissioner, and it was at that level that such issues needed to be discussed. The concerns over reporting were legitimate and he pledged to bring those concerns to the High Commissioner.

HENRY MAC-DONALD (Suriname), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), stated that its members were guided by fundamental principles of good governance, the rule of law, and respect for the basic rights and freedoms of all, and welcomed the recent entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a regional contribution towards the advancement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, comprehensive capacity development training would be organized from 8 to 12 December, in conjunction with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The training would enable Caribbean national Governments to better monitor and implement international human rights treaties.

He advised a holistic approach to the three pillars of the United Nations system: development; peace and security; and human rights; noting that the pervasiveness of poverty, the increase in inequities between and within countries, the spread of infectious diseases, armed conflict, and intolerance still stood in the way of "real implementation" of all human rights for all. Despite "notable progress" in the human rights field, particularly in the areas of civil and political rights, he said efforts towards the realization of economic, social and cultural rights by the international community "still fall short". Further, he urged finding a "durable" solution to the debt problems of developing countries, which could all positively advance human rights; creating market opportunities for them, especially small island developing States; and democratizing international financial institutions.

He noted the ongoing work of the Human Rights Council as it worked to fulfil its mandate with Member States in the promotion and protection of human rights for all, and he emphasized the critical importance of universal coverage and equal treatment of all States to periodic review of human rights situations. He urged the Human Rights Council to deliver on expectations to create a more conducive environment in pursuit of its work to advance human rights. In closing, he expressed appreciation for those who had supported the passing of the General Assembly resolution for the creation of a permanent memorial at the United Nations to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and urged continued commitment to finalize its placement, which represents the "very principles and ideals of the United Nations Charter".

PHILIPPE DELACROIX (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, recalled that 2008 was the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which afforded the opportunity to reiterate the importance of that text as the very basis of international policies promoting and ensuring human dignity. That celebration was also cause for reaffirming the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights, and the "equality" of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. But, despite progress on the international human rights agenda, the European Union was aware that the international community needed to redouble efforts to ensure full enjoyment of human rights. In view of issues brought about by globalization and security challenges, universal ratification of important international conventions "must take precedence more than ever before".

He said States that had not yet done so must make additional efforts to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The same call was made with regard to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in the case of reservations to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He remarked that the entry into force of the Convention against Enforced Disappearance would enhance and supplement standard-setting texts already in place.

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He said treaty bodies were "remarkable guides" on how to implement those international instruments. States parties to those instruments should ratify their Optional Protocols, or else submit statements to treaty bodies so that they could "receive individual communications". In that regard, the European Union supported the idea for a complaints procedure in the context of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It was regrettable that there were major delays in the submission of the reports of some States parties, since treaty bodies must be allowed to study the situations in countries and make recommendations within reasonable time frames. He said the European Union viewed Optional Protocols as important adjuncts to international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention against Torture, which sought to establish independent institutions to prevent torture in places of detention, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which committed all States parties to abolish the death penalty.

IDREES MOHAMED ALI MOHAMMED SAEED (Sudan) said his Government was convinced of the need for the promotion of human rights through international and regional instruments that had been adopted. As such, the Sudan was committed to reinforcing human rights by ratifying the relevant international treaties. The universality of human rights and their interdependence and indivisibility required that all rights be given equal status and, as such, human and cultural rights should be given the same importance as civil and political rights. However, though mechanisms had been put in place to reinforce civil and political rights, there were no such mechanisms supporting human and cultural rights. Operational steps were needed to further strengthen human and cultural rights, such as the right to food, the right to development and other social rights.

Cultural diversity should also be at the centre of any attempt to create human rights instruments, since such an approach would help prevent hegemony and a situation in which one group dominated over proceedings, he continued. A reform of the Office of the High Commissioner should help the Office achieve a better balance on its positions and to ensure that certain geographic groups would not be excluded from its work. The Office should study concerns over geographic imbalances, to ensure that it operated in full neutrality and without serving any narrow interest.

The Sudan was cooperating strictly with all human rights mechanisms, because it was convinced of the need for dialogue and communications to deal with the questions of human rights, he said. The African Group in Geneva had presented a draft resolution that had been adopted by the Human Rights Council, inviting them to include that resolution in its mandate for June of 2009. Such efforts underscored the progress made in human rights, which were the fruit of international cooperation and national and regional efforts. Collective action on human rights should be taken through the multiple mechanisms currently in use and should be done without dividing States. There were States that had not yet achieved various goals in the area of human rights. To help those countries meet those goals, all nations should participate in the "global march for the reinforcement of human rights" and work to reinforce the spirit that guided the Human Rights Council in its work.

SALIMA ABDELHAK (Algeria) said, in order to provide the best framework for the protection of human rights at the national level, her Government had implemented a number of judicial reforms that were aimed at aligning national efforts with international norms. Since the protection of human rights was, primarily, the responsibility of States, her Government had undertaken a number of revisions, including revisions to the penal, civil, family and nationality codes. Free and transparent elections were a priority for her Government and enshrined in national law. Now, dozens of political parties were active on the political scene and represented in the national assembly. Algeria also placed the enjoyment of the social, cultural and economic rights of its citizens among its top priorities and had implemented a number of measures to ensure the protection of those rights.

Aware of the fundamental role of women in building a society based on progress and modernity, she said her Government had ensured their full participation in economic, social and political life. For example, a national consultative commission on the promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms had 44 members, 16 of whom were women. That commission was responsible for examining all human rights violations and reported annually to the President. Aware of the interdependence and the universality of human rights, Algeria showed great interest for humanitarian rights as well, since all human rights were essential to the organization of a democratic society, to peaceful domestic relations and to the rule of law.

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NOBUKO KUROSAKI (Japan) said that Japan had ratified six of the principal international human rights instruments and had been implementing them in good faith. Furthermore, in celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Japan would observe a "Human Rights Week" in December to promote respect for human rights and to raise awareness of the importance of the Declaration. Japan recently underwent the Universal Periodic Review and its Governmental report was reviewed last week by the Human Rights Committee. The Government would continue to faithfully implement international human rights instruments and strive to find more effective ways of implementing them through treaty body reviews.

"The Human Rights Council now stands at a critical juncture", she said. Soon it would be possible to determine whether the Council would become a truly effective organization that could meet the expectations of the international community. The Universal Periodic Review was expected to become one of the important pillars of the Human Rights Council and, as a member of the Council, Japan had undergone the review in May. If it was impartial, efficient and effective, that mechanism, together with the follow-up measures that were taken, would prove useful to the Council. Overall, it was essential to make comprehensive efforts in a wide range of areas, including peace and development, to secure human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

MAHINDA SAMARASINGHE (Sri Lanka), Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, noted his country's "strong and vibrant human rights protection system" and shared both the progress and the challenges the country faced in its efforts to promote and ensure human rights. His country was a State party to seven core human rights treaties and several international instruments in the field of humanitarian law. The country's National Human Rights Commission had been established more than a decade ago. Further, the Government had implemented effective policies that laid the foundation of economic, social and cultural rights, among them, a free education system with a resulting literacy rate on par with developed countries, a national health care system, and a national campaign to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The objective of the Government, as pointed out by the President in his address to the General Assembly, was to speed development activities in those areas where there was a heavy presence of terrorists; fast-tracking economic development in the Eastern Province, for example, where former terrorists, having abandoned terrorism and embraced democracy, now served as government officials. Significantly, the restoration of democracy in the east of Sri Lanka had been achieved after less than one year of it being freed.

His country's efforts to promote and protect human rights took place under difficult and trying circumstances, due to the continuing challenge posed by the terrorist group, the LTTE, that still operated in the Northern Province. Despite that challenge, his Government had a policy of open and constructive engagement with the human rights treaty bodies and submitted regular reports. In May this year, Sri Lanka submitted its national Human Rights Report for review under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council, which was reflective of the open engagement by the Government with that process and its belief that openness and accountability through international means could strengthen national efforts. The National Human Rights Commission, operating through ten regional offices, also played a pivotal role in protecting human rights.

As a country affected by terrorism, the Government was committed to the physical safety and security of all civilians, non-combatants, internally displaced persons and humanitarian and development workers. During the conflict, food, medicine, educational supplies and other essential items were sent into the affected areas with the knowledge that a good deal would be seized by the LTTE. However, the Government's commitment to that humanitarian policy was not exclusionary. As a practical example, over the past three weeks the Government had ensured the supply of approximately 2,000 metric tons of food relief to the so-called uncleared areas. The Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance was a high-level coordinating mechanism that brought together the Government, international partners and civil society to discuss and implement policy on humanitarian assistance, and was geared to addressing the challenges that arise when dealing with countering a terrorist campaign.

In keeping with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, he concluded by announcing the recent steps taken to draft a national plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights. Working closely with the United Nations Development Programme and the senior advisor of the United Nations country team, the plan

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promised to expand the capacity of its national institutions and fulfil the objectives shared with the Human Rights Council during its recent Universal Periodic Review.

T. VANCE McMAHAN (United States) said his country was deeply committed to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and took its obligations under human rights treaties very seriously. That commitment, it was hoped, was evidenced by the depth and breadth of its reporting and the extensive consultations held throughout the Government and civil society in preparation for each appearance before a treaty committee. Indeed, implementation of existing human rights obligations should remain a priority for the General Assembly and the United Nations as a whole. Full realization of "human rights for all" was best served by a sharp focus on the implementation of existing instruments, rather than the creation of new ones.

He said that, although the Assembly could play an important role in calling attention to the most serious violations of human rights, treaty bodies were extremely valuable in strengthening countries' implementation of their treaty obligations. While their observations and comments were non-binding, they might prod countries to work on a particular problem area. The overall treaty reporting process itself was useful for compelling States to undertake a Government-wide effort to evaluate their progress in meeting treaty obligations, which often brought about changes in States policies and practices. The United States' most recent treaty body experience was its reporting on the implementation of two Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on children in armed conflict, which helped it to consider a variety of issues.

With regard to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which the United States was not party to, he expressed regret that the Committee tasked with overseeing its implementation often pressed for "legislative changes far beyond the text and spirit of the Convention itself". For example, the Committee took a stance against a draft law in Lithuania that would provide legal protection for unborn children by prohibiting abortion except in certain carefully defined circumstances. Likewise, it strongly criticized the Government of Honduras for its abortion laws, as well as Slovakia's laws allowing conscientious objection for health workers. That focus struck him as being misplaced, since there was no mention of abortion in the Convention. Moreover, the Committee spent "comparatively little time" on the top two measures that could reduce maternal mortality: skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care. The Committee had also used its dialogue with countries to call for the decriminalization of prostitution and to pressure changes in States' definition of family, based on what appeared to be the personal opinion of individual members of the Committee, rather than any relevant text in the Convention.

MOHAMED RIDA AL-HUSSAINI (Iraq) said his Government respected the goals and principles of the United Nations and, as such, his Government was resolved to honour its commitments and harmonize its national laws with international conventions and covenants. More specifically, the Government had completed legislative measures to adhere to the Optional Protocols on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on torture. The situation of migrants and displaced persons was an issue that held a great deal of interest and importance for his Government. As such, Iraq had allotted significant amounts of money to help resolve the situations of displaced Iraqis currently residing both inside and outside of the country. The Government was also focused on improving the living and economic conditions of its citizens through various economic measures aimed at the reconstruction and reactivation of the national economy. Efforts towards that goal had already achieved tangible progress, including a decrease in inflation and unemployment rates. In addition, Iraq had established a social protection network to provide better care to vulnerable groups, and it had embarked on a reform of the health sector to ensure basic health services for all.

The Government of Iraq had also launched a series of legal reforms and an anti-corruption initiative, he said, all in an effort to further protect the rights of its citizens. Iraq was keen to promote a human rights culture within the country, and it had already made significant progress towards that end. It had established a national system for the monitoring of human rights violations and had formed "monitoring task forces", in coordination with other human rights entities. In addition, much had been done to resolve issues surrounding the situation of persons who had disappeared during the war, prisoners of war and the existence of mass graves. The Government of Iraq was also committed to promoting the role of the judiciary in the protection of human rights. In closing, he drew attention to the

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upcoming provincial council elections and reaffirmed his Government's commitment to building an environment conducive to free, fair and democratic elections.

LIU ZHENMIN (China), emphasizing the great importance his Government attached to the role of international human rights instruments in promoting and protecting those rights, highlighted a number of such treaties to which China was a party. Most recently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had been ratified in June and had come into force on 31 August. China earnestly fulfilled its obligations to all treaties to which it was party and to that end had adopted legislative, judicial, and administrative measures towards their implementation. It also attentively submitted periodic reports to treaty bodies and maintained an excellent dialogue with them. Active support had also been given to the Governments of Hong Kong and Macao in protecting human rights.

Noting that this year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he said all countries should stick to the spirit of the Declaration and engage in dialogue on the basis of equality and mutual respect, with view to seeking common ground, narrowing differences and expanding consensus. But, while international human rights instruments had played a positive role overall, their excessively complicated and heavy reporting burden was a problem. The current reporting mechanism and duplication of labour among different treaty bodies was particularly notable. Further, certain treaty bodies often exceeded their mandates in the exercise of their duties. His Government had noted the recommendations by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to harmonize those reporting guidelines. Reform should be aimed at streamlining reporting mechanisms and enhancing efficiency. It was also imperative for treaty bodies to adhere to the principles of fairness, objectivity and neutrality and use caution when it came to unverified information from unreliable sources.

TARIQ ANWAR (India) noted that a few reports relating to today's agenda had been made available only very recently, while some were still not ready. That had denied States adequate time to study them, and so he requested that all reports be made available to Member States well in advance.

He went on to say that the observance of human rights was at the core of any civilized society. Progressive negotiations had brought about institutional mechanisms to handle human rights issues. The establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights rounded out the international "human rights regime", as set forth in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in proceeding texts, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The protection of the civil and political rights of people was equally important to the promotion of their economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. He expressed gratitude to the treaty bodies for their help in helping strengthen domestic policies. He stressed that experts serving on those bodies should handle development, democracy and human rights, which were strongly interrelated to each other, as a single "compact".

He said he welcomed efforts to streamline reporting by revised harmonization of the guidelines, which reduced duplication of work at the national level and helped provide a certain amount of standardization. Treaty bodies and the Office of the High Commissioner should develop the capacity of various Member States who found it difficult to submit their periodic reports due to lack of experience and capability. Strengthening national reporting procedures helped Member States identify gaps in their national policies and find the means to reduce them. For its part, India had consistently supported international efforts to evolve a normative framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. India was also concerned over the delays by various treaty bodies in examining country reports, and agreed, in principle, with the idea of holding Committee meetings in parallel chambers. The Office of the High Commissioner could also explore submitting a suitable proposal to temporarily increase the number of days that the Committee met, at least until the backlog was dealt with. The treaty body system had assisted India greatly in implementing its international obligations with regard to human rights, and it was hoped that all Member States were able to benefit in a similar way.

JO JOO-SUNG (Republic of Korea), noting the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, said significant progress had been made under United Nations leadership, notably in establishing legal frameworks and monitoring mechanisms. Norms, such as the International Covenants on Human Rights, had played a valuable part in contributing to an overall improvement in human rights situations. However, gaps remained between the

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ideals pursued through such norms and reality, as established international human rights conventions had not been fully implemented, and the protection of women, children and minorities, among others, left "much to be desired".

He said States' duty to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms should not be eclipsed by excessive emphasis on the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical backgrounds, as underlined in the Vienna Declaration. He emphasized maintaining momentum for the Universal Periodic Review process, whereby the human rights situations of all Member States were subject to review. His country attached great importance to -- and fully supported -- that process, as effective follow-up measures within it could lead to actual human rights improvements.

Vienna Declaration

MAX-OLIVIER GONNET (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated countries, said that 2008 not only marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also the fifteenth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the World Conference on human rights. The Vienna Declaration provided the reference framework to overcome obstacles to the promotion and universal protection of those rights. International attention should, therefore, remain focused on that framework and efforts should continue to effectively implement the Programme of Action. Huge progress had been made in promoting and protecting human rights over the last 15 years, including the founding of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Office had significantly raised awareness on human rights issues and had helped spread human rights within the United Nations system and on the ground. As such, it should have all necessary resources at its disposal to undertake its work, particularly in the area of technical assistance, and to independently determine its plan for strategic management. He added that the rules currently governing its budgetary policy and human resources should be maintained and efforts to broaden its activities on the ground, through the establishment of regional offices, should be encouraged.

Over the past 15 years, great strides had been made towards the universal ratification of relevant United Nations human rights conventions and the adoption of new conventions, he said. As well, there had been a worldwide emergence of associations and non-governmental organizations whose primary goal was the implementation of international treaties and the protection of human rights. In addition, the international codification of human rights continued to move forward with the negotiation of new international instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, in practice, too many people continued to be denied the right to fundamental rights and freedoms. In order for the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to be fully implemented and for all human rights violations to be put to a stop, all stakeholders would need to reiterate their commitment to justice, the rule of law, and the fight against impunity. "It is our collective responsibility, in collaboration with international and non-governmental organizations, to lay down conditions which allow human rights to be effectively exercised at a national, regional and international level," he said. Recommendations adopted at the international conference of experts, organized by the Austrian Government in August to discuss how best to strengthen local implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, deserved the Committee's full attention and should be an inspiration for future work.

SERGEI CHUMAREV(Russian Federation) noted that "human rights" was being used by some Members States as a way to advance their political ideology, and a kind of "human rights doctrine" -- a major component of "mass political culture" -- was having negative impacts on the cultural and national identities of people and their traditional value systems. It was entirely possible for believers in the human rights doctrine and their democratic bodies to adopt double standards, thereby contributing to the emergence of totalitarian regimes. An example from Europe included the birth of Nazism and xenophobia, including Russophobia. The human rights doctrine was a form of state ideology, exemplified by the return of the police state which interfered in people's private lives. The international community should avoid exporting that human rights ideology through economic circles, which resulted in the commercialization of human rights, in a kind of "market of human rights services".

He said that such a human rights ideology, which claimed to be universal, had not been able to prove its effectiveness in settling intergovernmental and interpersonal conflicts, such as conflicts over religion or the

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implementation of various economic, social and political rights. United Nations agencies involved in advancing the cause of human rights seemed to underestimate the value of holding dialogues among civilizations, and of fostering respect for religious values. It was important for them to look at the interdependence of all categories of rights, and to examine the question of rights from a philosophical angle.

He said the Russian legal tradition gave primacy to the notion of collective rights -- an organic unity of rights and duties of individuals in society, as embodied by responsible interactions between people. It was important to adopt a critical view of various attempts to create an ideal society, which was only serving to alienate people from their roots. He ended by stressing that he did not claim to establish an ultimate truth about human rights, but aimed to promote the idea of exploring the idea of "rights" through a dialogue of cultures. He appealed for a fresh look at many human rights dogmas that had led to the "emasculatation" of the profound humanistic content of Universal Declaration and the Vienna Programme of Action.

MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ(Egypt) said the establishment of the Human Rights Council, and the endorsement of its "institutional building package", followed by the launch of the Universal Review Mechanism and the review process of the mandates of special procedures, were among the steps taken by the international community to reformulate the human rights agenda. However, the world was still witnessing attempts on the part of a few who wished to "impose their view" on how certain concepts and internationally agreed standards should be applied, making it necessary to redirect international efforts on a number of key tracks. As a start, the international community should confront certain nations for their "sense of superiority" -- in assuming that their values, cultures and social and legal justice systems were superior to others. "We should not be misguided by the attempts to limit the consideration of human rights issues to those related to civil and political rights, at the expense of economic, social and cultural rights," he said.

Headed that full respect for the principles of international law and the complementarity between international human rights law and international humanitarian law would require a simultaneous recognition of "the right to development" as a fundamental right. Giving due attention to the right to development would allow for the provision of better living standards that would contribute to the promotion of human rights, with no attached conditionalities aimed at imposing "controversial concepts" or linking them to development assistance. It would also entail "respecting the institutional balance" between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in supervising the activities of the Human Rights Council and its special procedures and treaty bodies, while ending the use of the Security Council as a tool to politicize human rights questions. Further, there should be a clear commitment not to supersede the Third Committee's mandate as the Assembly's negotiating body on human rights issues. Further, countries should not override the mandate of the Human Rights Council by tabling country-specific resolutions or creating parallel structures in an attempt to strengthen the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, or by appointing people responsible for monitoring human rights situations to the offices of United Nations developmental programmes.

He said the international community must reinforce the notion that "human rights" was primarily the responsibility of national Governments, such as when coming to a comprehensive international understanding of the "responsibility to protect" and on "human security". Also, efforts should be made to correct the geographical distribution in the staffing structures of the Office of the High Commissioner, and in striking a balance between the assessed regular budget and voluntary contributions. The international community should engage in constructive dialogue based on respect for "cultural identities and particularities". Egypt was seeking to improve its legislative framework to encourage the articulation of a communal idea of human rights. Such efforts had led to the adoption of constitutional amendments through a referendum to create a larger degree of balance between the Presidency, the Government, Parliament and the courts.

Mr. CASAL (Venezuela) said, at the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights 60 years ago and at the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 15 years ago, individuals had expressed their hope for the protection and promotion of all human rights, including rights to peace, justice, equality, rule of law, and better living conditions. Yet, despite significant achievements over the past 60 years, including the creation of the Human Rights Council, many of those rights had still not been satisfied. Success now depended on the political will

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to implement the principles of human rights, enshrined in those declarations. International cooperation was the only means to achieve universal respect and compliance with basic human rights, and such cooperation should be based on genuine dialogue, with respect for the social, cultural, and political legacies of different regions.

He expressed his country's deep concern over the apparent neglect by some countries of their international commitments, including their commitment to solidarity and cooperation. Solidarity was closely tied in with human rights and the achievement of collective goals in the field. Countries of the South had launched numerous initiatives, based on the principle of solidarity, which had resulted in concrete examples of success. Consumerism, capitalism that benefited only a few, and financial speculation worked against the notion of solidarity. Turning to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, he said the new High Commissioner should work to remove all obstacles on the path to the achievement of human rights, especially in regards to the promotion and protection of the right to development. A clear and transparent dialogue between the Office and Member States was essential. In closing, he said the poor of the world were calling for a new international order, where human rights would prevail over economic interests.

Introduction of Draft Resolutions

The Committee then resumed its consideration of the agenda item relating to the advancement of women with the introduction of three draft resolutions. The representative of the Netherlands, speaking also on behalf of Belgium, introduced the draft resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (document A/C.3/63/L.12), which reflected the committed and comprehensive response of Member States on the issue. A culture of impunity for acts of violence against women continued to exist throughout the world and, as such, the main theme of the current draft resolution was aimed at ending that culture of impunity, he said. Negotiations on the draft resolution were taking place in an open and constructive manner and contributions on best practices proposed by Member States with a view to ending impunity were being included in those discussions.

Introducing the draft resolution on the future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (document A/C.3/63/L.14), the representative of Antigua and Barbuda, speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said that the draft recognized important contributions of INSTRAW to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its role in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The draft text also acknowledged the Institute's contributions to ongoing efforts on gender mainstreaming, through its research and training outputs involving national gender machineries, academic institutes, regional intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. She invited all Member States to continue to provide assistance and political and material support to the Institute, through voluntary contributions, substantive involvement in the Institute's projects and activities, and by offering unconditional support and co-sponsorship to the draft text.

The representative of Senegal then introduced the draft resolution on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula (document A/C.3/63/L.15), while highlighting the slow progress overall on achieving Millennium Goal 5 on maternal health. Obstetric fistula continued to be a major issue in many developing countries and the condition continued to be the cause of far too many deaths. Its victims were often poor, illiterate and had little or no access to health services. The draft resolution was aimed at raising public awareness of the condition, with a view to prevention. The text did not contain any substantial changes from a similar text that had been adopted at the previous session, but it did contain the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report. On that subject, she noted the late submission of the Secretary-General's report and suggested that, in the future, an earlier submission of the report would facilitate more effective discussions on the issue within the Committee.

Resumed Debate

CHRISTIAN EBNER (Austria), aligning himself with the statement by the European Union, informed the Committee that an international expert conference had been held in Austria from 28 to 29 August on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. Entitled "Global Standards -- Local Action", the conference gathered national human rights institutions, civil society groups, educational institutions,

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United Nations agencies and human rights experts. Its purpose had been to assess progress and identify major challenges in the implementation of international human rights standards from the perspective of local and regional human rights actors. The Vienna Programme of Action had had a significant impact on the development of human rights standards and machinery, leading, among other things, to the creation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

He said the major message emanating from that conference had been that, while the existing human rights framework was working well and "should not be put to question", there was a gap between standards and their implementation on the ground. In particular, participants said efforts to secure universal ratification of all major human rights treaties should be strengthened. People in all countries must be better informed about their rights through human rights education and have access to justice when their rights were violated. National human rights institutions should be established to work in cooperation with international human rights monitoring bodies, and human rights texts should be translated into local languages. Recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms should be regularly integrated into the Organization's development of programmes and field activities. Local stakeholders must be engaged in that process, in order to increase local ownership. Cooperation between United Nations human rights mechanisms and human rights mechanisms at the regional level should be enhanced to ensure better coordination on issues of mutual concern.

SARAH MWAIPOPO (United Republic of Tanzania) said her country was committed to promoting human rights, and was party to the core human rights instruments of both the United Nations and African Union. During the past two years, it had submitted four country reports on the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Optional Protocol to Rights of the Child, and the Women's Anti-Discrimination Convention. The Government was preparing the country report on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, for submission "in due course". The Government had been encouraged by the constructive dialogue during its report presentation and would work with treaty bodies to implement concluding remarks. She requested streamlined reporting within treaty bodies, and reducing the time lag between report submission and presentation before the bodies. She also underscored the importance of international cooperation in assisting developing nations to fulfil their treaty obligations.

She commended the treaty body chairs, for their preparedness to test new approaches, and the working group on the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, for finalizing the draft adopted by the Human Rights Council. Her country would undergo a review in 2011 by the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, and would need technical assistance in the preparation process. Supporting the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, she said her Government had passed a circular declaring 10 December National Human Rights Day, and also continued to implement the Vienna Declaration, notably through "fruitful discussions" with the Special Rapporteur, on the illicit movement and dumping of toxic wastes, who visited the country from 21 to 30 January. His Government was now working to implement his recommendations. The United Republic of Tanzania reiterated the need for global cooperation in implementing human rights standards.

SEYED MOHSEN EMADI (Iran) said the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action and holding of the World Conference on Human Rights had marked a turning point for human rights. Yet, six decades since the adoption of the United Nations Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the Vienna Programme, most of the international community's aspirations regarding international cooperation in the field of human rights remained unfulfilled. To achieve the Vienna Programme's lofty goals, Member States must create favourable conditions for their implementation. Iran had always rendered support to improving the effectiveness of United Nations human rights organs and had enjoyed good relations with the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. The Government of Iran had planned to provide voluntary funding to organize a seminar on human rights and cultural diversity, to be held in Geneva in the near future.

He said Iran had initiated a number of human rights dialogues with some countries, namely members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Conference. The Government would soon designate 5 August as "Islamic Human Rights and Human Dignity Day", a proposal that was adopted at the thirty-fifth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Conference on 19 May. Iran also had the honour of

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hosting the Non-Aligned Movement Centre for Human Rights and Cultural Diversity, along the lines of the Tehran Declaration and Programme of Action on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity. He indicated that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had put particular emphasis on the right to development as an "inextricable" component of human rights. But, the realization of that right still faced obstacles.

WARIF HALABI (Syria) said the fight against slavery, oppression, deprivation and poverty, and even the fight for the right to nutrition and daily subsistence, were manifestations of the overall fight for human rights. But, each nation should be given the chance to view the notion of "human rights" through its own lens, as shaped by their culture and traditions. Further, human rights must be upheld in a fair, just and "equal" way, and without double standards, and taking into account the socio-religious and historic characteristics of each country.

She said that, for its part, the economic, civil, political and social rights of Syrians were enshrined in the country's Constitution. It had ratified over 17 human rights instruments, including the 7 main human rights documents. It was unfortunate that the politicization of the human rights issue had allowed some countries to place pressure on others to obtain political concessions. Some States that were worthy of help were deprived of loans and other forms of assistance. Advances in various fields of knowledge had led to marked improvement in human life; yet humankind still lived in need. Local conflicts were causing human disasters, the most brutal of which were being committed collectively, such as through ethnic cleansing. The Vienna Programme provided for measures to ensure that human rights standards were being upheld, to be guaranteed through legal protection against violations. According to such human rights standards, foreign occupation was a serious violation of human rights. Consequently, ending human rights violations would mean putting an end to foreign occupation. It was high time that the international community imposed certain human rights standards, as enshrined in United Nations Charter, to address the serious violations posed by foreign occupation.

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**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE ON
PROMOTION OF CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
RIGHTS, RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this afternoon concluded its general debate on the promotion of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.

Issues raised by speakers included discrimination against minorities and persons with disabilities, the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples, freedom of opinion and expression, gender equality and women's rights, access to medication including for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, the feminization of migration, human rights defenders and the prohibition of torture.

Speaking in the general debate were New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden, Norway on behalf of Nordic countries, and Tanzania. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies also spoke.

The following non-governmental organizations also took the floor: International Federation of University Women, on behalf of several NGOs¹, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, on behalf of several NGOs², Asian Legal Resource Centre, in a joint statement with Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, Pax Romana and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), World Federation of Trade Unions, in a joint statement with Federation of Cuban Women, Europe-Third World Centre, Baha' International Community, International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, International Humanist and Ethical Union, in a joint statement with Association for World Education, Fraternite Notre Dame, United Nations Watch, Franciscans International, Human Rights Watch, Interfaith International, Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), Society for Threatened Peoples, Alhakim Foundation, World Muslim Congress, Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights, International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, in a joint statement with International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, International Educational Development, Union of Arab Jurists, Philippine Human Rights Information Centre, Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Union de l'action feminine, North South XXI, Association of World Citizens and International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Sri Lanka, India, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Thailand, Benin, Chile, Sudan, Cuba, Pakistan, Iran, Morocco and Belarus exercised their right of reply.

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At the end of the meeting, Ambassador Doru Romulus Costea of Romania, the President of the Council, said that the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children, Sigma Huda, was not in a position to come to Geneva to present her report. Given that Ms. Huda had not been able to attend any sessions since the second session of the Council in September 2006, and that it appeared highly unlikely that she would be able to attend the coming sessions, he proposed to the Council to include the mandate on the list of vacancies of mandate holders to be appointed in June.

The Human Rights Council today is holding three back-to-back meetings from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. When the Council starts its afternoon meeting at 3 p.m., it will hear the reports presented by the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and in Myanmar. It will also consider follow-up to the recommendations of the special session on Myanmar.

General Debate on the Promotion and Protection of Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development

AMY LAURENSEN (New Zealand) said that the full and universal implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms was essential to ending poverty. Non discrimination was an important step forward, but it was not universally applied. Human rights were equal to all. No one should suffer from any form of discrimination. New Zealand attached great importance to women's rights and gender equality. Disabled persons did not enjoy any dedicated discussion in the Council.

LARS VOLCK MADSEN (Denmark) noted that Nordic countries had been actively engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. Denmark firmly believed that the promotion of the human rights of indigenous peoples contributed to the maintenance and development of multicultural, pluralistic and tolerant societies built upon effective participation by all groups of society. One recent milestone in the promotion of human rights of indigenous peoples was the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With this document Denmark believed the Special Rapporteur in the situation of human rights of indigenous peoples had a good basis for his work. Denmark believed that incorporating indigenous representatives into the work of the United Nations at different levels served an important purpose. The Nordic countries remained committed to this cause and would work jointly with all interested parties in supporting the above-mentioned mandates and mechanisms and in promoting the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

JAN NORDLANDER (Sweden) said that freedom of expression was a venerable freedom, with a history stretching back long before it was enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Democracy itself could not function unless ideas were free to be debated and measured against each other. Many of the problems that remained were familiar. Legislation in many countries continued to either limit the freedom of expression, or be used to hinder its implementation. Censorship and harassment of journalists continued in many countries. Reporters without Borders estimated that 86 journalists were killed worldwide in 2007 while carrying out their work, more than a threefold increase in five years.

Sweden said that the rapid proliferation of cell phones and the breakthrough of e-mail had allowed an increase in the flow of information to an extent that few would have been able to imagine 20 years ago. The development of the internet, of course, was a fantastic chapter unto itself. Nevertheless, those who impeded the freedom of expression had unfortunately managed to keep pace. Regrettably, authorities continued to block websites in China, Iran, Egypt and other countries. Moreover, bloggers were harassed, censored and even imprisoned in many countries.

BEATE STIRO (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic Countries, said that, on the issue of women's rights, gender mainstreaming should not replace specific targeted action to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Gender mainstreaming has had a limited impact. It had too often amounted to nothing more than rhetoric. Monitoring and evaluation was needed as well as sufficient resources in terms of budget and staff. Human rights approach to gender implied protecting and promoting women's freedom of movement, control of reproduction, marriage and divorce, amongst others. Women defied simple categorization.

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BARAKA H. LUVANDA (Tanzania) commended the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her annual report on the access to medication in the context of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Tanzania, like many least developed countries, was not spared by the difficulties prevalent in reducing the spread of these pandemics and it was therefore necessary to reiterate the Government's resolve to step up measures towards adequate provision of medication. The issue of access to medication for these diseases was one to which the Government of Tanzania attached great importance. However, it was the view of the country that individual countries could not alone afford to provide medication without the support of the international community. Tanzania appealed to its development partners in the international community to extend their timely, appropriate and sufficient and predictable assistance in that regard. Tanzania subscribed fully to the assertion that access to medicine was a fundamental human right.

KATRIEN BEECKMAN, of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. In this regard, it commended Mr. Bustamante for his attention to the increasing feminization of migration and calling for gender equality programming. The National Societies of the International Federation had an auxiliary role to their public authorities in the humanitarian field, which offered a platform for partnership with governments. Moreover, the developmental benefits of migration were contingent upon the protection of rights of all migrants. Finally, the International Federation reiterated its strong commitment to combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia against migrants.

HALIMA WARZAZI, of the Consultative Council for Human Rights of Morocco, stressed the importance of socio economic rights in the strengthening of political rights. The Council had organized workshops in this regard. The recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Body had also been reviewed. Particular prominence had been given to community reparation. Another workshop had tackled corruption, which led to the violation of many rights. Social responsibility was an important issue.

CONCHITA PONCINI, of International Federation of University Women, on behalf of several NGOs¹, calling attention to the latest developments in the United Nations family on the two-pronged approach to gender equality and women's human rights, urged the Human Rights Council to take concrete steps in implementing the agreed conclusions and recommendations of the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women". The International Federation of University Women also called attention to the Consensus text of the 46th Session of the Commission for Social Development on "Promoting Full Enjoyment and Decent Work for All"; and strongly endorsed the Global Campaign to eliminate violence against women launched by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the opening day of the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

EDRE OLALIA, of International Association of Democratic Lawyers, on behalf of several NGOs², wished to address the issue of human rights defenders and saluted Hina Jilani for her exemplary and courageous work. Attacks against human rights lawyers violated the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1990 basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In the Philippines, such attacks had become increasingly frequent and suffice it to say that until this day, no one had ever been credibly convicted for these attacks. Finally, the high incidence of forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines remained a deep concern and should be addressed by the Council.

RAFENDI TIAJUN, of Asian Legal Resource Centre, in a joint statement with Lawyers Rights Watch Canada; Pax Romana; and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), said that despite the us cogens nature of the prohibition of torture, the practice had increased since 9/11 and went unpunished. Torture was a common tool in Asia. Indonesia had finally allowed the visit of the Special Rapporteur on torture after 14 years. It was regretted that he did not visit the intelligence headquarters. The Special Rapporteur findings on the torture of children were welcomed. Media workers were being tortured in Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, thousands had been arbitrarily detained.

OSIRIS OVIEDO, of World Federation of Trade Unions, in a joint statement with Federation of Cuban Women and Europe-Third World Centre, noted that, according to information provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization

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(FAO), some 854 million persons were seriously undernourished and every five seconds a child under ten died as a result of hunger and malnutrition and another 146 million children under five were underweight. None of these persons were Cuban. The Cuban Government had an impressive national food programme, as had been recognized by the FAO. This had been all been achieved under adverse conditions and amidst a harsh economic blockade imposed by the United States for four decades. As noted in the Human Rights Council report, this blockade was one of the main obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to food in Cuba. Food should never be used as an instrument for economic or political pressure.

SARAH VADER, of the Baha' International Community, spoke on the eradication of violence on women and girls. The failure of nations to recognize the extent of and to decrease this form of violence had revealed the shortcomings of a "reactive" approach, leading many to embrace the broader goal of prevention. Promoting specific morals or values could be controversial but the means to develop them had to be consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, aimed at fostering the spiritual, social, and intellectual development of all people. While such capabilities could be taught in schools, they would not be effective until they took root in the family and community. In conclusion, she reminded the Council that the State had the duty and responsibility to protect the individual and at this level enlightened leadership was desperately required.

ORETTE BONDETTINI DI POGGIO, of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, said that it had to be recognised that in many countries, the rights of human rights defenders were not being respected. They were harassed and persecuted and submitted to shame trials. Statements were obtained under pressure. There were serious violations of human rights of workers in Western Sahara. Hina Jilani had mentioned this in her report and had expressed concern over the situation. It was high time to publish the report of her 2006 visit.

ROY W. BROWN, of International Humanist and Ethical Union, in a joint statement with Association for World Education, indicated that on Human Rights Day 2007, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan, addressing the Council on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, spoke glowingly of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, noting the contribution made to its creation and to the two international covenants by many Muslim countries. The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam was "not an alternative, competing worldview on human rights". The International Humanist and Ethical Union was of the view that the Cairo Declaration could in no way be considered complementary to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under Shari'ah law, Muslim women and non-Muslims were not accorded equal treatment with Muslim men. Countries should consider the negative implications of the universality of human rights and the derogation of the international covenants that were implicit in the Cairo Declaration and the plans of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

SABINE LEGRAND, of Fraternite Notre Dame, said that Reverend Bishop Jean Marie should be applauded for his efforts in improving the situation of the most destitute and abandoned youth in Mongolia and for which he received a Knight in the National Order of Merit. However, the Catholic Church had the medal reclaimed from him and stated that he was not approved by the official authority of the Catholic Church of France and that Fraternite Notre Dame was on the list of sects. Furthermore, the speaker wondered why the French Government was so tamed by the Catholic Church of France, as if under a form of supervision.

HILLEL NEUER, of United Nations Watch, asked in what manner the world could pay tribute to the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This should be done by respecting the right to life. Bu this right was violated everyday in Sudan. Yesterday, the Secretary-General was scheduled to meet with the Sudanese President, but it had to be cancelled because the President had a headache. World leaders had to unite now to end the atrocities. Peacekeeping troops should be sent to the area. The Council had to send a powerful message to Sudan. Sudan was asked how long would headaches continue to afflict the lives of women and children. No more excuses, action was asked, if not from this Council, then from whom?

MADELEINE KOTY, of Franciscans International, noted that among certain populations, babies whose mothers died during childbirth or were born prematurely or with deformities were often labeled as "witches". In areas of Benin and Nigeria, where women often gave birth at home and many died as a result, there were serious violations perpetrated against children. Many newborns were killed while others risked becoming slaves. These practices

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were a serious act of violence against children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its observation in 2006 on the report of Benin, said it was concerned about the infanticide of certain "witch children" and disabled infants in the country. Measures had to be taken urgently to put an end to this scourge. These practices had to be addressed by the authorities concerned. An annual day should be devoted by the Council to the rights of the child.

JULIETTE DE RIVERO, of Human Rights Watch, expressed its concern with regards to human rights violations in Sri Lanka. Since the de facto end of the ceasefire in that country, insufficient attention had been given to human rights abuses, especially in terms of abductions and forced disappearances. Clergy, academics and migrant workers had disappeared under the false allegations that they were members or supporters of the LTTE. In the vast majority of cases, evidence of the involvement of the Sri Lankan military or police or pro-government armed groups was found. Many of the disappeared were feared dead. Unfortunately, none of these cases were fairly investigated and those responsible were not held accountable. Several Special Rapporteurs had made recommendations on these issues, yet the violence and abuses persisted unaddressed.

NOORDIN MENGAL, of Interfaith International, said that the Baluch nation, partly residing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, had been facing persistent repression by the Pakistani Army. Thousands of regular army soldiers were actively carrying out massive military operations in the Baluch nation. The Government had spent billions in the construction of military garrisons. The Chinese Government had assisted Pakistan in the construction of a port and had contributed to the exploitation of the Baluch wealth. Pakistani intelligence had launched aggressive campaigns to neutralize anyone that talked about the rights of the Baluch.

RACHEL BRETT, of Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), drawing attention to child prisoners, recalled that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was clear that it was usually in the best interest of children to be raised by their parents and, as pointed out by the Special Rapporteur on Prison Conditions in Africa, prisons were no place for babies and young children. Each year untold numbers of children were separated from their mothers by imprisonment. Under these circumstances, the first step was to consider whether the two principles could be reconciled by the use of alternatives to imprisonment or pre-trial custody. The Human Rights Council could play a significant role in highlighting this under-considered issue and could encourage States to identify and share good practices in this neglected area of child rights.

RENALDO MARIQUEO, of Society for Threatened Peoples, said that the illegal annexation of lands by Chile and Argentina had threatened the indigenous people of those countries, despite peaceful attempts to have their rights respected. The current administration of Chile had detained many indigenous activists who were subjected to police brutality, torture, and inhumane and degrading treatment. Judges and police were allowed to keep detainees even after their innocence had been established and even up to one year after their initial detention. The anti-terrorist laws of Chile were frequently being misused to arrest and detain indigenous peoples.

SAHIB AL-HAKIM, of Alhakim Foundation, said the Iraqi people were going through a unique experience after getting rid of the former dictator who had violated human rights for more than 35 years. Now, the new Iraq looked to the international community to assist in the promotion of cultural and social affairs. In order to help in the rehabilitation of this large segment of Iraqi society, socially and psychologically, economically and scientifically, the international community had to redouble its efforts seriously to save them. Their input should be in the form of more development and rebuilding the country's infrastructure. Alhakim called on the international community to implement humanitarian projects in the country and support the overall development in all aspects of life.

SHAGUFTA ASHRAF, of the World Muslim Congress, said that human rights were the backbone of human dignity. Peace could only be expected when human rights were respected, protected and promoted. Occupying States resorted more frequently to repression. This was happening in the Indian-occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir. Torture was used as a political weapon and manifested itself in many cruel forms such as rape against women, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings. The Council was requested to urge India to allow Special Procedures, non-governmental organizations and the media to visit Jammu and Kashmir to assess the human rights situation in that area.

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TOM GANIATSOS, of Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights, said the production of liquid biofuels was having an important impact on the right to food and had already contributed to rising food prices, as pointed out by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food. Large scale biofuel production also threatened the right to food by increasing climate change. Support should be given to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and other agencies in exploring alternative fuel sources in countries.

ILTAF HUSSAIN WANI, of International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, in a joint statement with International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, said that the people of the Indian-occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir were being denied the right to self-determination. Their basic human rights were being systematically violated. In 2006, 22 extrajudicial killings were reported and the number had increased in 2007. There was no room for freedom of expression or freedom of association in that territory. The role of the Human Rights Council was to defend the rights of all people and as such this issue had to be set and addressed on its forthcoming agenda.

KAREN PARKER, of International Educational Development, said International Educational Development welcomed the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders on her report on the situation in Sri Lanka and thanked her for her communication to the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The Special Representative indicated that the Sri Lankan authorities were instructed not to raise human rights issues during their talks with the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes. This showed a lack of cooperation by the Sri Lankan authorities with the United Nations. The efforts by the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of expression on Sri Lanka were also welcomed. His comments suggested that acts in Sri Lanka constituted some of the most serious cases of the violations of the freedom of expression.

HANA AL-BAYATY, of Union of Arab Jurists, emphasized the grave deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Iraq as well as Iraqi peoples' rights, whether civil, political or social. Approaching the fifth anniversary of the United States invasion of Iraq, serious estimates suggested that there were at least 1 million deaths and 4.4 refugees since the beginning of the war. The independent judicial system had collapsed and courts were being used to legitimize summary executions. One positive step to address the situation of human rights violations in Iraq could be the appointment of a Special Rapporteur for Iraq.

HANA AILEEN BACALSO, of the Philippine Human Rights Information Centre, said the Philippine Human Rights Information Centre took cognizance of the Working Group of Disappearances' concerns on the spate of enforced disappearances in the Philippines through the cases it recently received and the still unresolved cases of past administrations. In a meeting between the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances and President Macapagal-Arroyo in August 2001, she promised that there would be no more cases of enforced disappearances during her administration. On the contrary, new cases of disappearances and extrajudicial killings continued unabated. The Group appealed to the Government of the Philippines and all Members States of the United Nations to ensure the immediate entry into force of the related United Nations Convention.

LINDSAY GRAHAM, of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, said that at the heart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the interdependence of fundamental freedoms. The Becket Fund echoed the attention drawn by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression on the growing trend of defamation laws around the world. The defamation of ideologies, as opposed to the defamation of persons, forcibly required the State to determine which ideas were acceptable and as such unacceptably violated the fundamental right of freedom of expression. Finally, the Becket Fund reminded the Council that the freedom of speech was precious to freedom of conscience.

SAADANI MAOULAININE, of Union de l'action feminine, thanked the Special Rapporteurs for their excellent reports on various topics. With regard to the prisoners languishing in the Tindouf prison camp, these persons had been deprived of fundamental rights and had been subjected to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances and lacked freedom of expression. Thousands had been tortured inside these camps and humanitarian assistance was

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being diverted for the personal use of the leaders of the camps themselves, giving rise to further human rights violations. In the Tindouf camps human rights were being violated on a regular basis.

NIRAJ PABARI, of North South XXI, thanked all mandate holders for their services. The 29 remaining States that had not replied yet to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders were encouraged to do so. The work of the Working Group on arbitrary detention was important. It was hard to understand why several cases brought to the attention of the Working Group concerning Palestinians had not yet appeared before the Working Group.

GENEVIEVE JOURDAN, of Association of World Citizens, said migrants were essential stakeholders. Health was an indicator of fairness and a society providing decent life to its citizens would prosper. Brazil, Chile and Sweden, among other countries, had developed national strategies for health fairness to meet the health concerns of all their citizens. The World Health Assembly this year would address questions of health with regard to the migration phenomenon. It was hoped that when the next Special Rapporteur on health was appointed, an in-depth study would be undertaken in accordance with WHO standards to ensure that migrants enjoyed their rights fully, including their right to health.

MICHEL MONOD, of International Fellowship of Reconciliation, said that conscious objection was considered as a part of civil and political rights. There was alarming information that in Eritrea objection of military service was not possible. People were obliged to flee, if caught they were put in jail. Some tried to flee to European Union countries, crossing the Mediterranean. Eritrea was asked to act accordingly to respect this right.

Right of Reply

SHIRANI GUMATILLAKE (Sri Lanka), in a right of reply, said it was sad that Human Rights Watch failed to take a balanced view in dealing with the situation in Sri Lanka. They lacked credibility in doing so. The Government's position was that it objected to the proposal laid out by Human Rights Watch. Tamil representatives contributed in many Government initiatives to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict in the country.

RAJIV KUMAR CHANDER (India), speaking in a right of reply in response to the mentioning of Kashmir in the statement of Pakistan, said self-determination had long been recognised by India. Those that were trying to reinvent the Charter had to pay attention. However, the right to self-determination could not be abused. Self-determination could not be abused for a group to use it in order to undermine the territorial sovereignty of a state. The Indian state of Kashmir was an integral part of India. The people there had participated in free and fair elections. Pakistan was illegally occupying this part of the country. Under Pakistani occupation, human rights were being violated. India was convinced that bilateral issues should be discussed bilaterally.

BADRIDDIN OBIDOV (Uzbekistan), speaking in a right of reply referring to the statement by Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, said Uzbekistan was alarmed over the unsubstantiated claims made through the statement of alleged practices of torture in Uzbekistan. There was a total absence of facts. Unfortunately, the Human Rights Council continued to witness a practice whereby individual States were politicizing these issues. As pointed out by the United Nations Secretary-General, the Council should carry out its activities on the basis of non-selectivity and it should not be biased. The statement of the European Union ran counter to these principles. Uzbekistan was carrying out consistent reform and taking practical steps to rooting out all forms of torture. It was noted that as of January 2008 Uzbekistan had fully abolished the death penalty.

M. CHIDUKU (Zimbabwe), speaking in a right of reply to the statement by the European Union which said that there were violations of the freedom of expression in the period of run up to the elections in Zimbabwe, said that Zimbabwe remained concerned about the unwarranted attacks by the European Union. Whenever the European Union spoke it was easy to recognise the old colonial style. Zimbabwe respected freedom of expression and opinion. There was a free flow of information in the media and this was being implemented throughout the country. Zimbabwe had a right to self determination; the European Union statement was not welcomed.

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AMR ROSHDY HASSAN (Egypt), speaking in a right of reply, said Egypt was surprised by the statement of Sweden accusing Egypt of blocking Internet websites. Internet was free and uncensored in Egypt and Internet use had been growing fast. Rather there was a need for serious discussion on condemning pornography websites.

SIHASAK PHUANGKETKEOW (Thailand), speaking in a right of reply concerning the statement of the Asian Legal Resource Centre with regard to the situation in the southern part of Thailand, said that Thailand fully adhered to the Convention against Torture and their obligations hereunder. The Thai Government was not using torture and it attached utmost importance to upholding the rule of law in the country. Any allegations of torture would be looked into.

MARIE-CECILE ZINGKPE (Benin), speaking in a right of reply to the statement by Franciscans International referring to so-called children being accused of witchcraft in Benin, said this depiction was nothing more than a caricature. There had been a situation in the north of the country, but since the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child were implemented, this phenomenon had declined. The Government was concerned by such practices and undertook measures to combat them. Awareness raising campaigns had taken place to encourage women to give birth in health centres. This made it possible to fight infant and child mortality. Legislation now made it possible to punish those responsible for committing violence against children.

EDUARDO CHIHUALIAF (Chile), speaking in a right of reply concerning the statement of the Association of Defence of Threatened People, pointed out that he was himself a Mapuche. In Chile the right of association and assembly was fully granted. There were no forbidden indigenous activities. Chile had expanded the Presidential Commission and would strengthen the work on indigenous people.

OMER DAHAB FADOL MOHAMED (Sudan), speaking in a right of reply to the statement by United Nations Watch, said the representative of this organization was living in an imaginary media world where facts on Darfur were distorted. The Government of Sudan knew that the rebels were responsible for the crimes in Darfur. The Government had done much to reduce the suffering of persons in the region and realized that only a political solution would put an end to all this suffering. The Government had been working very closely with the rebels to restore peace and stability in the region and called on the international community to assume its obligations against those who refused solutions.

RODOLFO REYES RODRIGUEZ (Cuba), speaking in a right of reply on the United States statement during the debate on human rights defenders, said that there was false information presented in that statement. Recently there had been a bookfair in Cuba where thousands of books had been sold. Such statistics were rather applying for firearms sold in the United States. In Miami books were withdrawn from children, whenever they addressed the situation in Cuba. Human rights defenders were sitting in United States prisons, simply because they were Cubans and were defending human rights.

MARGHOOB SALEEM BUTT (Pakistan), speaking in a right of reply, said that the legal argument given by India had been rejected by both the United Nations and other international bodies. Jammu and Kashmir was an independent state and the Government of Pakistan demanded a free and fair plebiscite to address their right to self-determination. Prime Minister Nehru once said that the question of the accession of Kashmir should be left to the people. Despite provocations by India, Pakistan reminded the Council that the right of minorities had been violated by India, along with other fundamental human rights. The commitment of the Government to resolve this dispute was a priority and it looked forward to a peaceful resolution to the situation in the occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir.

ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran), speaking in a right of reply with regard to references made by Sweden concerning the activities of websites and blog sites in Iran, said Iran was among the countries with the highest number of websites in the world which also played a significant role in the social and economic life in the country. Any sites that were spreading immoral contents were banned, the speaker noted. Other websites had been banned due to private complaints against them. The regulations in this respect had been codified in the context of freedom

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of opinion and expression while considering the provisions contained in articles 19 and 20 in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

OMAR KADIRI (Morocco), speaking in a right of reply concerning the statement of one non-governmental organization about the situation of human rights defenders in the Moroccan territory, said that Morocco was attached to the defence of human rights throughout the world. Morocco ensured respect for human rights throughout the kingdom. In addition to this obligation, there was the obligation to respect the safety of its citizens. Each person who was found responsible for breaking the law was subjected to trials. Common law criminals should not be presented as human rights defenders before this body.

ANDREI MOLCHAN (Belarus) said that Belarus always provided all information requested by the Special Rapporteur. On all reports before this session, there was not one single report of any incident of torture in Belarus. Any suggestion of torture in Belarus was simply unjustified and unfounded. The Government had the impression that certain countries were turning the Council into a political bazaar. Silence on behalf of the European Union to address this issue would be interpreted as a form of complicity.

1Joint statement: International Federation of University Women; World Movement of Mothers; International Federation of Business and Professional women; Women's Federation for World Peace International; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; Zonta International; Women's World Summit Foundation; International Council of Women; Worldwide Organization for Women and Femmes Africa Solidarite.

2Joint statement: International Association of Democratic Lawyers; Asian Legal Resource Centre; Lawyers Rights Watch Canada; Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network and North-South XXI.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DISCUSSES HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE ITS ATTENTION

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this afternoon discussed issues under its agenda item on human rights situations that require the attention of the Council, hearing national delegations and representatives of non-governmental organizations raise alleged human rights violations in countries all around the world.

One delegation said that while no country had a perfect human rights record, there were situations that deserved highlighting. Another said that while the Council was reviewing the UN Member States without prejudice and with a view to protect human rights for all in the Universal Periodic Review process, there were situations of gross and systematic violations that were urgent and should be dealt with by the Council. It was important to draw the attention of the Council to where human rights had been violated. The Special Rapporteurs' visits and recommendations should be taken into consideration, and continued dialogue between the Governments and the Special Procedures should continue. Others stressed that the Council should get rid of double standards and politicisation.

Speaking in the general debate were delegations of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, the Netherlands, France, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, Switzerland, China, Bolivia, Sweden, Australia, Ireland, Iceland and New Zealand.

Also speaking were the following non-governmental organizations: France Libertes - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, speaking on behalf of several NGOs¹, Baha'i International Community; Asian Legal Resource Centre; Colombian Commission of Jurists; Human Rights Watch; Amnesty International; Liberation; International Educational Development; Interfaith International; International Commission of Jurists, in a joint statement with Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions; Society for Threatened Peoples; International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH); International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations; Association of World Citizens; International Human Rights Association of American Minorities; and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia).

Speaking in right of reply were Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Sudan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, China and Bangladesh.

When the Council meets at 10 a.m. on Monday, 9 June, it will start consideration of reports on 32 countries prepared following the first two sessions of the Working Group for the Universal Periodic Review.

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General Debate on Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention

ANDREJ LOGAR (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that no country had a perfect human rights record, the European Union States were no exception. However there were situations that deserved highlighting. The situation in Myanmar had been severely compounded with the Cyclone Nargis. The authorities were once again called on to speedily and fully implement all recommendations set out in the relevant Council resolutions. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the situation of human rights remained extremely serious and was not improving. The European Union remained seriously concerned about the situation in Sudan. All parties were called to cease violence immediately. Profound dismay was expressed with the Government's continued failure to comply with its obligations under Security Council resolution 1593, including its refusal to arrest and surrender to the International Criminal Court the men whom it had issued arrest warrants for.

The European Union was further concerned at the State-sponsored campaign of violence and intimidation that threatened to spiral out of control ahead of the Zimbabwe presidential run off. The Government must bring to an immediate end the human rights abuses. The electoral process required conditions on the ground to be in full accordance with international standards. The European Union further continued to be concerned about the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka. Ongoing violence and human rights violations as well as inadequate investigation had given rise to a climate of impunity. The situation in Iran was also concerning, especially the mounting pressure under which civil society had to work. The United Nations High Commissioner for human rights' visit to Tibet would be greatly welcomed. Of further concern was the situation in Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

ROBERT-JAN SIEBEN (Netherlands) said human rights issues constituted important challenges for all countries. The Netherlands trusted the Council to review the United Nations Member States without prejudice and with the view to protect human rights for all. There were situations of gross and systematic violations that were urgent and should be dealt with by the Council. The Universal Periodic Review could not be the only means of dealing with human rights violations on the country level. There was great concern about the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. A crucial starting point in reversing this situation was the acknowledgement of the Government of Sri Lanka of the scope of the problem and the role of the security forces and non-state armed groups. The Netherlands urged the Government of Sri Lanka to effectively investigate allegations of attacks on civilians, including human rights defenders and media personnel and to safeguard their rights.

The Government was gravely concerned about the situation in a number of countries in Africa that were torn by conflict and ongoing human rights violations. The Human Rights Council could not stand aside. It should deploy all available instruments and Special Procedures to monitor the situation and to protect victims of violations and human rights defenders. The human rights situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo where there was an ongoing war on women through widespread sexual violence was of great concern. The Netherlands was also concerned regarding the Government-instigated violence and intimidation campaign in Zimbabwe, and called for a fundamental investigation into the current human rights violations. It was also concerned about the random arrests of about 100 Darfuri people following the JEM attack on Omdurman and called on the Sudanese Government to put a halt to these arrests.

JEAN-BAPTISTE MATTEI (France) said human rights situations in all countries deserved attention. The Human Rights Council had a responsibility to look at specific situations. For Burma/Myanmar, France reaffirmed the importance of the free movement and work of United Nations humanitarian officials. It condemned the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi. France called on the United Nations Security Council to call for the release of all political prisoners. It said the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had not improved and that all rights were being violated. France called for the Government to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and to engage with the international community. France drew attention to the situation in Zimbabwe. It was alarmed by the two months of violence and the constant violation of human rights. It condemned the prohibition of international non governmental organizations and the arrest of opposition leaders.

France noted the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and called on the Government to agree to the request of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit the country. In Sudan, it called on the Government to

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allow free access for international human rights workers. It called on the Government to comply with the International Criminal Court and to capture those with international arrest warrants against them and to deliver them to the Court. In Iran, the Government was continuing draconian restrictions of freedom of expression and the press. France condemned the organized persecution of human rights workers. It condemned the violence against women. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, France called for the Government to cooperate with the International Criminal Court. It noted with alarm the levels of sexual violence against women.

MARIUS GRINIUS (Canada) believed that a number of human rights situations required the Council's attention. The need for free and democratic elections in Zimbabwe was underlined. Of deep concern was the suspension of operations of several non-governmental organizations. Unhindered access to those in need by humanitarian workers had to be ensured. In Iran, 370 individuals had been executed in 2007. Iran led the world in juvenile executions. The manipulation of the educational system to oppress and discredit the Baha'is was condemned. In Sudan, the Government was called on to increase measures to combat impunity. Full and unhindered humanitarian access had to be provided to everyone.

Further, the Democratic Republic of the Congo seemed to be taking its human rights commitments seriously; however the situation on the ground was still alarming. Women were still victims of sexual violence. Canada believed it was premature to end the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The human rights situation in Sri Lanka also remained alarming. Arbitrary arrests were common, as well as torture and restriction of movement. Sri Lanka had to allow the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to report on the situation in the country. In Belarus, harassment of independent media and human rights defenders was disappointing. Finally, on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, there was nothing democratic about that country.

MICHAEL KLEPSCH (Germany) expressed grave concern about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. Unlawful killings, politically motivated kidnappings and systematic attacks on and harassment of the political opposition and human rights defenders had occurred and increased. Security forces had arbitrarily arrested and detained journalists, lawyers, demonstrators, religious leaders and human rights defenders. The recent arrest of opposition leaders Mutambara and Tsvangirai were only concise examples of these practices. Access to food and basic social services was restricted in regions which were suspected to have supported the political opposition. The situation even worsened by the recent decision of the Zimbabwean Government to order an immediate end to all activities carried out by international non-governmental organizations.

In order to give all Zimbabweans the opportunity to freely choose their Government and determine the political course of action for their future, all acts of intimidation against political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers or others had to cease immediately. Further, Germany called on the Zimbabwean Government to take resolute steps to put an end to the prevailing climate of impunity in the country, to investigate all human rights violations and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

ANWAR CHOUDHURY (United Kingdom) said it was important to draw attention of this body to where human rights had been violated. No country was perfect. The United Kingdom was concerned by the crack down on civil society in Belarus. It was pleased that monitors from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development would be present for the elections. The United Kingdom was concerned about the violence in Sudan and called on all parties to stop such violence. The Government must commit to its international obligations to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. It was concerned by the growing trend of capital punishment in Iran and for the safety of women's right defenders and trade unionists. It drew attention to the problem of immunity of those committing violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially violence against women in the eastern part of the country. The perpetrators had to be held accountable for their actions.

In Kenya, all items identified by Kofi Anan had to be discussed and action must be taken on them. In Myanmar, the United Kingdom remained concerned that access to those in need was slow and called on the Government to allow relief workers access to those in need. It was worried by the environment that the referendum took place and by the extension of house arrest on Aung San Suu Kyi. The United Kingdom was deeply concerned by deteriorating conditions in Zimbabwe. It condemned the restriction of operations placed on international non-governmental

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organizations. The confinement of opposition leaders was unacceptable. This was not exhaustive list of countries worthy of concern. There were others, like the People's Republic of Korea, Tibet and Sri Lanka. The United Kingdom would stand with any country that had a genuine wish to improve human rights in their country.

MAKIO MIYAGAWA (Japan) said that Japan would refer only to the negative and positive aspects that had come to their attention. Japan had felt reassured by the positive remarks made by Sri Lanka at the Universal Periodic Review that it would invigorate its efforts. It was hoped that the Government would continue its battle to ensure the arrest of the perpetrators of human rights violations and to bring them to justice. The Government of Japan would continue to follow the efforts of Sri Lanka and would help its Government with technical assistance. On the situation in Zimbabwe, the deterioration of the human rights situation and democracy was noted. Concerns remained over growing political pressure against the opposition party from the ruling party. It was hoped that the run-off election would be held in a democratic and transparent manner. Appreciation was expressed to the Government and people of Nepal for taking a new step forward by holding the Constitutional Assembly last week with a view to building a democratic country. Japan would continue to support efforts of the Nepalese people. Referring to the recent terrorist incidents in Sri Lanka, Japan expressed its deep condolences to the victims. Such acts were condemned by the Government of Japan.

MURIEL BERSET (Switzerland) said that the responsibility of States should be to protect human rights and the medium and long term goals of the countries should take this into account. In Zimbabwe there were increasing human rights abuses. The Government should respect the rule of law and human rights should be protected. It was the responsibility of all stakeholders at the national and international level. This should be addressed especially for the upcoming elections on June 22 2008, which must be run fairly. In Sudan, attacks on civil society were frequent, not only in Darfur but also in the surrounding areas. The Government should set up efforts and improve the human rights situation in the country, especially with the upcoming elections. In Sri Lanka, there was a human rights and humanitarian situation. Free and unimpeded access should be given to the humanitarian organizations and to access for people who were in need of these services. Further, Switzerland had noted intolerable acts against the media. The Special Rapporteurs' visits and recommendations should be taken into consideration, and continued dialogue between the Governments and the Special Procedures should continue.

QIAN BO (China) said the Council should get rid of double standards and politicisation. China attached importance to the promotion and protection of human rights. The response to the earthquake in China was human centred and showed that human rights were respected in China. Tibet was a matter of national integrity and was about confronting a separatist movement. Members of the Human Rights Council showed a double standard when calling the events in Tibet a human rights issue. Tibetans enjoyed autonomy. Monks enjoyed freedom. Health facilities were found in the whole region. There were many schools. The Tibetan language was taught. The violent crimes in March of this year were actions of separatists organised by the Dali Lama. China hoped the Human Rights Council would help dispel the erroneous facts.

ANGELICA NAVARRO LLANOS (Bolivia) said that the Government of Bolivia wished to make public the serious human rights violations by non state groups against indigenous persons. On 24 May, indigenous leaders waiting for the visit of President Evo Morales in the city of Sucre had been beaten and publicly humiliated. The old colonial customs of humiliating indigenous people had re-emerged. Almost 20 years of democracy had not been enough to eradicate racism. This recent attack was part of a series of serious attacks against human rights violations that had taken place recently by unconstitutional armed groups. These attacks were based on racism. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Bolivia had issued a statement saying that the violence of these events was incompatible with human rights. The Ministry of Justice had further submitted a criminal complaint against the authors of these acts and investigations had begun. All international organizations had to speak out and condemn these racist acts. Bolivia believed that the Human Rights Council should also take a stand on this matter.

HANS DAHLGREN (Sweden) said since this Council began its last session in March, two evolving situations, in Tibet and Zimbabwe, had raised human rights issues which needed the attention of the Council. In Tibet in March general violence following demonstrations led to a deplorable loss of life. In the course of these events, there were reports of acts of violence by security forces and other agents of the Government of China. Additional restrictions were imposed on religious institutions. Individuals were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. Interference with

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Internet service providers further restricted the freedom of expression including the right to information. Large numbers of persons remained in detention, while the denial of equal protection before the law had been reported.

Following the first round of elections in Zimbabwe on 29 March, large-scale human rights violations had been reported against persons alleged to have voted for parties in opposition to the Government as well as other persons. These violations had included arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment, interference with the freedom of assembly, interference with the freedom of expression and information, interference with the right to vote, including through physical harassment and other intimidation, and arbitrary deprivation and destruction of property. Further, Sweden believed that these situations should be given more attention by the Council and its mechanisms, including by its relevant Special Procedures.

GUY O'BRIEN (Australia) said there were numerous areas of concern. Australia called for the release of all prisoners in Myanmar. It was concerned by the referendum process in Myanmar, which had not been transparent. Zimbabwe was facing a humanitarian disaster. Australia condemned the decision of the Government to stop activities of non governmental organizations. It was shocked at the escalating levels of violence by State supported actors. In Sudan, Australia was very disturbed by lack of progress of the Government to comply with the International Criminal Court. It called on all parties to work for peace. Australia was sorry to learn of the arrest of religious leaders in Iran. It said the Human Rights Council needed to play an active role in ensuring all rights were respected.

MICHEAL TIERNEY (Ireland) said that Ireland was deeply concerned over the situation in Myanmar and the Government's failure to comply with the Special Rapporteur's recommendations. The situation in Sri Lanka was also of deep concern. A substantial increase of violence had been seen in this country; all sides had to urgently address their differences peacefully. The consistent failure of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to collaborate with the Special Rapporteur had to cease and the Government had to respect its international obligations. State sponsored violence in Zimbabwe was also of deep concern. A credible election process needed minimum standards. The renewed violence in Darfur had caused new suffering for its population. The Government was urged to comply with the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court.

INGIBJORG DAVIOSDOTTIR (Iceland) said that Iceland would continue to support the endeavours of the Council to constantly remind Governments of their responsibility to protect all citizens. Iceland strongly urged the Government of Burma/Myanmar to lift all restrictions on the deployment of international assistance to the people of Burma/Myanmar and to cooperate fully with humanitarian organizations. The Government of Burma/Myanmar was urged to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and to lift all restraints on peaceful political activity. Iceland was concerned over the Government of Burma/Myanmar's decision to extend once again Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest.

The protection of human rights in Sudan remained a concern, especially the recent violations escalating in the past few days. The human rights violations in Sudan must be stopped, victims must be assisted and those who were responsible for the violations must be brought to justice. Impunity had to end and human rights law and humanitarian law must be respected. Further, Iceland opposed the death penalty under all circumstances and urged all countries to abolish it. In this context Iceland expressed concern about news coming out of Iran that it was considering applying the death penalty for conversion of religion.

MICHAEL MCBRYDE (New Zealand) said New Zealand was concerned by the human rights violations in Zimbabwe. The Government was allowing for State sponsored terror aimed at political opposition and the general public. The election must be free. New Zealand was concerned by events in Darfur where many violations were being committed by Government security forces. It called on the Government to cooperate with the United Nations and the African Union. It urged the Government to comply with international law and to stop the oppression of its citizens. It noted progress in Kenya. There was a desire for peaceful solutions. New Zealand commended the actions of the African Union, Kofi Annan and others.

GIANFRANCO FATTORINI, of France Libertes - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, speaking on behalf of several NGOs¹, drew attention to the situation in Bolivia. Indigenous people had been able to elect democratically and for

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the first time in history, an indigenous president. But President Evo Morales had been confronted with destabilisation attempts. Indigenous people had been the focus of recent racist attacks. Public appeals called to kill Indians or to treat them like animals. USAID had been reported to call during public meetings to murder the legally elected president. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had condemned these events. The Human Rights Council had to take swift action to strongly condemn these racist actions and to invite foreign powers not to support such actions.

DIANE ALA'I, of Baha'i International Community, said that on 14 May 2008, six members of the Baha'i leadership in Iran were summarily arrested in Tehran. They had not been given access to legal counsel, nor had their relatives been able to contact them. It was time for the Human Rights

Council to call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to abide by its international commitments. As a first step, the Council should call upon Iran to release the Baha'i leadership and grant all Iranian Baha'is their individual and collective human rights.

MICHAEL ANTHONY, of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, said the elections in Pakistan had brought hope of change. It appeared that after only two months in power, the Government of Pakistan was already failing in this regard. It did not reinstate the Chief Justice and other judges within 30 days. Instead a diluted constitutional package was introduced. The Asian Legal Resource Centre said it was difficult to see how any human rights could be possible without a functioning independent judiciary in place. Pakistan's record made it one of Asia's worst violators of human rights. In Bangladesh, the protection of human rights had been rendered near impossible since the declaration of a state of emergency. Under this, fundamental rights had been suspended. Reports by non-governmental organizations indicated that over 300,000 Bangladeshis had been arbitrarily arrested and detained. The order of magnitude of this problem spoke for itself. The Centre called on the Human Rights Council to demonstrate its commitment and to intervene with Bangladesh and urged the authorities to lift the state of emergency.

ISABELLE HEYER, of the Colombian Commission of Jurists, drew the attention of the Human Rights Council to the serious human rights violations of victims of crimes of war in Colombia as well as the ongoing attacks by Government officials on human rights defenders. The High Commissioner had in her last report stated that it was urgent to provide an adequate response to the request of victims, in full compliance with the rights of victims. This was important in order to achieve a lasting situation of peace. On 30 May the Government had extradited paramilitary members to the United States. This was contrary to the rights of victims and impeded them from being able to be informed on the whereabouts of their relatives.

SEBASTIEN GILLIOZ, of Human Rights Watch, said that this week the International Committee of the Red Cross called Somalia the worst tragedy of the past decade. Serious violations of international humanitarian law continued unabated and there had been no effort to establish accountability for past abuses, many of which amounted to war crimes. Human Rights Watch urged Member States to underscore the need to end impunity by calling for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry into recent crimes in violation of international law. There was concern for the pattern of serious violence of international humanitarian law documented in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Regional State. The Council should examine this situation and call for an end to the violence.

PETER SPLINTER, of Amnesty International, said it was very concerned that many grave situations escaped the Human Rights Council. Since September 11, the United States Government had carried out a determined assault on the rule of law. It had authorized interrogation methods that violated the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. It has subjected detainees to secret detention, inter-state transfers without due process, and enforced disappearances. The CIA's programme of secret detention was one part of this assault, the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay was another. The Human Rights Council must demand the closure of Guantanamo.

In Tibet, protests, crackdowns, and arrests flowed in a cycle. Security forces continued to use excessive force, occasionally lethal, to put down peaceful protests. The Council must call on the Chinese authorities to show restraint in responding to protests, disclose the names, whereabouts and legal status of all detainees, and release

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anyone detained solely for protesting peacefully. In Zimbabwe, Amnesty International had documented torture and other violations against mainly Movement for Democratic Change supporters.

YOANNA CLAQUIN, of Liberation, brought to the notice of the Council unaccounted grave human rights violations being committed in north-eastern states of India that were under the control of the Indian army. The Army and the police were jointly involved in human killings under the Indian Government's umbrella. Indian Courts were encouraging merciless human killings. The courts had told the Army and the Government that they could kill anybody if they paid the price fixed by court for such killings.

KAREN PARKER, of International Educational Development, said that for Afghanistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka there was neither a Special Rapporteur nor an item 10 Independent Expert to look at the situation where protracted armed conflicts in these countries were continuing. These three situations illustrated the tragic results when the Council was backed into a corner by certain actors, not limited to the Governments of these countries, and rendered ineffective to stop the carnage, the near and actual starvation of civilian victims of armed conflict, genocidal policies and intents, and other grave breaches of humanitarian law. The Council must act in accordance with the wishes of the High Commissioner and many of the Council's mandates.

PRITPAL SINGH, of Interfaith International, said the Human Rights Council must not be deceived by the sweet talk of democracy and pluralism in India. Rapes occurred in the north east of India perpetrated by Indian forces. The forces enjoyed protection under the draconian Armed Forces Special Power Act. This Council must not approve India's effort to deepen invisibility and voicelessness of the unfortunate people of these territories. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, retaliatory pogroms of Sikhs were encouraged by the ruling Congress Party. The victims of this genocide and their families still awaited justice while more of the primary accused had been acquitted. The Human Rights Council must not tolerate this impunity. In 2002, thousands of Muslims were put to death in the state of Gujarat. Why was the Council silent? Why didn't it demand justice for those who were wronged?

LUKAS MACHON, of International Commission of Jurists, in a joint statement with Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, said that in its March session, they had urged the Council to press Zimbabwe to ensure free and fair polling but the Zimbabwean Government had taken the Council's silence for granted. The leader of the opposition party and members of his team had been arrested. The Council had to request its relevant Special Procedures to address the Zimbabwean crisis as a matter of priority. Human rights lawyers and human rights defenders faced death threats for their professional activities. The Council was requested to adopt a resolution in order to address the situation. On the violent crackdown on the peaceful protest in Tibet in March, the Chinese authorities were urged to assist the investigation by relevant Special Procedures.

TENZIN S. KAYTA, of the Society for Threatened Peoples, said that China was responsible for the suffering, humiliation and current mental trauma and physical state of two former-Tibetan political prisoners, one who survived more than three decades of imprisonment and the other 15 years of imprisonment. There had been repeated attempts to stifle discussion on the present Tibetan uprising at the Council, despite the massive human rights violations which were taking place on the Tibetan Plateau. Since 10 March, due to a military crackdown on the so-called people's war, more than 200 were killed with over 5,700 arbitrarily detained. Many arrested Tibetans had just disappeared. These were facts as far as the Tibetan people were concerned. These acts and others required the immediate attention of the Council.

SIMIA AHMADI, of the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, was concerned by the situation in Zimbabwe. Restrictive domestic laws were used to stop political opposition. The International Federation condemned the arrest of opposition politicians. It called on the Human Rights Council to pass a resolution condemning the actions of the Government of Zimbabwe. It was concerned by the situation in Iran, especially the arrest of supporters of women's right and human rights workers, journalists, and students. Last year, more than 300 people were executed by application of the death penalty for minor crimes. The International Federation urged the Human Rights Council to condemn the actions of the Government of Iran.

SYED FAIZ NAQSHBANDI, of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, said that the human rights situation in Kashmir required the Council's attention. Children had been killed by Indian troops and some had

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disappeared since years, others were being detained in prisons all over India, far away from their parents. In the name of security, special laws had been enacted by India to facilitate human rights violations. Soldiers could shoot and kill in full impunity. The Council was requested to urge the Government of India to put an end to all human rights violations. A special mission should be sent to Kashmir, so that facts could come to light.

GENEVIEVE JOURDAN, of the Association of World Citizens, was gravely concerned at the number of deaths as a result of escalating violence in many parts of the world. Deep structural issues were at the heart of the inability of the world society to meet the needs of the world's citizens. There needed to be an analysis of financial flows and their impact on grains or the world would break in violence and xenophobic attitudes.

SARDAR AMJAD YOUSEF KHAN, of the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, raised concerns about missing persons in Kashmir. It said the Association of the Parents of Disappeared Persons had documented 8,000 to 10,000 enforced or involuntary disappearances of their loved ones. In Tehsil Uri between 970 and 1,000 nameless graves were found. According to the locals, the graves were dug at the order of the Indian security forces. Now the lives of the people digging the graves were also under threat.

BIYOUN KIM, of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia), wanted to remind the Council of the joint appeal of 65 Asian non-governmental organizations sent to the Council's President in March, urging the Council to hold a Special Session on the human rights situation in Tibet and to send a fact-finding mission there. Grave concern was expressed on the fact that the Council had failed to respond to their appeal. A rally had been held in front of the Palais during the current session. However, it seemed that their voices had been still ignored by the Council. The Council was urged to immediately send an independent international fact-finding mission into Tibet.

Right of Reply

SHARINDRA FERNANDO (Sri Lanka), in a right of reply, said that this morning buses carrying women, children and men were attacked leaving 23 people dead and 70 people injured. This was typical of the types of threats civilians faced day to day. The LTTE were responsible for such crimes. The right to life was one of the most important human rights. The Government of Japan was thanked for the human resource training assistance it provided, which supported the national institutions to enhance their capacity. Switzerland mentioned that Sri Lanka should have free and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors and Sri Lanka said that they would never compromise security concerns. In regards to the comments made about the lack of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights presence in the country negatively impacting the country, Sri Lanka said that during the Universal Periodic Review they gave presence to such a mission. This Council had passed many resolutions for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to have better regional geographical representation, but little had been done to that effect.

ENOS MAFEMBA (Zimbabwe), speaking in a right of reply, said the list of the countries which spoke out on Zimbabwe spoke for itself. They were the biggest violators of human rights. The enunciations of the Governments had a certain odour which should be deflected back onto the authors of the political and economic destabilisation of Zimbabwe, the United States and the United Kingdom and their allies. These Governments had created bogus non governmental organizations (NGOs). They were the new foot soldiers of the empire. The Government of Zimbabwe had exposed illegal vote-buying schemes of these NGOs sponsored by the United States and the United Kingdom in the recent election. Foreign diplomats who behaved undiplomatically would be constrained. Zimbabweans would elect their leader in their own freedom. There was no need for tutelage from the United Kingdom and the United States. Zimbabwe knew what they did to black people.

OMER DAHAB FADOL MOHAMED (Sudan), speaking in a right of reply, said that, regarding the statement on the International Criminal Court, they could not fail to note that all activities of the International Criminal Court at the level of investigations and indictment were all confined to alleged crimes in Africa and only there. A pillar of justice was equality. It was discouraging to see such a selective justice. Regarding the latest armed attacks, Sudan was pleased that the attacks which had claimed many casualties had been met with wide international condemnation. Only the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner had failed to condemn

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them. It was hoped that they would soon follow. Regarding the investigations and arrests that had followed the attacks, no one had been arbitrarily arrested. Sudan was ready to stand before any request of information on individual cases. Regarding the Human Rights Council's resolutions on Sudan, cooperation with the Council had been enhanced. The Special Rapporteur would visit the country in June for two weeks and her report would be sent to the Council in September.

CHOE MYONG NAM (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in a right of reply, said that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea rejected the groundless allegations made by countries against it. It was in fact these countries that had human rights violations and harboured those demonstrating acts of xenophobia. These countries always argued that human rights violations whenever, wherever should be brought to justice. The so-called human rights violations claimed by these countries were only aimed at shaming other countries.

ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran), speaking in a right of reply, said that Iran was fully aware and committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. Iran called on countries to look at their own human rights violations and records. With regard to the death penalty, within the legal code of the country a long legal procedure took place. In accordance with the Constitution, no one was detained for his or her belief, but only if they committed a contravention of the law.

BO QIAN (China), speaking in a right of reply, strongly rejected the criticism expressed by Sweden whose statement did not reflect reality. First of all, Tibet was an internal affair of China. The Chinese Government intended to maintain its national integrity while ensuring security in Tibet. The criminal and violent events had given rise to several deaths. China protected legal rights of the suspected criminals. Progress in human rights could not be covered by lies. About 50 years ago, China was living in a feudal system and most of the population was living under the poverty line. Acts of violence against children in Sweden were alarming and the Swedish Government should rather take actions in this regard.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh), speaking in a right of reply, said that Bangladesh did not comment on statements made by non governmental organizations, but rather listened and make appropriate judgements on their statements. If the Asian Legal Resource Centre had not crossed the line, there would have been no need to comment. That organization had accused Bangladesh of detaining 300,000 people. This was not possible and illustrated that some non-governmental organizations used their right for spreading propaganda with malicious purposes. Bangladesh was home to 15,000 non governmental organizations, some of whom were internationally acclaimed and some that were bigger than some nations. There should be a code of conduct established for non governmental organizations so that they did not abuse their rights, such as the Asian Legal Resource Centre had done today.

1Joint statement on behalf of: France Libertes - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand; Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; and Europe-Third World Centre.

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Dateline: Sri Lankan Army sharpshooter to take part in Beijing Olympics COLOMBO

Body

A Sri Lankan Army sharpshooter, who has been a veteran in several battles with Tamil Tiger rebels, has been selected to compete in the Beijing Olympics in August, a local newspaper said on Sunday.

Sunday Island, one of the major English newspapers in Sri Lanka, said Staff Sgt. E. M. Senanayake of the Sinha Regiment excelled in the Free-Style (Open) Pistol Shooting competition at the 11th Asian Shooting Tournament in Kuwait last year.

Senanayake will compete with the world's best marksmen in his favorite events at the Olympics.

A veteran in army operations in the north and east, Senanayake who joined the Army in 1990 and underwent training at the Minneriya Infantry Training Cent was posted to the Sri Lanka Sinha Regiment in 1990.

Unlike many other sportsmen and women who had joined services for benefits, Senanayake had faced the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in the battlefield in the north and proved his capabilities as a soldier before he was recognized for his sharp shooting abilities.

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**UN: MEETING IN PROGRESS: SECURITY COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND
ARMED CONFLICT 12 FEBRUARY 2008**

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The following information was released by the United Nations:

NOTE: FOLLOWING ARE SUMMARIES OF STATEMENTS MADE TODAY TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT. A COMPLETE SUMMARY OF THIS COUNCIL MEETING WILL BE AVAILABLE AFTER THE MEETING'S CONCLUSION AS PRESS RELEASE SC/9246.

Background

The Council had before it the report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict (document S/2007/757), which covers progress in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) on that topic, from October 2006 to August 2007, and includes information on compliance in ending grave violations, such as the recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as cross-cutting issues that have arisen due to the changing nature of conflicts.

According to the report, the use of child soldiers continues in Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda. On the positive side, no new cases of child recruitment have been recorded during that period in Cote d'Ivoire. The parties to the conflict there have not only ceased recruitment, but have taken measures to identify and release children associated with them for rehabilitation.

The Secretary-General points to the close link between child recruitment and internal displacement, noting that the lack of security around refugee and internally displaced person camps, and the "convenient concentration of vulnerable children", make these camps "prime recruiting grounds". He also warns that armed groups are moving across borders to recruit children from refugee camps, especially along the Sudan-Chad border. Both Sudanese and Chadian armed groups are recruiting children from Sudanese refugee camps in eastern Chad, while Chadian refugee children are being recruited by Sudanese rebel groups in Darfur.

Among other cross-cutting issues, the report discusses targeting of children during armed conflicts for sexual and gender-based violence, including rape. Some 60 per cent of sexual and gender-based violence cases recorded in Kisangani, in the northern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, involved victims between the ages of 11 and 17. In the Great Lakes region, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, the High Commissioner for Human Rights indicated appalling levels of sexual and gender-based violence. "It is imperative that perpetrators of acts of rape and other sexual violence, which leave a long-term, devastating impact on the victims, are prosecuted in accordance with the gravity of such crimes," the Secretary-General writes.

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Increasingly, children are also allegedly being detained for association with armed groups in violation of international standards, such as in Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Israel and the Philippines. While some children have been released, owing to United Nations advocacy efforts, many remain in detention. Another concern is the escalation of systematic and deliberate attacks on schoolchildren, teachers and school buildings in certain conflict situations, including Afghanistan and Iraq, which warrants increased attention and action by the global community, the Secretary-General states.

The Secretary-General urges the Security Council to consider a range of measures, including bans on military aid and travel restrictions on leaders, targeting parties to armed conflict who continue to systematically commit grave violations against children. The report recommends that the Council consider giving equal care to children affected by conflict in all situations of concern and attach equal weight to all categories of grave violations, including recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access to children. The Council is also encouraged to continue to call upon parties in situations of armed conflict to prepare concrete time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children and other violations, and to expand the call for action plans for all situations of concern. Adequate funding should be made available by donors to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of all children who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups.

The Secretary-General also recommends national action to bring to justice individuals responsible for grave violations against children and encourages the Council to refer violations against children in armed conflict to the International Criminal Court. In this regard, he points to "important precedents" set to end impunity for crimes against children. The Court has issued arrest warrants for five senior members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), including its leader, Joseph Kony, who faces charges on 33 counts, including the forcible enlistment and use of children in hostilities. The sentencing by the Special Court for Sierra Leone of three men and the conviction of a fourth for the recruitment and use of child soldiers sends an important message that such crimes against children "will not be tolerated and that those who engage in the practice will be brought to justice".

Briefings

RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, introduced the Secretary-General's seventh annual report on the issue, which concerned 18 situations, recording systematically the grave violations of: killing or maiming of children; recruiting or using child soldiers; attacks against schools or hospitals; rape and other grave sexual violence against children; the abduction of children; and the denial of humanitarian access to children. Fifty-eight offending parties were listed, drawn from 13 situations of concern. All 58 parties were responsible for the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Expressing her satisfaction that the report had been the result of a United Nations system-wide collaborative effort, she stressed that the hallmark of the monitoring and reporting exercise had been a constructive dialogue with the Member States.

She said that, in the past year, much had been accomplished. The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict had met six times, with positive results. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, former Mai-Mai Commander Kyungu Mutanga had been brought to trial. Thomas Lubanga, from the same country, was also facing charges of recruiting child soldiers, and others were also being brought to trial. Increasingly, parties were implementing key commitments regarding protection of children. Among other gains, Cote d'Ivoire had seen a delisting of parties from the annexes, which was a first. Progress had also been made in the Central African Republic, Myanmar, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Chad. Colombia's Government had accepted to implement the monitoring and reporting mechanism pursuant to Council resolution 1612 (2005).

In spite of the impressive progress, it was with regret that she reported that the overall situation of children affected by conflict remained "grave and entirely unacceptable". The protection of children was an issue that necessitated the concerted efforts of all Member States. It was important to note that in certain situations, the inability of the United Nations monitoring and reporting regime to engage in dialogue with non-State actors had impeded progress on securing the release and rehabilitation of children associated with such groups. She urged the Council to call on relevant Member States to facilitate such dialogue.

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Drawing attention to several urgent challenges requiring close examination, she said there were changing characteristics of conflict, with "grey zones" that blurred lines between armed conflict and criminal violence. Terrorism and counter-terrorism measures posed their own special problems. The use of suicide bombing was entirely unacceptable. Children had been used as suicide bombers, and many had been killed by such bombings. Counter-terrorism strategies sometimes saw the killing and maiming of children as collateral damage. Systematic and deliberate attacks on schoolchildren, teachers and school buildings had escalated. In Afghanistan, such attacks were targeted against girls' schools. In regional conflicts, cross-border recruitment of children from internally displaced persons and refugee camps was surging.

Continuing, she said that the detention of children for alleged association with armed groups, in violation of international standards, was worrisome. The use of indiscriminate weapons, such as cluster munitions, had a severe impact on children. Sexual and gender-based violence, including rape against children, was a devastating consequence of conflict in many parts of the world. Like the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence was always a deliberate, targeted and direct consequence of criminal intent.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers had been the main concern of the Council and the gateway to the annexed lists of the annual reports, she said. However, there were five other grave violations and child victims of those grave violations and abuses deserved the attention and protection of the international community and the annexed list of parties should include all grave violations. The inclusion of grave sexual violence would represent an important step forward in the monitoring process.

"It is now time that the Security Council move from words toward effective action," she urged. There were 16 persistent violators who had been on the annexed lists for five consecutive years. The Council had already expressed its intention to take concrete and targeted measures against those parties. It was most important that it make good on its promise, in order to ensure the credibility of that exercise. Measures could include the imposition of travel restrictions on leaders and their exclusion from any governance structures and amnesty provisions; the imposition of arms embargoes; and restrictions on the flow of financial resources.

The Security Council was playing a historical role when it dealt with the children and armed conflict theme. "No one who has looked into the eyes of a child soldier can be at peace unless we rid this world of this scourge," she said, adding, "No one who has held the hand of a young girl who has suffered multiple rapes can ever forget their duty to work for the protection of the vulnerable."

ANN M. VENEMAN, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said it was fitting that the Council was meeting on the sixth anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. States that had not done so should be urged to sign, ratify and fully implement that instrument. Children continued to suffer from the horrors of war, often coping with trauma, violence, and the loss of family, homes and community. Many had been killed or maimed, even long after conflict had ended. They were all too often victims of indiscriminate weapons, such as cluster munitions, and must be protected from their effects. Children also suffered from the resurgence of preventable diseases. Conflict and post-conflict countries had some of the highest rates of under-5 mortality, and conflict and strife often broke down public health services and contributed to food insecurity, displacement and continued instability. Misuse, occupation or attacks against schools were some of the worst violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

She said that UNICEF had a long history of advocating for and assisting in the release and reintegration of children used by armed forces and groups. It knew from experience that it was possible to reintegrate those children, especially when they were provided with assistance and skills to become productive members of society. Yet reintegration was a difficult and long-term process requiring patience and long-term commitment. For several years, UNICEF country offices had worked with States and non-State actors, which had recruited and used children, in order to bring an end to that abhorrent practice. The Secretary-General's report referenced UNICEF's engagement in the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire and the Sudan. The 2007 Paris Commitments had helped reinforce international consensus on the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. They had also reiterated

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measures States could take to protect and help reintegrate children involved in hostilities. States should be urged to endorse those Commitments.

There must be greater focus and attention to the issue of sexual violence against children, and abuse, rapes and sexual violence of all kinds must be halted, she urged. UNICEF welcomed the efforts of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In a relatively short time, the monitoring and reporting mechanism had produced positive results by focusing on grave violations in the six categories of abductions, recruitment, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, killing and maiming of children, and denial of humanitarian access. More should be done to better monitor, prevent and respond to those violations. The best interest of the child should be the guiding principle of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, above all other considerations.

In conclusion, she said that young voices had been heard in a compilation of stories and recommendations from conflict zones entitled "Will You Listen", which was launched last October as a supplement to the 10-year Graca Machel Strategic Review, and submitted to the General Assembly. Many of those children spoke of the important role they played in providing change, and of the need to act swiftly. As a young woman from Colombia said, "We are the future, and people should be aware of that. Right now, we are inheriting a very unstable world." Ms. Veneman appealed to Council members to keep those words in mind "as we move forward with a shared sense of urgency in helping to build a better and safer world for our children".

JO BECKER, representative of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, welcomed such achievements as the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the development of action plans to end the use of child soldiers, and efforts by the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. "However, we are not here to celebrate," she said. In many ways, children in armed conflict today were no better off than their peers had been years ago. Impunity for those who brutally attacked them was still the norm. Today, it was as important as ever that all the Council Members stayed focused on the purpose of their work and redouble their efforts to make real change for children.

She urged the Council to take several critical steps without delay, including strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanism and expanding its scope; taking consistent action against perpetrators who repeatedly violated children's rights; demanding accountability by imposing targeted measures, when warranted; and utilizing the full range of actions from the Working Group's "toolkit".

A recent Watchlist field-based study had found that the Council's monitoring and reporting mechanism had made impressive strides in the quest to collect accurate, timely and objective information, she continued. It had also identified obstacles and challenges, including: the need for greater collaboration with other existing networks; stronger support for the participation of civil society groups; better efforts to protect the safety of survivors and others who provided information; and more effective responses to violations.

She explained that the Watchlist provided practical recommendations to the United Nations and partners. As recommended by the Secretary-General, she urged the Council to give equal consideration to all six grave violations against children, as any of them could trigger the application of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the listing of a party in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports. As a next step, she encouraged the Council to add rape and other forms of gender-based violence as an additional trigger.

Between 2002 and 2008, 14 parties to armed conflict had been named in all five of the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict, she said. Those persistent violators included the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (**LTTE**) in Sri Lanka, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), also in Colombia, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and the Government forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. Those violators should be subjected to the Council's strongest action. So far, the Council had initiated targeted measures against just one individual, imposing a travel ban and asset freeze on a former commander in Cote d'Ivoire.

She stressed that the Council could not expect to achieve accountability based on empty threats. To ensure its own credibility, it must be prepared to exercise its powers to impose targeted measures, when warranted. That entailed systematically referring information to relevant sanctions committees, and in some cases, applying measures

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through country-specific or thematic resolutions by the full Security Council. The Working Group's toolkit provided a valuable array of actions to encourage parties to armed conflict to comply with their international obligations.

Statements

CHARLES MICHEL, Minister for Development Cooperation of Belgium, said that 300,000 children had been torn away from their families. They faced a cruel dilemma: kill or be killed, and they had to commit the worst atrocities, sometimes against their own family. That scourge could not be accepted. During his visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he had personally witnessed the distress children affected by armed conflict had to endure. Children who had only known war and the safety of their "Kalashnikov" were not a lost cause for peace and development; they were an essential part of it. The problem of children and armed conflict was not just a question of humanitarian assistance and human rights and development, but also one of peace and security. The Secretary-General's recommendations made must be rapidly implemented, as too many children had already seen their fate sealed.

He said that the annexed lists were an important dissuasive instrument, which had given the Council a tool with which to act. The protection of children in armed conflict was not negotiable, and the Council must adopt the necessary sanctions. Combating impunity was an indispensable prelude to reconciliation and lasting peace. Sexual violence was another scourge. In the framework of monitoring, that violence was only taken into account if it related to child soldiers. However, his Government would favour strengthening resolution 1612 (2005) and including in the annexes a list of those responsible for sexual crimes. The Council must encourage other United Nations bodies to strengthen their political pressure to put an end to the abuses. The Member States must turn commitment into concrete action. Belgium would continue to plead in favour of a binding instrument to tighten controls on small arms and light weapons. Armed conflicts were still victimizing children. "Let us give them hope," he said.

VITTORIO CRAXI, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Italy, aligning himself with the European Union's statement, said his country supported the work of the Special Representative and that of UNICEF and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), as well as of all the non-governmental organizations that worked for children. The figures in the Secretary-General's report required immediate action by the international community. His country had been actively involved in the promotion of children's rights. In 2003, under the Italian Presidency, the European Union had adopted guidelines on children in armed conflicts. There was a need to take up specific projects in health and labour to offer children alternatives, in order to help them integrate in civil society.

He said that Italy was developing new assistance strategies. UNICEF's projects in Afghanistan had been financed by Italy. Italy also focused on Iraq. He hoped the Working Group would have a greater impact in the future. A comprehensive strategy was needed, which was not limited to children's recruitment. Rape and other acts of sexual violence against children should be added to those violations that triggered inclusion in the annex list, and the International Criminal Court should continue to investigate such acts. Italy also endorsed the Union's position of adopting legal instruments to ban munitions that caused insufferable harm to civilians, including children. Today's debate should be a decisive stage towards adoption of a new Security Council resolution, which included lessons learned and progress made since the passage of resolution 1612 (2005).

GIADALLA ETTALHI (Libya) said the Secretary-General's consecutive reports indicated that shameful acts against children, such as recruiting them into armed conflicts, were on the rise. States should take serious measures within their national legislation and in accordance with international humanitarian law to hold perpetrators responsible for such actions and to impose the maximum deterrent penalty on them, without any opportunity for impunity.

He said that the detention of children in conflict zones based on claims of linkage with armed groups was a serious violation of international legal standards. Strongly condemning the Israeli military operations that had killed more than 500 children in the past year, he said that the international community must take the necessary measures to address the situation of children detained in Israeli prisons. Also condemning the use of cluster bombs and the effect on children of air bombing operations by coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, he expressed support for the establishment of a convention banning cluster bombs. International support should also be mobilized for

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programmes aimed at sustainable reintegration of affected children into society. The Working Group must avoid selectivity, double standards and politicization in its recommendations and conclusions, while the Council should consider the full impact of its sanctions.

ALEJANDRO D. WOLFF (United States) said that the development of action plans by States and non-State actors had proven to be a positive way to guide and measure progress. It would be useful for all the parties listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's report to be similarly required to submit such plans. As for the Council's Working Group, as its work evolved, it might need additional tools, including targeted and graduated measures against persistent violators to persuade them to comply with applicable international law.

He said he was pleased with the progress in Cote d'Ivoire, where parties previously associated with unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers had ended those practices. However, the Council's work had just begun. Over a quarter of a million child soldiers remained engaged in conflicts around the globe. He remained deeply concerned by the situation of children and armed conflict in Burma, urging immediate and unimpeded access to communities in that country. In the Sudan, he urged full cooperation from the Government of National Unity and Government in Southern Sudan to follow through on their commitments and to put an end to all violations against children. He also deplored continued use of rape as a weapon of war in Darfur, with the increasing targeting of young girls. His delegation urged the commitment of all parties to put an end to those violations and to grant United Nations entities unimpeded access for monitoring and verification purposes. Regarding Chad, he urged all parties to permit access to the United Nations monitors and others attempting to ascertain the extent of the problem. He welcomed the news that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was working to increase its child protection there.

Turning to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, he said that recidivism, or the child's inability to function properly within his family or community, was an issue of great concern to everybody, and certainly to his Government, as a major donor of such programmes. The United States applauded the hard work of UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and their partners. He encouraged Member States to allow full access to conflict areas, in order to accomplish the goals of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

While fully supporting the effort by the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and the Security Council to end unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, he did not agree that the Council should have a general policy or practice of referring cases to the International Criminal Court, as recommended in the Secretary-General's report. Different States had different views about the best mechanism for combating crimes against children. It was important to bear in mind that not all Member States were parties to the Rome Statute, and those who were not should be taken into account.

As for the recommendation that Member States should immediately address the subject of cluster munitions, he said his delegation would ask that the Working Group focus on the substantial issues already and clearly within its mandate. Discussion of cluster munitions was better left to weapons experts operating through the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said that his country was committed to ensuring the rights of children, and it intended to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning children and armed conflict. He shared the Secretary-General's concern in the report over the deteriorating situation of children in Afghanistan and Iraq and emphasized the responsibility of all the parties, including multinational forces, for the implementation of the norms of international humanitarian law. Unfortunately, the report did not contain information on the death of children, owing to the activities of private security firms in Iraq. He supported the inclusion of the Taliban on the lists of the violators, which opened the way to the consideration of the matter by the Council's Working Group.

Relevant attention should be paid to Iraq, he said, adding that he had recently seen a tape of Al Qaida terrorists teaching child soldiers to kill and abduct. Another matter of concern related to the incarceration of children by

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multinational forces. UNICEF should pay attention to the causes and conditions of their captivity, and the Council's monitoring and reporting mechanism should be involved in that regard. He supported the Secretary-General's suggestion that advisers on the protection of children be sent to Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon, as well as Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic. He welcomed the gains made in Cote d'Ivoire, which resulted in the delisting of some parties, and he agreed with the need to continue to focus on those situations, so that the improvements did not turn out to be short-lived.

All serious violations, including the murder and maiming of children, should receive the Council's attention, and the monitoring and reporting mechanism should be involved in all situations of concern. Priority in that regard should be given to the most acute and widespread conflicts on the Council's agenda. It would be impossible to protect children without interaction with the Governments of countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. The United Nations and the Security Council should focus more on supporting national measures directed at strengthening such protection; effective implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes; and the establishment of social and legal conditions for preventing recruiting and other crimes against children. Systemic efforts would result in concrete results, easing the situation of children in armed conflict.

DUMISANI KUMALO (South Africa) said that the Council should continue to call upon all parties in armed conflicts to prepare concrete time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children and to halt the abuses against them. The Council should also consider giving equal weight to all six categories of the relevant grave violations and it should refer cases to the International Criminal Court for investigations and prosecutions within its jurisdiction.

Further, he said, mainstreaming child protection into peacekeeping operations would enhance the monitoring and reporting mechanism. The inclusion of child protection advisers should be considered when reviewing or creating mandates, so as to provide for greater consistency in advocacy and response. A zero-tolerance policy for United Nations personnel should be implemented with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse of children, with a comprehensive strategy developed for assistance and support for victims. Finally, international support should be provided as a priority for the reintegration and rehabilitation of children who had been associated with armed groups. The special concerns of girls in such situations should be taken into account.

JOHN SAWERS (United Kingdom), associating himself with the statement to be made by the European Union, said that, committed to playing an active role in international efforts to protect children affected by armed conflict, it supported the Secretary-General's recommendation to include child protection advisers within the mandates of peacekeeping and relevant political mission in the future. He was pleased to note a number of positive developments, including in Cote d'Ivoire and in Nepal. The decrease in unlawful recruitment of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was a further positive sign and the cooperation of the country with the International Criminal Court was also very welcome. He would welcome further details on progress made in the development and implementation of the action plans of parties within Burma. He urged the Myanmar Government to adhere to its commitment to the Special Representative to cooperate in establishing a monitoring and reporting mechanism.

He said that all six grave violations remained of great concern to his country, which stood ready to contribute to a review of the violations that triggered the listing of a party in the annexes. He was greatly concerned that instances of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, during conflict had increased, including in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi. There was evidence that rape was used as an instrument of war in those regions to terrorize local populations. It was important that such crimes did not go unpunished, he said, expressing full support for the role of the International Criminal Court in investigating and prosecuting those and other violations against children in armed conflict that fell within its jurisdiction. The Council and its Working Group should make full use of the range of options for addressing systematic violations set out in resolution 1612 (2005) and in the Working Group's "toolkit", including targeted measures. Inaction was not an option.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) said that thousands of children still died each year from direct and indirect consequences of war. The report had noted the persistence of serious violations against children by armed groups

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and armed forces. Thousands of children were still being abducted and forcibly used as child soldiers. Violence stemming from cluster bombs and attacks against schools continued to kill and wound thousands of children. It was vital that appropriate measures be taken.

He called on Governments to criminalize recruitment of child soldiers and encouraged States that had not done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol. He called on the international community to ensure that schools were not targeted. Parties to a conflict must spare health-care services and water deliveries, and ensure safe passage for humanitarian organizations. He encouraged the Council to contemplate mandatory measures against any party that continued to systematically violate measures to protect children. It was the Council's duty to ensure full implementation of all resolutions thereto. He welcomed the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which had a deterrent effect, and recommended extending it to cover all violations.

LIU ZHENMIN (China) said that his country was against the recruitment and use of child soldiers and other violations, and supported the efforts of the international community and the Security Council to enhance the protection of children in armed conflict. The need to protect children in armed conflict stemmed from the existence of the armed conflicts, themselves, and the Council should strengthen its efforts to prevent conflict and safeguard peace, preventing and resolving conflicts at their origin. Thus, efforts should be made to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

He said that the role of the Governments concerned must be respected and supported. As emphasized in resolution 1612 (2005), the Governments concerned bore the primary responsibility for the protection of children. The Council and its Working Group should enhance their communications with those Governments and support the positive measures they took. The question of children should not be politicized and used as a pretext to interfere with a country's internal affairs. Resolution 1612 (2005) should continue to serve as the basis for improving the monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and the functioning of the Working Group. Under the coordination of France as the Chair, the Working Group had considered several countries and submitted relevant recommendations to the Council. Hopefully, that instrument would maintain its professionalism and seek to address relevant issues through cooperation with the Governments concerned. China always stood for dialogue to resolve relevant issues and opposed the wilful use or threat of sanctions.

In post-conflict reconstruction, the international community should prioritize the reintegration of children and ensure that adequate resources were provided, he said. To solve the question of children and armed conflict, the efforts of the Council alone were not enough. UNICEF and other relevant organizations should play a greater role. Also welcome was the positive role played by non-governmental organizations. Not long ago, China had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He called on all the countries that had not done so, to ratify and accede to the Protocol.

LE LUONG MINH (Viet Nam) said that, although progress had been made regarding recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and the willingness by Governments to punish those acts, the continuation of the practice was of grave concern. Such acts, together with attacks on schoolchildren, sexual abuse of children, torture, and deprivation of food and education, constituted serious violations of basic rights. There was a need for a broad strategy of conflict prevention that would address the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner, in order to enhance children's protection on a long-term basis, including by promoting sustainable development, poverty eradication, national reconciliation and respect for and protection of human rights.

He stressed the importance of strengthened dialogue and cooperation with national Governments in the efforts to monitor and report on the issue of children in armed conflict. The fact that some Governments had complained that they had not been consulted, leading to consideration of their views in the preparation of the Secretary-General's report, and that the situations in their respective countries were not armed conflicts and, thus, should not have been mentioned in the report, deserved the Council's attention. Equal treatment of all situations of armed conflict could also be an area for improvement. The Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should improve its performance and working methods, with a view to putting greater emphasis on prevention.

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NEVEN JURICA (Croatia) said that reporting on the six grave violations against children should not be solely contingent on a country being listed as recruiting child soldiers. Rather, the application of the monitoring and recruiting mechanism should be expanded to include those violations in all situations identified in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report. Condemning in the "strongest possible terms" the rising sexual violence against children and women in situations of armed conflict as unacceptable methods of warfare, he encouraged the Council to use targeted measures whenever needed to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. There should be a zero tolerance policy against sexual abuse of women and children by United Nations and related personnel, including those guarding the camps of the internally displaced persons, which had become recruiting grounds for child soldiers.

He said that all troop-contributing countries should provide training for participants of peacekeeping operations on the rights of children. Furthermore, Governments should end impunity for perpetrators accused of committing violations against children in armed conflict, and the Council should refer violations to the International Criminal Court in situations where national systems failed to address them. As an active member of the Working Group, he called for the strengthening of the Group's methods by using organized briefings with concerned countries six months after adoption of the Group's conclusions by the concerned countries. All possible actions in the "tool kit" should be used, as needed, especially field trips, followed by reports.

JORGE URBINA (Costa Rica) said that his country shared a particular concern for children and love of peace with Panama, which was expressed in the wish of both peoples to live in peace. The situation of children in zones of conflict remained a source of concern. While there had been encouraging progress in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers in some countries, there had been a lack of progress in many other areas. Children who were manipulated or forced to carry a rifle instead of schoolbooks required more than an annual debate. They required a naming of the perpetrators and fighting them with determination. The situation of child victims of abuse and other violations required serious consideration of measures to protect them. The Council had the responsibility to ensure compliance with all of its resolutions. The Working Group should recommend measures or sanctions against those who consistently violated the resolutions. It was time to bring those responsible to justice, leaving aside national conveniences or interests.

He urged the Council not to shy away from referring cases to the International Criminal Court, thereby sending a powerful message to those who sacrificed children for their selfish concerns. It was important to immediately revise monitoring criteria to include all six offences against children. Equal importance should be attached to all violations. It was the responsibility of all States to protect their people, and that responsibility was particularly grave in case of children. When such responsibility was not observed, the international community should step in. The quantity and location of cluster munitions should be provided, in order for the affected areas to be cleared. It was also necessary to conclude an international instrument on the use of cluster munitions.

MARTY M. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia) said the sight of children carrying machine guns and engaging in combat was absolutely unacceptable. It was an affront to international humanitarian law, which clearly prohibited such practices, either by armed forces or armed groups. The Council had to act to forge alliances with the concerned States to eradicate such practices. Delivery of humanitarian assistance to all children affected by armed conflict was vital. All humanitarian actors should continue to carry out their work based on the principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence. Situations such as those outlined in the report often pertained to developing countries facing complex and sometimes insurmountable difficulties. Progress on the issue, therefore, also depended on their capacity-building.

He said that the concern could only be properly addressed by adopting a broad strategy of conflict prevention and by tackling the root causes of armed conflict. Ultimately, the promotion of sustainable development, poverty eradication, national reconciliation, good governance and democracy, the rule of law and protection of human rights were the best guarantors of children's welfare. A successful release, rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed conflict required a comprehensive approach. On a specific point, he said he strongly deplored the use of cluster munitions targeted directly or indirectly at children. The Council should pronounce itself clearly in rejecting that practice by State or non-State actors. In conclusion, he stressed the

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importance of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed conflict to further enhance its working methods to achieve transparency and inclusiveness.

BERNARD KOUCHNER, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of France, said "the tragedy of child soldiers forces us to be determined and uncompromising". In spite of the countless, inevitable difficulties, there must only be one objective: the eradication of that barbarity. "The UN must play a central role in combating this heinous form of slavery which turns victims into assassins." The Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, presided over by France, was an innovative mechanism that had resulted in tangible progress. Thousands of children had been freed and returned to civilian life, notably in Burundi. Progress had also been made in Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, there were still children on the battlefields of Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burma, as well as in the Central African Republic and Afghanistan. The international community must remain mobilized and redouble its efforts.

He said his country would like to see the deterrent aspect of the Council increased. Its members must not shrink from the adoption of strong, targeted measures against parties that failed to comply with its recommendations. Action was not limited to the issue of child soldiers. The other five serious violations of children's rights, including sexual violence as a weapon of war, should also be addressed. Failure to react would be reprehensible. The Council must demand that the action plans drawn up by the belligerents integrated measures to end sexual violence and followed through on their implementation. The Working Group should tackle the tragedy of sexual violence against children in armed conflict independently of whether they were child soldiers or not. It should also address impunity. Council action, however irreplaceable, did not prevent other initiatives, such as from the International Criminal Court, the European Union and UNICEF.

France, in cooperation with UNICEF, had organized a ministerial conference in February 2007, called "Free Children from War", at which 59 countries signed on to the Paris Commitments, a raft of principles and good practices aimed at strengthening action significantly, he noted. A follow-up conference last October saw seven more countries join the Commitments. Another forum on the Paris Commitments, which sought to facilitate the financing of reintegration programmes, had a first meeting scheduled for September, on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

Speaking in his national capacity, Council President, SAMUEL LEWIS NAVARRO, Vice-President and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Panama, said that everybody recognized the negative impact of armed conflict on children. The international community had an obligation to prevent that. The Working Group created by the Council was evidence that the world would no longer address that issue in a fragmented manner. Peace and security, development and human rights were the pillars of the United Nations system. Those issues were interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Protection of children in armed conflict should not be undertaken by the Security Council alone. The General Assembly also had an important role to play. The Working Group's practice of meeting with States affected by its decisions should be used by other subsidiary bodies on many other occasions.

He said he welcomed the important recent advances, including recent convictions by the Special Court for Sierra Leone and charges issued by the International Criminal Court. While he was pleased by international efforts to put an end to persistent violations, he was concerned over the rising use of refugee and internally displaced persons camps for child soldier recruitment, as well as the proliferation of intentional attacks against teachers and schools, and the use of sexual violence as a tool of war. He encouraged the International Criminal Court to continue safeguarding children's rights when investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity. He also supported placing advisers on the issue of children and armed conflict in peacekeeping missions and stressed the need for greater focus on the reintegration into society of children affected by conflict.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this morning concluded its general debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention. It also heard an address by Joseph Dion Ngute, Minister Delegate in Charge of the Commonwealth at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cameroon.

Mr. Ngute assured the Council of the Government's commitment to observing, protecting and promoting human rights in Cameroon. The Human Rights Council should not operate in a vacuum or be seen as ignoring the disturbing reality of human rights violations around the world. The Council needed to show imagination and above all, determination in addressing the most flagrant abuses of human rights. Leaving behind some of the negative aspects, the Universal Periodic Review carried with it the possibility of ensuring the Council's legitimacy and the success of the Council was dependent on the implementation of this new and promising mechanism. Cameroon also appealed for greater flexibility to foster assistance to developing countries and reminded Council members of the need to work together and to pool efforts to help all countries overcome their handicaps and to promote international norms and standards established by the international community.

Speakers in the general debate on human rights situations requiring the attention of the Council expressed concerns about allegations of gross and systematic human rights violations in Darfur, Sudan; the execution of juvenile offenders, harassment of human rights defenders and restrictions on freedoms of religion and expression in Iran; the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka which was urged to accept establishment of a presence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor the situation there; political oppression in Zimbabwe; the failure of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in that country about the grave and persistent human rights abuses there; discrimination and marginalization of religious and racial minorities in European Union countries; limitations of freedom of speech and excessive use of force by police in France; Islamophobia and defamation of religion incidents in Denmark which were supported by the Government; human rights violations in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States; Turkey's harassment and killing of Kurdish people; Chinese repression of Tibetan political dissent; killings and torture of Muslims in Sri Lanka; Pakistan's attack on the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary; and the deteriorating situation of human rights in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, among others. Concern was also expressed about violations of human rights in Kenya, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Western Sahara, Jammu and Kashmir, Papua province of Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nepal.

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Speaking in the general debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention were the Netherlands, Switzerland, New Zealand, Ireland, Australia, Iceland, Belgium and Iran.

The following non-governmental organizations also took the floor: Europe-Third World Centre, on behalf of several NGOs¹, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, on behalf of several NGOs², Baha'i International Community, Minority Rights Group International, International Commission of Jurists, Franciscans International, in a joint statement with Pax Romana, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, Interfaith International, Human Rights Watch, B'nai B'rith International, speaking on behalf of Coordination Board of Jewish Organizations, International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, Action contre la faim, International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Asian Legal Resource Centre, in a joint statement with Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, World Muslim Congress, Union of Arab Jurists, Arab Lawyers Union, Colombian Commission of Jurists, International Educational Development, Union de l'action feminine, Centrist Democratic International, Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Bischoffliches Hilfswerk Misereor, Espace Afrique International and International Movement ATD Fourth World, on behalf of several NGOs³.

Speaking in right of reply were the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Iran, Iraq, Colombia, Nepal, Ethiopia, Slovenia and Japan.

The Council today is holding three back-to-back meetings from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. When the Council starts its midday meeting at noon, it will continue with its review, rationalization and improvement of mandates process concerning the Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

General Debate on Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention

NYNKE WIJMENG (Netherlands) noted that no country had a perfect human rights record and therefore the Netherlands welcomed the establishment of the Universal Periodic Review. However, there were situations of gross and systematic violations that were urgent and should be dealt with by the Council. The human rights situation in Sudan remained of grave concern to the Netherlands. The human rights situation in Darfur, in particular, had not improved and gross and systematic human rights violations were the order of the day. An issue of particular concern was sexual violence and other atrocities committed against women. The Netherlands urged Sudan to cooperate with the International Criminal Court. As to the situation in Iran, the Netherlands remained concerned about the execution of juvenile offenders, harassment of human rights defenders, and restrictions on freedoms of religions or belief and of expression. Iran was urged to respect its obligations under international human rights law.

The Netherlands was also very concerned about the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. The Netherlands called on Sri Lanka to fully cooperate with all relevant United Nations mechanisms and to agree with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on a monitoring and advisory human rights mission in the country. On the situation in Zimbabwe, the Netherlands believed it was of utmost importance that civil society organizations could play their role in the run-up to the elections. And with regard to the situation in Kenya, the Netherlands appreciated the cooperation by the Government of Kenya with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights fact-finding mission to assess the current situation and hoped the recent agreement between the parties would bring back stability to Kenya.

BLAISE GODET (Switzerland) said that each State was responsible for the implementation and promotion of human rights within its jurisdiction. Nonetheless, Switzerland observed that in a number of situations the respect for the most basic human rights was not yet a reality. Concerning the situation in Myanmar, the Council unanimously adopted, a little over five months ago, a resolution that defined specific objectives to improve the situation of human rights in that country. Switzerland was of the view that the Council could not ease up on its vigilance. The Council owed this to those, both male and female, who had risked their lives to send out a signal of distress. Switzerland

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reiterated its appeal to the Myanmar authorities to collaborate in the process initiated by the Council and to provide full access, without delay, to humanitarian organizations trying to reach those in need.

With regards to Sri Lanka, Switzerland urged the Government of Sri Lanka to accept the establishment of an office to monitor the human rights situation in that country. Nevertheless, as the High Commissioner stated, technical cooperation alone could not respond to the grave challenges present in Sri Lanka. Lastly, violence against civilians in the context of the conflict in Darfur was a source of great concern, particularly acts committed by the janjawid militias. Switzerland reminded all parties, in particular the Government of Sudan, to do their utmost to protect civilians and to observe all human rights standards and humanitarian law.

WENDY HINTON (New Zealand) said that New Zealand valued the various cooperative human rights bodies, including the Human Rights Council. New Zealand was ready to engage cooperatively with States in the Universal Periodic Review. The Universal Periodic Review was one of the Council's main tools; it could help achieve essential changes in the enjoyment of human rights on the ground. Two situations were of concern to New Zealand. New Zealand remained concerned about the loss of civilian lives in Sri Lanka and it urged the authorities to continue their collaboration with the Special Procedures. New Zealand also was concerned about the political oppression in Zimbabwe. New Zealand would very much welcome the return to an equal political debate. Elections should be held according to standards and should be verified by foreign observers.

DAITHI O CEALLAIGH (Ireland) said Ireland remained deeply concerned about the situation in Darfur and was deeply disturbed by reports of renewed violence in the region, including against civilians, in the last two months. Ireland particularly deplored the aerial bombing of civilians, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against women and children. Ireland also remained concerned at the human rights situation in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Ireland also believed that the serious human rights situation in Zimbabwe, and that in Eritrea, warranted particular international concern. The continuing deteriorating human rights position in Iran remained a source of great disappointment and concern.

Ireland also regretted the Government of Myanmar's failure to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, and to implement the recommendations made in his report to the body last December. The situation in Sri Lanka was also of real concern. The increasing violence and the termination of the ceasefire agreement could only have a negative impact on the already serious humanitarian and human rights situation on that country. All sides must urgently seek meaningfully and peacefully to address their differences. The consistent failure of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and other relevant United Nations mechanisms must end. Ireland remained deeply concerned by the grave and persistent human rights abuses in that country.

GUY O'BRIEN (Australia) said that the ongoing conflict in Darfur was of great concern and Australia urged all parties to the conflict to facilitate the deployment of the joint United Nations/African Union peacekeeping operation and to work towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. In Iran, the deteriorating human rights situation was also of deep concern. In particular, Australia remained concerned about the execution of juveniles, the increase in the number of public executions and the use of cruel and unusual punishment. While Australia acknowledged that the recent power-sharing agreement in Kenya was a positive step, there was still work to be done.

With regards to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Australia remained gravely concerned about the suppression of freedom of expression, religion and opinion, as well as torture and the imposition of the death penalty for political reasons. The continuing lack of democracy in Zimbabwe and the human rights abuses still present in Burma were also mentioned by the Australian delegate as situations that required immediate attention. In Burma, the regime continued to hold in detention hundreds of monks and civilians who protested peacefully.

THORBJORN JONSSON (Iceland) said that Iceland deeply regretted that the authorities in Myanmar had to date not granted the Special Rapporteur a visa to enable him to conduct his follow-up mission. The lack of collaboration was regretted. The information in the Special Rapporteur's reports was highly disturbing. There was a continued denial of basic civil and political rights. The situation was of grave concern. The Government of Myanmar was urged

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to ensure full respect for human rights. The renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur was fully supported. The protection of human rights in Sudan remained a challenge. In all parts of the country, human rights continued to be violated. Violence against women was widespread. The Government had the prime responsibility for protecting its citizens.

BART OUVRY (Belgium) said Belgium was concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran and especially about the execution of minors. A moratorium or an abolition of the death penalty would lead to more respect of human rights. Belgium called upon the Iranian authorities to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women or discrimination based on religious or ethnic differences. Information on human rights abuses against the Baha'i community in Iran was of particular concern. Belgium was also concerned about the human rights situation in Sudan. Belgium called upon the Government of Sudan to cooperate with the international community due to the urgent nature of the situation. Violence against women in Sudan was unacceptable, as it was anywhere in the world, and impunity could not be accepted for the perpetrators of these crimes. The Government of Sudan was urged to cooperate with the International Criminal Court. The Universal Periodic Review and the presence of many countries in this new procedure proved that there were more and more instruments to make an improvement to the human rights situation throughout the world. Belgium was pleased that Sri Lanka would be subjected to this Review. There were continuing human rights abuses in that country.

ALI BAHREYNI (Iran) said that the situation of religious and racial minorities in European Union countries was alarming. These groups were suffering from various forms of discrimination and marginalization in different areas such as employment, education, housing and standards of life as a whole. In the last few years, Islamophobia had become a prevailing phenomenon against Muslims in European countries. In France, there were sometimes limitations with regard to freedom of speech and press. Iran lamented the situation in French prisons, excessive use of force by police, torture and harassment of prisoners, and incorrect policies towards immigrants. In Denmark, a new wave of Islamophobia and defamation of religion was being witnessed. It was most regrettable that this trend had been encouraged and supported by the Danish Government.

With one of the worst human rights records in Europe, Iran condemned the serious violations of human rights occurring in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, international humanitarian law was being severely breached by United Kingdom's military forces in the context of the war in Iraq and the occupation of that country. In addition, Canada's human rights records revealed a series of systematic abuses, including social exclusion policies, police brutality and blatant racial discrimination against its own aboriginal people. Lastly, the shameful situation of prisoners in Abu Gharib prison demonstrated the inhuman nature of United States policies abroad.

MALIK ODZEN, of Europe-Third World Centre, on behalf of several NGOs¹, said that the situation in Turkey remained a concern and needed the attention of the Council. The harassment and killing of Kurdish people showed a sorry picture. Many persons had been killed by violence and negligence by the Turkish army. There were numerous complaints of cases of torture. Trade unions and other associations had been attacked by the Turkish police. Elected Kurds were constantly attacked. Turkey was also affecting Iraq with its incursions into the country. These attacks were most of all affecting the civilians in Iraq.

STEWART WATTERS, of International Fellowship of Reconciliation, on behalf of several NGOs², said since the imposition of martial law in Tibet from 8 March 1989 to 30 April 1990, the Chinese authorities had pursued a policy of "merciless repression" of even the slightest signs of Tibetan political dissent. The latest peaceful protest in Tibetan areas occurred in the wider context of the overwhelming Tibetan discontent with China's repressive policies. As was evident from the many Tibetan cases covered by the reports of the Special Procedures of the Council, China sought to eliminate all dissenting opinion by Tibetans, creating a climate of fear and a culture of impunity. As the world focused on the Beijing Olympics, the group of non-governmental organizations associated with the statement urged the Human Rights Council, especially the Special Procedures and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to condemn the use of force against Tibetans peacefully demonstrating, and to pay close attention to the links between the repressive political climate in Tibet and the impact of centrally driven development policies that threatened the very survival of the cultural, religious and national identity of the Tibetan people.

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DIANE ALA'I, of Baha' International Community, said that Baha'i International Community was gravely concerned about the many and various aspects of the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran. The Iranian authorities had been conducting a crackdown on everyone who held opinions or beliefs that differed from those of the ruling theocracy. Even kindergarten children had been humiliated in class and expelled from local schools. Across the country, Baha' cemeteries had been desecrated and, in some instances, razed to the ground. Baha'i International Community condemned the 1991 memorandum that established a detailed policy on how Baha's should be treated, giving no religious freedom and allowing minimum livelihood. It denounced the sharp increase in violent attacks by plainclothes militia on Baha'is in Iran.

KATHRYN RAMSAY, of Minority Rights Group International, said that Minority Rights Group International welcomed the reports of the Special Rapporteurs that had been addressing the situation in Sri Lanka. But these reports were not sufficiently addressing the reality of the occurring human rights violations since the ceasefire. There had been an increase in deaths and mass arrests had taken place. Muslims were victims of killings and tortures. Civilian society groups said that the elections had not been carried out with equity. The Government was urged to ensure security in the Tamil areas and the Government had to acknowledge the severity of the situation and to agree to collaborate with international human rights tools. Also, the Independent Expert on Minority Issues should be allowed to visit the country.

LUKAS MACHON, of International Commission of Jurists, said that the International Commission of Jurists welcomed the recent political settlement between the Government and the opposition in Kenya. However, as killings within the country continued, the Council needed to call on all parties to the conflict to honor and implement the agreement. The Government of Kenya had to investigate all alleged violations, including the excessive use of force, bringing all suspected perpetrators to justice, and providing adequate reparation to the victims of the violations. It was also essential to disband all militia groups, ensure an independent and impartial inquiry into the handling of the December elections, undertake electoral reform, and address past grievances. The human rights situation in Sri Lanka continued to deteriorate in the context of an armed conflict which had escalated since the end of the cease-fire agreement in January 2008. The legacy of the Government of Pakistan's attack on the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and the legal profession over the course of 2007, and especially since 3 November 2007, remained of serious concern. The International Commission of Jurists was also concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. Moreover, it urged the Government of Uganda to repeal national laws and end practices that may defeat the imperative of justice and accountability. The Government must also assist internally displaced people to resettle and facilitate regaining self-reliance and dignity.

BENEDICT AYODI, of Franciscans International, in a joint statement with Pax Romana, said that with the signing of the power sharing agreement between the opposition and the Government, peace and normalcy were slowly being restored in Kenya. However, many people remained divided, traumatized, displaced and hungry, nursing their wounds in the wake of the post election crisis that left over 1,000 people dead and 300,000 displaced. In response to this situation, the Government of Kenya banned all coverage of live news and events and assemblies of people that resembled political rallies. Kenya was now embarking on reconstruction and the following items were vital to build a sound foundation for this process: inclusion, equality, integrity, justice, transparency, accountability, professionalism, tolerance and strong institutions that respected, sustained and protected these values.

MOHAMED MOHAMED CHEIK, of International Movement for Youth and Students of the United Nations, said that the Movement believed in the indivisibility and universality of all human rights. But this universality was not enjoyed by all people. The Sahrawi people were part of those people and their tragic humanitarian situation was of concern. Morocco was daily flouting its international obligations. The Western Sahara situation had deteriorated over the last years, especially since Morocco had stepped up the closing of the territories and intensified its repression. The Movement wondered why the High Commissioner had not yet published its report on this issue.

VISUVAHINGHAN KIRUPARAHAN, of Interfaith International, said as one of the important pillars of the Human Rights Council, agenda item 4 on human rights situations that require the attention of the Council permitted members of civil society to raise their concerns regarding situations around the world. With regard to the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, Interfaith International noted that the humanitarian situation in the conflict areas was

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really worsening and the plight of the innocent people including women and children was a matter of gravest concern. Impunity continued to prevail in Sri Lanka. The emergency regulations had become the norm for more than 35 years. Human rights defenders were killed by so-called unknown gunmen in Sri Lanka. However, until today no proper investigations had been carried out on any of the killings of human rights defenders, despite many clues about the culprits of these cold-blooded murders. Since January 2006, 62 humanitarian workers had been killed in Sri Lanka. Interfaith International urged the Human Rights Council to seriously consider all available mechanisms to ensure rigorous and timely international scrutiny on Sri Lanka.

JULIE DE RIVERO, of Human Rights Watch, wished to discuss the human rights situation in Somalia. The Commission on Human Rights first took up the question of Somalia almost 15 years ago and yet the situation remained dire. Despite the excellent work of Mr. Alnajjar, the Independent Expert appointed by the Secretary-General on Somalia, the Council had failed to respond appropriately to the crisis that had engulfed Somalia over the past 15 months. If it was to be taken seriously as a human rights body, the Council needed to be actively engaged with situations as they developed as well as sustaining attention over a period of time. The fighting currently in Mogadishu - and Somalia generally - between Ethiopian and TFG forces and insurgent forces were even more intense than in 2007. According to United Nations estimates, up to 700,000 people, or 60 percent of the city's residents, were displaced from Mogadishu since 2007. Compounding this situation was the fact that large parts of Somalia were affected by drought and malnutrition rates were reportedly rising. In light of the grave humanitarian crisis occurring in Somalia, Human Rights Watch urgently called for a special session to deal with the escalating human rights violations in that country.

SYBIL KESSLER, of B'nai B'rith International, speaking on behalf of Coordination Board of Jewish Organizations, condemned the ongoing human rights violations in Darfur, Myanmar and Iran. The Council was urged to stop these violations. The Council was thanked for recognizing the urgency of the situation in Myanmar. But many of the conditions that had led to the Special Session on Myanmar continued to exist today. In Sudan, various reports pointed to an increase in attacks on civilians. Sudan was once again bombing villages. The ongoing human rights abuses in Iran were condemned. A new draft penal code had been proposed that would impose the death sentence for apostasy. It was unfortunate that the Council had ended the procedure which was considering the human rights situation in Iran.

SHAMEEM SHAWL, of International Islamic Federation of Students, drawing attention of the Council to the unending suffering of the people of Jammu and Kashmir at the hand of the Indian Security Forces, said the true and ugly face of the so-called biggest democracy of the world was known only to the people of Indian-Occupied Kashmir, whose generations had lived under the shadowy and ghost rule of Indian occupation. The voice of Kashmiris was being suppressed by all means. Years of impunity for serious abuses had led to a vicious cycle of continuing violence that created among the civilian population a pervasive climate of fear, distrust and sadness. The International Islamic Federation of Students urged the Human Rights Council to listen to the plight of the poor Kashmiri people in the Indian-Occupied Kashmir and consider ways and means to ensure the enjoyment of their basic human rights that should not be subjected to any conditions whatsoever.

ANNE GARELLA, of Action contre la faim, expressed outrage at the assassination of 17 employees of its organization on 4 August 2006 in Muthur, Sri Lanka. These 17 employees - 16 Tamils and 1 Muslim, 4 of whom were women - were brutally murdered in cold blood whilst helping victims of the Tsunami and conflict. The President Rajapaksa decided in November 2006 to create a Presidential Commission to investigate this particular case and 15 other grave violations of human rights. The role of the Independent Experts must be impartial and transparent. However Action against Hunger expressed its doubts that this Commission would meet international standards. The recommendations of international observers were not taken into consideration and he wondered seriously about the will of the authorities to address this case. Furthermore, in the absence of impartial observers, the outcome of the Presidential Commission seemed to be in jeopardy.

TAHIRA JABEEN KHAN, of International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, urged all United Nations members to fulfil their commitments to international conventions. Women living under foreign occupation were victims of violence. One such example was Indian-held Kashmir, where women were kept as hostages by the

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occupation forces. Thousands of widows were suffering from mental illness. Journalists documenting the incidents were often threatened or attacked. The Human Rights Council was requested to urge the Government of India to stop these violations.

MARIE HILAO HENRIQUEZ, of Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, said the fate of the indigenous people of Papua was hardly known to the international community, despite the fact that the Province of Papua was one of the richest regions of the world in terms of natural resources. The people of Papua, however, had never benefited from this richness and rather suffered from the inappropriate implementation of their economic, social and cultural rights. Papuans were subjected to torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and unfair trials by the Indonesian authorities. The right of an independent and fair trial was repeatedly violated in Papua. These abovementioned concerns on human rights related to the ongoing militarization of Papua. The access to Papua by outside human rights workers, journalists and even diplomats was restricted. The World Council of Churches asked the Human Rights Council to send a fact-finding mission to the Province of Papua in order to assess the right to health and education. A visit of the Special Rapporteurs on the independence of judges, the right to food and indigenous people and the Working Group on arbitrary detention to Papua was also sought.

BIJO FRANCIS, of Asian Legal Resource Centre, in a joint statement with Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, said that Sri Lanka, one of the Council's Vice Presidents, was also the State with the highest frequency and number of victims of forced disappearances. The state of denial about the gravity of the situation and the unwillingness to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reflected the complicity of the Sri Lankan Government. Despite absurdist claims that the situation was improving, how could it be getting better when new victims were being added on a daily basis, when none of the disappeared were resurfacing alive and well and when no single effective investigations or prosecutions were taking place. The situation in Bangladesh was in effect being ignored by this Council, despite its severity. Since the imposition of a state of emergency on 11 January 2007, most fundamental human rights had been suspended. Reports suggested that as many as 250,000 people had been arrested since the emergency began. Similar concerns were expressed regarding the situation of human rights in Nepal, where past and present violations remained unprosecuted.

ATTIA ANWAR ZOON, of Word Muslim Congress, drew attention of the Council towards the systematic and persistent human rights violations in Indian-occupied Kashmir. No other people could be more powerless and vulnerable than people under foreign occupation. The people of Jammu and Kashmir had been victims of incessant torture for decades. Voices which dared to differ simply disappeared and languished in Indian dungeons. Indian security forces had repeatedly engaged in abusive tactics.

ELIAS KHOURY, of Union of Arab Jurists, said the situation of human rights in the Middle East was continuing to deteriorate. The Council was duty bound for this reason to set up mechanisms to remedy this. Amongst the principle reasons for this situation were the policies of occupation and war carried out by certain States. Economic development and the democratic process of the people had been hindered. The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Iraq was of particular concern. Flagrant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law were taking place in Iraq. The situation must be dealt with urgently; there had been a fresh outbreak of violence. Some eight million people in Iraq depended on international humanitarian assistance and 54 per cent of the population lived on less than one dollar a day, while the cost of the war per day was 600 million dollars. The Human Rights Council should address this situation urgently and appoint a Special Rapporteur to examine the situation in Iraq.

SABAH EL MUKHTAR, of Arab Lawyers Union, said that a series of reports by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and various non-governmental organizations had pointed out the deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Iraq. Following the invasion of 2003, the scale of death, destruction, systematic human rights violations and oppression continued in Iraq. Iraqis were left without basic health care, education, drinkable water or adequate sanitation. The rights of women and children were totally ignored. The systematic abuse, mistreatment and torture continued in addition to the daily killings. Despite these circumstances, the Human Rights Council had still not discussed the human rights situation in Iraq. Iraqi intellectuals had been targeted since the

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beginning of the 2003 invasion. Many had been arrested, kidnapped, killed or forced to flee. It was estimated that more than 500 Iraqi intellectuals, 140 lawyers and 45 judges were assassinated in the last five years. In addition, one of the greatest losses due to the invasion was Iraq's historical heritage, in which some 10,000 pieces of the country's most prized archaeological artefacts were still missing.

ISABELLE HEYER, of Colombian Commission of Jurists, said that a document had been adopted by consensus with the agreement of the Government but Colombia was not complying with it. It was a source of concern that paramilitary groups had not respected the peace process and the situation remained the same, they had not complied with the peace process. Another concern was the framework that gave impunity for crimes. The very situation of human rights defenders in Colombia was worrying. Recently, one of the members of the Colombian Commission of Jurists had been subjected to death threats because of his participation in a peaceful march. This was not an isolated event. The Government had often been seen publicly attacking human rights defenders and demonizing them as rebels. Physical measures of protection by various Government programmes were not sufficient. The Government was urged to end its attacks and adopt all measures to investigate the attacks. There could be no human rights if defenders could not work properly.

KAREN PARKER, of International Educational Development, said International Educational Development could not accept the failure of the Human Rights Council to address two situations, Iraq and Sri Lanka, which directly and indirectly related to policies and interests of the United States. The Council's failure to address these situations clearly weighed heavily on its credibility. The United States invaded Iraq in clear violation of the United Nations Charter and had carried out persistent and systematic illegal military operations, including "shock and awe" terrorism in armed conflict and the targeting of protected persons and facilities such as hospitals, schools, and places of worship. The Council should at least express its concerns in the hope that countries with more will to support humanitarian law norms and the rule of law would ensure that their policies did not facilitate the situation for the United States or cause further damage to respect for humanitarian law. As to Sri Lanka, the United States' interests in securing navy and air force bases in the Tamil areas of that country and other interests in the region was a major factor in the prolongation of the conflict that now hovered on the brink of genocide. The Human Rights Council should call a special session on Sri Lanka as soon as possible, and should persuade Sri Lanka that it must, at the risk of sanctions, allow the High Commissioner to establish an expanded presence in the country.

KHALTOUM KHAYATI, of Union de l'action feminine, expressed concern at the unfortunate events occurring in Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria. It was shameful for such atrocities to occur without being addressed by the Council. The international community had condemned this type of behaviour and the Human Rights Council had a responsibility to do the same. The situation in Algeria was just one of the violations of human rights that were taking place in the Saharan region. The division of families and the lack of will on behalf of countries to deal with arbitrary detention were indeed shameful. At times, the Union doubted the intentions of the Algerian Government and urged the Council to deal with this situation as soon as possible.

AABADILA SEMLALI of Centrist Democratic International, said that there were tragic situations of populations living under the control of armed movements. The case of the living conditions of the Sahari people living in the Tindouf camps, under control of the Polisario Front, was mentioned. It was becoming a pressing need for the Council to start to study this case. Attention was drawn to the very serious situation of the young Saharans that were forced to join the Saharian rebel army. The only solution to the problem was peace.

LINDSAY GRAHAM, of Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, urged the Human Rights Council to address the continuing conflict in Darfur but not to be distracted from the rising tensions throughout Sudan, especially in Southern Sudan. State enforcement of religious law in any form risked severe violations of the religious conscience of those who did not subscribe to the Muslim religion and with respect, the Becket Fund urged the Council to examine the issue. The junta in Myanmar continued to deprive its citizens of basic rights to associate, to free speech, and to the free expression of beliefs and conscience, as the world witnessed last November. The Government continued to crack down on these groups through imprisonment, isolation and deprivation of basic citizenship. Moreover, with regard to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Becket Fund urged the

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Special Rapporteur to pay particularly close attention to the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities and urged the Council to investigate the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience in prisons and labour camps.

THEODOR RATHGEBER, of Bischofliches Hilfswerk Misereor, said that the almost constant armed conflict since independence in 1960 left most of Chad in a state of fragile peace. While Chad acceded to the core United Nations Human Rights conventions in the 1990s, human rights practices in that country gave rise to serious concerns. In particular, human rights defenders, critical journalists, as well as prominent members of the opposition in the country were at serious risk, and increasingly so since the recent political turmoil. The state of emergency, declared by the Government on 15 February 2008 for the whole country, had been used as a pretext for settling scores with unarmed opposition, critical civil society members and human rights defenders. In conclusion, MISEREOR urged the Government of Chad to meet its international human rights obligations, guaranteeing the physical and mental integrity of human rights defenders, immediately lifting the state of emergency, and instigating a national dialogue with all actors.

GERARD CAMARA, of Espace Afrique International, shared the views that had been expressed in the various reports. The main point of importance seemed to be the need to strengthen cultural dialogue as a means of strengthening development. Respect of cultural diversity was leading to the full enjoyment of human rights. One should appreciate the true value of indigenous people and foster dialogue between peoples. It was important to claim out loud the link between culture and development.

JANET NELSON, of International Movement ATD Fourth World, on behalf of several NGOs³, said it was the view of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) associated with the statement that the Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights represented an opportunity for the Human Rights Council to offer the international community a tool that could assist in responding to the Secretary-General's call for a "renewed determination to address the needs of the poorest of the world's poor who have been left behind by global economic growth", as he stated on 7 January 2008. Moreover, the report of the Deputy High Commissioner on the Principles, in which she said the consultations on the Principles revealed that the Governments and NGOs who responded were very supportive of the need to understand extreme poverty as a denial of human rights, were also welcomed. The associated NGOs called on the Human Rights Council to proceed with the work to finalize and adopt the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights with a concrete time frame. The Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty was also requested to contribute to the work of the Council on the Draft Guiding Principles by helping to clarify the ways in which social, economic, cultural, political and civil rights were violated when people were condemned to live in extreme poverty, and to identify good practices that could give further substance to the guiding principles on ways to address these violations.

Statement by the Minister Delegate in Charge of the Commonwealth of Cameroon

JOSEPH DION NGUTE, Minister Delegate in Charge of the Commonwealth at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cameroon, addressed the facts regarding the most recent outbreak of violence in Cameroon. On 24 February of this year, worker strikes took place largely due to rising fuel prices. In some urban centres, a number of youth took to the streets to demonstrate against the rising costs of living. Unfortunately, the situation quickly degenerated into vandalism and violence. However, by 29 February, law and order had been restored in the whole country. Nonetheless, the four days of violence caused the loss of life and a great deal of property, particularly in urban areas. In response to this crisis, the Government implemented a few initiatives to alleviate the situation. Oil prices had been reduced, taxes and import duties had been temporarily suspended, public sector salaries were raised by 15 percent and finally, those who committed violent acts against the country were in the process of being brought to justice, under the national rule of law.

Mr. Ngute assured the Council of the Government's commitment to observing, protecting and promoting human rights in Cameroon. The Human Rights Council should not operate in a vacuum or be seen as ignoring the disturbing reality of human rights violations around the world. The Council needed to show imagination and above all, determination in addressing the most flagrant abuses of human rights. Leaving behind some of the negative aspects, the Universal Periodic Review carried with it the possibility of ensuring the Council's legitimacy and the

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success of the Council would be dependent on the implementation of this new and promising mechanism. Cameroon also appealed for greater flexibility to foster assistance to developing countries.

Mr. Ngute also reminded Council members of the need to work together and to pool efforts to help all countries overcome their handicaps and to promote international norms and standards established by the international community. Cameroon had been gradually adapting its legislation and carrying out a broad human rights dissemination campaign to its citizens. Furthermore, it was committed to promoting good governance and fought to defend the rights of migrant workers and indigenous people worldwide. As regards combating corruption, the Government stepped up its efforts to address this issue, especially fraud which had damaged the reputation of his Government. This was at the fore of the Government's priorities. Addressing this issue would hopefully reinstate faith and honour to the Cameroonian administration. In addition, dealing with poverty and HIV/AIDS were of crucial importance to the Government and as such, anti-retrovirals were made available free of charge for extreme cases. An adequate standard of living and health must be applied to all. Hundreds of new schools and programmes had been established around the country and special efforts had been made to repair damaged infrastructure, most notably roads to improve the safety and speed of transportation.

Finally, Mr. Ngute affirmed that Cameroon was taking on a revision of its Constitution to ensure that the benefits of peace would flourish in that country. It must prevent and anticipate any possible crisis in the country by smoothing out any imperfections present in the administration. The manipulation of minds through the distortion of reality continued to tarnish the image of his Government, which was fully committed to assuring equal rights and opportunities to all.

Right of Reply

KIM YONG-HO (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in a right of reply, said that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea rejected the unsubstantiated statements made about the country by several delegations. The naming and shaming had resulted in a completely distorted picture of reality. It had also shown that the Special Rapporteur was just a mouthpiece of certain countries. This situation was making the collaboration between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Human Rights Council more and more difficult.

BO QIAN (China), speaking in a right of reply in reference to the statement of the European Union, categorically rejected the allegations made in the statement on the human rights situation in China. China had experienced a higher level of human rights over the years. The Government would continue to promote and protect human rights in line with the wishes of the Chinese people. The Chinese Government encouraged non-governmental organizations to carry out their work on human rights. Instead of accusing others, the European Union should take a look at its own human rights' records and look at issues such as discrimination. Tibet was an integral part of China and the Government would continue to work to promote the human rights of all Chinese, including Tibetans.

YASANTHO KODAGODE (Sri Lanka), speaking in a right of reply, said that it was the view of Sri Lanka that various situations in the world required the attention of the Human Rights Council. But if the members of the Council did not act in good faith, this would be reduced to another round of political rhetoric and useless naming and shaming. Conspicuous by its absence was the situation in Gaza. If this was not a serious situation, Sri Lanka wondered which one would be. Thus, it was felt that the current round of discussion had been reduced to mere political naming and shaming. Sri Lanka was committed to develop sustainable solutions for the resolution of the problems they were facing. The successive Governments had tried to engage the Tamil groups; however they had always walked away from peace talks and had resumed terrorist activities. Several delegations had suggested that Sri Lanka should collaborate with the Tamils. Would they ever dare to make such a recommendation to world powers and suggest that they should negotiate with Al-Queida? Did these delegates see any difference between the LTTE and AL-Queida?

ENOS MAFEMBA (Zimbabwe), speaking in a right of reply, said those delegations who had targeted Zimbabwe in their remarks were mortally bankrupt, liars, hypocrites, cowards and were timid in character. Zimbabwe did not expect much behavior from the great pretenders of human rights. Successive regimes in London and their allies

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were racists. The Human Rights Council should note that the United Kingdom had deprived the people of Chagos in the Maldives of their rights. The United Kingdom also spoke of the rule of law, but today Afghanistan bled due to their actions and lies. Citing an African proverb, the speaker said: "When an elephant is passing dogs can bark but that can't stop it".

ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran), speaking in a right of reply with regards to the allegations made by several delegations about the use of the death penalty in Iran, said that many countries were retaining the death penalty, and it was foremost an issue concerning the criminal justice system. In Iran, capital punishment was foreseen for the most serious crimes, in conformity with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The European Union's position was becoming a vehicle for protecting those who had committed the most serious crimes. It was ironic that the tragic human rights situations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay were totally being ignored by the same countries which spoke against Iran.

OMER BERZINJI (Iraq), speaking in a right of reply, noted that in each session the representative of the Union of Arab Jurists attempted to give a poisonous report on Iraq which was far from the truth in the country. Iraq categorically rejected their remarks. There was a need to review the situation in Iraq by looking back to the time of the regime of Saddam Hussein. He had killed thousands, Kurds among others, and turned Iraq into a corrupt cemetery. What was going on in Iraq was caused by terrorism and not by the elected Government. The situation now was much better than before.

TOMAS ERNESTO CONCHA (Colombia), speaking in a right of reply, said that current negotiations with paramilitary groups had meant that the situation was being stabilized in Colombia. The Government had been able to arrest and prosecute a number of paramilitary group members, not only for violent acts of terrorism but also for drug related charges. The Government, along with civil society organizations, had set up an office to ensure the protection of human rights in the country. The Government wished to reassert its commitment to peace. With regards to threats made against organizations that assisted in the most recent peace march, protection would be granted to them and an investigation was underway to follow-up on these particular threats.

BAHRAT RAJ PAUDYAL (Nepal), speaking in a right of reply, said that the authorities in Nepal had cooperated with non-governmental organizations for years. As long as factual information was presented, constructive comments were always welcomed. The Asian Legal Forum statement had dubious motives. Nepal did not claim that the situation was perfect, but the efforts of the Government were genuine.

LULIT LEWDIE (Ethiopia), speaking in a right of reply in reference to the statements of Ireland and Human Rights Watch, said the remarks made by the Irish representative were an egregious exaggeration of the situation in the Ogaden State which should not be ignored. Innocent civilians continued to be killed by terrorism groups in the State. Moreover, it should be noted that Eritrean troops, during 2005 and 2006, had been committing terrorists' acts by burning down houses and causing atrocities in many areas. Concerning the statement of Human Rights Watch alleging that Ethiopian troops committed war crimes, it was inconsistent and seriously comprised the integrity of Human Rights Watch. The fact was that the civilians were being murdered by senseless acts of terrorism groups.

EVA TOMIC (Slovenia), speaking in a right of reply on behalf of the European Union, said that each and every country could work to improve the situation of human rights. This, of course, also applied to the countries of the European Union. She was worried to hear that the delegate of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea rejected the remarks of the European Union, which were based on the reports of the Special Rapporteur. She reiterated that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should allow access to the Special Rapporteur and address the issues mentioned in the Special Rapporteur's report. With response to the situation in Iran, the application of the death penalty needed to be in conformity with international norms that the country had engaged in. One of these fundamental international principles was the obligation not to execute minors.

MAKIO MIYAGAWA (Japan), speaking in a right of reply, said that Japan reiterated its sincere call to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that they should understand the genuine hopes for the improvement of the human rights situation in the country and to allow the Special Rapporteur to conduct a visit to the country.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT
REQUIRE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION

1Joint statement: Europe-Third World Centre; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; International League for the Rights and Liberation of peoples; Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples; and France Libertes - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand.

2Joint statement: International Fellowship of Reconciliation; Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples; Society for Threatened Peoples; Liberation; International Educational Development; Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA); Worldview International Foundation; International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development; and Interfaith International.

3Joint statement: International Movement ATD Fourth World; International Council of Women; International Federation of Social Workers; and Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities).

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CONTINUES DISCUSSION WITH SPECIAL PROCEDURES ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, SALE OF CHILDREN AND TORTURE

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The Human Rights Council this morning continued its discussion with the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Among the issues raised during the interactive discussion with the Special Procedures were those pertaining to State complicity in addressing cases of torture, the voluntary trust fund for victims of torture, compensation to victims of torture and ill-treatment, legal frameworks for enforced disappearances, the right to truth, national efforts to combat all forms of violence against women and children, the gender perspective in combating acts of torture, rape as an act of torture and the link drawn between torture and sexual violence, the ratification of the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and female genital mutilation.

Several speakers also commented on national, regional and international efforts and partnerships to address the afore-mentioned issues as well as partnerships between State authorities and civil society. Of note were the best practices highlighted to combat these human rights violations.

Santiago Corcuera Cabezut, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances; Juan Miguel Petit, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment presented their reports to the Council yesterday. (See press release HRC/08/18 of 10 March).

Speaking as concerned countries in response to the above reports were Nigeria, Togo and Sri Lanka.

Speaking in the interactive dialogue on the reports were Palestine on behalf of the Arab Group, Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Philippines, Argentina, Algeria, Brazil, Liechtenstein, Morocco, Peru, the Russian Federation, Colombia, Norway, Chile, Mexico, Tunisia, Thailand, Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, Belgium, Sudan, Denmark, Nepal, New Zealand, Israel, Australia, Canada, Austria, Belarus, Iran, Switzerland, Bhutan, Uruguay, the Czech Republic, Kenya and Malaysia.

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Also speaking were representatives of Mexican National Human Rights Commission, National Human Rights Commission of Togo, National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia, International League for the Rights and Liberation of peoples, Amnesty International, World Organization against Torture, on behalf of several NGOs¹, International Commission of Jurists, Franciscans International, Association for the Prevention of Torture, International Fellowship of Reconciliation (speaking on behalf of several NGOs²), Colombian Commission of Jurists, Jubilee Campaign and Union de l'action feminine.

Exercising their right of reply were Morocco, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Thailand and Algeria.

At 3 p.m. this afternoon, the Council will conclude its interactive dialogue on the reports on enforced or involuntary disappearances, the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and torture before beginning its discussion with the Special Rapporteurs on the right to health, the right to food and freedom of expression.

Statements by Concerned Countries on Reports on Enforced Disappearances, Sale of Children and Torture

MARTIN IHOEGHIAN UHOMOIBHI (Nigeria), speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture, recalled that the Special Rapporteur had suggested that Nigeria should make adequate commitments to address the situation of torture in the country. The pursuit of the highest standards of the promotion and protection of human rights was one of the priorities of the State policy in Nigeria. Nigeria was signatory of core human rights international instruments, and as a member of the Human Rights Council was poised to cooperate with all partners for the improvement and enjoyment of rights. Nigeria took note of the report's recommendations and had established human rights desks at various levels in the Nigerian police and security services. Moreover, training had been taking place on human rights standards and prisons had been reformed as well. Nigeria welcomed the call by the Special Rapporteur for Nigeria to build its relevant capacities to address acts of torture and inhuman treatment.

CELESTINE AKOUAVI A DAM (Togo), speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture, said that since Togo's ratification of the Convention against Torture on 18 December 1987, it had been aware that national penal code was insufficient to effectively deal with all cases of torture. The Government had therefore taken the opportunity to implement the National Programme for the Modernization of Justice in order to deal with such issues. With regards to the problem of impunity, the new criminal code would take into account the criminalization of torture, which would be considered in conformity with article 4 of the Convention on Torture. Moreover, the law no. 98-06 of the 17 November 1998 explicitly condemned female genital mutilation. The Government also announced its plans to hire 300 new prison guards who would be officially trained with a view to protect and promote the human rights of detainees.

SHARINDRA FERNANDO (Sri Lanka), speaking as a concerned country, said that Sri Lanka had appreciated the visit of the Special Rapporteur on torture to the country. The Government had been pleased to facilitate the visit. Sri Lanka appreciated sincerely the manner and methods of work of the Special Rapporteur. The Government had been given the opportunity to see the interim draft of the report. The Special Rapporteur had engaged in a free and frank exchange of views. Reservations were expressed with regard to the words used by the Special Rapporteur, saying that torture was "widely practiced" in Sri Lanka. The Government had asked for clarification. The Special Rapporteur had stated that he had witnessed evidence of torture. The problem of torture was not present in a widespread systematic manner in the country. The confidential inquiry of the Committee against Torture had confirmed that there was no systematic torture in the country. The Government would continue to engage with the Special Rapporteur and would keep him updated as to developments. Prisons and police had been directed to inquire into allegations raised in his report. Concerning the opening of an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights local office, Sri Lanka repeated that what was needed was the strengthening of national institutions. This included funding, physical infrastructure and well trained human resources.

Interactive Debate on Reports on Enforced Disappearances, Sale of Children and Torture

IMAD ZUHAIRI (Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, expressed concern at the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which listed crimes that had to be

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addressed. Such crimes against children not only constituted flagrant violations of their rights but also led to psychological and social problems that could remain with these children for a long time. The Arab Group also was concerned over the links between child prostitution and AIDS, which could have serious ramifications on the future of these children and the right to a dignified life. Concerns were also expressed about the exploitation of children through pornography on the Internet. The Arab Group asked for the comments of the Special Rapporteur on the importance of international cooperation in this regard and the role of governments to put an end to child pornography on the Internet, as well as his assessment of the measures taken by the United Nations to address the issue of trafficking in children.

MARGHOOB SALEEM BUTT (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that while most countries responded promptly to the communications received by the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, there were cases in which Governments of the Organization of the Islamic Conference had to verify the authenticity of information contained in some of the communications. All forms of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment to any human being were condemned, particularly to vulnerable groups including women. State complicity was an important constituent of torture under the Convention against Torture, be it direct or indirect. As such, it was the responsibility of States to apply the principle of due diligence in preventing acts of torture both in the public and private spheres. Finally, the Organization of the Islamic Conference requested more information from the Special Rapporteur regarding the growing industry of international sex tourism.

DENIS Y. LEPATAN (Philippines), responding to the allegations mentioned in the report of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, said that the allegations that there was an absence of an appropriate legal framework on enforced disappearances in the Philippines had no basis. While there was no specific law, there were criminal laws in the penal code that could be applied in cases of enforced disappearances. The Philippine Commission on Human Rights had the mandate to investigate the violations and had funds to assist victims. The Philippines was committed to address all cases of alleged enforced disappearances. Eighty per cent of the cases had been clarified. In 67 per cent of those cases the victims had been found to be at liberty. Only 18 per cent were found to be dead. The Philippines acknowledged that the police capability could be improved. The Philippines would like the Working Group to correct its report.

SEBASTIAN ROSALES (Argentina) expressed Argentina's commitment to the issue of enforced or involuntary disappearances and noted that the country had adopted a series of measures to address these cases. Argentina had provided regular information on pending cases and had elucidated 54 such cases during 2007. Cooperation with the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances reflected Argentina's commitment to resolve these cases; Argentina had also invited the Working Group to cooperate further through country visits. There was a need to address the right to truth and it was hoped this would receive appropriate attention in future reports of the Working Group. Argentina had been the second country to ratify the Convention on Forced Disappearances. Argentina also had an initiative, which dealt with the subjects of child prostitution and trafficking in children.

MOHAMMED BESSEDIK (Algeria) said that on a number of occasions, the Algerian Government had informed the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances that the question of disappearances should be placed into a historical context, which was the violent eruption at the beginning of the 1990s of the phenomenon of terrorism. Concerning this national tragedy, the Working Group was informed of procedures that had been implemented in Algeria to help victims regularize their administrative situation. This had allowed the Government to resolve more than 80 per cent of the cases from a judicial point of view. Whenever it had been given a communication, the Government had done its utmost to participate in good faith. However, concerning the request for a visit by the Special Rapporteur on torture, Algeria felt that such a visit was not justified.

MURILO VIEIRA KOMNISKI (Brazil) said that, on enforced disappearances, the general comment on defining the crime which was adopted by the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances was welcomed. The issue of enforced or involuntary disappearances was of great concern and it remained one of the human rights priorities in Brazil. On child prostitution, the rights of the child were an important part of the Brazilian human rights secretariat's work. Brazil would host the world congress on exploitation of children. A periodic report would soon be sent to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Child trafficking and pornography were important issues. On the

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issue of torture, the creation of the national committee on the fight against torture and the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture had been important institutional milestones in the fight against torture in Brazil. Brazil wanted to guarantee all human rights. Guaranteeing all human rights on the ground, combating impunity and building an open dialogue with civil society were the main areas of work.

PATRICK RITTER (Liechtenstein) said Liechtenstein attached great importance to the issue of combating child prostitution and child pornography. In addition to adopting and implementing efficient national legislation and policy measures, Liechtenstein had actively participated in the relevant activities of the Council of Europe, including the elaboration of two major legal instruments to address this scourge. The Special Rapporteur was asked how the interaction at the regional and international levels could be further enhanced to establish a framework which would promote the exchange of regional experience for the benefit of stronger action against child prostitution and child pornography at the global level. Moreover, Liechtenstein welcomed the focus the Special Rapporteur on torture placed in his report on the need to adopt a gender-inclusive approach to the interpretation of torture and other forms of ill treatment. The Special Rapporteur was asked whether he would elaborate on the concept of States' due diligence obligations in situations of de facto deprivation of liberty.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) said that with the aim of closing past human rights violations, the Government of Morocco had set up a Truth Commission to deal with any cases regarding enforced or involuntary disappearances. In this respect, compensation would also be offered. Concerning the report presented by Mr. Nowak, Morocco had introduced a new law criminalizing any act of torture. Child pornography and prostitution were also important subjects and, amongst numerous judicial measures, the Government had begun a media campaign to address these issues in the public domain. Finally, Morocco announced that it had developed a National Plan of Action and a National Strategy on the rights of the child.

DANIEL ZEGARRA BLOCH (Peru) said that, on enforced disappearances, it was good that the Working Group had been able to include the information provided by Peru. This information was important for Peru, in order to give an impression of the complex situation that Peru had experienced. There was a comprehensive compensation plan and a council had been put in place. This council was responsible for registering victims and settling claims. Its function was to evaluate the status of victims. The registry of missing people contained information coming from many sources. Peru would continue to collaborate with the Working Group and they would send a more detailed report soon.

ROMAN KASHAEV (Russian Federation) said the Russian Federation, since the creation of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances, had actively cooperated with the Group on specific cases of disappearances. The Russian law enforcement agencies had been taking all necessary measures to determine the fate and whereabouts of missing persons. The Russian Federation called upon the Working Group to only use thoroughly verified information on specific cases of disappearances. The Russian Federation expected that the experts of the Group would elaborate a new mechanism for the consideration of closing pending cases taking into account expiry dates. The Russian Federation also thanked the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and noted that in the Russian Federation 2008 had been hailed the Year of the Family. During this year, activities would be increased in the areas addressed in the report of the Special Rapporteur. The Special Rapporteur was asked for his opinion on the role of the family in rehabilitation of children affected by the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

TOMAS ERNESTO CONCHA (Colombia) said that in accordance with Colombia's constitutional and legal norms, no persons should be subject to torture, forced disappearance, or inhumane and degrading treatment. In law 589 of 2000, a search commission had been implemented to deal with disappearances and to determine the whereabouts of disappeared persons. In addition, the Government enacted law 986 of 2005, which protected victims of disappearance in terms of their finances, tax obligations, health and education. The Government had collected 1,036 testimonies of persons who belonged to self-defence organizations. Moreover, 1,056 mass graves had also been found and identified. Finally, measures were being implemented to speed up the process of compensation to victims of disappearances.

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BEATE STIRO (Norway) welcomed that the Special Rapporteur on torture had devoted his report to women's need for protection against torture. This was an important contribution by the Special Rapporteur in his efforts to integrate a gender perspective into his mandate, as was requested by the Council in the resolution on the integration of human rights of women throughout the United Nations system. The Special Rapporteur had stated that the Convention against Torture extended State obligations into the private sphere. However, it was difficult to assess the full scope of the State's obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent torture from being inflicted in the private sphere. What were the most important elements of the State's obligation for this? The Special Rapporteur's suggestion to add the criterion of powerlessness to the definition of torture was interesting. On the sale of children, the creation of a special representative on violence against children had been approved by the General Assembly. How did the Special Rapporteur see the scope of co-operation with this new mandate?

EDUARDO CHIHUALIAF (Chile) said with regard to the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture, it was particularly important for Chile that the Special Rapporteur included the gender perspective and the issue of combating violence against women in his work. Chile agreed with the Special Rapporteur that a degree of powerlessness could be added to elements amounting to torture. Clearly rape had deep consequences for those subjected to this crime. Domestic violence was also an issue which should be addressed. Chile was not free of this scourge and this year 15 cases of murder of women had been recorded. As to the report on enforced and involuntary disappearances, Chile would work further to clarify the situation of those who had disappeared in the country. Chile recently completed the drafting of its first Constitutional act dealing with this issue which would soon be brought before the Senate for its consideration.

JOSE GUEVARA (Mexico) reiterated Mexico's commitment to helping the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances. Furthermore, Mexico welcomed the procedural improvements of the Working Group. Given the importance attached to this particular subject, the Senate had approved the ratification of the Convention on Enforced Disappearances. This would no doubt help Mexico to prosecute crimes of enforced disappearances. Violence against women was also a priority for Mexico and it was committed to preventing and punishing the trafficking of women. In this regard, a Special Prosecutor's Office had been established to prosecute any criminals found trafficking or committing violence against women.

ALI CHERIF (Tunisia) said that Tunisia had closely considered the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The report had emphasised the scale of violence against children. This violence was a challenge to all, especially because the victims were children. The very complex nature of the problem had to be tackled and the report was a tool for this. Tunisian legislature recognised the importance of protecting children. A new body had been created for this. The number of reported cases of violations against children had increased in past years.

LADA PHUMAS (Thailand) indicated that Thailand concurred with the Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should promote and add to its programme of technical cooperation some activities and assistance to strengthen national capacities to prevent and eradicate disappearances. It was noted that representatives from the concerned Thai Government agencies had taken initiatives and volunteered to meet with the Working Group at its eighty-third session last November to provide an update on the latest developments in some outstanding cases, which demonstrated the seriousness which Thailand attached to the work of the Working Group. Every case of suspected disappearance reported to the Thai authorities had been, and would be, investigated without delay and without exception, in accordance with the rule of law and the principle of transparency. The investigations were still ongoing and Thailand was determined to do all it could to ensure that justice was done.

DOMINIK FRELIH (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union, had several questions to pose to the various Special Rapporteurs. The first set of questions were addressed to the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances and touched on the issue of impunity and the ways in which the principles against enforced disappearances could be made better-known in the public sphere. As for the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the European Union also wanted to know which was the most effective way to promote a culture worldwide in which sexual exploitation and abuse were not tolerated? In its

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questions to the Special Rapporteur on torture, what was the current situation regarding a possible mission to Russia? Furthermore, the European Union inquired as to Paraguay's implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the status of the National Preventative Mechanism. In addition, the delegation requested an update on the Special Rapporteur's discussions with the Government of Zimbabwe to secure an invitation to visit as well as his views on the situation there.

NATHALIE RONDEUX (Belgium) said the clear link drawn between torture and sexual violence in the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture was particularly revealing. This form of torture had unique aspects as it often led to the isolation of the victims. In some cultures a victim of rape could be rejected from her society. This exclusion seriously hampered the psychological healing of the victim. The Special Rapporteur called on States to tackle the issue of stigmatisation; what concrete steps did the Special Rapporteur envisage? About the upcoming visit to Iraq, could the Special Rapporteur say more about the timing of his visit there?

OMER DAHAB FADOL MOHAMED (Sudan) said although the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was dated January 2008, it was unfortunate that the crimes committed by the French organization L'Arche de Zoe in October last year were not reflected in the report. These crimes amounted to attempted kidnappings of children from Darfur and eastern Chad. Sudan had been hopeful that the Special Rapporteur's statement issued at the time would have been reflected in his report. The criminal intent of the organization reaffirmed what was stated in the report of the Special Rapporteur that the primary element contributing to these crimes was armed conflict. The organization exaggerated the events in Darfur and contributed to perpetrating this crime through a media campaign. Sudan asked for the views of the Special Rapporteur on these crimes, in general, and for information on the compensation to the families of these children. With regard to the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture, Sudan was of the view that female genital mutilation should be considered as a form of torture. Sudan agreed that States must prohibit such actions through their legislation. The laws of Sudan completely prohibited such practices.

MARIE-LOUISE OVERVAD (Denmark) said that Denmark had a comment and two questions to Professor Manfred Nowak. After quickly commending the Special Rapporteur on torture for his work and his dedication to the mandate, Denmark asked for greater details on the situation in Sri Lanka. More precisely, what measures could be made to better implement the recommendations made for that country. With regards to thematic reports, would there be any merit in occasionally covering the same subject over a longer period of time in order to register and influence mid- or long-term developments?

BAHRAT RAJ PAUDYAL (Nepal) said that the Government had extended full cooperation to the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances during its visit in 2004. As a follow-up, Nepal had been regularly providing updates. A total of 211 cases had been clarified. Most of the cases dated back to the time of the armed conflict. They had been largely due to the improper recording and reporting of releases and detentions. The Government was seriously working to find out the true identities of persons and to clarify the remaining cases. In the Working Group's report, allegations of a general nature had been placed on Nepal, whereas the paragraph referred to some other country. This was maybe the result of cut-paste work and it was wished not to believe that this was meant to indicate that an allegation of general nature could be generalized to all countries in the South. On torture, the analytical work on women was appreciated. However, the Special Rapporteur should not perform as a tribunal or judge. The references to Nepal were largely based on secondary information. It was difficult to agree with generalized and subjective assertions that torture was practised systematically in Nepal.

AMY LAURENSEN (New Zealand), commenting on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, said New Zealand was grateful to the attention Mr. Petit gave to these acts and for the clear manner in which he identified the special needs of these child victims. The way in which the Special Rapporteur highlighted good practices to address these needs was also commendable. New Zealand had been undertaking a number of measures concerning the commercial exploitation of children through legislative changes and through actions with civil society. New Zealand had also taken measures to ensure services were in place for children victims and had in place a 24-hour personal support hotline, among other things. New Zealand had also played an active role in the smuggling of persons and trafficking. New Zealand remained committed to

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developing such programmes and noted that the Special Rapporteur's report indicated that special rehabilitation programmes were generally lacking. The Special Rapporteur was asked about the major obstacles for the services providing assistance to children and what the Council could do in that regard.

HILRAY STAUFFER (Israel) said that Israel had supported the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography for many years and co-sponsored the most recent renewals of this mandate in both 2001 and 2004. Recent legislative changes in Israel enabled the country to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What suggestions were there to better improve this mandate in the future, specifically with regards to cooperation and interaction with other UN mechanisms? Also, had the Special Rapporteur gone on joint missions in the past and would he recommend it in the future as an effective use of limited UN resources?

LARA NASSAU (Australia) said that, on enforced disappearances, the report had illustrated the enormity and extent of disappearances throughout the world and that the numbers were deeply concerning. Australia was concerned over reports of widespread forced disappearances in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Government was encouraged to act to ensure alleged perpetrators were brought to justice. Over the years, the Working Group had recognised that a culture of impunity fuelled disappearances. Ensuring that there was no impunity was essential. Those responsible should not go unpunished.

INES KWAN (Canada) welcomed the efforts of the Special Rapporteur on torture to mainstream gender equality and combat violence against women through his promotion of a gender-inclusive approach to human rights work in this area. Canada condemned rape and sexual violence in all circumstances, including their use against persons in detention. Canada acknowledged the role of the international criminal tribunals and the International Criminal Court in the recognition of rape as a form of torture and broadening the scope of crimes of sexual violence that could be prosecuted under this rubric. Canada shared the Special Rapporteur's concerns with the sentencing to death of women by stoning. Canada further appreciated the attention given by the Special Rapporteur to issues of violence within the family and community which may constitute torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Special Rapporteur was asked to elaborate on how States may meaningfully address the obstacle of stigma which could undermine women victims in their search for justice, especially in cases of sexual violence.

MICHAEL SCHOISWOHL (Austria) commended the Special Rapporteur on torture for applying gender sensitivity as well as gender-specific methodology to the prohibition of torture. However, which measures could and should States adopt in order to ensure justice and effective remedies for women victims of torture? With reference to the particular vulnerability of women with disabilities, and stressing that forced abortions and sterilizations of women with disabilities may constitute torture or ill-treatment, what linkages were there between torture and women with disabilities, in particular against the background of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its provisions on legal capacity?

ANDREI MOLCHAN (Belarus) said that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was a humanitarian one and it should be strengthened. In 2007, a national centre to combat the trade in children had been opened in Minsk. One of the themes of the upcoming child protection conference was child pornography and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had been invited to attend it. Belarus believed that the extreme scope of today's emergence of mass paedophilia on the Internet was worrying and it had to be tackled. Was the monitoring of the media by the State a solution to this problem?

ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran) noted, as had the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children in his report, that Iran had adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography which stemmed from the country's firm belief in protecting children and its strong commitment to eliminate those evil forms of child exploitation. Iran attached great importance to the work of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and shared most of his views contained in the report on the importance of assistance and rehabilitation programmes for child victims of trafficking and sexual commercial exploitation. Iran was of the view that, among others, promotion of spirituality and morals as well as cultural and

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religious values on the one hand, and strengthening the foundation of the family on the other hand, would highly contribute to the elimination of different forms of child sexual exploitation. The Special Rapporteur was asked whether he had raised with the country concerned in the case involving L'Arche de Zoe the question of facilitating visas for this operation.

NATALIE KOHLI (Switzerland) took note of the innovative approach by the Special Rapporteur on torture to the subject of violence against women. In addition, the many recommendations elucidated in the report on Sri Lanka were both useful and appreciated. The presence of widespread torture in Sri Lanka was deplorable and furthermore, it was regrettable that the Special Rapporteur did not have access to areas currently under occupation by the LTTE. The fight against impunity was a priority for Switzerland and as such additional comments were requested by Mr. Nowak with regards to universal jurisdiction on the issue of torture.

DOMA TSHERING (Bhutan) said Bhutan supported the work of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances; the Working Group had an important mandate. The Working Group had adopted a general comment providing definition of enforced disappearances; this was welcomed and was seen as a positive contribution towards providing greater clarity to the work of the Working Group and the strengthening of international norms. How could States contribute further towards the clarification of cases which continued to remain outstanding despite sincere attempts to resolve them? Was there space to distinguish between cases in which States wilfully refused to disclose information and those cases in which States were genuinely unable to provide information?

ALEJANDRO ARTUCIO RODRIGUEZ (Uruguay) said Uruguay especially valued the focus contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children on best practices in terms of assistance to child victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking at the governmental level and in international organizations as well as the way the role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society in implementing awareness-raising programmes and social reintegration programmes for children were highlighted. This subject continued to be a great concern to Uruguay and the international community as a whole. The guidelines for establishing programmes and services in the report were also welcomed. In all these reports by the Special Rapporteur and in the work of the Commission and the Human Rights Council the international community had benefited through the information provided on the best experiences accumulated to combat these unjustifiable practices. A great deal remained to be done to eradicate this scourge. This topic should continue to be one of the priorities of the Human Rights Council.

JAN KAMINEK (Czech Republic) aligned itself with the comments and questions raised by the European Union. In Mr. Nowak's reports on his visits, he described a number of children being held in appalling conditions in detention and oftentimes subjected to violence. With this in mind, could his recommendations be elaborated regarding these children? Moreover, were there any indications that measures were being taken in connection with these cases? Finally, with regards to a number of pending requests to States for invitations, did the Special Rapporteur recognize any increase of positive replies, especially from countries that had long-term requests pending from as far back as the 1990s?

MARIA NZOMO (Kenya) said that as a signatory of the Convention against Torture, Kenya attached importance to every individual's freedom from torture. Since 2003, Kenya had made significant progress in the elimination of torture. Criminal law amendments ensured that persons suspected of committing criminal offence were not subjected to torture. Confessions could only be taken if the suspect was sound of mind. Corporal punishment had been abolished. Various reform initiatives were currently ongoing in the justice law sector. Tremendous efforts had been invested in improving prison conditions. Kenya was also sensitive to the gender dimension of torture. Female genital mutilation and early and forced marriages were prohibited by law.

AMIRUDDIN ZURAIDAH (Malaysia) said Malaysia recognized that trafficking in persons, especially women and children, was a serious problem with increasing involvement of organized criminal groups. Among other things, Malaysia had set up two shelters for children and women who were victims of human trafficking and these shelters provided services such as crisis counseling and rehabilitation to trafficked women and children. The Government had been using a variety of laws to address the issue of sale, trafficking and abduction of children. Malaysia had

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several bilateral and multilateral arrangements to combat transnational crime, including preventing and suppressing trafficking in persons. These arrangements provided for cooperation in criminal matters and border control as well as cooperation in the identification of the offender and victims, sharing information about modus operandi and routes used as well as the training of law enforcement personnel. Malaysia remained committed to ending violence against children through national measures.

KATHARINA ROSE, of Mexican National Human Rights Commission, strongly believed that the ratification of the Convention against Enforced Disappearances would strengthen Governments obligations to investigate submitted cases by the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances. There was indeed a duty to investigate fully all the cases of disappearances perpetrated by State actors or by private individuals or organized groups acting on behalf of, or with the support of the Government. The Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances and the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico were currently working on the investigation of more than 200 cases in Mexico and would hopefully provide answers with respect to the scarce information about enforced disappearance cases and the growing number of disappearances of human rights defenders.

KOFFI KOUTE, of National Human Rights Commission of Togo, thanked Mr. Novak for his report. The analysis and recommendations contained in the Special Rapporteur's report were similar to those that were found in the commission's own report on visits of places of detention. The commission had already started several actions. The ratification of the Optional Protocol was one of the priorities of the commission. On the conditions in places of detention, the commission shared the Special Rapporteur's views. Urgent measures had to be taken to ensure the dignity and fundamental rights of prisoners.

KATHARINA ROSE, of the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights - Komnas HAM, said the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights observed that since legal or moral prosecution was part of the retaliation politics, especially in the military, there was indication that impunity of human rights violations still existed. The Commission shared the view with the Special Rapporteur on torture that torture should be criminalized in the Indonesian Criminal Code. To meet the effectiveness of torture prevention, it was important to endorse the establishment of standard mechanisms in monitoring and visiting detention places, as well as the importance of the ratification of the Convention against Torture. Based on a visit to certain detention centres in 2007 in Indonesia, the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights noted several conditions in the detention places were not providing the standard minimum in the protection of prisoners.

VERENA GRAF, of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, said that several reputable non-governmental organizations had reported on the widespread practice of torture in Sri Lanka since the 1970s. Since the Special Rapporteur was unable to visit Jaffna, the International League brought to his attention numerous cases of torture being carried out against innocent civilians by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in Jaffna. All this occurred despite the fact that Sri Lanka was a party to the Convention on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment. In conclusion, the International League recalled that this was only one aspect of a war situation, a war waged by a Government on a people seeking to exercise its right to self-determination.

TOMMASO FALCHETTA, of Amnesty International, said that Mr. Nowak's report had included the case of Nassim Saadi, a Tunisian resident of Italy who had appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, as the Italian authorities had sought to deport him to Tunisia as an urgent measure to combat terrorism. There was a substantial risk for Mr. Saadi being subjected to torture if he was deported. The danger of terrorism must not call into question the absolute nature of the prohibition of torture. Weeks earlier, the CIA Director had made public that the agency was using waterboarding as an interrogation technique. Last Friday, President Bush had vetoed legislation aimed at preventing the CIA from using waterboarding and other enhanced interrogation techniques. What could the Council do to better defend the absolute prohibition of torture in the context of counterterrorism measures?

MARIANA DUARTE, of World Organization against Torture, on behalf of several NGOs¹, welcomed the Special Rapporteur on torture's thematic report concerning women and considered it a major step in the recognition of the specificities of acts of torture and ill-treatment against women and of the requirement of adequate responses

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thereto. The World Organization called on States to apply a gender-sensitive definition of torture in light of the elements contained in article 1 of the Convention against Torture, discrimination being one of the purposes provided for. Moreover, States should allocate sufficient resources for the support and rehabilitation of torture victims. The World Organization also stressed the need for States to promote regular scrutiny and accountability of institutions where women were deprived of their liberty, by means of independent visits and other monitoring mechanisms. The Special Rapporteur was asked if he intended to undertake or encourage the conduct of joint field missions and joint consultations with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

LUKAS MACHON, of the International Commission of Jurists, supported the establishment of the criteria for closure or discontinuation of reported cases by the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances. However, he recalled that this provision on the presumption of death did not exonerate a State from its obligations under international law to continue the investigation until the fate of the disappeared person had been clarified and had brought the perpetrators of the disappearance to justice. Additionally, concerns were expressed at the high rate of disappearances in Sri Lanka. In 2007, 58 new cases of enforced disappearances were reported, while 5,516 cases remained pending. While the Sri Lankan Army and Criminal Investigation Department were allegedly responsible for 37 cases, according to the report, only one of these cases was clarified.

BUDI HERNAWAN, of Franciscans International, said that the report of Franciscans International on torture had covered 242 individual cases over a period of nine years. The visit of the Special Rapporteur on torture to West Papua was seen as a major step in the protection of the indigenous peoples' rights. Three major conclusions had been found in their own report. Most of the cases in West Papua had been committed by police or military forces, most documented cases had not been prosecuted and thirdly, security services had continuously resorted to the use of torture as part of their practices. Could the Special Rapporteur analyse the lack of accountability of security services?

MATTHEW PRINGLE, of Association for the Prevention of Torture, valued the commitment of the Special Rapporteur on torture who undertook country visits and visits to places of detention. There was a need to implement an effective system of monitoring in all places of detention and special measures may be required to prevent gender-based violence in places of detention and to address the needs of women inmates with young children. The Special Rapporteur was asked what legislative measures States could consider to improve the conditions of pregnant women prisoners and detainees and whether there were any measures that States should consider to more effectively combat torture or ill-treatment. The Special Rapporteur was also asked what expertise should be included in a visiting team to countries and places of detention.

TSERING JAMPA, of International Fellowship of Reconciliation, speaking on behalf of several NGOs², expressed its gratitude to the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances for citing the outstanding case of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Eleventh Panchen Lama. However, it was disappointed with the lack of cooperation from the Government of China. This particular case was raised because it completed almost 13 years of uncertain fate in obscurity and because most Tibetans and others remained concerned about his whereabouts, his physical and mental state of health and the status of his religious education. Furthermore, why had the Working Group not sought an official explanation on this case from the Chinese Government, especially when one considered that the last response was now over 10 years old?

ISABELLE HEYER, of Colombian Commission of Jurists, said that, on the report on torture, many indigenous people had been injured following tear gas attacks. The Special Rapporteur had talked about establishing norms for having normal judges, but in practice, military tribunals were still conducting investigations. On homicides conducted by state agents, the Working Group should continue to follow up the work in Colombia. In 90 per cent of the cases, they had been attributed to State and paramilitary State actors and only 2 per cent had been attributed to rebel forces. Not many of the Working Group's recommendations had been implemented.

ELIZABETH DE GROOT, of Jubilee Campaign, noted that the buying and selling or trafficking of children victimized approximately 400,000 children a year, which excluded those children trafficked within their own country. Traffic

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along the Balkan corridor was particularly heavy. Many of these children were sold in Greece or Italy, and ended up working in brothels or begging on the streets. Despite international efforts to combat trafficking the number of victims continued to grow. Factors contributing to the continuance of this trade in children included: globalization and the feminization of poverty; traditional and cultural lack of education and employment opportunities discrimination based on ethnicity or minority status; and conflict, refugees and internal displacement and selective migration policies. Countries must be more pro-active in eliminating these factors and must actively seek out, prosecute and punish traffickers for their involvement in the trade so as to deter others looking to make a profit in this manner.

KALTARM KHAYATI, of Union de l'action feminine, spoke against the outrageous atrocities in refugee camps in rural Morocco. Despite the regular denunciations by established human rights bodies, these atrocities continued to take place. In the provinces found in the Moroccan Saharan desert, diverse populations had undergone extreme suffering. The Government was guilty of manipulating arguments and diverting international attention away from the horrors that had been inflicted upon these peoples, in which women and children were the most vulnerable victims.

Right of Reply

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco), speaking in a right of reply, said that, concerning yesterday's statement by Interfaith International, the speaker had been confused between his situation and the case of hundreds of Moroccans living very decently and in great dignity in the southern provinces of Morocco. The speaker had not been able to give more than two examples of security agents found guilty. Those persons were tried in accordance to international standards, with the presence of foreign observers at their trial. Morocco was a country where the rule of law prevailed. It was also a responsible States, responsible for the security of its citizens and their property throughout its territory. Morocco recalled that the fourth round of negotiations on the autonomy of southern provinces would start next week. Everyone knew about Morocco's' constant defence of human rights. It was dangerous for the credibility of the Council to allow any person, including criminals, to come before the Council and pretend that they were defending human rights. The Council should be more vigilant.

OZO NWOBUE (Nigeria), speaking in a right of reply, referring to the statement by Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, said following the reports on the alleged disappearance of one detainee, an investigation had been undertaken by the Government of Nigeria and it had determined that he was admitted to a hospital to undergo a life-saving surgery and had since recovered, was returned to prison and was now awaiting trial. As to another case, the speaker reported that he had died from gunshot wounds received during a shootout with the police. He had received proper medical attention while in custody before he died. It was noted that more than 167 police officers had been killed in shootouts with armed criminals in Nigeria last year.

DAYAN JAYATILLEKA (Sri Lanka), speaking in a right of reply, raised three points. Sri Lanka had an ongoing dialogue with the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances and had not refused it access, as suggested by one non-governmental organization. Sri Lanka had allowed a number of Special Rapporteurs to enter the country even amidst the current conflict and instability and would continue to cooperate with international forces. The question raised by Switzerland to Mr. Nowak on universal jurisdiction was considered out of line, particularly while Switzerland permitted on its own soil the commemoration of Black Tiger day, which celebrated suicide bomb attacks that took place on Indian territory. This was far more serious than bringing one ex-criminal to justice. He also reiterated a quote from a Tamil Tiger leader stating that they drained the blood of Sri Lankan soldiers until they died. That quote was delivered to the French newspaper "Le Point" in May 2000.

ALI CHERIF (Tunisia), speaking in a right of reply, said that the statement of the World Organization against Torture about the Tunisian individual that had been extradited by Italy, had been an unjustifiable statement that could only give rise to astonishment. The Tunisian national had to be extradited because of involvement in drug trafficking. The Tunisian law ensured full respect for human rights and the protection for everyone to be free from torture.

LADA PHUMAS (Thailand), speaking in a right of reply referring to the statement by the International Commission of Jurists, pointed out that the Thai Government attached great importance to the case of Mr. Neelapajit, a human

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rights lawyer, which was under investigation by the Ministry of Justice. More revelation should be forthcoming as the investigation proceeded. The Government would leave no stone unturned in this case. The Thai Government did not condone any acts leading to forced or involuntary disappearances. The Working Group could rest assured that Thailand would do its utmost to bring all pending cases to closure.

LAZHARE SOUALEM (Algeria), speaking in a right of reply, commented on the non-governmental organization (NGO) from the Union de l'Action Feminine, whose statement was totally unrelated to the issue. He would like to tell the lady who spoke that when you have denied your origins and your own family, you are unworthy to speak of humanity in that context.

1Joint statement: World Organization against Torture; International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims; International Federation of ACAT (Action By Christians for the Abolition of Torture; Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development; Center for Women's Global Leadership; and Canadian HIV/Aids Legal Network.

2Joint statement on behalf of: International Fellowship of Reconciliation; France Libertes - Fondation Danielle Mitterrand; Society for Threatened Peoples; Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples; Comite international pour le respect et l'application de la charte africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples; Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network; International Educational Development; Femmes Africa Solidarite; and Pax Romana.

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council today continued its general debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention, hearing from 33 non governmental organizations which alleged human rights violations in China, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, India, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, the Republic of Korea and Georgia among others.

The following non governmental organizations took the floor: Society for Threatened People, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Movement against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples, Baha'i International Community, International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, Franciscans International, Human Rights Watch, International Education Development, Colombian Commission of Jurists, International Commission of Jurists, Union of Arab Jurists, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Amnesty International, United Nations Watch, International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, World Muslim Congress, International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, M'bororo Socio-Cultural Development Association, World Organization against Torture, Liberation, Lawyers for a Democratic Society, Lutheran World Federation, International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Society Studies Centre, Hawa Organization for **Women**, Al-Zubair Charity Organization, Child Development Foundation, Sudanese **Women** General Union, African-American Society for Humanitarian Aid and Development, North South XXI, Arab Lawyers Union and European Union of Public Relations.

The following countries exercised their right of reply: Sudan, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Myanmar, Ethiopia, India, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Zimbabwe, Russian Federation, Pakistan, Colombia, China, Iran, Morocco, Afghanistan, Iraq, Netherlands, Japan, France and Uzbekistan.

The Council will resume its meeting at 3 p.m. this afternoon and hear two remaining countries exercise their right of reply before taking up the issue of human rights bodies and mechanisms.

Continuation of General Debate on Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention

TENZIN KAYTA, of Society for Threatened Peoples, in a joint statement with Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia), Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network, and Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, said that the Society for Threatened People had raised concern about the frequent reports of deportation of Tibetan refugees by the Government of Nepal at the seventh session of the Council. They urged the Council to take note of the announcement last week that Tibetans living in the country without legal

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documents would face deportation from Nepal. That was an alarming and yet ironic development, as Nepal had stopped issuing registration certificates to Tibetans in the 1990s. On the other side of the Himalayas, the human rights crisis confronted by the Tibetan people demanded immediate attention. According to one report, more than 200 Tibetans had died as a direct result of China's "people's war" launched to suppress the Tibetan Uprising. Reports on the continued use of torture on Tibetan detainees had emerged. The complete lack of political will by China to acknowledge the existence of a human rights problem in Tibet meant that the legitimate grievances of the Tibetan people received no fair hearing. The Council should encourage the Chinese authorities to immediately receive the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

JEREMIE SMITH, of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, said that both reports submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in Sudan had identified impunity and lack of civilian protection by all parties to the conflict as the principal obstacles to peace in Darfur. As the Special Rapporteur had pointed out in her reports, no improvement on the ground had been made by the Government of Sudan. Continued efforts of the Human Rights Council and better involvement of the Arab League were essential to address the lack of improvement and to ensure civilian protection, particularly in Darfur. The implementation of recommendations of the Council's Expert Group on Darfur, particularly those aimed at combating impunity and increasing civilian protection, remained the essential part of the path to peace.

GIANFRANCO FATTORINI, of Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, spoke about the camp in the Western Sahara. It said that the High Commissioner must be able to carry out her mission there in total impartiality. The Movement called on the Council to publish the report on the last visit to the camp and to plan a new visit. That was necessary to ensure the right to self determination of the people living in the camp.

DIANE ALA'I, of Baha'i International Community, said that the Baha'i International Community was grateful that the United Nations, civil society and the media had kept the public informed about the campaign of terrorising the Baha'i community in Iran. Children were being refused registration in schools and, in a number of cases, work permits had been withdrawn. The Iranian authorities were relentlessly persecuting this community. A hateful propaganda campaign by the official media was also taking place. But more and more Iranians were taking a stand on human rights and were standing behind the Baha'i. That was a welcome change. Further, now that a growing tide of oppression was taking place, the international community was asked by the Baha'i International Community to call for the release of the Baha'i leadership from Iranian prisons.

SIMIA AHMADI, of International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), expressed its deep concern over the human rights situation in Somalia, where indiscriminate attacks had caused displacement of large portions of the population and attacks on humanitarian workers continued. The International Federation called on the Human Rights Council to call for a special session on Somalia, to condemn the grave human rights situation, and to call on all parties to refrain from the attacks on civilians, humanitarian workers and journalists. The United Nations should establish the Commission of Enquiry and nominate Special Rapporteurs. Also of concern was the human rights situation in Iran, where minors continued to be subjected to the death penalty and human rights defenders were still targeted. Several imprisoned Kurdish human rights defenders were currently on hunger strike. The International Federation called on Iran to immediately stop executing minor offenders and to implement the standing invitation of the Special Rapporteur.

FRANCIS KAVIYIL OFM, of Franciscans International, drew attention to communal violence and impunity in India. In the state of Orissa, thousands of people had fled or were living in hiding because they were Christians and did not want to convert to Hinduism. Communal violence had also been experienced in the state of Gujarat. The right to life and religious freedom had to be protected and impartial investigations had to be carried out. Also, human rights defenders had to be protected. Franciscans International called on the Council to encourage the Indian Government to protect religious freedom and the right to life.

JULIE DE RIVERO, of Human Rights Watch, called for the Council to address the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Further attention should also be paid to the ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe, where firsthand accounts of ongoing killings had been received. At least 163 persons had been killed over the past months. Accountability was

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the foundation for an enduring transition in the country and the Council should thus call for accountability and justice for the past human rights violations in Zimbabwe. Turning to the situation in Georgia, the assault by the Georgian military as well as the use of cluster munitions by the Russian Forces had heavily affected the civilian population. The Council should hold a special session on Georgia.

KAREN PARKER, of International Education Development, highlighted that serious breaches of international humanitarian law were being committed in the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, including the genocidal statements by former government officials. The situation in the north of the country had been deteriorating, and Tamil civilians in this region faced annihilation. The Government of Sri Lanka sought the removal of representatives of the international community from these regions, including the United Nations humanitarian agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The civilian population in the north of the country did not have access to basic needs, such as food, health, or water. That represented a crime of extermination according to the International Criminal Court. The Council was asked to hold a special session on the situation in the north of Sri Lanka, to prevent another Rwanda.

ISABELLE HEYER, of the Colombian Commission of Jurists, said the Commission was concerned about serious threats to Colombia's security, the judiciary and human rights defenders. The judiciary was hindered and attacked while it was carrying out investigations related to vote buying during the elections. Several government officials had filed criminal complaints against several court magistrates. Extrajudicial killings were still being committed. The Commission called on the Human Rights Council to closely follow the situation in Colombia.

LUKAS MACHON, of the International Commission of Jurists, said that, during the last sessions, the International Commission of Jurists had criticized a lacking capacity on part of the Human Rights Council to address major human rights crises in substance. In the case of Zimbabwe, the harassment and violence against the peaceful political opposition had been rightly considered as the "perversion of democracy" by the former High Commissioner. The power-sharing agreement recently concluded would bring the country back to peace and stability only if it addressed justice for victims and members of their families and the accountability of perpetrators. The International Commission reiterated its call to the relevant Special Procedures to undertake a joint monitoring visit to Zimbabwe.

ELIAS KHOURI, of Union of Arab Jurists, in a joint statement with General Arab Women Federation, drew the Council's attention to the human rights situation in Iraq, saying it was strange that the Human Rights Council was silent on one of the worst human rights situations in the world. The improvements in the human rights situation that had been recently reported represented the view of the media who wanted to divert the public opinion from what was really happening on the ground. Right now, Iraq was suffering silently from a cholera epidemic and hundreds had died as a result of negligence and denial of basic rights, including the right to life. Grave violations of human rights were persistent, including torture, also in prisons run by the militias. Women were denied their rights. This tragedy would not happen if not for the blatant disregard of human rights and international humanitarian laws and as a result of the occupation and invasion of Iraq by one of the founding members of the United Nations. The Union of Arab Jurists called on the Human Rights Council to include matters concerning Iraq in its agenda and to appoint a Special Rapporteur to investigate the situation in Iraq.

GI YOUN KIM, of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia), noted with grave concern the serious setback in the situation of human rights defenders in the Republic of Korea. The evidence gathered in a fact-finding mission conducted by the Forum and others showed that lawyers, human rights group members, staff of the National Human Rights Commission and even medical workers were victims of indiscriminate violence by the police. The Forum urged the Government of the Republic of Korea to immediately stop criminalizing human rights defenders by releasing all those detained. The perpetrators including the police had to be brought to justice. Also, relevant laws had to be revised to ensure the work of human rights defenders and the Republic of Korea had to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur in earnest. The Forum was also concerned about Bangladesh's unjustified 20-month state of emergency and urged all States in the preparation to the forthcoming Universal Period Review of Bangladesh to pay attention to the suspension of fundamental rights under the illegitimate emergency, the endemic torture, mass arbitrary detention and the closure of at least 160 newspapers.

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PETER SPLINTER, of Amnesty International, urged the Council to act with no delay on situations calling for its attention. In the case of Zimbabwe, they had evidence that the human rights violations that had taken place after the elections had been State-sponsored. The Council should urge the parties to address those human rights violations. On Georgia, Amnesty was concerned about the situation of human rights and international humanitarian law, as there were accounts of attacks on civilians from both sides. The Council should call for an end to those abuses. The voluntary and safe return of internally displaced persons should be ensured. In Sri Lanka, many internally displaced persons were trapped between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (**LTTE**) and the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. The Council should call on all parties to uphold human rights.

HILLEL NEUER, of United Nations Watch, said that, in order to appropriately celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the Council had to take action when it learned of gross human rights violations. Yet, after hearing at this very session of atrocities committed by the Sudanese Government against people of Darfur, they had heard the call of the Government of Sudan, supported by the African Group, to eliminate the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in Sudan. According to a United Nations Watch report, the Council this year had effectively addressed only 2 out of the 20 countries on Freedom House's list of worst human rights abusers. That had to change. To truly honour the sixtieth anniversary, all nations should declare amnesty for their political prisoners, such as those imprisoned in China, Myanmar, Egypt, Libya, Viet Nam, and Syria.

ALTAF HUSSAIN WANI, of the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, said that the Kashmiri people had been resisting Indian occupying forces for a long time. When the Kashmiri people demonstrated against the Indian occupier peacefully, the Indian Army opened fire. India was one of the worst violators of human rights. The Council was urged to report on the occupational repression in Kashmir.

ATIA ANWER ZOON, of International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, wished to bring the attention of the Council to the situation of the people in Jammu and Kashmir, who called for their right to self determination which India was continuously denying. Indian security forces were indiscriminately shooting at all peaceful protests. That was in serious violation of all major human rights instruments and standards. Since last month, peaceful demonstrations had been most brutally dealt with. Such events only added to those happening for the last 25 years. All provisions of human rights and humanitarian law instruments had been flouted by India. The people in Jammu and Kashmir were looking to the Council to raise its voice.

MME GEORGINA STEVENS, of International Movement against all Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), in a joint statement with Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia), drew the attention of the Human Rights Council to the situation of the civilian population in the north of Sri Lanka, where a large-scale military operation was currently taking place. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 12,000 new families were displaced in the last month alone. Military authorities had said they could not guarantee safety and security of humanitarian organizations in the area and requested their withdrawal. Only the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was permitted to remain. By denying the access to humanitarian workers and imposing restrictions on the transport of humanitarian aid, the Government of Sri Lanka had failed to protect all its citizens and was in violation of international humanitarian law and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Denying access to non governmental organizations also meant there were no independent and impartial witnesses to the violations of human rights.

The International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism urged the Human Rights Council to remind the Government of Sri Lanka to allow access to the civilian population in need of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian aid.

UDIT RAJ, of the M'bororo Socio-Cultural Development Association, said that, despite various provisions of the Indian Constitution aiming at the protection and promotion of human rights of Dalits, their implementation remained inadequate. Atrocities, untouchability, insufficient wages, bonded labour, child labour, landlessness, illiteracy, inequality of opportunity and manual scavenging were still the order of the day in the life of Dalits. The Association urged the Government of India to establish mechanisms of protection for Dalits in order to curb crimes against

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them, as well as to empower them with education. Also, recent brutal attacks on Christians in Orissa State reminded everyone that religious intolerance and caste discrimination were synonymous. The Association urged the Human Rights Council and the Government of India to work together to establish justice, peaceful co-existence and harmony between the different religious communities.

ALEXANDRA KOSSIN, of the World Organization against Torture, welcomed the ceasefire in Georgia but remained concerned over the plight of the people and the refugees that had fled the conflict. Attacks on civilian property and looting had been reported during the conflict. That was a clear violation of international treaties. A United Nations fact-finding-mission should take place in order to identify the culprits and launch legal action against them. In the case of Zimbabwe, it was hoped that the deal reached between the two leading political parties would lead to peace in the country. The World Organization against Torture underlined that torture had been employed by the police there to obtain allegations. The Government should be asked to ratify the Convention against Torture and extend invitations to all United Nations Special Rapporteurs.

ARUP CHANDRA BORBORA, of Liberation, talked about the situation in the north-east state of India, Assam, and the conflict between its sovereignty movement and Indian Armed Forces. Grave violations of human rights had been committed by the Indian forces in that context over the years. The people of Assam demanded a political solution to the conflict. Liberation called on the Indian Government to continue the dialogue and take constructive steps towards a peaceful solution. The international community was also urged to put pressure on India to make peace in Assam.

BYOUNG-JOO KIM, of Lawyers for a Democratic Society, in a joint statement with Asian Legal Resource Centre, drew the attention of the Council to the human rights situation in the Republic of Korea. Peaceful demonstrations were deemed illegal under the Law of Assembly and Demonstration which was not in accordance with the Korean Constitution or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Since May 2008, over 1,500 people had been arrested through the abusive use of relevant laws and regulations. The Government had also taken a number of oppressive measures against the press to silence their criticism of the government's policies. Lawyers for a Democratic Society urged the Government to immediately implement the commitments it had made during the Universal Periodic Review and its election to the Council. It also called on the Council to encourage and facilitate the visit of Special Procedure mandate holders to the Republic of Korea.

FRANCESCA TRAGLIA, of Lutheran World Federation, in a joint statement with International Movement against all Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), said that the recent violence in the State of Orissa in India warranted the close attention of the Human Rights Council. While the events had been portrayed as a Hindu-Christian religious conflict, they had in fact much more to do with local political forces trading in sectarian hatred, and with attempts to preserve caste ideology and structures of subjugation. Caste politics and the struggle for the empowerment of the Dalits were particularly powerful factors in this context. Dalits, who were strongly represented in the Christian community, had made much progress in claiming and securing their own resolution. This had been met with powerful and often violent reactions. The Council should encourage the Indian Government to take all necessary action to ensure that the perpetrators were swiftly apprehended and submitted to due and impartial process of law.

KAREN FRANCIS, of International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), drew the attention of the international community and the Human Rights Council to the human rights situation of children in Iraq. Keeping human rights in mind and politics out, the situation of children was appalling. Children were lacking access to all basic services and their basic needs were not covered. According to a report, the vast majority of children had been traumatized by the war, while 93 per cent had learning impediments due to the atmosphere of fear they were growing up in. The international community was obligated to give its voice to the defenceless, safeguard and nurture children. The International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination urged the Human Rights Council to enquire in the issue of the 2003 dismissal of the Special Rapporteur for human rights in Iraq.

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MASHAIR AHMED AL-AMIN, of Society Studies Centre, said that Sima Samar, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan, spoke only very briefly of the Armed Forces Act and other provisions that had been passed. The report did not give enough attention to such acts. Ms. Samar also made very general accusations against law enforcement forces in Sudan. Such selectivity in the report would not be to any use to the process in Sudan and the Centre therefore did not see much utility in renewing her mandate.

MOHAMMED MOHI EL DIN, of the Sudan Council for Voluntary Agencies, said that despite the appreciation of the Sudan Council for Voluntary Agencies of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Sudan, all their attempts to meet her in Khartoum during her last visit had failed because of her refusal to meet them. The international community should support the non governmental organizations to perform their role in ensuring human rights. The Sudan Council for Voluntary Agencies was awaiting to see more pressure from the international community on all armed factions, in order to put an end to the fighting.

ABLA MAHDI, of the Hawa Organization for Women, expressed their appreciation to those who had given positive support to peace in Sudan and called on the international community to fulfil its obligations with regards to development and stability. Also, the Hawa Organization for Women called on the parties to the conflict to negotiate the peace and on rebel groups to join the negotiations. Many mechanisms existed in Sudan, which should promote peace and stability, but the problem was the lack of transparency, which fanned discord rather than promoted unity. The Hawa Organization for Women called on the Human Rights Council to put an end to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in Sudan.

IBRAHIM ABDEL HALIM, of Al Zubair Charity Foundation, commented on Ms. Sima Samar's report. The report was biased and had a selective approach. It focused on the negative developments and was often erroneous. The conclusions were hasty and unsure. How could anybody claim that justice did not want the truth? Criminal procedures had been undertaken in Sudan. The Al-Zubair Charity Organization recommended encouraging all parties to the conflict to come together and reach peace. There was an elected parliament that could monitor human rights and therefore there was no need to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

AMAL MAHMOUD, of the Child Development Foundation, spoke about the status of children and women in Sudan. They were the prime victims and targets of abduction, sexual violence and trafficking. These crimes had been recognised as serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law. In light of the attempted abduction of children by the French non governmental organization "L'Arche de Zoe" and of abuses by United Nations personnel, the Child Development Foundation recommended the adoption of a code of conduct, in line with international norms and standards, which would apply to all non governmental organizations workers and peacekeepers.

GAMAR HABANI, of the Sudanese Women General Union, said that Sudan continued to struggle for peace, development and a better situation for its people. Sanctions affected the development and poverty and worsened the situation of women and children. The Union wondered if the statement made by the Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in Sudan in her report of March 2008 that women had been treated as second-class citizens and imprisoned if not able to pay dowry, was an intention by the international community to tarnish the reality of women in Sudan. The Union appealed for peace in all parts on Sudan and noted again that the sanctions did not affect the Government but ordinary people and had negative impact on the situation of women in particular.

YOUSIF ELTYAIB, of African-American Society for Humanitarian Aid and Development, said that the prolonging and protraction of the conflict in Darfur had a direct negative implication on the peace process and aborted genuine attempts to stop that conflict. The memorandum of the International Criminal Court's Prosecutor to order the extradition of the President Al Bashir would further stiffen the positions of conflicting parties. Regarding the rights of children, the society resented the fact that children were used in wars as soldiers. The Society requested the Human Rights Council condemn the crime of abduction, trafficking and sale of Sudanese and Chadian children committed by a French organization.

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ABDELBAGI JIBRIL, of North South XXI, said that the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Sudan had shown a picture of a country where violence was prevailing. Because of the situation, the United Nations had had to scale down its presence, leaving thousands without assistance. The attack on the Kalma Camp appeared to have been a political strategy. Security forces had used excessive force. North South XXI wished to emphasize that the situation of human rights in Sudan was acute and dangerous; it was the responsibility of the Council to send a signal to the Government of Sudan. The report of the Special Rapporteur had once again documented serious violations; the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan should be continued.

SABAH AL-MUKHTAR, of the Arab Lawyers Union, repeated the request that the Human Rights Council include the human rights situation in Iraq in its agenda and urgently appoint a Special Rapporteur. Human rights violations happened everywhere and always, but in Iraq all human rights were being violated every day. The continuing silence of the Human Rights Council was disturbing. Progress in the human rights situation in Iraq had been reported, but there was no baseline against which the progress could be measured. The United States air force continued to bomb the civilian population claiming they were terrorists. The Government in Baghdad denied all rights to civilians, including the right to life and the right to basic services. The Human Rights Council continued to be told about the abuses of the previous regime, rather than be told about the human rights situation today. All were aware of the lies to justify the occupation of Iraq, with the United Nations cover. It was incumbent on the United Nations and the Human Rights Council to actually protect Iraqi people. With the oil revenues coming in, theft and corruption had increased and Iraq now ranked third on the list of the Transparency International. Many people were detained, tortured, raped and killed.

STEPHAN CICCOLI, of the European Union of Public Relations, said that Azad Kashmir was a region that was totally neglected. People lacked housing, food and education. However, several mineral leases had been allocated to outsiders, including foreigners, in Gilgit-Baltistan which would not benefit the local people and would cause further displacement. The Union called on the Human Rights Council to appoint a Special Observer to the region of Azad Kashmir to seek a review of the lopsided policies of the Government of Pakistan.

Right of Reply

JOHN UKEC LUETH UKEC (Sudan), speaking in a right of reply, said that when the Council had taken up the situation in Sudan, the delegation of Sudan had been thrilled that their country's efforts and cooperation with the world community, particularly the Human Rights Council, would be recognized and applauded. To the contrary, the European Union and the Special Rapporteur had tarnished Sudan's image due to their hostile agenda towards Sudan. The African Group, Arab Group and the Organization of the Islamic Conference were thanked for their efforts and help. For the Special Rapporteur to say the situation of human rights in the entire country was bleak was a demonstration of her biased attitude towards Sudan. If Sudan was totally devoid of human rights, how could she fly and travel there safely?

Sudan was on track, fulfilling its obligations towards enhancing human rights in the entire country, particularly in the pockets of rebel infested areas. The issue was the rebels; they attacked civilians and ambushed peacekeepers. Sudan had taken incredible steps to emerge out of war. By next year, Sudan would be governed by freely elected individuals from over 40 parties. This was what the West and the European Union did not want to happen. What Sudan needed was for the international community to convince the rebels in Darfur to accept dialogue.

RAJIVA WIJESINHA (Sri Lanka), speaking in a right of reply, said much was made of the fact that Sri Lanka had to impose restrictions on international organizations in the country for their own safety. The pomposity of the pronouncements regarding the international community could sometimes be painful. The Government noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent had been asked to continue to work in place and did so dutifully. Sri Lanka would look after its own and with the assistance of those who cared for its people, including the dedicated workers of several United Nations agencies. Given the caution of non governmental organizations with regards to the security situation, it was clear that the best assistance the international community could offer was to persuade Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to let the people go to the safety of government-controlled areas from where return and restitution could be ensured. Sri Lanka regretted the assertion of Ireland

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that the peace process had been terminated and said the process continued and that terrorists should not be rewarded by being treated as the sole arbiters of peace when other democratically pluralistic Tamils were keen on negotiations. Sri Lanka reiterated it would be helpful for the work of the Council if those who spoke in the spirit of finger-pointing were required to register the sources of their funding that facilitated and explained their performances.

TAMAR TAMASHVILI (Georgia), speaking in a right of reply, said that Georgia agreed that the situation in Georgia had to be secure and the right of return of internally displaced persons had to be assured. All this had to take place under the principles of international law, human rights law and humanitarian law. With respect to the Collective Security Treaty Organization and its members, it was important to ensure peace and peace operations taken on the territory of the Caucasus. Georgia underlined that perhaps the notion of peace enforcement and ensuring peace was a notion that only one organ on the international level was allowed to conduct, and that was specifically written in chapter seven. No unilateral action should be taken by any State to argue that it could secure the peace in any part of the world. Perhaps they should look seriously at the situation in Georgia, noting that there had been an international armed conflict there and therefore neither of the parties that took part in the armed conflict could be argued to be impartial and neutral and could take part in the peacekeeping in the Caucasus. Perhaps an international mechanism should be present in the conflict regions of Georgia. Georgia underlined that there should be access to humanitarian aid in the conflict regions. As for the right to return, Georgia asked if the humanitarian organizations could not enter from Gori district into South Ossetia, did that mean that internally displaced persons could safely return? The right to return had to be guaranteed. Georgia was open to an impartial investigation. If a solution was to be reached, impartiality, neutrality and objectivity as well as transparency were the principles that had to guide the negotiations.

WUNNA MAUNG LWIN (Myanmar), speaking in a right of reply, said that Myanmar had noticed with regret that the scepticism expressed by certain countries with regard to the human rights situation in Myanmar was based on unfounded allegations. Myanmar had taken a tangible step in the political process last May by adopting the new Constitution and thus, the multi-party democracy general election would be held in 2010. Regarding cooperation with the international community, Myanmar had received the Special Rapporteur and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The Special Rapporteur had, according to his communications, considered the missions successful. The authorities had also granted most of the requests of the Special Envoy. Myanmar would continue to pursue a dialogue and engagement with the international community so as to improve and promote human rights conditions in the country. Therefore, the allegations that were expressed by some countries could mislead the international community and tarnish the image of Myanmar. Conversely, it could be interpreted that these allegations were just an attempt to politicise on the human rights issue which could lead to a dangerous precedent to the Council.

ALLEHONE MULUGETA ABEBE (Ethiopia), speaking in a right of reply, said that some speakers made reference to the conduct of Ethiopian troops in Somalia and the human rights situation in the Somali national regional state in Ethiopia. The allegations of human rights violations by Ethiopian troops in Somalia were unfounded. Ethiopia was invited by the legitimate Government in Somalia and its efforts were supported by the European Union and the African Union and the conduct of its forces had been in accordance with international humanitarian law. Jihadist groups and militiamen were conducting indiscriminate attacks in Somalia. Ethiopia was gravely disappointed that the statements made in the Council not only selectively targeted Ethiopian troops and peacekeepers who put their lives on the line to restore peace and order in Somalia, but also regrettably gave semblance of credence to outrageous allegations spread by a few with the purpose of tainting the reputation of Ethiopia's professional defense forces and African Union peacekeepers. The Independent Expert held very productive discussions with the Ethiopian Government and Ethiopia was supportive of the extension of this mandate.

Regarding human rights allegations within the Somalia national regional state, the Ethiopian Government rejected allegations of human rights violations and expressed its commitment to ensuring that its actions following the terrorist attack against Ethiopians and foreign workers in April 2007 that resulted in the death of 74 civilians was consistent with human rights norms and humanitarian standards.

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MUNU MAHAWAR (India), speaking in a right of reply, said the delegation of Pakistan had once again made reference to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in their statement. It was ironic that comments with regard to human rights of the people of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir had been made by a country which was persisting with its illegal occupation of a part of Jammu and Kashmir. India shared the concern that many countries had about the growth and consolidation of militancy and extremism. The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir had been a victim of cross-border terrorism for almost two decades and the authorities had always acted within the law and with restraint. Pakistan should exercise restraint in their comments and should not raise bilateral issues under the guise of human rights. Pakistan should focus on taking effective steps to curb use of its territory or the territory controlled by it for launching terrorist activities against India. Such statements by Pakistan did not contribute to creating the atmosphere necessary for the dialogue process between India and Pakistan to move forward.

CHOE MYONG NAM (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in a right of reply, said that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea categorically rejected the allegations of Japan and the European Union. They wanted to solve the issue of abductions of Japanese individuals, but Japan had not respected its obligations and had not provided for the settlement of Japan's past with regard to resolving the abduction cases. Japan had committed crimes as millions of Koreans had been abducted or subjected to sexual slavery during World War II; Japan was bound to apologise.

The concerns of the European Union were also either fabricated or distorted. The European Union was always talking about the right to life but did not talk about the thousands of deaths resulting from the Iraqi invasion. They were ignorant of the violations taking place on their own territories and of those of their allies around their world. The politicisation of human rights had to be put to an end.

ENOS MAFEMBA (Zimbabwe), speaking in a right of reply, thanked delegations that had made encouraging remarks about the current developments in Zimbabwe. Baseless allegations made against Zimbabwe reflected desperation by those who did not care about the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, which took note of their illegal sanctions and other destabilizing actions, including funding saboteurs. Land had been at the core of Zimbabwe's dispute with some European Union member States. Zimbabwe urged France not to be mouthpiece for the British Labour regime and other racist groups and challenged the European Union to address through France, issues of human rights in Corsica, the Chagos archipelago, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. On Canada, Zimbabwe said its delegation would have a field day one of those sessions on human rights and the Royal Mounties. Zimbabwe said it would be convinced that the European Union was honest and sincere about human rights if it stopped politicisation, selectivity and hypocrisy.

OLEG MALGINOV (Russian Federation), speaking in a right of reply, said on 7 August, the regular Georgian armed forces had begun massive bombing and artillery shelling of the South Ossetian villages. As a result, an entire small nation was threatened with total extermination. The right word to describe such action was well known to all. The operation drove tens of thousands of Ossetians from their land. Russia needed to take decisive action in order to stop these attacks. The plan reached between President Medvedev and President Sarkozy would help to stabilize the situation. South Ossetia and Russia were consistently implementing the plan's provisions. Georgia was once again threatening South Ossetia and Abkhazia with war. Access of humanitarian assistance to the multinational population of South Ossetia was totally open. Those who wanted to help were helping. Others were making a fuss about access. The United Nations humanitarian mission was in South Ossetia today. Independent observers had noted that Russia had intervened to avoid a catastrophe in South Ossetia. The Commissioner of the European Council for Human Rights had spent a week in the region and had published his report. Some countries did not like this report because it contained objective facts. The report contained realistic proposals which Russia was studying and which could help stabilize the situation. The key to normalize the situation was for Tbilisi to renounce violence and war. Also there should be a refusal of any policy which encouraged aggression and which rearmed Georgia.

MARGHOOB SALEEM BUTT (Pakistan), speaking in a right of reply, said that Jammu Kashmir was not an Indian state, it was recognised by the United Nations as a disputed territory. The people of this territory also did not recognise the territory as being part of India and together with the United Nations had rejected the elections organised by India. The region was part of the composite dialogue between India and Pakistan. Surely India would

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not discuss any of its integral part under this dialogue phase. As a party to this dispute, Pakistan had every right to question the treatment of occupied Kashmiris by the Indian occupation security forces.

With respect to its international dimension, Kashmir did have a recognized international dimension. It was India which caused it by referring Jammu and Kashmir to the United Nations Security Council. The Council had a responsibility to the people of Kashmir in the context of human rights violations. India could not hoodwink the Council by the talk of foreign sponsored terrorism in Kashmir. The independent and objective media, both national and international, had a different story to tell. If all this was foreign sponsored terrorism, how would India explain thousands of recent unnamed graves which contained dead bodies of Kashmiris who became victims of enforced disappearance and were later killed in Indian dungeons. Were the families that visited these graves foreigners? These statistics had been compiled by international bodies. All victims were Kashmiri. With regard to Pakistan, they strongly opposed the use of the war against terrorism to occupy other territories.

CARLOS FRANCO (Colombia), speaking in a right of reply, said that the work of non governmental organizations had contributed to Colombia paying attention to victims of human rights abuses. Colombia noted that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had a regular presence in the country, and there was a standing invitation to all human rights bodies to visit the country. There was broad presence of international non governmental organizations, which were free to move in the territory without any restrictions. In December 2008, Colombia would voluntarily submit itself to the Universal Periodic Review. As to the comments made by non governmental organizations on the justice system in Colombia, Colombia recalled that the State had doubled the budget for the functioning of the justice system and had guaranteed a social security contribution so that justice agents could act independently. There was a difference in criteria as to some judicial decisions, but the President said that what enriched a democracy was a frank and open dialogue. It was not that Colombia was covering up complaints about the public forces, but it did not agree with the assertion that there was a State policy in Colombia of systematic violations of human rights. The Government had done everything in its power to remedy the situation. Some 750 military men were tried as a result of the lodged complaints. Colombia recognized that there were sometimes difficulties in relations with non governmental organizations and how they assessed situations, but Colombia repeated its invitation for these organizations to build a constructive relationship with the Government and to recognise that there was no systematic violation of human rights in Colombia.

QIAN BO (China), speaking in a right of reply, said China attached great importance to constructive dialogue with non governmental organizations, but it rejected a statement made by the Society of Threatened People which misrepresented facts and was totally unfounded. The statement was obviously politically motivated. What happened in Tibet was part of China's internal affairs. The Chinese Government was determined to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and was firmly opposed to any secessionist attempts. The promotion and protection of human rights was enshrined in the Chinese Constitution. The Government attached great importance to human rights and was working to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of Chinese citizens. The Government had also been working to promote and protect human rights in Tibet. Last May, China was hit by a big earthquake, and this summer the Olympics were held in Beijing. The efforts of the Government to promote human rights had not started with the Olympic Games nor did they end with them.

ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran), speaking in a right of reply concerning the statements by the European Union and Canada on the human rights situation in Iran, said that Iran was fully aware of its obligations and responsibilities in the field of human rights. Iran would not let any country interfere in their international affairs or impose a specific culture of human rights. Undoubtedly the published evidence on the role of the Government of France in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as well as its role in the case of abduction of Sudanese and Chadian children and the numerous cases of discrimination, and restrictive policies against Muslims and Islamic symbols in France, as well as Canada's cases of systematic abuses of the human rights of indigenous peoples, would not put those Governments in a position to teach others the lessons of human rights.

Further, contrary to the false accusations made, no cases of stoning or any cases of execution for minors had been carried in Iran. With regard to Baha'i, all Iranian citizens enjoyed their full constitutional rights. All were equal before the law.

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MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco), speaking in a right of reply in relation to a non governmental organization, said this organization had mentioned problems in south Morocco. In doing so, it had confirmed the way in which it insisted on pointing the finger at the question concerning the Sahara. He attempted to cloak this by defending the principle of self determination which he persisted in wishing to apply only to this question, whereas the Fourth Committee of the United Nations was looking at 16 other situations. In an attempt to establish some credibility for his comments, the speaker did not hesitate to borrow out of context general statements made by other delegations which were members of the Council and deformed the nature of those claims, making them say what they did not say. This should be condemned. If that organization was truly motivated by the human rights situation in the Sahara, the situation of the Saharis in the camps would have surely been mentioned. The speaker was a part of the known ploy in attempt to obstruct the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Morocco.

NANGUYALAI TARZI (Afghanistan), speaking in a right of reply regarding victims in the war in Afghanistan, said that after five years of war, the terrorist groups responsible for the victims still acted in the same way. Although Afghanistan had made considerable progress in human rights protection, it was still concerned about the security of its citizens. It firmly condemned the measures used by these terrorist groups, such as attacks on civilians and their use as human shields.

OMER BERZINJI (Iraq), speaking in a right of reply, thanked all those who had expressed support for Iraq. They wanted to hear more about the Iraqi children. The Iraqi children needed help and support for their health and education and other rights. Iraq was making its own efforts, but they needed the help of everyone in this regard. Further, the statements by the Union of Arab Jurists were always destructive and not constructive.

ROBERT-JAN SIEBEN (Netherlands), speaking in a right of reply, said that, while speaking of human rights violations in Somalia by Ethiopian armed forces, the Netherlands had made the reference to the May 2008 report of Amnesty International and had felt the accusations were serious enough to demand an independent investigation of what had happened. The Netherlands hoped Ethiopia would be willing to cooperate with this independent investigation.

In reaction to the intervention of Uzbekistan, the Netherlands said that the concerns about the human rights situation there were shared by many other countries and civil society organizations.

MAKIO MIYAGAWA (Japan), speaking in a right of reply, said Japan regrettably felt obliged to remind the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that in their working level consultations, that country had agreed upon the overall objective and specific modalities of the investigation of the abductions from every angle. The Democratic People's republic of Korea should implement this undertaking and establish the investigation committee. Japan remained committed to pursuing its basic policy to normalize relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Japan had faced its past history with sincerity and had borne in mind the remorse and apologies. False allegations could in no way justify and give excuses for the refusal of cooperation.

EMMANUEL ROUSSEAU (France), speaking in a right of reply, said that France had been seriously accused by name for a role that it did not play in the Rwandan genocide. France deplored this serious and unfounded accusation. The French authorities in the Government and Parliament had addressed this issue in a transparent process. The national commission of inquiry had shed full light on the events. France had also fully collaborated with the Rwandan tribunal.

TAMAR TAMASHVILI (Georgia), speaking in a second right of reply, said that Georgia was aware of the humanitarian mission to be deployed, but it was to be the high-level mission from the United Nations humanitarian agencies. Georgia expressed the hope that the mission would enquire about the situation and would have full access. Georgia noted that there was still no access for humanitarian aid from the south and expressed the wish that humanitarian aid would go to South Ossetia. Some non governmental organizations registered in the Russian Federation requested that the humanitarian aid enter through that channel.

CHOE MYONG NAM (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in a right of reply, said that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had done everything in the abduction case. Japan had not done anything

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on their part. Japan was not qualified to refer to other countries regarding human rights violations. Japan was distorting its history which was full of violence. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea reiterated its call on the Japanese authorities to address the human rights violations that were taking place in Japan.

BADRIDDIN OBIDOV (Uzbekistan), speaking in a right of reply in reaction to the right of reply of the Netherlands, said that Uzbekistan had heard once again unfounded accusations of human rights violations in their country. In those references, no specific instances or facts had been given. Uzbekistan was carrying out an open dialogue with all countries in the region and with civil society. States should focus on the situations which really needed the attention of the Council. If one wanted to talk about single situations it had to base this on facts.

NATALIA ZOLOTOVA (Russian Federation), speaking in a second right of reply, said the Russian Federation had repeatedly emphasized its commitment to conflict resolution on a human rights basis. From the very beginning it had said there was a need for international police forces in the regions neighbouring South Ossetia. The Russian Federation said Georgian authorities would have to resolve the issues with the authorities of South Ossetia. The Russian Federation noted that those who today were making the fuss had been for some reason very silent during the first days of Georgian aggression on South Ossetia.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DISCUSSES REPORTS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE, AND MINORITY ISSUES

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The following information was released by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG):

The Human Rights Council this morning held an interactive discussion on the reports of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide, and the Independent Expert on Minority Issues.

Gay McDougall, the Independent Expert on minority issues, presenting her report, said she had continued her work to promote implementation of the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, having undertaken new thematic work, notably in the context of the Forum on Minority Issues which focused on minorities and the right to education. Additionally, she had conducted two country visits to Guyana and Greece. She had given a high priority to the issues of minority women in her work, and reached out to women who too often lacked a voice, or an audience to hear it. Those voices and information that she had received consistently revealed that women belonging to minorities experienced unique challenges.

The Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Walter Kalin; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo; and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide, Francis Deng presented their reports at the previous meeting. (See press release HRC/09/21 of 12 March)

In the interactive discussion on the reports, among other things, speakers, said it was disturbing to note that more than 26 million people were presently internally displaced as a result of armed conflict or other violence in more than 50 countries. States had the primary duty and responsibility to prevent internal displacement, to protect and assist the displaced, and to provide them with durable solutions. Internally displaced persons should have a right to return to their domicile in dignity. Resolving internal displacement was inextricably linked with the achievement of lasting peace and the protection of internally displaced persons should constitute a part of peace agreements.

Trafficking in persons was a serious challenge to humanity and there was a clear need to increase international efforts with a high level of collaboration and coordination between States to combat it more systematically and effectively. It was hoped that the criminalization of human trafficking would put an end to the phenomenon as well as all the efforts in the fight against poverty. This was a transnational threat which the international community

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should join together to address with effective countermeasures. The deeper reasons should be eradicated: the sex industry, cheap labour, and low living standards in countries of origin.

The crime of genocide, as one of the most serious crimes, should be considered in the context of the Convention against Genocide, and it was dangerous to speculate on it from political perspectives, as this debased it, speakers said. The principles of the prevention of genocide and responsibility to protect were the key principles that lay at the core of this joint struggle and the United Nations system could demonstrate its ability to act on time in preventing crimes against humanity. The prevention of genocide could only be ensured by making the correct assessment of signs of a grave escalation. It was imperative to distinguish subjective considerations from those situations which did carry objective and concrete elements of the crime of genocide.

Minorities as a vulnerable group could be particularly exposed to ethnically motivated violence and scapegoating for economic problems facing societies given the current global economic crisis. At such times it was particularly important to ensure the delicate balance between full respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities and their full inclusion in the life of society. The education of minorities was the main means to reduce poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Speaking as concerned countries were the representatives of Georgia, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Sudan, Greece and Guyana.

Also speaking this morning were the representatives of Argentina, Egypt, Yemen on behalf of the Arab Group, Nigeria, Chile, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union, Costa Rica, Philippines, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Indonesia, Japan, Qatar, Russian Federation, Norway, Iraq, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Timor-Leste, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Australia, Belarus, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Bangladesh, Spain, Rwanda, African Union, China, United Kingdom, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Colombia, Armenia, Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey, Latvia, Canada, Austria, United States, Switzerland and the Republic of Korea.

The interactive debate will continue at 3 p.m. this afternoon. From 4 p.m., the Council will convene in closed meeting to discuss issues raised under the complaints procedure.

Documents on Minority Issues

The Council has before it the report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, Gay McDougall (A/HRC/10/11 and Add.1-3), which provides a summary of activities by the Special Rapporteur since her last report including to promote the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities, including country visits; to apply a gender perspective; to cooperate with other United Nations bodies and regional organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme; and to take into account the views of non-governmental organizations. In a final section the report provides details of the inaugural Forum on Minority Issues and thematic recommendations of the Forum.

Addendum one contains the recommendations of the Forum on Minority Issues, with a particular focus on education. Among others, with regard to the learning environment, it is recommended that teacher training, including training of teachers from minority communities, should include anti-discrimination, gender sensitive and intercultural training.

Addendum two, a report of the Independent Expert's mission to Guyana, is not available.

A third addendum, containing the report of the Independent Expert's visit to Greece from 8 to 16 September 2008, notes that Greece recognizes only one minority, the Muslim religious minority in Western Thrace, and is convinced that the claims of the existence of other minorities are unsubstantiated and politically motivated. The Special Rapporteur notes that whether a State officially recognizes a minority is not conclusive with respect to its obligations toward minority populations. The Independent Expert urges Greece to withdraw from the dispute over whether there is a Macedonian or a Turkish minority in Greece and focus on protecting the rights to self-identification, freedom of expression and freedom of association of those communities. Greece should also comply fully with the judgements

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of the European Court of Human Rights, specifically those decisions that associations should be allowed to use the words "Macedonian" and "Turkish" in their names and to express their ethnic identities freely. With regard to discrimination against Roma, despite commending an Integrated Action Programme on Roma, there are serious problems of implementation at the local level, particularly regarding living conditions and the segregation of Roma in certain public schools.

Presentation by the Independent Expert on Minority Issues

Gay McDougall, Independent Expert on Minority Issues, presenting her report, said since her last report she had continued her work to promote implementation of the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, having undertaken new thematic work, notably in the context of the Forum on Minority Issues which focused on minorities and the right to education. Additionally, she had conducted two country visits to Guyana and Greece. She had given a high priority to the issues of minority women in her work, and reached out to women who too often lacked a voice, or an audience to hear it. Those voices, and information that she had received consistently revealed that women belonging to minorities experienced unique challenges.

First, her mandate required her "to cooperate closely, while avoiding duplication, with existing relevant United Nations bodies, mandates, mechanisms and regional organisations", and she considered this to be a particularly important part of her mandate, to share information and strengthen understanding and capacity in regard to minority issues with these bodies and institutions. Second, she had consistently highlighted in her country-specific work the importance of ensuring that minorities were represented in elected bodies at the national and local levels and institutions including the police. Third, she placed a high priority on her engagement with NGOs from all regions and benefited greatly from the views and information provided by them in respect to all aspects of her work.

Ms. McDougall said she had undertaken a visit to Greece in September 2008. Greece only recognised one minority, the Muslim religious minority in Western Thrace, and did not recognise the Turkish ethnicity of some groups within the Muslim religious minority or the minority status of any other communities. The Government was convinced that claims to minority status by other groups were unsubstantiated and politically motivated. She urged the Government of Greece to withdraw from the dispute over whether there was a Macedonian or a Turkish minority, and place its full focus on protecting the rights to self-identification, freedom of expression, and freedom of association of those communities. She would also like to commend the Government for the positive practices that it had adopted with respect to improving the quality of education available for the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. The Government's efforts to develop positive policies through the "Integrated Action Program on Roma" were also commended, however there were serious problems of implementation at the local level.

Ms. McDougall said she had conducted a visit to Guyana in summer 2008, during which she focused her attention on the relations between, and comparative situations of Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese. She recognised commendable steps on the part of the Government to date to address issues of ethnic tensions, criminal activities and economic underdevelopment that had plagued Guyana. However, she also witnessed evidence that tensions had deepened and transformed in some instances into despair, anger, and resistance, and this was particularly evident among Afro-Guyanese individuals and communities. The report described two separate and conflicting narratives and perceptions of reality that had emerged among Afro- and Indo-Guyanese, which threatened to undermine shared values and common goals that were essential to a united, prosperous Guyana. Further effective action was required urgently to restore confidence in good governance and the rule of law among all communities, and prevent further polarisation and possible violence. An open and constructive dialogue on inclusive governance remained an essential component of change.

Statements by Concerned Countries on Reports on Internally Displaced Persons, on Trafficking in Persons, on Genocide and on Minority Issues

GIORGI GORGILADZE (Georgia), speaking as a concerned country regarding humanitarian access, said that following Russia's aggression and occupation of Georgian territories, the issues of humanitarian assistance to war-affected people and access to the occupied territories remained critical. It was unacceptable that the Russian

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Federation blocked the access of international humanitarian assistance, humanitarian actors as well as international organizations and observers to the conflict region from the South. Access of the humanitarian assistance in the occupied territories as well as international organizations, by entering the territory of Georgia from the North only, would be perceived and interpreted by Russia and proxy regimes as recognition and legitimization of independence of the above-mentioned territories.

Concerning internally displaced persons, Georgia said that the persons displaced by Russia's military aggression and subsequent occupation of the Georgian territory in August 2008, should be officially granted the internally displaced persons status in spring 2009. As pointed out in the report, the Government had been continuing to treat them as internally displaced persons, providing all necessary aid and assistance. The Government also remained cautious that proper assistance and attention should be paid to internally displaced persons displaced in early 1990s. That was why the Government acknowledged the need to meet the new challenges along with the existing commitments towards all internally displaced persons in the territories falling under control of the Georgian authorities.

MALLOUM BAMANGA ABBAS (Chad), speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, thanked and congratulated Mr. Walter Kalin for his mission to Chad, following the invitation by the authorities in Chad. In paragraph 7, the Secretary-General considered the internal peace process between the Chadian political actors was one way to stabilize populations. In this regard, the Chadian Government was not convinced that the inclusive dialogue was the answer for achieving peace in Chad. The experience of the recent past had demonstrated the contrary. Several conferences had taken place in the 1980s to facilitate the establishment of peace. Unfortunately, the agreements signed between the various protagonists were not applied. These agreements plunged the country into chaos due to non compliance with them by the politico-military, who wanted instead to take power in the country. This was the main reason that Chad had undertaken to ensure a democratic process in the 1990s.

It was unrealistic to advocate dialogue between the Government, civil society and the military, stressed Chad. The Government instead engaged in dialogue with legal opposition parties in 2007, which led to an agreement on 13 August 2007 with the support of the international community. There were rebel groups coming from Sudan who had been closely watched by the army. Chad called for support. With regard to the recommendations on the lack of infrastructure mentioned by Mr. Kalin, the Government of Chad was attempting to establish a sectoral programme to ensure that all social aspects were established in the country. In addition a seminar was also being organized by the Government with the help of its partners. With regard to the deficiencies mentioned by the Mr. Kalin, the Government remained determined to fulfil their obligation to address the issue of the internally displaced persons on its territory with the help of the international community.

SEBASTIEN MUTOMB MUJING (Democratic Republic of Congo), speaking as a concerned country, said genocide was a crime against humanity which required prevention from all States and freedom-loving people. The mandate of the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide fit into this context. The Democratic Republic of Congo was made up of more than 450 ethnicities which had always lived in perfect harmony and without major violent incidents since the creation of the modern State. The facts reported by Mr. Deng did not exactly agree with the good reputation of the Congolese with regards to hospitality, nor with the true situation on the ground. It was notorious that some Congolese groups were victims of their hospitality, and the cyclic tribal conflicts occurring in some neighbouring countries had pushed ethnic groups to take refuge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they had, unfortunately, continued their conflict.

The report of the Special Advisor contained inaccuracies and allegations which could compromise any exact understanding of the situation in North Kivu. The report, for example, noted ethnic conflicts in this area of the country, but did not say between which ethnic groups nor why. It also mentioned the illegal exploitation of mining. The report did not note that this was committed by armed groups in order to finance the war. Further, the Democratic Republic of Congo believed that the affirmation that the Government applied a policy of discrimination to certain ethnicities was unfounded. The Government had consistently made efforts to identify ways and means for peaceful coexistence between all ethnicities. Consequently, the risk of genocide in the Democratic Republic of

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Congo was minimal. Taking into account the situation which had prevailed in the east of the country, and to contain any eventual danger, the Goma Peace Conference, initiated by the Government, had put in place a permanent framework of discussion and dialogue between the different communities, and the Nairobi Accords only reinforced this important mechanism.

JEMES KIHWAGA, (Kenya), speaking as a concerned country, said concerning activities of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide, that following the disputed presidential election results in December 2007, an unprecedented wave of violence erupted in several parts of the country. The violence quickly spread and was transformed into an ethnic conflict. The crisis had the potential of growing into a civil war as the two protagonist political parties hardened their positions. The crisis brought to the surface deep-seated undercurrents and divisions in Kenya that threatened the very existence of Kenya as a nation-state. The country was rapidly getting divided into ethno-regional blocks. It was at the height of these tensions and violence that the Special Adviser had visited the country.

Shortly after his visit on 28 February 2008, under the auspices of the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities chaired by Mr. Kofi Annan, the Party of National Unity and the Orange Democratic Party signed the Agreement on the Principles of Partnership of a Coalition Government. The Parties had agreed to enact the National Accord and Reconciliation Act 2008 and end the political crisis. The National Accord laid the foundation for power sharing, moving the country out of the crisis. The agreement identified four main agenda items: immediate action to stop the violence and restore fundamental rights and liberties; immediate measures to address the humanitarian crisis and promote reconciliation and healing; measures to overcome the political crisis; and to address long term issues, inter alia, legal reform, land reform, tackling youth unemployment, tackling poverty, addressing impunity.

OMER DAHAB FADOL MOHAMED (Sudan), speaking as a concerned country with regard to the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide, said time and again Sudan had explained to the Council and to all stakeholders that the root cause of the conflict in Darfur went back to the environmental degradation and climate change which affected and continued to affect seriously the Sub-Saharan region of Africa. This situation led to competition and conflict between sedentary and pastoralist tribes in Darfur over increasingly shrinking resources of land and water. In this connection, Sudan made reference to the statements of the United Nations Secretary-General and to the reports of the United Nations Environment Programme. Environmental degradation and climate change, part of which was man made or human induced, was aggravated by the illicit small arms trafficking by European and Israeli companies, a phenomenon characteristic of all African internal conflicts. So far, one of the genuine practical examples of foreign assistance Sudan received in Darfur was the drilling of hundreds of wells by the Chinese Government which effectively addressed the roots causes of the conflict.

Crying wolf by repeating the unfounded claim of genocide, as Mr. Ocampo, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, was meant to bring about a calculated political agenda in the same way the provision of small arms to the armed groups was meant. Sudan had painstakingly and repeatedly produced and reproduced conclusive evidence by independent sources, institutions and individuals, that what had unfolded in Darfur was not genocide. As for national, bilateral, regional and international efforts aimed at arriving at a lasting and durable settlement in Darfur, a multiplicity of efforts were continuously being invested.

FRANCISCOS VERROS (Greece), speaking as a concerned country on the report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, said Greece fully subscribed to the basic principle that the protection of minorities and the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to them formed an integral part of the international protection of human rights. The treatment of persons belonging to minorities should be based on international human rights and minority treaties, and not on mere policy choices linked to inter-State relations. The protection of the Muslim minority of Thrace was mainly based on the 1923 Lausanne treaty. Greece of course fully respected the right of every person to self-identity - however, such self-identification should be neither arbitrary nor at the expense of the right to self-identification of other groups. The Muslim minority of Thrace consisted of three distinct groups, those of Turkish, Pomak or Roma origin. Any attempt to identify the entire Muslim community in Thrace was unacceptable, not only for political reasons, but also because it did not objectively reflect the actual composition of the whole minority.

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In implementing the letter and spirit of the Lausanne Treaty, Greece had adopted a number of important positive measures in favour of the Muslim minority. On another footing, Greece did not recognise that a distinct ethnic or linguistic minority existed in Greece by the name "Macedonian", and the use of the term threatened to create a serious confusion or even a potential clash over identities in the whole region. Of course, Greece fully respected the individual rights of those claiming to belong to a "Macedonian ethnic minority", including their freedom of association. References in the report to the name "Macedonian" to denote an ethnic "minority" living in the Greek region of Macedonia or a "language" spoken in the region should have been avoided. These references should not be interpreted as implying a determination that such a minority or language existed in Greece, but as claims emanating from the individuals concerned.

PATRICK I. GOMES (Guyana), speaking as a concerned country, expressed its displeasure and disappointment on the draft and revised draft report of the UN Independent Expert on minority issues resulting from her visit to Guyana in July 2008. Guyana emphasized that there was neither an understanding nor any indication that the Expert's visit was intended to focus on any one ethnic group. Furthermore, there was no indication that the Independent Expert would be focusing on Afro-Guyanese, and the relations between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese as stated in the Draft Report. Guyana had no idea of the Independent Expert's focus or area of interest. It was concerned about the scant regard and manner in which a Member State of the United Nations and signatory to five human rights treaties was treated. Guyana was not a divided society. If the Independent Expert spoke to individuals that had grievances, those grievances should be reported as individual opinions. The report gave the impression that Guyanese lived in an Apartheid-like situation which was definitely not the case. Guyana underlined that important posts in the military were held by Afro-Guyanese which was just one sign of the integration of this minority into Guyanese society.

Interactive Dialogue on Reports on Internally Displaced Persons, on Trafficking in Persons, on Genocide and on Minority Issues

MARIELA FOGANTE (Argentina) said the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention for the Prevention of Genocide had been the starting point for the significant development of norms and standards for the promotion and protection of human rights and for impunity of perpetrators in national and international courts. Despite this, the world still witnessed crimes being committed, in particular crimes of genocide. In addressing this problem it was important to ensure the participation of many actors. The Government of Argentina knew that there were a number of events that led to genocide, and several signs of alarm were present in order for the international community to take action in a reasonable amount of time. Argentina and Latin America had a lot to contribute as a result of their history.

Argentina organized on 10 December 2008 in Buenos Aires a conference under the auspice of the United Nations, keeping in mind the need to implement the recommendations of the Special Representative of Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide, and also looked at ways to come up with different standards and regional mechanisms in this context. Argentina stressed that the fight against impunity and the relationship between impunity and the prevention of genocide were central to the debate among States at the conference. Argentina also stressed that it was necessary to bring to trial those guilty of such crimes. Furthermore, Argentina said it would continue to work on organizing conferences such as this one between the periods of 2009-2010.

HEBA MOSTAFA (Egypt) said trafficking in persons was a serious challenge to humanity and there was a clear need to increase international efforts with a high level of collaboration and coordination between States to combat it more systematically and effectively. The conclusions and recommendations of the Special Rapporteur in her report were important and required careful consideration by all States. An effective means to combat trafficking in persons would require among other things enhanced information sharing between States through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and increased data collection capacities, awareness-raising, a global plan of action to combat trafficking, addressing the root causes of trafficking such as widespread poverty, conflicts and restrictive immigration policies. Egypt was ready to work with the Special Rapporteur in successfully carrying out her mandate and to cooperate with all concerned stakeholders to elaborate a global solution to this global challenge.

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IBRAHIM SAIED MOHAMED AL-ADOOFI, (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, thanked the Special Rapporteurs for their reports. On the report on internally displaced persons, Yemen said that the report had reflected on the issue. The presence of 26 million internally displaced persons worldwide as a result of armed conflict and violence clearly showed the necessity of concerted action. Mr. Kalin had not referred to the real problems that led to internally displaced persons, as the negation of the right to self-determination and foreign interventions. The Arab Group was concerned about the Israeli intervention in Gaza. Mr. Kalin's report did not in any way refer to the thousands of Syrian internally displaced persons. Regarding the report on human trafficking, the Arab Group noted that the victims did not usually cooperate with the authorities, often because of fear. The Arab Group expressed concern because it saw an increase of this phenomenon. It welcomed the criminalization of human trafficking and hoped that this would put an end to the phenomenon as well as all the efforts in the fight against poverty.

IFEANYI NWOSY (Nigeria) shared the views of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons Joy Ngozi Ezeilo that almost every country of the world was affected by trafficking either as a source, transit and or destination country for women, children and men trafficked for the purpose of sexual or labour exploitation. It was worrisome that about 80 per cent of transnational victims were women and girls and up to 50 per cent were minors. Nigeria was fully committed to the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children and had put in place mechanisms and programmes of action aimed at combating this ugly phenomenon. Nigeria remained ready to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur in her assignment. Nigeria endorsed her recommendations on trafficking in persons being a mostly cross-border phenomenon that required enhanced information sharing between and among States through bilateral and multilateral cooperation; and that States should consider urgent action to address the root causes of trafficking, among them on growing poverty, youth unemployment and gender inequalities.

XIMENA VERDUGO (Chile) said the very complete report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons was very interesting, and the Guiding Principles that had been presented 10 years ago, while not a binding legal instrument, did reflect and were consistent with international human rights and international humanitarian law, covering the specific needs of internally displaced persons around the world, containing rights and guarantees. Member States should use the application of the rights of internally displaced persons in the plans and policies aimed at protecting them. The increasing emphasis of the Representative on those displaced by natural disasters was supported, as the frequency and scope of natural disasters would increase with global warming. Governments should step up their efforts to prevent the risk of disasters and prepare for those that could take place. It was regretted that the number of internally displaced persons had not fallen over the last 10 years.

DRAGANA ANDELIC (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said regarding the rights of internally displaced persons that the special challenge for Bosnia and Herzegovina was that it had to face two equally important priorities that directly influenced the reform processes. These were the obligation of the total overtaking of responsibilities for implementation of the Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Accords from the international community institutions onto the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the one hand, and realization of the scheduled strategic objectives on the other hand. The results achieved in the realization of the strategic objectives were undoubtedly exceptional. This was accompanied by establishment and organization of a transparent system that became a guarantee for equality of all refugees, displaced persons and returnees when talking about the access to assistance for return.

JANA REZNA (Czech Republic), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that Mr. Kalin was currently developing, together with the United Nations Mediation Support Unit, a manual for mediators to facilitate the inclusion of internally displaced persons and their interests in peace processes; and asked Mr. Kalin if could further elaborate on this? In September 2008, Mr. Kalin undertook a working visit to Sri Lanka as a follow-up to his mission in 2007, when he highlighted the need to find durable solutions for internally displaced persons who had been displaced for more than 20 years. What should be the priority measures to be taken by the Government of Sri Lanka in order to find adequate solutions for the problems of their long-term internally displaced persons; and what suggestions did he make to address the needs of the short term internally displaced persons caught up in the current military hostilities, asked the European Union.

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The European Union said that the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons in her report mentioned her intention to develop an anti-trafficking model legislation that integrated a human rights perspective. The European Union asked if she had in mind how to base the model on existing best practices and how to incorporate existing differences in legislative systems worldwide?

EUGENIA RICA (Costa Rica) said with regards to the report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, it contained much important information, and the approach of the Special Rapporteur was welcomed. Costa Rica supported the idea set out on the treatment to be given of victims of trafficking and that they should not be considered illegal migrants and should not be deported. The Special Rapporteur could identify measures and practices illustrating solutions to deal with this issue, and help in applying all the principles. Costa Rica had decided to combat trafficking through its National Development Plan, making it one of the State's commitments. There was a Strategic Plan of Action for various Government and non-Government bodies to implement in this regard. There was also a fundamental element in terms of protection in which victims of trafficking were provided with special protection during the investigation of their situation and better alternatives for their future were identified.

GAGIK HOVHANNISYAN (Philippines) said that Mr. Kalin, the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, mentioned that the Philippines was among those with massive new displacements. The Philippines would like to know Mr. Kalin's criteria for "massive" in as much as the present internally displaced persons situation in the Philippines did not compare to the time of Mr. Deng's visit, Mr. Kalin's predecessor. The Philippine Government assumed not just primary responsibility, but full responsibility in responding to situations of displacements whether natural or man-made. As a country prone to natural disasters, including the biggest volcanic eruption of the century, the Philippines took pride in the capability of its National Disaster Coordinating Council in responding to natural or man-made disasters and emergencies and in providing comprehensive assistance from the humanitarian phase to the recovery phase.

MARGHOOB SALEEM BUTT (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, thanked the Special Rapporteur on internally displaced persons for his report. It was disturbing to note that more than 26 million people were presently internally displaced as a result of armed conflict or other violence in more than 50 countries. The Organization of the Islamic Conference remained cognizant of the fact that the majority of internally displaced persons were nationals of the State in which they found themselves. As such, they were entitled to the full protection of national law and the rights it granted, without any adverse distinction resulting from the fact of their displacement. States had the primary duty and responsibility to prevent internal displacement, to protect and assist the displaced, and to provide them with durable solutions. On the issue of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Organization of the Islamic Conference noted with appreciation the report presented by Ms. Ezeilo, which analysed the issue of trafficking from international, as well as regional and national perspectives.

DIMA SAMODRA (Indonesia) said given the location of the Indonesian archipelago, it was one of the most seismically active zones in the world, and was often subject to a range of natural disasters. Indonesia thus fully appreciated the importance of international cooperation and assistance when these struck, and believed a more effective funding mechanism should be created to bridge the gap between funding for emergency phases in the case of natural disaster, and funding for the development phase. Indonesia had adopted various relevant laws on migrants, and established a Task Force with the mandate to coordinate efforts to prevent and deal with cases of trafficking in persons, to undertake advocacy, dissemination, training and cooperation at national and international levels, to monitor the protection of victims through rehabilitation, arrival and social reintegration, to monitor law enforcement, and to report and evaluate. The Special Rapporteur should further elucidate her intention to pay particular attention to human rights violations in the situation of trafficking.

AKIO ISOMATA (Japan) said regarding human trafficking that this was a serious crime involving a grave violation of human rights and human dignity. With the continued advance of globalization and the widening of economic disparities, human trafficking had become a transnational threat that the international community must join together to address with effective countermeasures. To prevent and eradicate human trafficking as well as to ensure victims' continuous protection, including the reintegration into society, it was essential that both countries of destination and countries of origin closely cooperated with each other. This far, the Japanese Government had dispatched inter-

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ministerial delegations to 14 countries of origin to discuss trafficking issues. The delegations held meetings with the Governments, relevant international organizations and non-governmental organizations in those countries.

KHALID J. AL-THANI (Qatar) expressed thanks to the Special Rapporteur for her excellent report on activities to combat trafficking. The phenomenon was global and transnational. This phenomenon posed security, social, economic and political threats and enhanced international cooperation was needed to fight it. With regard to legislative and awareness raising efforts, the Government had adopted a law in 2004 that criminalized acts of sexual exploitation and procurement. Qatar had also ratified the International Labour Convention with respect to forced labour, and was looking into joining the Palermo Protocol. In 2009 concerning the entry and exit of foreign workers, the Government provided for persons to be sponsored, and even in some cases had increased the rights of those sponsored. The Government was currently engaged in a study on trafficking in persons. Qatar noted the essential role the Qatar Anti-Trafficking Institute played in this context, which now had full authority to act. Qatar also noted the visit by the Special Rapporteur in November 2006, and said that she had noted in her report the full support she received in this regard from the Government of Qatar. Qatar would spare no effort in combating trafficking in all forms, and stressed that they had the full political will and the atmosphere in the country to continue to promote human rights.

VLADIMIR YAKOVLEV (Russian Federation) said there should be a global plan of action to combat the phenomenon of trafficking. The deeper reasons should be eradicated: the sex industry, cheap labour, and low living standards in countries of origin. The crime of genocide, as one of the most serious crimes, should be considered in the context of the Convention against Genocide, and it was dangerous to speculate on it from political perspectives, as this debased it. What should be done to prevent resurrection of an ideology which justified genocide, the Russian Federation asked. With regards to the growing numbers of internally displaced persons, the Guiding Principles were not considered an international document, as there had not been sufficient consultation. Internally displaced persons should have a right to return to their domicile while ensuring their dignity. The large number of internally displaced persons in Georgia was the fault of that nation - Russia had done its best to protect the peaceful civilian population, and was prepared to further interact with the international community on this issue. The right to citizenship was a basic human right, and its deprivation was used in some countries to control minorities, and this was a problem, as it was a gross violation of human rights standards.

SVEIN MICHELSEN (Norway) said that the report on human trafficking pointed to the fact that there was no clear indication of a decline in the exploitation of men, women and children in forced labour, prostitution and sale of organs. Five years after the entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, there was a need to establish a mechanism to review the implementation of those obligations. The recent Conference of the States Parties to the Convention decided to establish a Working Group with the mandate to consider such a mechanism. In this regard the provisions of the new Council of Europe Convention against trafficking and its group of experts on monitoring, called GRETA, might serve as an example of best practices. How could, in the view of the Special Rapporteur, her work be linked more closely to the efforts by the States parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as well as the Council of Europe?

FARIS AL-ANI (Iraq) thanked the Independent Expert on minority issues for her reports. Iraq had one of the most diversely religious and ethnic societies in the world. The people in the country had suffered enormously as a result of terrorist groups, which in this context favoured civil war. However, with the success of the rule of law, the Government of Iraq had been able to confront those challenges. The Special Rapporteur closely followed the violations of minority rights in Iraq. The region of Kurdistan had now become a safe haven for people fleeing to lead a normal life. There was now a feeling of citizenship in the country.

CHOMPOONUTE NAKORNTHAP (Thailand) said the lack of accurate and reliable data on trafficking, which was exacerbated by its clandestine nature, made it difficult to obtain a clear picture of the scope and scale of the problem. The data collection capability of States and information-sharing among States should be further strengthened and enhanced in order to combat trafficking at all levels. There was a need for national legal and

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policy frameworks to comprehensively address trafficking in persons: good legislation, however, was only a first step, it needed to be further coupled by effective implementation and enforcement, which required political will and adequate resources. Addressing the root causes of human trafficking would be the key to reaching a long-term and sustainable solution to the problem.

MAMMAD TALIBOV (Azerbaijan) said that Azerbaijan welcomed the efforts of the African Union to produce a Convention on internal displacement which, if adopted, would be the first internationally binding document on internally displaced persons. Such a document could contribute to the recognition of the Guiding Principles on internal displacement all over the world. Fully acknowledging its primary responsibility in addressing internally displaced persons related issues, the Government of Azerbaijan had strengthened its strides to improve housing and living condition of internally displaced persons. During the last several years, 61 settlements had been built for internally displaced persons. Only in 2008, \$ 183 million had been allocated by the Government for this purpose. The issue of prevention of genocide was of special importance to Azerbaijan, whose population on several occasions in the course of the last century, most recently in the early nineties, had been subjected to the horrendous practice of ethnic cleansing that amounted to genocide. Particular attention should be paid to exploration of the occurrence of possible elements of the crime of genocide such as ethnic cleansing, forced displacement of population, etc.

JOAQUIM A.M.L. DA FONSECA (Timor-Leste) welcomed the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, and thanked him for his observations and recommendations. Timor-Leste informed the Council that between December 2008 when Mr. Kalin visited the country and today, several developments had occurred in connection to the voluntary return of internally displaced persons. Additional camps had been closed voluntarily, leaving only four camps, with approximately 1,371 families of internally displaced persons. The process was underway for the voluntary closure of those remaining camps before the second quarter of this year. The Government had also put in place new infrastructure projects, including in the internally displaced persons affected communities, both who had been affected in the past as well as those receiving the returning internally displaced persons. More social schemes had also been launched to address the necessities of vulnerable citizens, both within and outside the context of displacement.

INGIBJORD DAVIDSDOTTIR (Iceland) said trafficking was a massive global problem and one of the fastest growing criminal activities in the world, which the international community needed to combat in a comprehensive and concerted manner. In varying degrees and circumstances, men, women and children all over the world were victims of what had become a modern day slave trade. The magnitude of the problem was horrendous. The Icelandic Government was fully committed to doing its utmost to combat trafficking in human beings and to prevent and reduce gender-based violence, and a National Action Plan was currently being drafted to combat trafficking in human beings, and this would significantly reinforce coordination of actions by relevant agencies against trafficking, including measures to protect victims.

AMANDA M. GRUNDINSKAS (Israel) said that the Special Rapporteur had aptly stated that human trafficking was a grave violation of human rights, and as part of the Palermo Protocol, and Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Israel had undergone extensive legislative reform to eradicate such violations on its territory. Deterrents for perpetrators included extensive prison sentences for convictions, economic tools such as forfeiture funds, and the extraterritorial application of jurisdiction for Israeli citizens committing such crimes abroad. Israel said that attention had also been paid to rehabilitation efforts. It was underlined that human trafficking took place within many borders and was also a phenomenon that crossed borders. Some States under review during the fourth Universal Periodic Review had rejected Israel's recommendations to develop and implement national anti-trafficking legislation. Israel sincerely hoped that those countries rethought their positions on the matter.

PATRICK RITTER (Liechtenstein) thanked the four experts for their inspiring reports and valuable presentations. In the report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Ms. Ezeilo stated that trafficking within national borders was a large-scale phenomenon. In that regard, Liechtenstein asked how she intended to address the situation of trafficked persons that were lured or forced into exploitation without crossing an international border.

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Liechtenstein was of the view that work in this area would perfectly fit into the Special Rapporteur's intention to add further value to the activities undertaken by her predecessor. A special focus on advocacy for the protection of human rights of the victims of domestic trafficking would also be in line with the findings of the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons that had recently been published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Additionally, according to the UNODC report, the data collected showed that domestic trafficking had been detected in at least 32 countries among those where information was available, and that in some countries, domestic trafficking was a major issue.

HENRY WINTER (Australia) said the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress And Punish Trafficking in Persons of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was the primary instrument in the area of trafficking of persons. The Special Rapporteur's focus on systematic and coordinated data collection and management on all forms of trafficking was supported. Australia did not, however, support the creation of a global action plan, believing that that would duplicate existing measures and increase onerous reporting requirements, which would divert resources from current anti-trafficking activities.

EUGENY LAZAREV (Belarus) said, regarding human trafficking, that the Special Rapporteur had to direct her attention towards the demand for human trafficking. A global plan of action was a good way to move; such a global plan was currently under way in collaboration with Belarus. Such an effort had to be a coordinated effort in order to meet the constant challenge of combating human trafficking. Belarus noted that there needed to be more active action in human rights terms. The visit of the Special Rapporteur was an excellent means to coordinate efforts in this field. Belarus ensured the Special Rapporteur of its best cooperation.

OBAID SALEM SAEED AL ZAABI (United Arab Emirates) said the United Arab Emirates was well aware of the gravity of the phenomenon of trafficking in persons and as such was ready to cooperate at both the national and international levels. The Government had adopted Law 51, which provided for the establishment of a National Committee on Trafficking in Persons. The National Committee held workshops in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration in order to train governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in this field. The Government had also adopted the Convention on Combating Transnational Organized Crime, and ratified the Optional Protocol on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. In order to take further measures on trafficking in persons, the Government had funded the activities of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime with \$15 million. The Government was determined in its war on trafficking in persons to continue its efforts on all fronts, and had developed all national legislation to be consistent with all international conventions at all levels, as well as providing assistance to victims.

RAJIVA WIJESINHA (Sri Lanka) expressed gratitude to the Representative of the Secretary-General on the rights of the internally displaced, both for his assistance with regard to finding durable solutions for the long-term displaced and for his advice with regard to current problems. He had noted that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were preventing civilians from getting away and instead held them as human shields. The Special Representative had expressed some concerns about the right of the internally displaced to freedom of movement. However, he should also recognize the appalling nature of suicide bombing, and the need for security screenings in that regard. Sri Lanka regretted the inadequate nature of some of the camps set up for those earlier displaced and was determined, even if United Nations agencies thought that Sri Lanka was exceeding the limits placed on relief provisions, to provide better conditions for the recently displaced.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh) thanked the Special Rapporteur for providing a global perspective of the human trafficking phenomenon and also for elaborating the trends and present manifestations of trafficking. That had been pertinent, as almost all States in the world were affected by that scourge, either as a source, transit or destination country. Men, women and children, all were victims. As the report indicated, most of the trafficked persons were women and children and the flow was from the developing countries to the developed world, often for sexual exploitation. Despite efforts by many States, including Bangladesh, the problem continued to persist at an alarming level. In the absence of a global effort, the situation was not improving.

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CHRISTOFFER BERG (Sweden) said Sweden aligned itself with the statement made by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. The acute humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka and the serious situation for the approximately 200,000 persons displaced in Vanni was of grave concern to Sweden. Sweden noted that the report corroborated those concerns and was pleased that Mr. Kalin had had a constructive dialogue with the Government of Sri Lanka. In the report, four universal elements were cited as essential in order to enable the internally displaced to return to normal life and for the reconstruction of a post-conflict country. The second of those was to ensure the safety of returnees or relocated persons. Sweden asked, how did the Special Rapporteur perceive that to be dealt with in the case of Sri Lanka, and was it something he intended to bring up in his dialogue with the Government? Also, in light of a future possible peace process in Sri Lanka, how could that be ensured?

SILVIA ESCOBAR (Spain) said trafficking in persons was a lucrative pastime of criminal organizations. The International Labour Organization believed that millions of people were enslaved every year. It was important, as the Representative of the Secretary-General had said, for the judicial systems of countries to reflect the gravity of the crime. It was also necessary to improve coordination to fight the trafficking in persons, and to protect the victims. Spain had implemented a National Action Plan against trafficking, the formulation of which civil society had participated in. Trafficking in human persons for sexual exploitation was one of the cruellest manifestations of that phenomenon. Not only should there be an improved coordination between countries, but also between international organizations.

ALPHONSE KAYITAYIRE (Rwanda) said that the presentation of the report by the Special Adviser on Genocide was taking place while Rwanda and the whole world was preparing for the fifteenth commemoration of the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. In that context, Rwanda was particularly thinking of the prevention of genocide in the future. After the Holocaust, the adoption of a Convention of 1948 on the prevention of genocide had as an objective the prevention of genocide worldwide. That instrument had, however, not prevented a new genocide, 46 years later, which had as an objective the extermination of Tutsi in Rwanda. After the Holocaust and the genocide on the Tutsis, the United Nations and the international community needed to take measures to prevent such crimes. Rwanda urged the Human Rights Council to fight any kind of negation and revision in order to prevent such a crime in the future.

KHADIJA R. MASRI, of the African Union, thanked the Special Representative, Mr. Kalin, for his report and presentation. The African Union welcomed his contribution to work done to assist internally displaced persons in Africa in particular. The assistance provided to internally displaced persons was based on a legal principle where the problem of internally displaced persons was present. The African Union said that with regard to the question of internally displaced persons, the continent of Africa was particularly limited in terms of financial and technical resources, and as such urged for more assistance from the international community in that context. Africa had been the generous host of internally displaced persons for nearby countries. The African Union would continue to ensure appropriate conditions and minimum access to services for internally displaced persons, and called on States to include the needs of those internally displaced in the negotiation of treaties and agreements. The report of Special Representative of the Secretary-General focused on the national dimension; however the African Union stressed that it was important to note a more global dimension in order for responsibilities to be shared.

LI QIAO (China) thanked the Special Rapporteur and the Independent Expert for their reports and valuable presentations. The education of minorities was the main means to reduce poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of China for nearly 10 years had adopted measures to increase education opportunities for minorities. China appreciated the cooperation between the Independent Expert, United Nations bodies and regional and international organizations in that context. China hoped that more attention would be paid to the rights and needs of minority groups in future reports. On trafficking in persons, China stressed that that threatened the right to life for the victims of those crimes. Furthermore, organized crime in human trafficking deserved the international community's attention. China would continue to combat and eradicate that scourge.

LAURA CALLAGHAN-PACE (United Kingdom) thanked the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons for his insightful report, and supported the mandate and the work carried out by various organizations and regional initiatives to protect the human rights of internally displaced persons around

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the world. There was also concern for the internally displaced in Sri Lanka, and the United Kingdom reiterated the call of the Representative on all parties of the conflict to scrupulously respect international humanitarian law. The Sri Lankan Government should adequately address the needs of the internally displaced persons created as a result of the recent military hostilities. The Government of Colombia was also encouraged to follow up on the suggestion to strengthen its early warning system including through allocation of sufficient resources.

GEORGI AVRAMCHEV (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said the report of the Independent Expert on minority issues presented in a comprehensive, objective and unbiased manner the situation of minorities in Greece. It reflected the facts and findings presented by the Greek citizens who had a different ethnic identity than the majority population, including the Macedonian. The presented facts indicated a long-term strong assimilation policy and denial by the Greek authorities of the existence of a Macedonian ethnic minority, suppression of any use of the language and cultural activities, and harsh treatment of those identifying as ethnic Macedonians. The conclusions and recommendations in the report were fully supported. Greece should live up to its international obligations and transpose them into national legislation and practice. The report should serve as an excellent guide to the Government in ensuring the protection of rights for all those who identified themselves as belonging to the national minorities, including the right to self-identification, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

ALVARO AYALA (Colombia) welcomed the work of the Special Representative on internally displaced persons. In follow-up to his visit in 2008, Colombia commented on measures that had been taken. Colombia was committed to eradicate this phenomenon. The Guiding Principles had been integrated in Colombian legislation. Furthermore, the instruments to respond to the situation had been improved. Also, \$500 million had been devoted to develop prevention and resettlement programme in urban areas. Those actions were simply to complement measures that had been already instituted.

GAGIK HOVHANNISYAN (Armenia) welcomed the report of the Special Adviser on the prevention of Genocide, and expressed its hope that the interactive dialogue would result in more concrete steps and means to further strengthen the United Nations system in developing early warning mechanisms to react effectively to those situations that could lead to genocide. The principles of the prevention of genocide and responsibility to protect were the key principles that lay at the core of that joint struggle, and the United Nations system could demonstrate its ability to act on time in preventing crimes against humanity. Armenia appreciated the enormous work done in strengthening the capacities of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General in his work. In particular, Armenia said that by developing the 8-point Framework of Analysis which would help to determine situations that might lead to genocide, the Office of the Special Adviser had made significant steps in identifying those universally accepted guiding principles that could serve as a early warning signs for the situations that could lead to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

HAMZA AHMED (Sudan), commenting on the situation in Darfur, said that the Sudanese Government did not have a negative attitude towards humanitarian organizations working in Sudan. It should be underlined that 80 per cent of all humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons was provided by the Government. The Government was determined to provide all possible assistance to internally displaced persons in Darfur. In the camps for the internally displaced, the Government had ensured that all Sudanese agencies continued to give assistance in health and food and had stepped up its coverage. Regarding the International Criminal Court, Sudan asked whether it was possible that humanitarian action should include incitement to insult and the collection of secret service information?

NIXON N. NTIMBWA (Tanzania) said trafficking was a complex phenomenon made even more insidious by its clandestine nature. In order to develop an understanding of the phenomenon, it was necessary to consider the operation of, and interaction between, a range of factors that combined to enable individuals and organizations to traffic vulnerable people through the use of deception, coercion, and exploitation. These factors could be structural and proximate. Whereas structural factors included issues of economic deprivation, market downturns, the effects of globalisation, and others, proximate factors included lax national and international law regimes, poor law enforcement, corruption, organised crime entrepreneurship and weak education campaigns. An understanding of these factors was vital for addressing the problem at both the site of origin and the destination, as well as at the

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international level. Tanzania hoped the international community would work with Tanzania in combating the scourge of trafficking in persons.

ASLIGUL UGDUL (Turkey) said the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide was the fundamental instrument at the disposal of the international community in this regard, and should be a guide, forming the general framework for efforts to establish early warning mechanisms to prevent genocide. Despite a robust human rights framework, there continued to be massive violations which could even escalate into the utmost crime. The prevention of genocide could only be ensured by making the correct assessment of signs of a grave escalation. It was imperative to distinguish subjective considerations from those situations which did carry objective and concrete elements of the crime of genocide. Every United Nations effort to be made and mechanisms to be eventually developed under this particular heading of "prevention of genocide" should be guided by the terms of the Convention. Turkey hoped that Greece would address the problems in the report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, including freedom of religion, association, education and identity.

JANIS MAZEIKS (Latvia) welcomed the Independent Expert on minority issues' efforts to mainstream minority issues in the United Nations system and wide consultations with the United Nations agencies and bodies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme. Latvia asked Ms. McDougall to share her views about the practical cooperation between the distinguished mandate holder and relevant treaty bodies, as well as other mandate holders in applying a gender perspective. Minorities as a vulnerable group could be particularly exposed to ethnically motivated violence and scapegoating for economic problems facing societies given the current global economic crisis. At such times it was particularly important to ensure the delicate balance between full respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities and their full inclusion in the life of society. In this respect Latvia considered that the First Forum on Minority Issues had provided useful insight on how to ensure such a balance in the field of education.

JOHN KAUFMAN (Canada) said that the international community agreed that the prevention of genocide was vital. And yet when time came for action they often responded too slowly. They wrung their hands after the fact. But the international community was working to improve their response. The means by which they sought change was the principle of the responsibility to protect. Governments bore the primary responsibility to protect their own populations. Canada agreed on this. However the international community also had a role when States failed to meet this responsibility. This Canada also agreed on too. Canada also agreed that understanding the early warning signs of genocide was of vital importance.

PETER GUSCHELBAUER (Austria) thanked all the mandate-holders for their excellent work in fulfilling their mandates. Austria expressed their appreciation to Mr. Kalin for his very interesting report and extensive information given on his country mission and working visits. In Mr. Kalin's report he took a closer look at the relationship between internal displacement and peace processes. Austria was in agreement that resolving internal displacement was inextricably linked with the achievement of lasting peace and that the protection of internally displaced persons should constitute a part of peace agreements. Austria asked Mr. Kalin what could be a meaningful contribution of the Human Rights Council in this regard? The report also placed increased emphasis on the human rights protection of persons displaced by natural disasters, in particular in the context of climate change. Austria also noted that Mr. Kalin noted in his report the lack of criteria and normative gaps in this regard. In this context, Austria asked if he could explain this in more detail as well as his concept of a rights-based approach in the design of national disaster mitigation and management process?

MARK C. STORELLA (United States) said that last year the Genocide Convention turned sixty. This six-decade milestone was cause for both celebration and reflection. The international community must reaffirm and strengthen its commitment to ending genocide, while also admitting soberly that its collective efforts had fallen short. A crime that breathed such a heavy toll on all of humanity had no place in a civilized world and they must work fastidiously to eradicate it. The Special Adviser had rightly focused on the critical role that early warning signs played in preventing genocide. International attention to these signs was the front line in prevention. The United States agreed on the importance of properly linking individual warning signs to each other.

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MURIEL BERSET (Switzerland) noted that with regard to the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, specifically since his last visit to Sri Lanka, the humanitarian situation in the north of the island had deteriorated significantly. In addition to the problems, resumed control of virtually the entire territory by the Government now raised the issue of resettlement and integration of displaced persons; this was a major challenge to bring about peace and reconciliation in the country. In this regard Switzerland asked what support did the Special Representative expect from various actors in the country and from the internal community given those developments? Switzerland appreciated the durable solutions proposed for internally displaced persons who were also from regions such as Georgia and Chad for example. Switzerland appreciated the approach to develop joint cooperation in the promotion and development of peace, and asked what specific measures were proposed for those actors for the sustainable development of internally displaced persons?

On the Special Rapporteur's report on trafficking in persons, Switzerland noted with particular satisfaction that she believed that her mandate should include labour exploitation, which affected many men and boys. The Government of Switzerland asked how did she intend to further delve into this issue, and what timeline was envisaged for this?

HYE RAN CHUN (Republic of Korea) said that the Republic of Korea shared the ongoing concerns regarding internally displaced persons. Since lasting peace could not be achieved without resolving the issue of internally displaced persons, States should pay more attention to this issue. The Republic of Korea wanted to know from Mr. Kalin how were the specific needs of women and children incorporated into the Manual? The Republic of Korea was of the view that assisting communities receiving returning internally displaced persons was most crucial. It would appreciate Mr. Kalin's view on other possible means to assist those communities. The Republic of Korea was committed to fight climate change, since internal displacement caused by climate change could only be addressed through coordinated efforts by the international community.

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