



International Service for Human Rights

Oral statement Item 5

17 September 2008

Mr President,

The first session of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee demonstrated this new mechanism's potential to act as the independent expert body that it was designed to be. However, at the same time, it exposed some areas of potential concern.

First of all, we welcome the Advisory Committee's openness to the participation of NGOs. Throughout its first session, the Advisory Committee actively solicited input from NGOs and responded directly to their concerns. While NGOs should take advantage of this opportunity and actively engage with the Advisory Committee, we hope that the Advisory Committee will in turn maintain and enhance the involvement of NGOs in its work. We support the Advisory Committee's proposal for making its work more accessible through the preparation of summary records of its meetings and the use of webcasting.

We also welcome the sense of initiative already displayed by the Advisory Committee. In several cases, the Advisory Committee interpreted broadly the requests made to it by the Council and volunteered itself for further action. We hope that this trend will continue beyond the inaugural session and that the Council will create the necessary conditions for the Advisory Committee to develop its work. In this regard, we encourage the Council to positively consider the recommendations that have so far been made to it by the Advisory Committee.

On a less positive note, we are concerned by the repeated attempt of some States to further narrow the Advisory Committee's already limited mandate. The Advisory Committee is indeed subsidiary to the Council, but it is also meant to be an independent expert body. Having created it in the first place, States should, at the very least, allow it to operate as such.

As the Council continues to improve the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of its work, it is imperative that this commitment be reflected, among others, in its own subsidiary bodies. In this respect, the severe under-representation of women in the Advisory Committee, where they constitute less than a quarter of the

membership, undermines the Council's stated objective to integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of its work. The ISHR urges States to correct, at the earliest opportunity, the severe under-representation of women on the Advisory Committee.

The extent to which this new body can meaningfully contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights ultimately rests with the Council. The ISHR hopes that the Advisory Committee will live up to the expectations and implement its mandate as a truly independent body, providing concrete and substantive expert guidance to the Human Rights Council.

Thank you.