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EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

Regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights

**Report of the Secretary-General on the state of regional arrangements for
the promotion and protection of human rights, submitted in accordance
with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/79***

* In accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/208B, paragraph 8, this document is submitted late so as to include the most up-to-date information possible.

Executive summary

The present report on regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights has been prepared in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/79 of 25 April 2001, and contains information on the action taken pursuant to that resolution. The report focuses on the regional strategies of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the most significant developments since 2001 and should be read in conjunction with the Secretary-General's report on Regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights (A/57/283) presented to the General Assembly at its last session.

In order to maximize the impact of the activities of the United Nations at the national level, the Office of the High Commissioner has been systematically pursuing regional and subregional efforts through a variety of complementary means and methods, in particular by supporting the establishment of regional frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights, adopting a subregional focus wherever appropriate, outposting regional and subregional advisers, concluding cooperative agreements with United Nations agencies and regional institutions, undertaking joint regional projects, and sponsoring or organizing consultations and dialogues.

Introduction

1. In its resolution 2001/79 of 25 April 2001, the Commission on Human Rights requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-ninth session a report on the state of regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights, on concrete proposals and recommendations on ways and means to strengthen cooperation between United Nations and regional arrangements in the field of human rights, and to include therein the results of action taken in pursuance of that resolution. This report is submitted pursuant to that request and should be read in conjunction with the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights (A/57/283).

I. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

2. Progress in protecting and promoting human rights depends primarily on actions taken at the national level - actions that are directly linked to the full application of the provisions of core international human rights treaties. However, in order to maximize the impact at the national level of the activities of the United Nations, OHCHR has been pursuing regional and subregional activities through a variety of complementary means and methods, including, in particular, the following:

- (a) Supporting the establishment of regional frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights;
- (b) Adopting a subregional focus wherever appropriate;
- (c) Outposting regional and subregional advisers; and
- (d) Concluding cooperative agreements with United Nations agencies and regional institutions, undertaking joint regional projects, and sponsoring or organizing consultations and dialogues.

II. REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

A. Africa

3. From 5 to 7 November 2001, OHCHR organized a consultative dialogue at Geneva on the theme "Human rights, the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development", which brought together African governmental representatives, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, academia, subregional economic organizations and human rights experts from the continent and the diaspora. One of the objectives of the dialogue was to support the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the consultative process for the establishment of the African Union on the one hand, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), on the other. The dialogue was organized in close collaboration with the OAU secretariat, the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

4. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/55 A of 1 December 1999, the High Commissioner for Human Rights established, in cooperation with the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, at Yaoundé. Since beginning its operations in March 2001, the Centre has been developing partnerships with the United Nations agencies working in Cameroon and Central Africa, other relevant bilateral and multilateral partners, research institutions and civil society.

5. In August 2002, a six-month work plan was drawn up and coordinated between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Centre. As a follow-up to this cooperation, the Adviser for Democracy had a meeting with ECCAS on the strengthening of ECCAS' capacities on democracy and in the field of peace and security, in December 2002. Regarding democracy, peace and security components, the Centre is developing networks with electoral commissions, Governments and civil society organizations as well as with United Nations agencies in governance programmes.

6. OHCHR has continued to support the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Following the evaluation in March 2002 of the assistance provided to the African Commission since its establishment, OHCHR envisages a new cycle of cooperation.

7. As a follow-up to the African dialogue held at Geneva in November 2001, OHCHR in collaboration with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, organized the second African dialogue at Arusha, Tanzania, from 24 to 26 May 2002, which had as its theme "Promoting justice and reconciliation in Africa: challenges for human rights and development".

8. OHCHR signed a memorandum of understanding with the Economic Commission for Africa in July 2001 and with the Economic Community of Central African States in July 2002.

9. As part of its enhanced efforts at mainstreaming in the field, OHCHR held a Training Workshop on Human Rights Mainstreaming for Southern Africa United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) from 11 to 13 November 2002 in Pretoria, South Africa.

10. OHCHR facilitated a Training Workshop on Human Rights Mainstreaming for Eastern and Central Africa UNCTs from 27 to 29 January 2003 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Participants were drawn from the UNDP-SURF, the economic communities of ECCAS and COMESA, and 14 UNCT human rights focal points, one from each country in the Eastern/Central African subregion.

11. OHCHR organized from 27 to 30 January 2003 a workshop aiming at bringing together government representatives of the five Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa and NGO representatives working in the field of human rights.

B. Arab region

12. OHCHR regional advisers continued to provide advice, upon request, to Member States in the formulation of human rights plans of action, relevant legislation and the establishment of national human rights institutions, and provided technical support and guidance to all

components of civil society in the Arab region in order to improve their institutional and operational capacities and enhance their catalytical role in human rights promotional, awareness and protection activities. Strategic relationships have also developed with United Nations country teams in the region, especially within the framework of rights-based planning and programming, and in the identification, devising and implementation of best practice.

13. In accordance with the Memorandum of Intent (MOI) signed between OHCHR and the League of Arab States (LAS), the two secretariats continued their cooperative approach and agreed to undertake specific activities in the field of human rights. Accordingly, OHCHR is organizing a training course on the United Nations human rights system for staff from the LAS. In accordance with the MOI, the League of Arab States has granted OHCHR in January 2003 an "Observer status" in the Permanent Arab Commission on Human Rights.

14. In the context of the regional project on "Human Rights and Human Development in Arab States", supported by UNDP and OHCHR and implemented by the Arab Organization for Human Rights, a Steering Committee representing the three organizations and an advisory group composed of experts from the region has been established. The first activity under this project, "Human Rights and media", was organized in Cairo in January 2003.

C. Asia and the Pacific

15. Pursuant to the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, the Office of the High Commissioner has been further developing regional cooperation for human rights in Asia and the Pacific. Annual workshops on regional cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights in Asia and the Pacific were organized at Bangkok in 2001 and Beirut in 2002.

16. The Eleventh Workshop on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asian and Pacific Region is being organized in cooperation with the Government of Pakistan, from 25 to 27 February 2003, in Islamabad. A separate report on the outcome of the workshop will be submitted to the Commission at its present session.

17. To assist States to meet their commitments under the Tehran Framework with regard to the development and implementation of national plans of action for the promotion and protection of human rights and the strengthening of national capacities, OHCHR finalized the "Handbook on National Human Rights Plans of Action" in August 2002. This handbook is available on the OHCHR web site at www.ohchr.org.

18. In February 2001, OHCHR concluded a memorandum of intent with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which led to the appointment of a Regional Adviser for Asia-Pacific, located at the Commission's headquarters in Bangkok, and for the strengthening of cooperation with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations in the region. This initiative builds on the experience gained since the convening of the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, which recommended that human rights officers be assigned to regional offices of the United Nations. The representative took up his functions at Bangkok in January 2002.

19. Through the Bangkok-based Regional Adviser for Asia-Pacific, OHCHR is developing closer working relations with and stronger human rights support for ESCAP as well as Governments, United Nations country teams and civil society in the region. A priority is building human rights capacity at the national level and integrating human rights approaches into the work of the United Nations in the region.

D. Europe

20. OHCHR's regional approach in Europe was addressed at the International Conference on Human Rights and Democratization, held at Dubrovnik, Croatia, in October 2001 in partnership with the Government of Croatia, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and OSCE.

21. In July 2002, High Commissioner Mary Robinson addressed the OSCE Permanent Council at Vienna, and in October 2002 the new High Commissioner, Sergio Vieira de Mello, made his first address to the Permanent Council. Mr. Vieira de Mello also attended the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Porto, Portugal, in December 2002.

22. OHCHR continues to coordinate and implement its country activities in consultation with OSCE missions and Council of Europe information centres in the field.

23. The High Commissioner holds regular consultations with the leadership of the European Commission. OHCHR also has numerous funding arrangements with the European Commission in support of its field presences and technical cooperation projects, such as a project on supporting rights-sensitive transitional justice arrangements in post-conflict and post-crisis countries, which was started in June 2002.

E. Latin America and the Caribbean

24. A seminar for Latin American and Caribbean experts was held in Mexico from 1 to 3 July 2002 and was opened by the High Commissioner. The seminar provided a forum for the exchange of ideas on how to move forward in implementing the Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

25. As a step towards developing a specific approach for the English-speaking Caribbean, OHCHR held a consultation with United Nations and other international and regional partners from the region from 28 to 31 May 2002. As a result, OHCHR gained an up-to-date appreciation of the human rights situation in the region and identified the potential and means for further activities specific to the subregion. A workshop on mainstreaming and human rights awareness will be conducted from 10-12 March 2003, it will review the assessment of the programming of the United Nations partners and will adopt a road map for the cooperation between OHCHR and its partners in the subregion, integrate human rights and adopt the rights-based approach in programming in the implementation of the Millennium Goals.

26. In April 2002 OHCHR supported the creation of a Human Rights Chair as a segment of the annual course of the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights. An agreement was signed with the Institute, in the context of which, OHCHR is facilitating the participation of Governments' officials, representatives of national institutions and of non-governmental

organizations at the annual course as fellows. The aim of the Human Rights Chair is to strengthen the knowledge of the international human rights instruments and mechanisms. Between 8 and 12 July 2002, OHCHR carried out a mission at the headquarters of the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., with the aims of identifying concrete areas for cooperation with the Organization of American States, agreeing on the implementation of joint activities in the Latin American and Caribbean region and of improving coordination between regional and United Nations human rights mechanisms.

III. CONCLUSION

27. **The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will continue to pay special attention to the development or strengthening of regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights, and will continue to report on the results of the action taken in that respect, in response to decisions and guidance received on this subject by the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly.**
