

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

STATEMENT

BY

**H.E. Ms. RITA KIEBER-BECK,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN**

GENEVA, 19 JUNE 2006

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, we are witnessing a historic opportunity. The creation of the Human Rights Council is so far the most significant result flowing from the Summit meeting past September in New York. There was general dissatisfaction with the way the Commission on Human Rights was conducting its work which was of such essential importance to the overall work of the United Nations. This Council gives us the chance, a unique chance indeed, to change our discourse and place the human rights work on a more solid and more effective basis. The expectations are thus very high. We share those expectations, but are also under no illusions: The Commission will not go down in the history books as the failure that some presented it to be. Much rather it was a body of on overall proud and impressive record whose time had come to an end due to political problems. These problems do persist and have not vanished through the institutional change we were able to agree on in New York. We believe that the following changes are necessary, if we are indeed to bring about the fresh start that we are all looking for.

Strong emphasis on dialogue

Our human rights discourse must be based on genuine dialogue. The foundation of such a dialogue is firmly established:

- Universality of all human rights
- Interconnected and interdependent nature of all human rights
- All human rights must be given the same emphasis
- Implementation of international standards is first and foremost an obligation of States, while the universal promotion and protection is a legitimate concern of the international community as a whole.

This means that we have to engage with each other in order to enhance the implementation of human rights standards worldwide. And that the Council must be able to respond to human rights crises worldwide in an effective and credible manner.

Focus on implementation

The implementation of the existing human rights standards must be at the forefront of the activities of the Council. Reality is that there are very high human rights standards on paper, and that their application is very poor. If only the standards set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is binding on all States, were applied worldwide, the numerous reports on the global situation on human rights would look much different. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has rightly launched the discussion on the “implementation gap”, and the Council must take up this challenge.

Focus on capacity-building

Capacity-building and technical assistance must be a core activity of the new Council: Non-implementation of human rights standards can be due either to the unwillingness or inability of States to implement agreed standards. Every State that lacks the capacity for implementation should be assisted by the United Nations, but also other bodies such as regional organizations. This will greatly contribute to the implementation of human rights standards worldwide and also help identify those States that are not willing to implement those standards.

Meaningful and effective division of work

The standing of Geneva as the center for the human rights work of the United Nations is further emphasized through the creation of the Human Rights Council. We welcome this emphasis, but also bear in mind that the General Assembly in New York will continue to be engaged in human rights agenda as well. The new Council must therefore be based on a clear division of work between the two bodies. The very significant amount of overlap in the past both diluted focus and was a wasteful use of resources, both human and financial. This is to be avoided under all circumstances. The work of the General Assembly can be reduced and better focused, in particular on work in the area of standard-setting. This would further emphasize the focus of the Council's work on implementation and provide for the necessary universal participation in the further development of international human rights standards.

Like other States, we had expressed the view that the Human Rights Council should be a standing body – meaning that it should be a body that can be convened at any time and take up any issue whenever needed. While this proved impossible to achieve for the time-being, it was nevertheless possible to carve out more meeting time for the Council and to have it spread out all over the year. We favour an agenda that is generic, i.e. not loaded with specific issues such as the consideration of particular human rights or situations in particular parts of the world. An agenda that is fundamentally different from the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights is essential to make the Council a body that is truly different and offers a possibility for a genuine new start in the human rights discourse.

With this general vision in mind, we believe that the Council should achieve the following during its June session

1. It should **set the right tone** for the future of human rights work. This High-level segment will hopefully create the public attention this body deserves and convey the message of a general political will to provide the human rights discussion with a new start;
2. We must establish **clear processes, including deadlines**, on all matters that are yet to be resolved, such as the Universal Periodic Review and the Review of Special Procedures.o

3. This session must result in a **simple, generic agenda** which allows for discussion of all human rights issues at future sessions, without placing unnecessary emphasis on any particular subject matter which would not sit well with the goal of sending the Council off to a new start. We strongly believe that an agenda that is fundamentally different from the one of the Commission is essential in order to leave the past behind.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate all those States which have been chosen to serve as members of the first Human Rights Council. We expect that they will live up to their special responsibility, because – clearly – the first years of the Council will be decisive in shaping its future. We also expect that non-members have on all matters of content the same rights and thus an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the work of the Council. We certainly intend to do so and will continue to be an active and independent voice on human rights matters.

I thank you.