



Press Release

15 April 2002

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: MARY ROBINSON SUBMITS STATUS REPORT ON PLANNED MISSION TO MIDDLE EAST

Commission on Human Rights
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15 April 2002
Afternoon

Debate on Indigenous Issues and Civil and Political Rights Continues

High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson this afternoon presented to the Commission on Human Rights a status report on her planned visiting mission to the occupied Palestinian territories. She said that since the resolution was adopted, violence had escalated even further and there had been more suicide-bombings and further destruction and loss of life in the territories.

Mrs. Robinson noted that efforts were underway to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground and to relaunch a peace process. She stressed that the peace process must be based on human rights and humanitarian law. She also underlined that serious problems of human rights violations still had to be addressed. The tragic killings of Palestinians and Israelis must be brought to an end and she believed that the visiting mission could play a preliminary role in that regard. She repeated the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the United Nations could not be neutral in the face of great moral challenges.

The High Commissioner recalled that the resolution on the visiting mission to investigate the human rights situation in the area had been adopted by the Commission on Friday 5 April, 2002. The rapid deterioration of the situation and the escalation of violence in the occupied territories had been the reason behind the resolution. The mission had not been able to travel immediately to the area as mandated.

The Chairperson of the Commission, Krzysztof Jakubowski, said that there was wide spread support in the Commission for the mission. A representative of Palestine said that since the Commission had adopted the resolution, many developments had taken place. Even more serious and horrendous crimes had been committed, including the massacre of the Jenin camp which had led to over 500 deaths, as well as injuries and disappearances. Other camps had also been under military siege and had been declared closed military zones -- exactly in the same manner as the Jenin camp before the massacre. It was hoped that the High Commissioner would do her utmost to reach the occupied territories to rescue the Palestinian people, even though Israel was not allowing her visit.

A representative of Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, proposed that the Commission take immediate and urgent action and expressed its' deep dismay that its resolution on the visiting mission had not been implemented even though the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories had deteriorated due to the absence of a positive response from the occupying power. He urged the Commission to call for the immediate implementation of its resolution 2002/1 and to urge the High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently report to the Commission on the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory on the basis of authentic reports from all concerned organizations present in the Territories.

Also this afternoon, the Commission concluded its debate on indigenous issues. Several non-governmental organizations stressed that the progress towards the completion of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was far too slow and that the Working Group had been stalled. There was a lack of willingness of certain States to accept the collective rights of indigenous peoples and their right to self-determination, they said. And the Commission continued its consideration of civil and political rights, hearing from a number of non-governmental organizations and Cuba. The Commission was addressed by the representatives of Canada, Chile (on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries), Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Norway (on behalf of the Nordic countries), Australia, Spain (on behalf of the European Union), Algeria, China, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria (on behalf of the African Group) et Switzerland.

The following non-governmental organizations addressed the Commission this afternoon: Centro de Estudios Europeos (on behalf of Movimiento Cubano por la Paz y la Soberanía de los Pueblos, Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the National Union of Jurists of Cuba), Comision Juridica para el Autodesarrollo de los Pueblos Originarios Andinos "Capaj", International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, International Federation of Free Journalists, International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, International Association for Religious Freedom (on behalf of Interfaith International, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women and Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University), and International Education Development (on behalf of Indigenous World Association).

A representative of Azerbaijan exercised his right of reply.

The Commission will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Tuesday to take action on the proposal of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and to continue its consideration of civil and political rights.

Status Report by High Commissioner for Human Rights and Statements in Response to it

MARY ROBINSON, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, presenting a status report on the visiting mission to the occupied territories, said that the rapid deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories had been behind the Commission's resolution 2002/1 to send a visiting mission to the occupied territories. The mission was constituted after the resolution had been adopted and it was ready to travel to the area. However, it had not been able to travel immediately to the area and return to submit its findings to the Commission. Since the resolution had been adopted, violence had worsened. Two further suicide bombings had been carried out since the constitution of the Mission as well as further destruction and loss of life in the occupied territories. Today, the ICRC was allowed to enter the Jenin Camp and efforts were underway to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Mrs. Robinson said that it was essential for the peace process to be based on human rights foundations. The tragic killings of Palestinians and Israelis must be brought to an end. A process had to be considered and instituted to account for the death and destruction that had taken place. The mission could play a preliminary role in that regard. The international community could not permit the indiscriminate killings of Israeli civilians or the wanton killings of Palestinian civilians and the destruction of the civilian infrastructure to support life. It could not be right to wage war on civilian populations. The international community had a responsibility to protect that it must discharge. The United Nations could not be neutral in the face of great moral challenges.

Mrs. Robinson welcomed the statement made by Yasser Arafat condemning suicide bombings and the killing of innocent civilians, and the decision by the Israeli Supreme Court to hand over the dead bodies of Palestinians to their relatives.

KRZYSZTOF JAKUBOWSKI, Chairperson of the Commission, said that there was still wide support within the Commission for the visiting mission to be led by the High Commissioner, and the Commission should express its solidarity so that the mission could achieve concrete results. NABIL RAMLAWI (Palestine) said the situation on the ground in the occupied territories was so serious that the Commission had been seized to send a visiting mission. The Israel incursion in the Jenin area had led to the massacre of more than 500 Palestinians. Today, other camps had been encircled and it was feared that they would meet the same fate as that of the Jenin camps, which had first been encircled before the massacre. The Israeli military machine continued to gravely harm the Palestinian people. Israel had attempted to stop the visit of the High Commissioner to the region; whatever the situation might be, she and the personalities she had chosen to accompany her should go to the region. Israel did not want anyone from the outside world to see the traces of its crimes. Following its massacre in Jenin, Israel had carried away the corpses in refrigerated trucks and had buried them in unmarked burial places where they would not be found.

Although Mr. Powell was in the region, he was not there to investigate the violations of human rights and the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people. The Secretary of State had refused to visit the Jenin camps. He had seen Mr. Arafat once but he did not stop the massacre. The High Commissioner should go to the region and to occupied Palestine. The mission had to see what was going on in the occupied territories; it should witness the situation so that the world could understand the crimes committed by Israel.

MUNIR AKRAM (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that following the report of the High Commissioner on the status of her proposed mission to the Palestinian occupied territories, a number of delegations from the Organization of the Islamic Conference had been consulted. The consultation had not been as broad as had been wished, it was clear that the Commission could not continue to remain silent and inactive in the face of the evolving and deteriorating situation in the area. Given the circumstances, the members of the OIC believed that the Commission needed to take a further urgent decision. It proposed the following decision for consideration and adoption. First, the Commission must express its deep dismay that its resolution of 5 April had not been implemented, even though the human rights situation in the Palestinian occupied territories had continued to deteriorate due to the absence of a positive response from the occupying power. The Commission must call for the immediate implementation of its resolution 2002/1. The Commission must urge the High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently report to the Commission on the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory on the basis of authentic reports from all concerned organizations present in the occupied territories. This was the proposal and immediate action was urged.

JOAQUIN PEREZ VILLANUEVA Y TOVAR (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU), said that the situation of extraordinary gravity justified the sending of a visiting mission to the occupied territories. All members and observers of the Commission had a common objective - to contribute significantly to improving the situation on the ground. Everyone shared the same objective: to act in a concrete manner to put an end to the constant human rights violations in the territories and the loss of life on both sides. However, the Commission must take into account other initiatives underway at present with respect to which it should avoid interference. With regard to the present proposal by Pakistan, Spain said that the measures taken by the Commissions should not be another opportunity to make sterile declarations. The Commission should avoid maximalist positions and external considerations and should not engage in a battle of words that would do nothing to improve the lives of victims. As always, Spain would study the proposal put forward by Pakistan but expressed its reservations with regard to proposals made during the plenary that did not allow for sufficient time for consultation.

MOHAMED-SALAH DEMBRI (Algeria) said that all those in the Commission would like to see the supreme triumph of human rights wherever it might be. The urgency of the situation in the occupied territories had been expressed by a number of personalities in the world. The world had expressed its fear that the life of Mr. Arafat was being threatened. The elements of genocide had been seen; and a resolution or a Chairperson's statement should clearly reflect the situation. The world had witnessed that Israel had not opened a corridor for humanitarian assistance, such as to the Red Cross and Red Crescent, for the victims. The bodies of Palestinians, killed by Israeli forces, were exposed on the streets of the occupied territories. One should not forget that genocide was being committed in the occupied territories of Palestine.

JUAN ENRIQUE VEGA (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), said GRULAC had not had a meeting to discuss the proposal of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. However, the Group's support for Mrs. Robinson was without any reservation whatsoever. The defense of human rights called for the utmost firmness. It was necessary to assess the extent of deaths since with each discussion there was an increase in victims. Human rights violations could not be seen in terms of quantity. A human rights violation was a human rights violation. The Commission could not only adopt ethical resolutions but also effective resolutions. Looking at the virtue of the mission, it was clear that one needed to ensure immediate compliance. What would happen if compliance was not achieved within the time of this session? What would happen to the responsibility entrusted to Mrs. Robinson? One must make it clear that the Commission did not operate with double standards. A mere debate of repetition was unnecessary, everyone knew the facts. GRULAC would consider the proposal but not only in terms of its ethical value but also its practical value.

MARIE GERVAIS-VIDRICAIRE (Canada) said that as stated in the debate under item 8 on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories

and the special sitting, Canada was deeply concerned about the situation in the occupied territories as well as the terrorist attacks against Israel. Although Canada did not vote in favour of resolution 2002/1, it understood the concern expressed about its non-implementation. Canada did not agree with Pakistan when it said that the Commission could not remain silent in face of the situation in the occupied territories. The Commission had not been silent on the issue. On the contrary, it had devoted extensive time to the question. Now there was an urgent need to complete consideration of other items on the agenda. With regard to the visiting mission, there was a need to take into account other important initiatives, such as the visit by Secretary of State Colin Powell. With regard to the proposal of Pakistan, Canada would like to have it in writing to study it carefully.

LIU XINSHENG (China) said he appreciated the efforts of the High Commissioner in arranging the mission in accordance with resolution 2002/1 of the Commission. China supported the proposal of Pakistan, and would like to see the mission accomplished as soon as possible, due to the urgency of the situation.

ABDULWAHAB ABDULSALAM ATTAR (Saudi Arabia) said his delegation supported the statements made by the representatives of Pakistan and Palestine. As the representative of Algeria had already pointed out, the Commission must assume its responsibilities in the form of support to the High Commissioner. The Commission must ensure that it was credible B which was why it was necessary to take a decision.

W. O. AKINSANYA (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the Group was disappointed and dismayed that the visiting mission had not been able to discharge any of its responsibilities pursuant to Commission resolution 2002/1. There was need for the Commission to move swiftly. Consequently, the Group was in favour of the proposal put forward by Pakistan. The Commission should ensure that the mission was undertaken.

FRANCOIS NORDMANN (Switzerland) said his country had already expressed its position in support of the visiting mission. The High Commissioner needed cooperation in discharging her mission. Her mission could help lessen the suffering of the people in the region.

JUAN ANTONIO FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) said it regretted that it had not yet been possible to conduct the mission due to the lack of cooperation of Israel. The investigation had a multilateral and international mandate which superceded any bilateral investigation. The situation in the occupied territories was intolerable. The bloody massacre in Jenin needed to be investigated. Cuba supported the proposal by Pakistan and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

MUNIR AKRAM (Pakistan) said that as indicated by the Chair, everyone agreed that the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories was unacceptable. Consequently, the Commission should take urgent action. The representative recalled that the Commission could only take decisions. It unfortunately could not transport the High Commissioner to the occupied territories. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was of the view that the Commission should take an immediate decision in view of the gravity of the situation and the clarity of the proposal. This said, the OIC was prepared to respond positively to requests made by several Members to allow more time for consideration but urged that the Commission take action on the proposal tomorrow morning. In this regard, Canada was requested not to invoke the 24 hour rule.

Statements on Indigenous Issues

LAZARO MORA, of Centros de Estudios Europeos, speaking on behalf of Movimiento Cubano por la Paz y la Soberania de los Pueblos, Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the National Union of Jurists of Cuba, said that States continued to ignore rights of indigenous populations, both their rights as peoples and as nations. Indigenous peoples were denied their right to self determination, treaties were flouted, their lands continued to be taken away and they were not given adequate participation on matters of concern to them. The natural resources of indigenous people continued to be looted and systematically exploited and their culture and identity were not respected. There must be an end to impunity of actions committed against indigenous people. The creation of a Permanent Forum could be a step forward in establishing a dialogue between Governments and indigenous people but only if it was recognized by States.

MARCELINO DIAZ DE JESUS, of the Comision Juridica para el Autodesarrollo de los Pueblos Originarios Andinos "Capaj", said that in Mexico there was still a systematic violation of the human rights of indigenous peoples. The good intentions of the international community were not paralleled by Mexico, even though promises had been made by the new Government. The President contradicted himself and could not be taken seriously. A reform had been promised, but no steps towards the realization thereof had been observed. Indigenous people could not wait any longer due to the reprehensible acts that had been taken against them. Mexico had ratified the relevant conventions and therefore had a duty to act accordingly. There had also been several disappearances and executions by the army. How long would this continue and how far would this go?

PELPHINA SAHUREKA, of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, said that an international investigation team from the United Nations should be sent to the Moluccas to urgently examine on the ground the core of the war crimes and crimes against humanity still being perpetrated against the indigenous Moluccan people by the Indonesian forces and their paramilitary troops, the Laskar Jihad and the Laskar Mujahidin. An impartial UN investigation team would immediately see that the grave human insecurity of the indigenous Moluccan people laid in the constant threat of being ousted from their ancestral lands. In three years, there was a complete devastation everywhere, an almost total collapse of the educational system, more than 85 per cent of the economy was ruined; approximately 75 per cent of the Moluccans had been ousted from their ancestral lands. More than 40,000 Moluccans had been killed, more than 100,000 had fled the Moluccas, while nearly the whole population had been internally displaced.

LES MALEZER, of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, said the Commission must express its concern about the indigenous peoples of Australia and the slow progress towards the completion of the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. The Working Group was stalled by the lack of willingness of certain States to accept the collective rights of indigenous peoples and opposition to the right to self-determination. There was no advantage in having a declaration which sought only to state the rights of the indigenous person, as those rights could not and should not be distinguished from the rights of any other person. It was hoped that Australia, in the spirit of maintaining global human rights standards, would clarify its position on the rights of indigenous peoples and the human rights treaties and allow the Racial Discrimination Act to apply to all Australian laws relating to Aboriginal peoples, provide periodic reports and confirm that Australia was fulfilling its obligations under all human rights treaties.

ALGIS TOMAS GENIUSAS, of the International Federation of Free Journalists, said that as reported by UNESCO about half of the 6,000 or so languages spoken in the world were under threat, and at least 3,000 tongues were endangered, seriously endangered or dying in many parts of the world. Many of the languages belonging to indigenous groups had already disappeared. Before the Second World War, ethnic Latvians made up more than three quarters of the country's population, while Russians made only 9%. By 1989, the proportion of ethnic Latvians in their own territory had dropped to slightly more than half. This was the result of a concerted program of "Russification", not to mention the tremendous

population losses that Latvians suffered due to mass deportations to Siberia. Chechen people were paying the heavy price of rapid and ruthless extermination. They had endured the unyielding onslaught of colonial expansionism since the middle of the nineteenth century, but they had never before been subjected to such horrendous suffering and even a threat to their very survival.

WARREN ALLMAND, of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, said that after seven years, the Working Group which was mandated to elaborate a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples had only approved two articles out of 34 in the draft declaration. This year, it approved none. One should remember that the draft declaration was prepared over a period of several years by the Working Group of experts designated by the Subcommission. After more than ten years, the Working Group only had the approval of two articles. The mandate of the group was to complete its work on the draft during the decade for the indigenous peoples to be concluded by the end of 2004. That was a shameful progress.

WAYNE LORD (Canada) said that her country would co-sponsor the annual combined resolution on the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommission. The Permanent Forum had great potential but needed the full support and active participation of States. Canada was pleased to provide support for the holding of a pre-session meeting for the members of the Permanent Forum. Canada highlighted the operative paragraph in this year's resolution which recalled the ECOSOC decision that requested the Secretary-General to seek information from Governments, NGOs, indigenous people's organizations and the United Nations system, as a basis for holding the mandate's review as soon as possible and not later than 2003. Canada also highlighted and reinforced the call for States to support the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Canada would continue to make contributions to both funds.

Canada considered the seventh session of the Working Group a success and believed it had facilitated genuine and substantive dialogue. That being said, one needed to take note of the view of those who were very concerned about the prospects of the Working Group. Some thought that the pace of work was so slow and the process so cumbersome that there was no possibility of completing a Declaration before the end of the Decade. It was imperative that States responded to these concerns by working harder and showing more political will.

JUAN ENRIQUE VEGA (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), said that GRULAC wished to reaffirm and renew its commitment to improving the human rights situation of indigenous people in its own region and throughout the world. Members of GRULAC appealed for a text of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to be approved as soon as possible since existing mechanisms for the protection of the human rights of indigenous people could not function properly without a universally accepted framework that clearly defined the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples. The marginalization, exclusion and discrimination being suffered by indigenous people were not only individual but also collective and related to religion, the administration of matters of collective interest, the settlement of disputes, and non recognition which amounted to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. An important milestone was the creation of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that would be holding its first session in New York in 2002. GRULAC also welcomed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

JAIME ANDRADE (Chile) said that as of 1990, Chile had returned to democratic rule and it had recognized the rights of its indigenous peoples. The development and respect for their culture had also been recognized. The present policy of the Government on indigenous people was based on new relationships. An agreement had been made with the Government in December 1989 with the participation of representatives of indigenous organizations. The agreement had initiated a new relationship and considered the indigenous peoples as valid interlocutors. Since the approval of the legislation on indigenous peoples in 1993, the public policy of Chile had been focusing on the respect of the human rights of the indigenous peoples. That situation had further strengthened the new relationship through the respect of the fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples and the recognition of their identities.

A number of initiatives had been undertaken in the field of acquisition and restitution of lands for the indigenous peoples. A Fund for Indigenous Land had been created, and 100,000 hectares of land had been distributed to them since 1989. Chile had constituted in 2001 a Commission on Truth and New Treatment to further integrate the indigenous people into the society. The Government had ratified ILO Convention No. 169 and it had been given constitutional standard.

FABIAN VALDIVIESO (Ecuador) said the Ecuador Constitution recognized the collective rights of indigenous people and their individual rights. Implementing these laws and rights had been a challenge to the Government. The human rights of the indigenous people were protected on an international level through appropriate human rights mechanisms which had been ratified by Ecuador. The basic norm guiding Ecuador in dealing with the human rights of indigenous people was communication between the Government and society. Dialogue must play a significant role in national legislation and regulation. Mr. Chavez, Chairman of the Working Group, was complimented on his role in the process. It was believed that the Working Group would play an important role on the rights of indigenous people. It was also clear that declarations were not enough, each Government needed to consider the rights and aspirations of indigenous people. Ecuador was fully prepared to continue to contribute to the Fund since the human rights of indigenous people was a priority in the Country.

JUAN PABLO VEGAS TORRES (Peru) said that Peruvian society was multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. The Government was doing its utmost, both at the national and international levels, to promote the development and equal opportunity of indigenous peoples as compared to the rest of the population of the country, while respecting and recognizing their ethnic and cultural identity and their valuable contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of the country. At the national level, the Government had created the Andean and Amazonian Council. This body, which included the participation of recognized indigenous representatives, was charged with guiding and coordinating the Government's policy on indigenous issues and following up on Peru's international commitments in the field. At the international level, Peru actively participated in the work of the Commission on indigenous matters.

ERASMO MARTINEZ (Mexico) said that Mexico was a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nation. On the basis of that constitutional premise, the Government of President Fox had taken measures, including as a priority, the construction of a new relationship between the State and the indigenous peoples who constituted part of the national society. Such a relationship would allow the recognition of the indigenous identities and respect for their cultures and languages, and it was also a means to consolidate the democratic process. Mexico advocated the creation of conditions in which indigenous people could participate in the elaboration of national and international legal frameworks, which would guarantee the free determination of indigenous autonomies, human rights and fundamental freedoms. At present, an important and in-depth debate was going on in Mexico concerning constitutional reform in matters of indigenous peoples.

The National Programme for the Development of Indigenous Peoples 2001-2006 had been adopted by the federal Government after wide

consultation with civil society. It was aimed at promoting the full respect of the cultural diversity of the society; increasing the participation of the indigenous peoples in decision-making processes concerning their own communities; and creating the administrative and legal framework through the constitutional reform. This year, Mexico and Guatemala were sponsoring a resolution supporting the work of the Special Rapporteur on rights of indigenous peoples.

ROALD NAESS (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic Group of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway, said the Nordic countries continued to give the highest priority to the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and firmly believed that the full realization by indigenous peoples of their human rights was indispensable for eliminating racism. The values and diversity of the cultures and the heritage of indigenous people, which contributed to the development of cultural pluralism of society, were fundamental for political and social stability. The goal of the International Decade was to strengthen international cooperation in areas such as human rights, the environment, development and education and health. The activities undertaken so far had served to increase the awareness of human rights problems faced by indigenous peoples.

The Nordic countries were committed to working towards the adoption of a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as one of the main objectives of the Decade. The Working Group was however far from reaching this goal. All parties were urged, in particular Governments and indigenous peoples, to make every effort to demonstrate greater flexibility in the drafting process in order to achieve the necessary progress and bring the negotiations on the draft declaration to a successful conclusion before the end of the Decade in 2004.

PETER HEYWARD (Australia) said that it remained committed to protecting the human rights of indigenous people and recognized the importance of this continuing commitment to the nation's future. The Government recognized that indigenous Australians represented the most disadvantaged group in the Australian community and remained strongly committed to addressing the social and economic disadvantages they faced. Accordingly, spending this year on indigenous-related programmes had been increased to a record level. The goal was to ensure that indigenous people were able to participate fully in the nation's social and economic life, and to achieve practical and lasting reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Australia strongly supported the continuing efforts of the Commission's Working Group to elaborate a draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and recognized the potential of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The advent of the Forum made it vital to ensure that duplication of UN efforts on indigenous issues was avoided.

Statements on Civil and Political Rights

JUAN ANTONIO FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) recalled that last Thursday, 11 April, there was a coup d'etat in Venezuela against the democratic and constitutional elected authorities. The episode started with the violent breaking of democratic institutions in the country, after the coup d'etat of the most reactionary sectors of the national oligarchy in coordination with sectors of the high military and the private media, then the later reestablishment of the democratic and constitutional President Hugo Chavez, thanks to the revolutionary intervention of the Venezuelan people. There were questions about which one should meditate: what was the response of the United States Government, which pretended to defend so much the democratic institutions, before those events? Why did it not urgently use the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was imposed on Latin America by the United States, to restore President Chavez and the rest of the legitimate authorities of the country to their posts? On the contrary, the United States had recognized, de facto, the usurping authorities. The Cuban people honoured the Venezuelan people for their courage and defence of justice and democracy.

Cuba would like to reiterate its concern about the negative tendency perceived in connection with the use of the so-called "war against terrorism" - carried out by the United States as a consequence of the horrible events on 11 September -- for ignoring a long catalogue of dispositions of domestic legislation and rules of international law and international humanitarian law. Cuba reiterated today a dangerous phenomenon, which was not defensible from an ethical perspective and which should be eradicated. But, with the same vehemence, Cuba rejected the approach that in order to fight against this aberrant phenomenon, it was necessary to demolish from top to bottom.

JOHN TAYLOR, of the International Association of Religious Freedom, speaking on behalf of Interfaith International, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, and Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, said a preventative strategy against all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief might be furthered by school education which could "cultivate respect for religions or beliefs, thereby promoting mutual understanding and tolerance" as said by the Special Rapporteur. This was one of the objectives in the final document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination held in November last year. There was a lively debate among educators about ways to learn about religions and from religions in order to strengthen the value of tolerance. Basic ignorance about religions exposed people, young and old, to wrong information and misconceptions which could lead to conflicts. It was stressed that prevention was very important.

KAREN PARKER, of International Educational Development, speaking on behalf of the Indigenous World Association, said that while much attention had been given to the civilian casualties of September 11, far more civilians had been killed by State terrorist regimes. In China, over 1,600 Falun Gong practitioners had been tortured to death in Chinese jails. Thousands more were in jail, forced labour camps and psychiatric hospitals. Sometimes State terrorism was directed at whole areas as in Jammu and Kashmir or against the Kurdish area of Turkey. So called anti-terrorist legislation being adopted in a number of countries cut far too deeply into protected human rights. Indigenous peoples had expressed grave concern that the United States laws could adversely affect their current efforts to clearly define their rights to self-determination. This was especially true in Alaska and Hawaii.

Right of Reply

The Representative of Azerbaijan, referring to the statement made by Armenia in the morning meeting, said that Armenia had violated all international norms when it occupied the territories of Azerbaijan. A number of Azerbaijanis had been taken hostage and they were still being held by Armenia. In addition, a terrorist act had been committed by Armenia against Azerbaijan. The Armenian delegation had said that there were peace negotiations going on between the two countries, however, the discussions were deadlocked.

Related documents:

- [UNCHR adopts resolution](#)
- [E/CN.4/RES/2002/1](#)
- [High Commissioner's statement](#)
- [UNCHR press release \(dated 08.04.02\)](#)
- [UNCHR press release \(dated 09.04.02\)](#)
- [UNHCHR statement](#)
- [UNCHR press release \(dated 17.04.02\)](#)

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