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## **HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL HEARS PRESENTATION BY SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

Concludes General Debate Welcoming New High Commissioner for Human Rights  
9 September 2008

The Human Rights Council this morning heard a presentation from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict after concluding its general debate with the new High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, said the changing nature of warfare, with less protection for civilian lives, represented the main challenge the world faced for children and armed conflict, cases in point being Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and countries facing terrorism. It was the duty of the Council to make clear that rules of engagement had to be respected and full protection accorded to civilians, particularly children. It was important that the Council dealt comprehensively with the issue of non-state actors and related issues of accountability and impunity. The Council also needed to deal with State tolerances of non-State actors and their activities, while States needed to facilitate the dialogue with them. There were 16 persistent violators who had continued to defy the Council and had been listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report for using and recruiting children. The Council had been urged during the previous debate on this topic to move forward and to set up a mechanism for determining targeted measures against these violators.

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The Council also concluded its general debate in welcome of Navi Pillay, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, who addressed the opening meeting of the Council on 8 September. In the general debate, States warmly welcomed and congratulated the new High Commissioner for Human Rights.

### **Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict**

RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, welcomed Navi Pillay as the new High Commissioner for Human Rights. She noted an increase in the intensity of armed conflicts around the world since her last report to the Council, and a growing sense of despair in situations of protracted conflict. Success had been registered too, in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The changing nature of warfare, with less protection for civilian lives, represented the main challenge the world faced for children and armed conflict, cases in point being Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and countries facing a terror problem. Children were being recruited by insurgent groups, used as suicide bombers, kept in military detention without judicial protection, while schools were being attacked and girl-children suffered particular brutality. Humanitarian space had been increasingly politicised and lines between humanitarian and military work blurred, while the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law - the separation of civilian from combatant - were breached. It was the duty of the Council to make clear that rules of engagement had to be respected and full protection accorded to civilians, particularly children.

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### **General Debate with the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

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ASADOLLAH ESHRAGH JAHROMI (Iran) congratulated the President on his election and extended a warm welcome and sincere congratulations to the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided an ample opportunity to assess the achievements and shortcomings, with a view to address challenges in a comprehensive manner. While celebrating this anniversary, the plight of the Palestinian people should not be forgotten. Iran considered the Universal Periodic Review as the innovative mechanism of the Human Rights Council and an appropriate tool to address human rights situations globally. Last year Iran hosted a Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on human rights and cultural diversity, in which Member States renewed their commitment to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. This meeting also provided a platform to lay greater emphasis on the importance of respect for culture as one of the fundamental human rights and explored all avenues for further enrichment of the universality of human rights. The international community needed to take concrete measures to realize, inter alia, the right to development, eradicate poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, injustice, occupation and aggression.

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HILLEL NEUER, of United Nations Watch, extended warm greetings to the new High Commissioner for Human Rights. They eagerly looked forward to working in cooperation with the High Commissioner to fulfil the human rights principles and guarantees of the United Nations Charter and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in these common causes. United Nations Watch joined in the statements made by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Egypt on behalf of the African Group, and Cuba for the Non-Aligned Movement. They urged the need to look at the root cause, which was the attempt by certain States to misuse the language and terminology of the anti-racism cause for political ends. The High Commissioner praised the Abuja Conference as productive; however its outcome declaration breached the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by criticizing free speech, in paragraph 13, and breached the non-selectivity principle by singling out the Palestinian situation, in paragraph 32.

1Joint statement: International Service for Human Rights; Franciscans International; Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers); Association for the Prevention of Torture; and Baha'i International Community.

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HRC08087E

