



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2004/NGO/64
26 February 2004

ENGLISH AND FRENCH ONLY

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixtieth session
Item 18 (b) of the provisional agenda

**EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS:
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

**Written statement* submitted by Agir ensemble pour les droits de l'homme and the
International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL),
non-governmental organizations in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2004]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Revision of the Arab Charter on Human Rights

The above-mentioned Non-Governmental Organisations would like to draw the attention of the Commission and of the concerned Arab States to the important stakes of the current process aiming to revise the Arab Charter on Human Rights.

Context

1. In March 1994, the League of Arab States adopted the Arab Charter on Human Rights and presented it to the League's member states for ratification. In its Resolution 6089 of 12 March 2001, the Council of the Arab League recommended that the Arab states accelerate the process for the signing and ratification of the 1994 Charter, which is still not in force, due to an insufficient number of ratifications.
2. It also emerged, in light of the reaction of many Arab and international NGOs, that the 1994 Charter did not correspond to international standards for human rights and that it contained serious deficiencies. Aware of these shortcomings, the Council of the Arab League adopted resolutions 6184 of 10 March 2002 and 6243 of 5 September 2002, providing for the revision and modernization of the Arab Charter on Human Rights.
3. Among the constructive proposals submitted by the Arab NGOs, the most notable is the text known as the "*Sana'a Declaration on the modernization of the Arab Charter on Human Rights*" of 22 December 2002.
4. On 24 March 2003, the Council of the Arab League, in its Resolution 6032-129, encouraged the Permanent Arab Commission on Human Rights to "modernize" the Arab Charter on Human Rights. Amr Musa, Secretary General of the League, explained that the term "modernization" should be understood as the process to bring Charter provisions into compliance with international standards for human rights.
5. With reference to Resolution 2001 / 77 of 25 April 2001, Resolution 2002 / 80 of 26 April 2002 and Resolution 2003 / 75 of the Human Rights Commission on regional cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights in Asia and the Pacific, the High Commissioner for human rights offered his assistance by gathering a group of independent Arab experts responsible for making recommendations in view of modernizing the Arab Charter on Human Rights. This group of experts met in Cairo, from 21 to 26 December 2003 and submitted its recommendations to the League of Arab States' Permanent Commission on Human Rights. Based on this new text, the Arab Commission will make proposals to the Council of the Arab League, which will review them in March 2004.

Recommendations

6. The signatory NGOs reconfirm the need to strengthen the protection of human rights in the Arab world, and especially the rights of women and children, to allow effective implementation of the international instruments adopted by the Arab states. Said states must fully ratify the charter and lift any reservations.

7. The NGOs indicate that the task of modernizing the Arab charter must be conducted in compliance with the standards of the principal international instruments, with broad reference to the existing regional mechanisms.
8. The Arab charter must provide for the set-up of efficient and appropriate mechanisms for promoting, protecting and monitoring human rights so that the members of the league of Arab states will allocate the resources needed to implement the universal instruments for protecting human rights and for promoting the universal culture of human rights in the Arab world.
9. The signatory NGOs request that the Arab states quickly adopt the proposals for revision of the Arab charter on human rights submitted by the committee of experts gathered in Cairo in December 2003. They recommend that the follow-up of this issue be added to the agenda of the meetings of the council of the Arab league.
10. They call for close and permanent collaboration among the Arab states and the NGOs. To facilitate this collaboration, the league of Arab states should simplify the procedure for NGOs to obtain observatory status.
11. They ask the human rights commission to add the issue of modernization of the Arab charter to its agenda and to allocate the appropriate resources for monitoring the issue on a regular basis.
12. Thanking the high commissariat for its assistance, they call, lastly, for the continuation of this constructive cooperation among states, the relevant United Nations bodies and civil society, represented by the NGOs.
