



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC  
AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.4/791  
23 November 1959

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sixteenth session  
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to advise the Commission on Human Rights that Mr. R.S.S. Gunewardene, Chairman of the Commission, has proposed the inscription of an item, "National advisory committees on human rights", on the provisional agenda of the sixteenth session of the Commission, and has submitted an explanatory memorandum relating thereto.

The Chairman's letter and the text of the memorandum are reproduced below.

Sir,

In accordance with rule 6, paragraph 5, of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, I have the honour to propose the inscription of an item, "National advisory committees on human rights", on the provisional agenda of the sixteenth session of the Commission on Human Rights. Attached hereto is an explanatory memorandum on the item.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) R.S.S. Gunewardene  
Chairman  
Commission on Human Rights

MEMORANDUM ON NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES  
ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Upon the recommendation of the nuclear Commission on Human Rights, the Economic and Social Council, in resolution 9 (II) of 26 June 1946, invited Member States of the United Nations "to consider the desirability of establishing information groups or local human rights committees within their respective countries to collaborate with them in furthering the work of the Commission on Human Rights".

In a report (E/CN.4/519) submitted to its seventh session (1951), the Secretary-General informed the Commission on Human Rights that eleven Governments had either established human rights committees or utilized existing organizations for the purposes envisaged in Council resolution 9 (II); that nine Governments had indicated their interest in establishing human rights committees; and that three Governments had stated that the functions of such committees would require further clarification before they could take any action.

At its eighth session (1952) the Commission was informed by the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/519/Add.1) of a recommendation of the fourth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities concerning local human rights committees. Under that recommendation the Economic and Social Council would request the governments of Member States to "encourage the establishment of national and local committees composed of highly qualified persons, including members of minorities, if any, to study and survey the extent to which measures of discrimination on grounds of race, nationality, religion or language may exist in law or in fact within territories under their jurisdiction, and to recommend to their governments legal, educational and other appropriate means whereby such discrimination may be eliminated and prevented from occurring in the future".

In resolution I concerning periodic reports on human rights adopted at its twelfth session (1956), the Commission "requests the Economic and Social Council to call the attention of each Member State to the advisability of setting up an advisory body, composed of experienced and competent persons, to assist their government in the preparation of its report" (E/2844, paragraph 23).

Since the adoption of Council resolution 9 (II), the Commission on Human Rights has not taken up the question of national human rights committees, as it has been engaged, first, in preparing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

/...

next, in drafting the international covenants on human rights; and more recently, in the establishment and operation of the advisory services programme and in matters relating to periodic reports and studies of specific rights or groups of rights.

It is proposed that the Commission take up the question of national human rights committees at its next session. National advisory committees on human rights, properly instituted and consisting of prominent personalities, would be of great assistance to Governments in advising regarding standards of human rights and in solving national or local human rights problems.

The organization and structure of national advisory committees on human rights would probably differ from country to country. Such a committee might be an official or a semi-official or a purely unofficial organization. It would be difficult to establish a particular pattern of organization applicable to all. Each Member State could be requested to establish, or to make arrangements for the establishment of, a national advisory committee on human rights which should be composed of persons of outstanding ability and reputation.

The functions of national committees could also vary from country to country. It is suggested that a national committee might perform, inter alia, the following advisory functions:

- (1) to study current problems of human rights on the national or local level and to make recommendations to the government thereon;
- (2) to advise the government on any matters, legislative or administrative, relating to the observance of human rights;
- (3) to hold annual or periodic conferences or seminars on human rights;
- (4) to make annual or periodic surveys on how human rights are observed; and
- (5) to assist the government in preparing periodic reports on human rights to the United Nations and in making studies on specific rights or groups of rights.

In the light of the foregoing, the following draft resolution is submitted to the Commission for its consideration:

The Economic and Social Council,  
Recalling resolution 9 (II) of 26 June 1946 relating to local human rights committees,

/...

Invites, the Government of each State Member of the United Nations or of any specialized agency to consider the advisability of establishing a national advisory committee on human rights, consisting of persons of outstanding ability and reputation, which could have such functions, inter alia, as follows:

- (1) to study current problems of human rights on the national or local level and to make recommendations to the government thereon;
- (2) to advise the government on any matters, legislative or administrative, relating to the observance of human rights;
- (3) to hold annual or periodic conferences or seminars on human rights;
- (4) to make annual or periodic surveys on how human rights are observed; and
- (5) to assist the government in preparing periodic reports on human rights to the United Nations and in making studies on specific rights or groups of rights;

Requests each Government to report on the functions and activities of such committee to the eighteenth session of the Commission on Human Rights in 1962.

-----