



Oral statement

Organisational session for the 4th cycle of the Human Rights Council

19 June 2009

Mr President,

First of all, the International Service for Human Rights would like to congratulate you on your election as the new President of the Council. We look forward to working with you over the next year and wish you much success in guiding the Council's work.

We have followed the Council's development, its challenges and advances over the last three years. In looking ahead to this fourth cycle we wish to highlight some key issues for its success based on the experiences of the last year.

The Human Rights Council was established to improve upon the work of the Commission. While we understand the evolutionary nature of this process, and recognise certain achievements, this Council has not yet reached this goal. To reach this goal, it has to improve its work in many areas. We wish to highlight three such areas.

First, expertise. The Council needs to do more to respect the system of independent human rights expertise it has set up. This means respecting the independence of the special procedures without intimidation of or threats to mandate holders. The resolution passed at the 11th session sends a wrong signal in this regard and we look forward to a more constructive approach to special procedures by all States. We urge all States to uphold and defend the integrity of the special procedures system. This starts, but does not end, with establishing a respectful dialogue with mandate holders, and must include serious reflection and action on their recommendations. Respecting human rights expertise also means ensuring meaningful space for input by NGOs in the Council's work including in the UPR.

Second, meaningful action. The Council is mandated to address all violations of human rights wherever they occur. The use of no-action motions runs counter to this. Arguments about non-intervention and the sovereignty of States are also incompatible with the Council's mandate. It is a long agreed principle of international law that the promotion and protection of human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community. The challenge for the Council is to make that principle an operational reality in its work that will be felt by human rights defenders and victims around the world.

Finally, Mr President, respect. The Council needs to do more to improve the tone of its debates and ensure constructive dialogue on any issue. We expect the Council to be the forum for respectful dialogue and cooperation that many have heralded it to be. The Council and its members and observers must at all times uphold a respectful exchange of views. Statements demeaning or incriminating any person or NGO bringing human rights concerns to the attention of this body should simply not be tolerated.

Mr President, we congratulate the Council on its third birthday. My son too will be three years old soon. And he walks and talks. It is time that the Human Rights Council started walking.