



General Assembly

Sixty-third session

65th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 10 December 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Agenda item 64 (continued)

Promotion and protection of human rights

Draft resolution (A/63/L.54)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The General Assembly is holding this plenary meeting to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in accordance with the decision on the allocation of items taken at its 2nd plenary meeting and pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 62/171 of 18 December 2007 and 63/25 of 24 November 2008.

(*spoke in English*)

On 10 December 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, we celebrate its sixtieth anniversary, recognizing it as a basic source of rights and freedoms and an ethical and legal standard that calls on us to recognize and respect the dignity, freedom and equality of all human beings, without discrimination on the grounds of age or for political, social, religious, ethnic or other reasons.

At a point in history marked by the maniacal and suicidal selfishness of an increasingly discredited system, aimed at the ever-increasing concentration of wealth and power, the Universal Declaration tells us that the values that should govern the new world socio-economic order are justice, solidarity, equality and the recognition that we are all members of the human family. Those same values have always formed the

foundation of all religious, ethical and philosophical traditions.

Today, we reaffirm that human rights are not the exclusive birthright of any particular group, class or segment of society. Civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights belong to all people, men and women alike. Those rights cannot, and should not, be ranked in a hierarchy. All of them are important, and all must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to accept the fact that human rights are progressive and evolving. As human beings have become more aware of their living conditions and have identified injustices, they have risen up to demand respect for their human dignity. It is that demand that has brought about the successive recognition of human rights in each country's legal system and in the United Nations system.

There are many examples of the transformational power of human rights: the abolition of slavery; the recognition of individual rights, collective rights and rights of solidarity; the recognition of full equality between men and women; and the codification of the rights of the child, of persons with disabilities and of migrant workers and their families, among others.

We are here today not just for a pro forma commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but to bear witness to the fact that human rights are a living, dialectical and transformational force that enjoins us to strive together

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



to eradicate the ills that plague contemporary society, such as the converging international crises; climate change; the deterioration of our Mother Earth; human trafficking; all forms of violence; all forms of terrorism, including State terrorism; and abuses against women and children, among other worldwide scourges.

Human rights are the paradigm for the twenty-first century. States must, therefore, renew their commitment to preventing any further massive or individual violations of human rights. We must stop such violations and redress the historical damage that we have caused to all those who have suffered abuses anywhere in the world.

When we see the world through the lens of human rights, we cannot tolerate the fact that more than 1 billion people live on less than one dollar a day and 2.8 billion live on less than two dollars a day; 923 million people go hungry; tens of thousands of women and children are victims of human trafficking; 9 million hectares of forest are lost each year; individuals are illegally detained, subjected to torture and to cruel and inhuman treatment and deprived of their right to prompt and impartial justice; and foreign military bases are established in sovereign nations.

On 14 November 2008, a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was carried aboard the Space Shuttle in specially protected packaging and will be stored in space indefinitely. Our challenge is to instil the letter and the spirit of the Declaration in the hearts of all people, including political leaders and decision makers, and in the foundations of the new world economic architecture.

If human rights are to be the present and future archetype, then international relations and economic, educational and institutional models will have to be consistent with the rights to education, food, health, housing, secure employment, clean water, self-determination and peace, among other rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a source of international law, should guide us in the process of adapting and democratizing the United Nations. All dictatorships must end, including dictatorship in this House. Power should not be concentrated in a few, but should be shared by all. So let us continue to strengthen the "Group of 192" Member States that make up this General Assembly.

In the 60 years since the Declaration was adopted, we have created many agreements, covenants, plans, programmes and institutions in the field of human rights. But that is not enough. We must make further efforts to strengthen human rights oversight, monitoring and implementation mechanisms. All States must take the measures needed for the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, so that we can translate legal formulas into real-life plans for our peoples.

We must work harder to implement human rights treaties and resolutions. Human rights are all-encompassing and holistic. Their enjoyment and implementation are primarily responsibilities of States, but all individuals and public, civil and private institutions share responsibility for promoting and upholding them.

Article 28 of the Declaration provides, "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized." That requires that we put an end to the insolent opulence of a few and the extreme poverty of millions in order to build a just society that respects all forms of life.

I take this opportunity to urge Member States to ratify regional and universal human rights agreements so that these rights will be a commitment shared by all.

Today, we will honour some human rights heroes and heroines who, as I have said before, are symbols of persistence, valour and tenacity in their resistance to public and private authorities that violate human rights. They constitute a moral force to put an end to human rights violations and an inspiration to seek another type of society, another political system, another economic model, another world where all persons will be treated as brothers and sisters, without discrimination, exclusion or the destruction of life in all its forms. Considering that today is also the tenth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the example of those men and women prompts me to call on States to protect the life and integrity of all those who promote and defend human rights.

Inspired by resolution 62/171, which proclaimed 10 December 2008 as the beginning of the International Year of Human Rights Learning, the human rights education campaigns undertaken by Member States and United Nations bodies and agencies should be continued and expanded to create a universal

culture of human rights in which everyone expects and upholds respect for human rights.

We must continue to make headway in the recognition of new rights such as the right to water and the right to sustainable development, sovereignty and multiculturalism for indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples, among other rights. In the interest of recognizing new rights, today we will adopt the draft optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We can build a better world if we observe and fulfil the human rights of all individuals and people everywhere in the world.

(spoke in Spanish)

The Assembly will now hear a message transmitted by video from the Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I send my warmest greetings to the Assembly from Poznań, Poland, where I am attending the United Nations Climate Change Conference. I thank the Assembly for gathering in New York on Human Rights Day to mark the sixtieth anniversary of a landmark document.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted amid utter destruction and destitution, following the Holocaust and the Second World War. It reflects humanity's aspirations for a future of prosperity, dignity and peaceful coexistence. It is, and always will be, a core part of the United Nations identity. The international community has drawn enduring inspiration from the Declaration to build a great foundation of laws that now protect countless people around the world. We have come a long way, but the reality is that we have not lived up to the Declaration's vision — at least not yet.

Since I took office as Secretary-General, I have been very humbled and saddened by having seen so many people whose human rights are being abused and not properly protected. We see human tragedy, the exploitation of children and a host of other ills plaguing millions of people. The global financial crisis and development emergency have enormous implications for the realization of human rights, including the right to development. The food and climate crisis are having the most detrimental impact on those least able to bear such burdens.

After all the lessons we profess to have learned, shocking acts of brutality against innocent people still

often go unanswered. We cannot turn a blind eye to poverty, bigotry and repression. We have a collective responsibility to reject indifference. Human rights, indivisible and interdependent, must hold the whole world in solidarity.

The struggle for human rights would not be possible without human rights defenders who risk their lives to ensure that others are protected. It would not be possible without human rights experts who scrutinize country reports or assess complaints. It would not be possible without lawyers and the press, and without ordinary people who find extraordinary courage and stand up for what is rightfully theirs, yours, mine and ours. We need to keep building up the edifice of human rights — the treaties, declarations and other instruments that set global standards and give people hope. But most of all, we need to implement these instruments. These are living documents and should be used as such.

We should work with urgency; there is no time to rest. The Declaration was created as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. We will honour its towering vision only when its principles are applied fully, everywhere, for everyone. I thank the Assembly once again for coming together to mark this milestone. Let us go forth from this anniversary more determined than ever to uphold the principles and vision of this great achievement in human affairs.

The President *(spoke in Spanish)*: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 63/25 of 24 November 2008, I now give the floor to the President of the Human Rights Council, His Excellency Mr. Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoihi.

Mr. Uhomoihi (President, Human Rights Council): As President of the Human Rights Council, it is an honour and privilege to participate at the commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sixty years is ample enough time to reflect upon and assess the achievements of the high instrument and Declaration adopted unanimously by Member States. This is also a fitting and appropriate occasion to assess the challenges and chart the way forward towards ensuring better implementation of its ideals and objectives. Essentially, this anniversary should serve as a unique means of reinvigorating the commitment of the

international community to all outstanding efforts to ensure the realization and universality of all human rights for all people.

Therefore, on this solemn occasion of introspection and retrospection, one is very much reminded of the circumstances and purposes of the elaboration of this common and universal Declaration. The world had just emerged from a horrific and devastating world war that wreaked untold misery on societies and nations, as a result of which the United Nations was established. The need was felt to create guiding principles and norms to prevent the reoccurrence of such misery. Quite rightly, therefore, the Declaration recognized that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. In the body of the Declaration, that core principle is articulated and expanded in a number of articles that have since emerged as the Magna Carta of contemporary international human rights and humanitarian law.

Simply put, humanity today no longer lacks the human rights instruments to promote, protect and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, what is sorely needed is for States parties to existing human rights instruments to take the practical steps necessary to implement their provisions for the benefit of all mankind.

In that connection, I would agree with the concern expressed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last year, in a message in Geneva at the flagging-off ceremony of the year of activities that culminate today in the marking of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when he poignantly said:

“The Declaration remains as relevant today as it did on the day it was adopted. But the fundamental freedoms enshrined in it are still not a reality for everyone. Too often, Governments lack the political will to implement international norms they have willingly accepted.

“This anniversary year is an occasion to build up that will.”

Apart from the pernicious crisis of lack of political will, it is regrettable that the picture of human rights is dismal and begs for remedy in many other aspects. The problem of poverty is rampant and stands

at the core of the denial of many basic human rights. Children are exploited, the elderly are neglected and women are still denied their fundamental rights. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance pose huge challenges to establishing a world of true equality, justice and freedom as was envisaged in the Universal Declaration. Climate change, migration, health issues related to HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and the pervasiveness of civil and political conflicts present enormous challenges of their own to the enjoyment of human rights.

It has always been the concern of the United Nations to provide a forum for sharing the values of our common humanity and our common destiny. In the human rights arena in particular, the United Nations system has played a critical role and made good progress. It has done that through, inter alia, the establishment of the treaty body system that closely monitors the fulfilment of State obligations under the respective treaties, through the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is the custodian of human rights on the ground around the world, and, not least, through the Human Rights Council, the successor body to the Commission on Human Rights.

Now in its third year of existence, the Human Rights Council has made good strides in carrying out its mandate to promote universal respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner. It remains constantly seized of human rights violations around the globe, while at the same time providing an invaluable space for voices of defenders of the Universal Declaration to be heard with the aim of inspiring change and the improvement of human rights situations.

Under the mechanism of the Universal Periodic Review, all United Nations Member States have committed themselves to undergoing peer review of their human rights records — a novel and, one might add, revolutionary initiative, with real potential for ensuring accountability and commitments by all States to international human rights standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The road travelled over the past 60 years to actualize the protection and promotion of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of the individual has been a long and arduous one. Although over these

years, a global consciousness of human rights that inspires people around the world today may have emerged, we have not yet arrived at the El Dorado of their full enjoyment.

Breaking the jinx that prevents the full enjoyment of human rights is a collective responsibility of all human beings — individuals, civil society organizations, politicians, diplomats and men and women, regardless of our race, colour, creed, national origin, disability or age. In whatever profession we may find ourselves, it is incumbent upon us to pool our resources for the defence and promotion of human rights. Global solidarity is key in all of those enterprises.

Let us take the opportunity of this unique moment in our history to reaffirm our commitments to the goal of the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights. Let us spare no effort to translate those rights into reality for the benefit of all human beings.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 63/25 of 24 November 2008, I will now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Ms. Pillay (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): I am profoundly honoured to be here for this commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Six decades ago, on this day, the General Assembly proved that the ostensibly unachievable was, in fact, attainable. It affirmed the force of ideas and a vision of respectful and peaceful coexistence in the aftermath of utter brutality and destruction.

Indeed, I cannot think of a better place than this Hall to mark such a defining moment in human history. And I cannot think of a better way to begin my address than by reciting article 1 of the Universal Declaration, which states:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Those words resonate today as widely and as movingly as they did in 1948. They speak with the timeless and unalterable force of both the power of rights and our kinship in rights.

The power of rights made it possible for an ever-expanding number of people to claim freedom, equality, justice and well-being. Thanks to the Universal Declaration, all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural — were recognized as inherent and inalienable entitlements of all people, rather than privileges magnanimously bestowed upon them or denied to them at the caprice of the powerful.

The Universal Declaration made manifest the relation between fundamental freedoms and social justice and the connection of both of those elements to peace and security. It gave impulse to a wide and growing legal architecture, as well as to advocacy vehicles for the promotion and the protection of all rights.

Today, the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration have found an echo in the constitutions and laws of more than 90 countries. Dedicated international, regional and national mechanisms — including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council, with its independent experts — have been put in place to be both the custodians and the monitors of human rights and of their promotion and their protection. Civil society everywhere exerts vigilance over rights implementation with growing capacity and influence.

Reiterating the natural and social bonds of human destiny anywhere — that is, our kinship in rights — the Universal Declaration insisted on our common claim to a life in dignity, on our right to count and be counted irrespective of our ancestry, gender, colour, status and creed. It envisaged a world in which every man, woman and child lives free from hunger and protected from oppression, violence and discrimination, with the benefits of housing, health care, education and opportunity. That vision encapsulates the global culture of human rights that we strive towards and should therefore be a unifying rather than divisive force, within and among all cultures.

Sadly, such vision, from its earliest formulations to our days, continues to be undermined by repression, discrimination and inequality. We cannot forget, and Nelson Mandela has reminded us, that the Universal Declaration was adopted only a few months after the formation of the first apartheid Government. But, as he said, the Universal Declaration gave hope to the

oppressed in the darkest moment of their existence. It was, as Mandela put it,

“a shining beacon and an inspiration to many millions of South Africans. It was proof that they were not alone, but rather part of a great global movement against racism and colonialism, for human rights, peace and justice.”

His words ring true for all who still suffer from human rights violations.

I grew up in apartheid South Africa as a second-class citizen, but in the course of my life I had the privilege to see and experience a complete transformation in my country. South Africa now has one of the strongest constitutions in the world, and while it struggles as many countries do, to turn legal rights into reality, watching such amazing change over a single decade and through a relatively peaceful evolution gives me great hope. I stand before you today as a living testimony of rights realized.

At the same time, I am acutely aware that for too many people in the world, the Universal Declaration remains an unfulfilled promise, as the political will to give effect to States' human rights obligations lags lamentably behind their pledges. We live in a world where crimes against humanity are ongoing, where mass rape and murder continue with impunity and where the most basic economic rights critical to survival are not realized and often not even accorded the urgency they warrant.

The Universal Declaration wisely chose not to rank rights. On the contrary, it recognized the equal status of political and civil rights with economic, social and cultural rights. It did so because all rights are inextricably linked. Violations of one set of rights reverberate on other rights and enfeeble them all. As the Secretary-General noted, the recent food emergencies, the degradation of the natural environment, the current financial crisis and the unrest that they engender all underscore that those who are at the front lines of hardship are also likely to be the victims of the ripple effects of human rights violations.

With this in mind, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is of singular importance. Approved by the Human Rights Council in June and by the Third Committee last month, the Optional Protocol is now before the plenary for final adoption. Closing an

historic gap in human rights protection under the international system, the Optional Protocol represents a veritable milestone. It will move us closer to the unified vision of human rights of the Universal Declaration. Importantly, it will enable victims to seek justice for violations of their economic, social and cultural rights at the international level for the first time.

Charles Malik of Lebanon, one of the Universal Declaration's co-drafters, pointed out that the Declaration was never intended to be a mere catalogue of hopes, ringing in rhetoric but limping in deeds. It was intended to end brutality and destruction, to protect the human rights of his and of future generations.

Sixty years after its passage, despite many advances in the legal elaboration of its principles and despite progress on many fronts, the promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have yet to be realized for most people in the world. The challenge facing us is the implementation of these rights on the ground.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home.” Until these rights touch the lives of every man, woman and child everywhere, our work is not done. As United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, I pledge — and the Secretary-General has personally assured me of his full support — to do everything we can to give full effect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I hope you will join me in this effort.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In view of the desire of members to dispose of this item expeditiously, I should like to consult the Assembly with a view to proceeding immediately to consider the draft resolution contained in document A/63/L.54. In that connection, since the draft resolution has only been circulated this morning, it would be necessary to waive the relevant provision of rule 78 of the rules of procedure, which reads as follows:

“As a general rule, no proposal shall be discussed or put to the vote at any meeting of the General Assembly unless copies of it have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the meeting.”

Unless I hear any objections, I will take it that the Assembly agrees to that proposal.

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have been informed that a technical correction should be made to the English version of draft resolution A/63/L.54. In the first and last paragraphs of the Declaration set out therein, “States Members” should read “Member States”.

We will now proceed to consider draft resolution A/63/L.54. The Assembly will take a decision on the draft resolution, entitled “Sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/63/L.54, as orally corrected?

Draft resolution A/63/L.54, as orally corrected, was adopted (resolution 63/116).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now begin the ceremony for the award of the United Nations Prizes in the Field of Human Rights for 2008.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2217 (XXI) of 19 December 1966, seven prizes are to be awarded this year to individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Two of the prizes are special posthumous awards.

The award recipients are the following.

Ms. Louise Arbour was United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2004 to 2008. Prior to her role as High Commissioner, Ms. Arbour served as the Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and was responsible for the first indictment in history of a sitting head of State. She has also served as a judge on the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Ramsey Clark, veteran human rights defender and rule of law advocate, and former Attorney-General of the United States, has been a leading voice for peace and justice at the international level for decades. He played a key role in the civil rights and peace movements in his home country, and in promoting fairness and justice around the globe. He has most recently been recognized for his principled opposition to abuses committed in the name of counter-terrorism and his steadfast insistence on respect for human rights

and fair judicial process for all persons, in accordance with international standards.

Dr. Carolyn Gomes is the Executive Director, since November 2002, and co-founder of Jamaicans for Justice. Jamaicans for Justice defends the human rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups against all forms of violence, supports victims to seek redress through the judicial system and advocates for their protection. Under Dr. Gomes’s leadership, the organization has become the premier human rights advocacy group in Jamaica, developing innovative local and international partnerships to advance the cause of human rights.

Human Rights Watch was established in 1978 and has for the past 30 years documented human rights violations around the globe and advocated for the promotion of human rights and freedoms. Each year, Human Rights Watch publishes more than 100 reports and briefings on human rights conditions in some 80 countries. The organization has played a key role in major advocacy campaigns, such as for the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and, more recently, the Cluster Munitions Coalition.

Dr. Denis Mukwege co-founded and currently operates the General Referral Hospital of Panzi, in Bukavu, South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For more than 10 years he has devoted himself to helping women and girl victims of sexual violence in the province, setting up specialized services for their treatment and training nurses, obstetricians and doctors so that all those who come to the hospital can be helped. An average of 10 to 12 women arrive daily at the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu to be treated, many of whom require major surgery. Dr. Mukwege describes the sexual violence in the region as a weapon of war, destroying entire communities.

The committee is also bestowing two special posthumous awards on the following individuals.

Ms. Benazir Bhutto was an ardent advocate for democracy and for the human rights of the most vulnerable sections of society, particularly women, children and members of minorities. Ms. Bhutto was twice elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, in 1988 and 1993. After returning to Pakistan following years in exile, Ms. Bhutto was assassinated in an attack following a political rally in Rawalpindi in December

2007. Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, her son, will accept the award on her behalf.

Sister Dorothy Stang, of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, defended the human rights of the poor, landless and indigenous populations of the Anapu region of Brazil for nearly 40 years. She worked tirelessly together with the farmers of the region to help them rebuild their livelihoods, cultivate their land and defend their rights from illegal loggers and ranchers. Sister Stang became a symbol of the fight to preserve the rainforest and to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups. She persevered in her mission, despite numerous death threats. Sister Stang was murdered in 2005 in Anapu, Brazil. Mr. David Stang, her brother, and Sister Joan Burke of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur will accept the award on her behalf.

I will now present the awards. I kindly request delegations to reserve their applause until the last award has been presented.

I invite the representative of the Secretariat to call the recipients to the podium. Ms. Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and I will greet the recipients at the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): I call to the podium Mr. Kenneth Roth to receive the award on behalf of Ms. Louise Arbour, who could not join us today.

Mr. Kenneth Roth was escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Mr. Ramsey Clark to receive the award.

Mr. Ramsey Clark was escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Dr. Carolyn Gomes to receive the award.

Dr. Carolyn Gomes was escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Mr. Kenneth Roth to receive the award on behalf on Human Rights Watch.

Mr. Kenneth Roth was escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Human Rights Watch in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Dr. Denis Mukwege to receive the award.

Dr. Denis Mukwege was escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to receive the award on behalf of the late Ms. Benazir Bhutto.

Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Ms. Benazir Bhutto in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Mr. David Stang and Sister Joan Burke to receive the award on behalf of the late Sister Dorothy Stang.

Mr. David Stang and Sister Joan Burke were escorted to the podium.

Mr. Shaaban (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Sister Dorothy Stang in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The winners of the United Nations Prizes in the Field of Human Rights for 2008 are hereby presented to the members of the General Assembly.

I request representatives to remain seated while the President escorts the recipients of the awards. The 65th plenary meeting will then stand suspended so that the Assembly can take action at its 66th plenary meeting on the recommendation contained in the report of the Third Committee issued in document A/63/435. At the resumption of the 65th plenary meeting, statements by representatives of regional groups and others will be heard.

The meeting was suspended at 4.25 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m., with Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica), Vice President, in the Chair.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco): The Kingdom of Morocco is honoured and privileged to speak today on behalf of the African Group at this historical event marking the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This important meeting gives us an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the Universal Declaration to humanity.

It is important to recall at the outset that the resolution 62/171, entitled "International Year of Human Rights Learning", in which the Assembly decided to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was an African initiative. The African Group is proud and honoured to contribute positively to this event and to demonstrate once again the commitment of Africa to the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide.

Africa's commitment is shown through the achievements of the African Union in the field of human rights, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted in 1981, the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the creation of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights under a protocol to the Charter adopted in 1998 and the African Peer Review Mechanism,

which reviews the progress of African States in the protection and promotion of human rights.

The achievements that have emanated from the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are undeniable. The Universal Declaration affirmed the universal values that are shared by all and established the basic standards in the field of human rights, which led to many subsequent regional and international instruments. Human rights are universal, interdependent, indivisible and interrelated, and therefore the values enshrined in the Declaration called for moral, legal and political action to promote the realization of freedom, equality and dignity for all human beings.

The African Group reaffirms that the enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights is essential to the full achievement of the purposes of the Universal Declaration. In this context, progress in the field of human rights should be achieved through cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect. The exploitation of human rights as an instrument for political purposes should be prohibited.

In addition, particular attention should be devoted to enhancing the capacity-building of developing countries, at their request, in the field of human rights.

Despite all the progress achieved, there are still too many men and women deprived of their fundamental rights. Many phenomena, such as colonialism, poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, hunger, discrimination, racism and religious intolerance continue to prevail. All these issues should be addressed in order to ensure dignity and justice for all.

The fate of peoples under foreign occupation and colonial or alien domination should not be forgotten, and their right to self-determination and its exercise remains valid and essential.

The African Group expresses equally its full adherence to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference. The African Group attaches great importance to the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and advocates that economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights should be treated equally.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development, known as NEPAD, launched seven years ago, is a cornerstone initiative towards this purpose, as it aims

to promote and protect the social and economic rights of African people. The African Group seizes the occasion of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by the Human Rights Council in June 2008 and today by the General Assembly to celebrate it as a new achievement in the field of human rights. The right to development needs to be recognized as an essential and integral part of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to development is an inalienable human right, from which all countries and individuals should benefit.

The African Group would like to emphasize that tolerance and respect for cultural diversity are important to facilitate the enjoyment of all human rights by all. The African Group opposes all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief; it condemns all acts of violence falsely claimed by perpetrators to be done in the name of religion and reaffirms that terrorism could not and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Overall, inter-religious dialogue and a culture of peace should be promoted in such a way as to foster unity for all peoples and mankind, with due respect to all cultures and religions.

The African Group would like to express once again the importance of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up. The Group also expresses its support for the prioritization by the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the comprehensive follow-up to Durban and the support given by her Office for the Durban Review Conference, to be held in February 2009. The African Group calls upon all stakeholders to make all efforts to ensure the success of this important Conference.

The African Group attaches great importance to the Human Rights Council and its added value. I would like to welcome the presence of the President of the Human Rights Council with us today. We also attach great importance to the Universal Periodic Review and underline the central role that this new mechanism should play in bringing about the realization all of human rights for all.

Human rights education constitutes an essential contribution to the prevention of human rights abuses over the long term. It represents an important investment in the endeavour to achieve a just society, in which all human rights of all persons are valued and

respected. Human rights education promotes values and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community. In this context, the African Group wishes to express its support for the adoption by the Human Rights Council of a declaration on training and education in the field of human rights.

The African Group would like to recall that the General Assembly has proclaimed the year commencing 10 December 2008 as the International Year of Human Rights Learning, to be devoted to activities to broaden and deepen human rights learning on the basis of the principles of universality, interdependency, impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity, constructive dialogue and cooperation. The African Group encourages all Member States, as well as civil society, to contribute actively to the International Year of Human Rights Learning.

I should like to conclude my statement by reaffirming the commitment of the African Group to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which remains the common standard of achievement for all peoples. We will continue to support the efforts of the international community in the promotion and protection of all human rights around the world.

Mr. Pramudwinai (Thailand): On behalf of the Asian Group, I have the great honour of joining people from around the world in commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which since its adoption on this date sixty years ago has served as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

Rising from the ashes of the Second World War, this historic Declaration was a vivid and defiant proclamation in recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Asia, the largest continent with the largest population and the most diversity in terms of political, economic, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, has embraced this noble ideal for human dignity and justice for all as enshrined in the Declaration because it is the ideal that finds resonance in all social and religious values across the continent.

Sixty years ago, Asian countries had played an active role in the birth of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights. The Asian Group has observed with great satisfaction that since then there has been ever-growing awareness of human rights in countries across the world. Today, human rights has become a common language in the globalizing world, as it speaks to the common desire for an equal respect for the human dignity of every human being. The Declaration has also inspired the adoption of a great variety of international human rights instruments that together constitute a solid body of international law encompassing all human rights for all: civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and the right to development.

Progress in Asia is notable. Countries across Asia have become parties to many core international human rights instruments, while many of them have incorporated elements and principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other core international human rights instruments into their respective national legislation and institutions. Human rights consciousness is growing rapidly across Asia. Human rights education is being actively promoted in many countries, while human rights civil society organizations have blossomed throughout the continent. But Asia knows well that there is still room for improvement. We believe that the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offers a unique opportunity for the international community to reflect upon the current challenges facing human rights in the world today so that we may advance a fuller observance of these rights in a just and balanced manner in the future.

In this context, the Asian Group would like to share with the Assembly the following key points that we deem to be of vital importance.

First, the Asian Group reaffirms its conviction that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. The Asian Group holds firm in our belief that, while the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. The processes of promoting and protecting human rights should be conducted in conformity with the purposes and

principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and with international law.

The Asian Group would also like to stress the importance of the fundamental and inalienable right of all peoples to self-determination, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations, in common article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Secondly, the Asian Group stresses the urgency of addressing extreme poverty around the world. It is the belief of the Asian Group that the international community cannot continue to speak highly of our success in promoting human dignity while millions of our fellow human beings are still struggling in extreme poverty. We cannot continue to talk confidently about our success in advancing social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom when millions of people around the world are still struggling daily, in search of the basic needs, such as food, clean drinking water, shelter and basic health care.

It is thus very important that the international community do all it can to advance the right to development as a process towards the effective fulfilment of human potential. "Development", in the words of Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen, "is freedom". It is equally important that we take every possible measure to address the present world financial crisis and prevent it from turning into a development and human crisis. Today, we know full well that the international community has the ability and the resources to ensure the realization of the Millennium Development Goals by countries around the world. The question is: Do we have the will to help each other realize the goals that we have set for ourselves and to unlock the potential of millions around the world?

Thirdly, the Asian Group strongly believes that constructive dialogue and cooperation on human rights, based on mutual respect and understanding, is the best and most sustainable way of advancing human rights. The Asian Group is firmly convinced that the international community should avoid politicization, selectivity and double standards in the promotion of human rights. Therefore, the Asian Group supported the creation of the Human Rights Council to address the past flaws of the key human rights mechanism of the United Nations.

We particularly welcome the establishment of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism under the Human Rights Council and believe that it will play an essential role in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. For the Asian Group, it is important that the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms be guided by the same principles that gave birth to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: universality, objectivity, impartiality and the spirit of constructive dialogue and cooperation.

Last but not least, it is important to create an enabling environment for a culture of human rights to thrive in every society as a contribution towards peace, justice and tolerance. Therefore, the Asian Group supports the promotion of human rights education and efforts to promote human rights awareness in languages and narratives that are easily accessible to people of different backgrounds. The Asian Group believes that knowledge of human rights constitutes an effective means of achieving the empowerment of the people in each society. We also believe that when people recognize that human rights is not something alien to their lives but a part of their daily life, then a human rights culture will thrive. In that way, the noble ideal and aspiration of the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — human dignity and justice for all amidst the great diversity that defines our world — will be fully realized.

In conclusion, the Asian Group believes that we could pay no greater tribute to those who framed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than by giving practical meaning to their vision. We urge the international community to use this commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration to re-energize our collective efforts to turn its noble vision into effective actions on the ground. Our peoples deserve no less.

Mr. Palouš (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Today, people around the world are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The States of the Eastern European Group continue to be strongly committed to this most important universal human rights document and to all the principles contained therein.

It is a painful fact that the elaboration of this generous code of fundamental rights and freedoms was

based on tragic experiences of humankind, particularly those linked to the horrific crimes of the Second World War. It was a bold undertaking of bold people, envisioning, in the aftermath of that horrible global bloodshed, a world where every human being would enjoy dignity and justice. The drafters of the Declaration believed that a world where all individuals were entitled to truly universal and inalienable rights and freedoms would be the best guarantee of enduring universal peace.

The difficult and challenging task of drafting an international bill of rights was given to the Commission on Human Rights, composed of strong and committed personalities. After two years of work on the text of the Declaration, they provided the world with a document establishing a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, a document which, as the first global human rights instrument, has become the source and inspiration for international human rights law.

Today, the Assembly and people throughout the world applaud the vision and courage to follow the path towards securing the fundamental values of humanity for all shown by the persons involved in drafting the Declaration. Over the course of six decades, this uncertain venture of visionary idealists has grown into a firm global commitment. Today, human rights are firmly embedded in international law, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been incorporated into the constitutions of many countries.

During the past six decades, the Declaration has demonstrated a great ability to unite the world's people. It has been translated into more than 360 languages and dialects, thus being the most translated document in the world. The Declaration has proved to be a living document and a programme of action that has, during the past 60 years, inspired many nations, international, regional and national organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals. All core human rights instruments draw their inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Credit for providing continuous support for the principles contained in the Declaration, and thus for the progress and improvements achieved in promoting human rights, should go to the international community, seeking to realize human rights to the maximum extent, and to States and civil society for

their relentless efforts to protect and promote human rights. All actors at all levels have their particular role in fulfilling the noble goals of the Declaration. Especially vital is the defence and promotion of human rights stemming from the grass-roots level.

On this day, as we celebrate Human Rights Day, we can perhaps realize the full and continuing significance of the Declaration only if we think of a life without these rights and freedoms. It is obvious that, despite the positive developments, the Declaration's ultimate goal, namely all human rights for all, has yet to be achieved and a lot of work remains to be done in order to make human rights truly universally respected.

There are many people deprived of their dignity; for them, the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Declaration have yet to become a reality. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly stated, we must work together to ensure that the human rights are a living reality — that they are known, understood and enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. Indeed, the promotion and popularization of human rights and human rights education, especially for the young generation, are vital for building a better world. Human rights are a prerequisite for the well-being of individuals and of humankind as a whole. Words must turn into deeds, and the formal commitments of Governments must have a real impact in even the remotest corners of the world.

The sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents an opportunity to highlight and celebrate achievements and learn lessons from failures. To this end, Governments throughout Eastern Europe, as well as non-governmental organizations, have embarked upon organizing a variety of events to commemorate the anniversary of this landmark document.

The Declaration has had a tremendous impact on the recent history of our region. I have the pleasure and honour to express the adherence of the countries of the Eastern European Group to the principles of the now 60-year-old Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those principles have remained vital and they will remain a source of guidance for the international community in protecting and advancing human rights around the world.

Let me, on this occasion, reiterate the commitment of all States of the Eastern European

Group to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which we will continue to fully and actively support and defend.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Group of Latin America and Caribbean States welcomes the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since its adoption, the Declaration has become a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. The countries of the Latin American and Caribbean Group consider the Declaration to be important as the basis of the recognition, promotion and universal protection of all human rights for all people.

As an expression of a common understanding of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Declaration has strengthened the commitment and responsibility of States in the promotion of and respect for those rights and freedoms, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We also recognize the fundamental role of the Declaration in the work of the United Nations, in compliance with the purposes defined in the Charter, including through international cooperation in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction or discrimination of any kind. The countries of our region have participated constructively in various processes arising from the Universal Declaration, which have allowed the creation of significant national and international political, legislative and institutional frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights.

During those 60 years, the States of our Group have made significant contributions as committed actors in the setting of norms and standards. That is reflected in the covenants, conventions and other international human rights instruments that are inspired by and based upon the Declaration. The creation of a number of thematic human rights procedures was made possible on the initiative of countries in the region. Let us recall that in 1968, Jamaica, a country in our region, initiated the proclamation of the International Year for Human Rights as part of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration. That event, in turn, made possible the broad dissemination of the content of the Declaration.

The establishment of the Human Rights Council is one of the most recent achievements of the

international community in this field. The countries of our Group have actively supported its process of institution-building, in particular the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. One of our hopes is to be able to consolidate and strengthen the Council as an instrument for cooperation, collaboration and dialogue with a view to improving the promotion and protection of all human rights.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States reaffirms its commitment to democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as interdependent, mutually reinforcing elements. The countries of our region reaffirm their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the Vienna Programme of Action, which endorsed the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelated nature of all human rights. Moreover, we reiterate the need to consider them comprehensively, in a fair and equal manner, with the same emphasis on civil and political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.

On the occasion of this anniversary, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States would like to emphasize certain thematic areas to which the countries of our region attach particular importance, and on which these countries have launched initiatives, either individually or collectively within the framework of the United Nations. Our Group highlights the contributions of, *inter alia*, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in operationalizing the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration.

The States of our Group reiterate the urgent need to promote effective and concerted actions to eradicate poverty, which is a major obstacle to the fulfilment of human rights. In this regard, the countries of the Group attach great importance to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. We underscore the particular importance of the right to development. More than two decades have passed since the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development. That right has been restated and reaffirmed at summits of heads of State and in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies. The countries of our Group stress the need to mobilize the political will required to strengthen and consolidate

current institutional processes and mechanisms for the effective realization of that right.

The principles of gender equality and women's empowerment are also special priorities for the countries of our Group. The advancement of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence that may affect them are essential objectives in the realization of human rights for all and in social and economic development. We reaffirm our commitment to those objectives and our willingness to work to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to act and cooperate with others on these issues, especially in support of initiatives undertaken by States.

The States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group have worked resolutely to promote the rights of the child. To that end, we have supported and sponsored draft resolutions on that topic every year, which have been adopted by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. In those resolutions, actions and recommendations are spelled out so that States can move forward in the protection of children under the law, with the support of the international community, including the United Nations. Such actions must incorporate measures to address situations of risk so that we can enhance protection, restore the affected rights, and ensure an environment that fosters the holistic development of children.

The countries of our Group also attach particular importance to strengthening the protection of migrants. Migration, understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, has contributed to social and economic development and cultural and political life in various regions. This issue requires that origin, transit and receiving States implement comprehensive policies that include the fulfilment of the fundamental rights of all migrants. We urge the international community to broaden the dialogue and joint work to move forward in this direction. We are also convinced of the significance of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and therefore we call upon States that have not done so to consider signing and ratifying that instrument.

Our Group welcomes the recent entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The vulnerability that affects those persons merits special attention and effective response

by States, with the support of the international community. Our goal must be the promotion of effective social integration and full realization of the rights of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with the rest of the population.

We also underline the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as a significant step in the protection of human rights. Prevention, eradication of impunity, reparations and the right of all victims to the truth are essential elements in the fight against that crime.

We reaffirm our commitment to continue working for the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples at the local, national, regional and international levels. Recognition of and respect for their rights, and the implementation of national and international actions to ensure their inclusion and participation in economic, social, cultural, civil and political life, are central elements in the development process and in the building of equitable and just societies.

We reiterate the importance of the effective implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action of the Durban World Conference against Racism. We acknowledge the relevance of complementary international norms and commitments that strengthen the existing instruments and actions aimed at combating this scourge.

We wish to emphasize the importance of human rights education and learning to instilling in all persons and social sectors a deeply rooted culture of promotion and protection of human rights. As the Universal Declaration states, it is essential to promote, through both formal and informal teaching and education, respect for all internationally recognized rights and freedoms as a foundation for the realization of the ideals of freedom, justice, peace and respect for the inherent dignity and worth of the human person.

The States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group reaffirm the significant role that the international community plays, including through the progressive development of international law and standards, effective assistance and cooperation initiatives and South-South cooperation, so that all countries may reach the realization of all human rights.

The joint work of States, in the framework of the principles and purposes defined in the Charter of the Organization, and the harmonious dialogue aimed at building consensus must be consolidated as a means to make progress towards the full implementation of the Declaration. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States affirms its commitment in this regard and its willingness to continue working with dedication, as we have done so far, with a view to achieving this essential goal of the United Nations.

Ms. Shalev (Israel):

“We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This declaration may well become the international Magna Carta of all men everywhere.”

Those were the words spoken by Eleanor Roosevelt at the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations 60 years ago. They represent the hope and aspiration of the drafters of the Declaration and of the international community that human rights are universal and indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States. In 1945, the international community was shocked and horrified by the atrocities of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Determined to respond to the brutal attack on human dignity and values, 60 years ago today the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a landmark document that reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women.

Today we pay tribute to those who drafted the Declaration, who sought to establish a world where justice transcends oppression and where freedom rises above tyranny. Indeed, the realization of human rights and freedoms, a noble cause in itself, promotes all other basic purposes of the United Nations, including peace, security, and prosperity for all.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents the highest aspirations of mankind and strives for a common understanding of these rights and freedoms. Six decades may have passed since the adoption of this historic document, but beyond its

symbolic attributes, the Declaration remains a powerful beacon of liberty, freedom and dignity.

Since its adoption we have witnessed an unprecedented rise in the recognition of these rights. The freedoms enumerated in the Universal Declaration helped spread the entitlement of individuals to liberties, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The Universal Declaration, which has inspired the adoption of many legal instruments promoting freedom, upholding dignity and advancing equality, is the living promise that human rights are not a luxury for the few but a basic necessity for all.

On this anniversary, however, we must acknowledge that for millions upon millions of the world's most vulnerable and disenfranchised people, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains an unfulfilled promise. For them, it is our shared responsibility to commit ourselves yet again to the full realization of the principles contained in the Declaration. So let us use the beacon of the Universal Declaration to guide our efforts. Let us reaffirm that each and every State, regardless of circumstances, must fulfil its primary responsibility to respect and protect the rights of all individuals, without distinction of any kind. Let us continue to promote the work of non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders, who have played a critical role in assessing violations and protection gaps. Let us work towards supporting international mechanisms, such as human rights treaty bodies, international and regional tribunals and courts and the International Criminal Court, all of which seek to provide effective tools to ensure adequate redress and respect for human rights.

In an era when we are increasingly interconnected and at a time when information flows rapidly across oceans and continents, we must shine the light of the Universal Declaration to the four corners of the globe. We must commit our resources and our collective resolve and determination to secure human life, dignity and basic rights for all. For in the end, human rights are not merely legal instruments. They are expressions of our common humanity, our common vision for a better, more just world. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to turn this hope into action and these ideals into achievements.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): The people of the United States join in celebrating this landmark anniversary with men and women of every

nationality and culture, of every race and religion throughout the world.

Sixty years ago today, the General Assembly took the extraordinary step of adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was an historic day for all people and all nations, recognizing and enshrining the principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The eloquent text reflected the common aspirations of all mankind for human rights and fundamental freedoms, for which all Governments should be held accountable. It was a monumental achievement. The world was still recovering from the devastation of the Second World War, which had left millions dead, wounded, displaced or without homes. Yet from those trying times arose a strong determination, courage and inspiration.

In early 1947, nations came together to draft an international bill of human rights that would meet the approval of the 18-member Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly itself. The group of drafters unanimously elected Eleanor Roosevelt as their chair. The United States is tremendously proud of the work of Mrs. Roosevelt and of the many diplomats, philosophers and legal experts from around the globe who worked together tirelessly to forge consensus on universal human rights and to create a better world for all of us.

In a world devastated by war and divided by ideology, sceptics believed there would be little common ground on the rights of all people. Yet, in preparing for their task, the delegates found that their diverse cultures, religions and nationalities had more in common than many had anticipated.

With her unwavering spirit, dedication and faith in humanity, Eleanor Roosevelt inspired all who participated in the Declaration's creation. She once asked:

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home — so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without

discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”

Mrs. Roosevelt knew of whom she was speaking. She had travelled the length and breadth of the United States during the Great Depression, and she had journeyed throughout the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa. Everywhere she went, she listened to the voices of ordinary people, and she heard their deep desire and hopes, for themselves and for future generations, to live in dignity and freedom.

For 60 years the spirit and the letter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has guided countless millions of people in their efforts to secure their human dignity and liberty, to follow their conscience, to speak their minds, to practice their religion and to live free from fear of discrimination or persecution for exercising their rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt, whose dedication to social justice and human rights remains an example for all Americans, would celebrate the gains for human rights that have been achieved, but she would also remind us of the great work we have left to do. As we honour her legacy, let us remember that if the promise of the Declaration is to be fulfilled, the international community cannot stand silently by as men and women in any part of the world are condemned to live under tyranny, deprived of their most basic rights. We must entrust our citizens with greater freedom so that they can use it to correct the injustices and violations that stand in the way of the realization of human rights for all.

Regrettably, some Governments impose crippling constraints on the ability of their people to exercise their fundamental freedoms or deprive them of their rights altogether. Men and women who have done nothing more than attempt to act peacefully upon their rights now languish in jails and labour camps as prisoners of conscience. There are Governments that pressure civil society and the independent news media, including those who publish on the Internet, Governments that ignore the will of their citizens by conducting fraudulent elections or simply discarding election results, and Governments that use urgently needed humanitarian aid, including food and medical aid, as a political weapon.

As we rededicate ourselves to the Universal Declaration, let us join together to hold all

Governments accountable for protecting, promoting and assuring human rights for all.

The Acting President: It is my honour to give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Mathias Chicawe, Minister of Justice of the United Republic of Tanzania, who will speak on behalf of the African Union.

Mr. Chicawe (United Republic of Tanzania): I am honoured to speak before this body on behalf of the member States of the African Union.

The commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights should provide us with an opportunity to reaffirm our commitments to the values, principles and standards enshrined in the Declaration, which provided the moral strength and platform for African countries in their struggle for freedom, independence and dignity. The Declaration continues to be the guiding beacon for the African Union in advocating and institutionalizing democracy, the rule of law and good governance in Africa. It is also the thread that seamlessly weaves the people of Africa into the global human family.

In retrospect, it may be an understatement to say the record of human rights in Africa in the post-independence era has been chequered. The excesses of dictators have blighted the human rights landscape in Africa, and war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide have happened in Africa under our watch. That should not be repeated. The African Union is striving to rise to the challenge and is leading the way to provide a framework for protecting and promoting human rights in Africa.

Africa accepts and respects the universality, indivisibility and equality of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration, as embodied in its various instruments. The Constitutive Act of the African Union reaffirms Africa’s commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and peoples’ rights, the consolidation, of democratic institutions and culture, the promotion of good governance and the rule of law. Furthermore, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) unambiguously puts human rights at the centre of democratic governance, the rule of law, the creation of environments that enable sustainable economic development and the attainment and maintenance of peace and security.

The African Peer Review Mechanism, which is part of NEPAD, is being embraced by more African countries to institutionalize human rights. It is gratifying to note that aspects of the African Peer Review Mechanism have found resonance in the Human Rights Council, which we fully support. Both the Constitutive Act and NEPAD underscore social, economic and cultural rights and the right to development. We believe that the attainment of human rights for all has to encompass social, economic, political and cultural rights, including the right to development as an integral part of those rights.

The Africa Union has adopted several instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights. They include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted in June 1981, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was established under the African Charter, and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which my country, Tanzania, will be proud to host when it becomes operational. In ensuring that the rights of women and children are respected, the African Union has put in place the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The latest African Union instrument that, among other principles, enshrines human rights, is the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which was adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in January 2007.

It is undeniable that the Human Rights Declaration has had great influence and has been an inspiration for those that seek human rights for all. While notable achievements have been made, there are still many men and women who are denied their basic human rights. Political will for the implementation of the Declaration is high. However, our continent and peoples face many multifaceted obstacles in view of the still-prevailing political, social and economic challenges in Africa that make it difficult to realize the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It may be a futile exercise to preach human rights to people steeped in poverty and debilitated by hunger and disease. We have to address those challenges simultaneously to make the Declaration relevant and useful to ordinary people, for the betterment of their daily lives and out of recognition of their human dignity.

We realize that no country can claim that it has a perfect record on human rights. We are at different stages of development and at different levels in achieving human rights. We should thus work together and maintain dialogue with each other to ensure that the standards set forth in the Declaration are achieved pragmatically and realistically in the different parts of the world. International cooperation and understanding should guide our collective responsibility in this regard. Building a culture of human rights must be a collective endeavour. The sixtieth anniversary is a milestone in a long journey. We should continue beyond it and excel in our resolve to make the Declaration meaningful to all humanity.

Allow me at this juncture to congratulate the recipients of the United Nations Human Rights Prizes. Their achievements and contributions to the attainment of human rights are a tribute to many others who have preceded them.

Let me conclude by reiterating the commitment of the African Union and its willingness to work with the United Nations and the international community as a whole in furthering the promotion and protection of human rights for all peoples.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I would like to inform members that the Assembly will consider the reports of the Sixth Committee as the first item on the agenda for tomorrow, Thursday, 11 December at 10 a.m. Also at that meeting, the Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 65, entitled, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance"; agenda item 107, "Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit"; and sub-item (f) of agenda item 114, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries", and to take action on draft resolutions submitted under those items. In addition, the election of seven members of the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission, sub-item (b) of under agenda item 104, which was scheduled for tomorrow, has now been postponed to Monday, 15 December 2008.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I am particularly happy to speak today on behalf of the European Union, 60 years after the adoption in Paris of

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary, the European Union would like to reaffirm the primary importance it attaches to the Declaration. Its universality, and the need to promote it, have been reaffirmed at the highest level, in particular at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 and at the World Summit in 2005.

The Universal Declaration is the cornerstone of the edifice built after the atrocities of the Second World War for the protection and promotion of human rights at the national, regional and international levels, and is the foundation for advancing and ensuring respect for human dignity throughout the world. The European Union welcomes the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is being recognized by an increasing number of States as a major contribution to the development of customary international law.

The European Union, which is founded on the principles of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and of conscience, democracy and the rule of law, fully shares the values in which the Declaration is rooted. Its action both internally and externally is based on respect for human rights as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Treaty on European Union, and is reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The universality and indivisibility of human rights, the responsibility to defend those rights throughout the world and the promotion of pluralistic democracy and effective guarantees for the rule of law are, for the European Union, essential principles.

The European Union would therefore like to reiterate that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration without any distinction as to birth, race, sex, language, religion or conviction, political or any other opinion, origin, membership in a minority or any other situation. It reaffirms that international law in the area of human rights has a primary vocation to protect persons in the exercise of their freedoms and their rights. In our view, no particular provision motivated by tradition or any national, cultural or religious considerations can infringe upon the principles contained in the Declaration.

The European Union recognizes and welcomes progress made since the adoption of the Universal Declaration. However, it deplores the continuing flagrant violations of human rights in many regions of the world, including on the basis of sexual orientation. It reaffirms that the international community and all States, acting individually or collectively, have the legitimate and permanent responsibility to promote and safeguard human rights throughout the world, particularly in the context of the responsibility to protect, a key concept endorsed by all heads of State and Government at the World Summit of 2005 that must be promoted in order to protect civilian populations against the crime of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The European Union, for its part, will continue to denounce such violations and will endeavour to bring them to an end wherever they occur. It reaffirms its commitment and unshakeable determination to make the full exercise of human rights in their entirety a reality for all.

The European Union wishes to pay tribute to the courage of human rights defenders, women and men — often anonymous — who fight indefatigably to defend those universal values, sometimes at the cost of their own security or of their lives, and will continue to accord them its full support.

The European Union urges all States that have not yet done so to accede to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the main conventions relative to human rights concluded in the context of the United Nations.

As we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, combating impunity of those responsible for human rights violations must be a priority for us. The European Union calls on all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Reaffirming the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights, the European Union notes with interest the adoption today by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The European Union also welcomes the adoption on 18 December 2007 by the General Assembly of its historic resolution 62/149, calling for a moratorium on

the use of the death penalty. It reaffirms its strongly held commitment to the universal abolition of the death penalty and urges those States that still practise it to consider abolishing it for good.

Women's rights merit very special attention, as they are still all too often flouted throughout the world. All States are called upon to step up their actions regarding the place and role of women in areas such as equality between men and women, the right to have a family, work, and combating violence against women.

With regard to the rights of the child, the Union will continue to promote a comprehensive and consistent approach in all of its policies relating to human rights, security and development and humanitarian action.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate that the European Union fully supports international human rights mechanisms at the global and regional levels, particularly those within the United Nations. The General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the special procedures play a major role in the promotion and protection of human rights. They may count on the full support of the European Union.

Mrs. Núñez Mordocho (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Non-Aligned Movement welcomes the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

The theme chosen last year for the campaign for this commemoration — "Dignity and justice for all of us" — appropriately reflects the spirit of the wish and commitment of all members of the Non-Aligned Movement to contribute to a world free from injustices, where dignity and respect are a reality for all human beings without distinction in terms of race, sex, language, religion or social origin.

Therefore, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries wishes to highlight once again the importance of implementing all of the human rights elements contained in the principal documents guiding the positions of the Movement, in particular the Final Document of the 14th Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, which

was held in Havana from 11 to 16 September 2006, as well as the Final Document of the recent 15th Ministerial Conference of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Tehran on 29 and 30 July 2008.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms and underscores its abiding faith in and strong commitment to its founding principles, one of which is the respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms the great importance it attaches to the promotion and protection of human rights and the commitment to fulfil obligations to promote universal respect for and observance and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, other instruments relating to human rights, as appropriate, and international law, as clearly stated in the outcomes of its summit conferences and ministerial meetings, including the Havana Summit.

The Movement further reaffirms that all human rights, in particular the right to development, are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. It reaffirms that human rights issues must be addressed within the global context through an approach based on constructive dialogue in a fair and equal manner, with objectivity, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, impartiality, non-selectivity and transparency as the guiding principles, taking into account the political, historical, social, religious and cultural particularities of each country. In this regard, we reiterate the Movement's dismay at and unequivocal condemnation of gross and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and situations that constitute serious obstacles to their full enjoyment, as well as violent acts and activities that infringe upon their full enjoyment.

The Non-Aligned Countries take this opportunity to re-emphasize that the exploitation of human rights for political purposes — including selective targeting of certain countries for extraneous considerations, which is contrary to the founding principles of the Movement and the Charter of the United Nations — should be prohibited. They urge that, in the discussions on human rights, adequate attention be given to the issues of poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization,

instability and foreign occupation, which engender social and economic exclusion and violate human dignity and human rights and which cannot be divorced from any meaningful discussion relating to human rights.

The Movement stresses the fundamental and inalienable right of all peoples, including all non-self-governing territories and territories under foreign occupation or colonial or alien domination, to self-determination, the exercise of which, in the case of peoples under foreign occupation or colonial or alien domination, remains valid and essential for ensuring the eradication of all those situations and for guaranteeing universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries reaffirms that democracy and good governance at the national and international levels, development and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the right to development, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The adoption of coercive unilateral measures, rules and policies against developing countries, for any cause or consideration, constitutes a flagrant violation of the basic rights of their populations. It is essential that States promote efforts to combat extreme poverty and hunger and also foster participation by the poorest members of society in decision-making processes.

The Non-Aligned countries reiterate the need to undertake efforts to further strengthen and promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and to establish democratic institutions and sound economic policies responsive to the needs of the people. In this context, they also reiterate the need for the core principles, such as equity, non-discrimination, transparency, accountability, participation and international cooperation, including partnership and commitments in the international financial, monetary and trading systems, and full and effective participation of developing countries in decision-making and standards-setting.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries has agreed on measures such as promoting and protecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all peoples, in particular the right to development, and providing an effective framework thereof, including remedies to redress infringements on or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance

with the relevant founding principles of the Movement, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant international human rights instruments, consistent with the obligations of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems.

The observance of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration provides an opportunity for the international community to reflect on the complex situations that we are witnessing every day in our world and that affect the full enjoyment of all human rights. On this significant anniversary, the Non-Aligned Movement renews its commitment to give effect to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In promoting a world of dignity and respect for all, the international community can always count on the firm support and commitment of the countries of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to deliver the following statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights presents an important opportunity for us to reiterate our commitment to the Declaration's lofty principles. The international community agreed to make those principles the foundation of collective efforts in the field of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is also a reminder of our commitments, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant international instruments we have adopted, to work towards reinforcing universal respect for all human rights for all without discrimination as to race, sex, language or religion.

Collective international efforts have recently made serious steps aimed at reformulating the international drive to effectively address human rights issues, making them common denominators that unite all societies, and at setting aside politicization, selectivity and double standards. Such steps have already shown success, as reflected in the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the endorsement of its institution-building package and, subsequently, in the launch of the universal review mechanism and in the review process of the mandates

of the special procedures. These steps have ushered in a new era in which the issue of human rights and of the rights of peoples are dealt with in a clear institutional framework based on constructive cooperation and the avoidance of confrontation and conflict.

The Arab States wish to emphasize that protection of human rights is primarily the responsibility of national Governments. Effective assistance from the international community in the form of consultation and technical and financial support is essential to bolstering national capacity-building, thereby allowing national Governments to shoulder their responsibilities to promote and protect human rights within the boundaries of the full respect of the principles of non-intervention in domestic affairs and of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

The Arab States also stress the necessity of focusing on the right to development as one of the fundamental rights that is intrinsically bound up with other rights — a matter that would serve to narrow the gap between North and South — and that allowing for the creation of better living standards that would lead to the promotion of human rights. It is imperative to avoid attaching conditionalities that only aim at imposing or linking controversial concepts to development assistance and programmes.

Moreover, the Arab States wish to underline the importance of reinforcing respect for the institutional balance that exists between the principal United Nations organs, with particular respect to the prerogatives of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in supervising the activities of the Human Rights Council, the special procedures and the treaty bodies.

The Arab States reassert their commitment to continue their serious efforts to promote human rights at the national level. They also maintain that further collaborative efforts in the field of human rights are necessary to address common standards in order to prevent attempts by some to impose their views on how to implement internationally agreed standards or to impose their own standards as internationally agreed when they are not. That also entails averting attempts to limit consideration of human rights issues to those related to civil and political rights at the expense of economic, social and cultural rights that are paramount for people in developing countries.

In this context, the Arab States wish to stress that in order to reinforce all these efforts on the national level, it is imperative that all forms of extremism, discrimination, racism and xenophobia, in which the attempts to defame religions and to scorn their symbols are deeply rooted, be combated with solid determination. In parallel, it is necessary to enhance the existing dialogue based on respect for cultural identities and particularities in order to deepen mutual understanding, respect and tolerance.

The Arab States believe that a serious international dialogue should continue in order to strike the balance necessary for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression in tandem with the universal right to belong to different religions in various societies without distinction, to practise their religious rituals and to freely preserve their identity without restrictions. That approach similarly requires a stronger commitment to respecting human rights while countering terrorism on the basis of existing international commitments, the least of which is the commitment to the comprehensive and integrated implementation of all aspects of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Whereas it is essential to enhance the rule of law in order to ensure the protection of human rights as stipulated in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is incumbent upon the international community to step up collective efforts to meet the pledges and protect and realize the inalienable right of peoples under occupation to self-determination.

In this regard, the States members of the League of Arab States reaffirm that the pursuit of universal respect for human rights for all and the rights of peoples will not materialize unless the international community totally divests itself of selectivity, politicization and double standards in dealing with the question of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and other Arab peoples that are suffering under foreign occupation, including those of the occupied Arab territories in Syria and Lebanon. Such rights will succeed only when the international community acts with firm determination to end violations by the occupying Power of its commitments under international law, most importantly the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Arab States consider the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an occasion for reiterating the international commitment to supporting the aspirations of the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate right to self-determination to the fullest and to enabling them to establish their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Rio Group. Our Group associates itself with the statement made by Colombia on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

The 1948 Declaration was an historic milestone in recognizing that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that every individual is entitled to all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without any distinction of any kind. The Declaration also marks the beginning of a profound transformation of the relationship between the individual and the State.

The Rio Group recognizes the value of the Declaration for the work of the United Nations system in fulfilling the purposes defined in the Charter of the United Nations, including, through international cooperation, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

The Rio Group also recognizes the significant progress that the international community has made since the adoption of this crucially important document, which has been a source of inspiration for the development of international human rights law, and which we are convinced will continue to inspire us in contributing to its progressive development.

We cannot omit mentioning the instruments adopted more recently by the General Assembly for the further promotion and protection of human rights — the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and just today, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

We reiterate our adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the Vienna Programme of Action, which endorses the universality,

indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights.

It is clear that much still needs to be done, as no State can claim that human rights are fully and universally respected. We recognize the role that the United Nations, and particularly its Human Rights Council, plays in their promotion and protection. In this regard, the universal periodic review mechanism is a significant innovation. We are convinced that this new mechanism has the great potential to enhance cooperation, collaboration and constructive dialogue with a view to improving the promotion and protection of all human rights, including improving the human rights situation in all countries and addressing violations wherever they occur. The Council has begun to make a contribution in this regard, in addition to all the international bodies and mechanisms already in place, in particular through the work of the special procedures. We must make a special reference to the work carried out by treaty bodies in assisting States to implement all of their obligations under the human rights covenants, conventions and protocols.

At this solemn event, we pay a special tribute to human rights defenders — to all the women and men who have devoted or even sacrificed their lives for the cause of human rights in every corner of the world.

In this context, the Rio Group also wishes to highlight the importance of addressing and giving adequate attention at all levels to issues of poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, instability and other aspects that engender social and economic exclusion as well as violation of human dignity and human rights.

When we established this Organization, we reaffirmed our faith in all human rights for all, in the dignity and worth of every human person. Today, 60 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration, the countries of the Rio Group recognize the challenges they face, but we categorically reaffirm our unequivocal commitment to fulfilling the objectives set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We are convinced that the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family without discrimination is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the member States

and associated States of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela and my own country, Brazil.

We fully support the statements by the Permanent Representative of Colombia on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and by the Permanent Representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. We would like to make additional comments on human rights issues in our subregion.

Today, 60 years after its adoption, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains a living, inspiring document. It is a framework not only in terms of the universal recognition of the rights that we all have, but also because it represents a success of the international community in establishing common definitions on an issue of fundamental importance to mankind.

One cannot speak of human rights in the international sphere without recognizing the fundamental importance of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993. The acknowledgement that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing concepts is particularly important to our region. In this sense, the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights and the eradication of hunger and poverty have a central place in our national policies and strategies.

In the last 60 years, the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and development have been fundamental axes of the political and social life of MERCOSUR countries. We faced and continue to face many challenges in the historic fight for human rights, freedom and dignity of all men and women in our countries.

Nevertheless, we should recognize that there has been substantial progress on the institutional level and in creating awareness in our societies of the importance of preventing and punishing violations of human rights, ensuring reparation for victims and promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinctions or discrimination of any kind. The importance of this is reflected in the commitment of States members of MERCOSUR and Associated States to the absolute preservation of democratic institutions and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as essential conditions for

the validity and evolution of the integration process of the countries of the group, as are established in, inter alia, the Asunción Protocol on Commitment for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights within MERCOSUR, adopted by the member States of MERCOSUR in 2005. As a result, the Protocol provides that grave and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in a member State can be the basis for the suspension of that State from the integration process.

Other relevant MERCOSUR mechanisms are the regular meetings of the High-Level Authorities in Human Rights and related working groups. The 2008-2009 working plan adopted at the 12th Meeting of the High-Level Authorities in Human Rights and Foreign Ministries of the MERCOSUR and Associated States, held in Buenos Aires, in June 2008, sets forth the goals, inter alia, of coordinating actions in multilateral human rights organizations; creating a public policy institute in the area of human rights for MERCOSUR; combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance; furthering issues related to the right to truth, memory and justice; promoting and protecting the rights of children and adolescents, including the Niñ@sur initiative; strengthening and coordinating actions in the fields of education, training and culture related to human rights; improving the development of a system of indicators for economic, social and cultural rights that make it possible to monitor and evaluate the advancements in the fulfilment of those rights; drafting, together with civil society, a MERCOSUR charter for the protection of human rights and ethnic and sociocultural minorities in the region; promoting agreements for compliance with international human rights instruments on preventing and combating crimes related to trafficking in persons; strengthening the protection and promotion of the rights of migrants; enhancing the protection of the elderly and promoting conditions of economic security, health, social participation and education; enhancing the promotion and protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities; fostering regional mechanisms to prevent, investigate and punish torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; enhancing the protection of the human rights of and non-discrimination for lesbians, gays, transsexuals and bisexuals, and promoting anti-discriminatory legislation and public policy in this field.

We recall that MERCOSUR members and associated States have participated actively in the international efforts that led to the adoption of the main human rights instruments. Within the framework of the Organization of American States, for example, MERCOSUR countries actively contributed to the adoption of the Democratic Charter, currently in force, and are today engaged in the negotiation of the Social Charter of the Americas on the obligations of States to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights in the Americas.

We emphasize our support for international cooperation in human rights, including South-South cooperation, as well as the strengthening of the United Nations human rights pillar, in particular the Human Rights Council, and its special procedures and universal periodic review mechanism.

In the context of the Human Rights Council, we welcome the widespread support expressed by the adoption in September of a series of voluntary goals in the field of human rights, inspired by the Millennium Development Goals. The voluntary goals were conceived in order to strengthen the existing obligations and commitments in the field of human rights, in particular the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in commemoration of its sixtieth anniversary.

The members and Associated States of MERCOSUR today reaffirm their commitment to the prevention and punishment of all human rights violations, working for reparation for victims and fighting impunity, as well as the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction or discrimination of any kind.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): It is my honour to take the floor on behalf of the five Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden — on this important occasion celebrating the 60 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Nordic countries are pleased to join countries from all regions of the world in reaffirming this cornerstone of human rights, which constitutes the foundation for safeguarding and advancing human dignity worldwide.

The Nordic countries would like to take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to human rights defenders in all regions of the world. Over the years,

human rights defenders have been a crucial force in bringing violations to our attention and pointing to the ways of improvement. Without their courage and persistence we would not be where we are today. We pledge our continued support of their efforts.

For 60 years, the Declaration has inspired national and international efforts to put the protection of individuals at the centre of human development. It has contributed to the development of customary international law, and the rights enshrined in the Declaration have been laid down in international conventions on human rights that have been widely ratified. Mechanisms have been developed at the regional and international level to promote and protect these internationally agreed instruments.

We have come a long way in developing the foundation established by the Universal Declaration. Yet this is not only a day for celebration, but also for reflection and for great concern. Sixty years down the road, no country can claim to have fully realized the aspirations of the Declaration. Millions of persons still suffer violations of their civil, political, economic and social rights at the hands of their Governments, or suffer human rights violations that we as Governments have a responsibility to prevent. In an era when genocide and other large-scale violations of human rights should be crimes of the past, they are crimes of the present.

We must all pledge to do better. As the international community and as individual countries, we have a joint responsibility to take this work to the next level. As Governments, we must do everything in our power to extend the protection of all human rights to all without distinction of any kind, including distinctions as to birth, race, sex, language, religion or conviction, political or other opinion, origin or any other status, including sexual orientation.

The ownership of the Universal Declaration must be shared not only by Governments, but also by the men, women, girls and boys whom it strives to protect. In order to realize full ownership, we must undertake to bring the contents of the Declaration to the attention of those it concerns through human rights education and learning.

We, the five Nordic countries, reaffirm our commitment to engaging with Governments, the United Nations and civil society with the aim of making human rights a reality for all.

Mr. McNee (Canada): I am honoured to speak today on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Sixty years ago, in the aftermath of the deaths of some 70 million people in the Second World War and the Holocaust, our predecessors came together to build a better world. They founded a new institution, the United Nations, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large and small. Soon after, men and women of vision and goodwill laid the groundwork for the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

That was an event with no historical precedent — the nations of the world embracing a global expression of the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings are entitled and a standard that all nations could adopt and against which they could be held to account. Canada, Australia and New Zealand played active roles in achieving the agreement. This landmark Declaration forms the cornerstone of the international human rights system. Sixty years on, it remains the global benchmark for the protection of human rights. It is as relevant to every person in today's world of more than 6 billion as it was to the world's 2.5 billion people in 1948.

The principle enshrined in the Universal Declaration — that all human beings have fundamental rights and freedoms — is concrete and remains undiminished today. Everyone is equal in dignity and rights. But the Declaration also speaks to our responsibilities wherever there is a violation of the human rights of any person for any reason in any part of the world. It transcends nations, cultures, politics, personalities, creeds and tongues. Among our responsibilities is the need to act. It is not enough to simply promote these rights; they must also be actively protected and defended.

Yet, despite the global benchmark provided in the Universal Declaration, discrimination and violations of human rights persist 60 years after its adoption. There are still serious and overwhelming gaps between these universally endorsed standards and the practices of States in all regions of the world.

(spoke in French)

The sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration is also an opportunity to acknowledge the gap between these universally recognized standards and everyday practices and to bridge that gap. It is also an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to respect for human rights in the United Nations and to lend new impetus to our efforts in that area. In addition, it is time to mobilize our collective resources with a view to the comprehensive and effective implementation of the Universal Declaration and the subsequent human rights treaties to which a great many Member States have voluntarily acceded.

As we commemorate the adoption of the Universal Declaration, we urge all States to redouble their efforts and to engage in dialogue with national, regional and multilateral institutions to reduce the gap between these universally recognized standards and the everyday realities experienced by millions of people around the world. We believe that the Human Rights Council has significant potential in that regard. We must fulfil that potential in order to support genuine respect for human rights. Finally, we wish to pay tribute to human rights defenders working throughout the world, many of whom are often persecuted precisely because they defend the rights of their fellow citizens.

Sixty years after its adoption, the Declaration remains a defining document in the history of humankind on the protection of freedoms and human rights. In the light of the challenges ahead of us, it also provides an essential guidepost for our actions. Today, Canada, Australia and New Zealand reaffirm our strong commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our resolve to work on behalf of our countries, Governments and peoples, at the national level and together with other Governments throughout the world, to realize those rights for the benefit of all.

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): On the occasion of this sixtieth anniversary commemoration of the proclamation and adoption by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The societies that constitute our Community were forged in an environment characterized by the most pervasive violations of human rights. The pernicious system of slavery and the indentureship that followed witnessed a visitation of the worst forms of indignities

on the forebears of today's CARICOM citizens. The colonial enterprise, building on that foundation, functioned in many respects on the basis of a denial of fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination.

Caribbean peoples have thus paid a heavy price historically for the assertion of the human rights and fundamental freedoms that we enjoy today. Our citizens place a high value on the safeguarding and full realization of those rights and freedoms. We also recognize that our present achievements were made possible not only through our own arduous and sometimes revolutionary struggles, but also by the actions of men and women of goodwill from every nation under the sun. Our own voices have been joined by those of others against the ravages of colonialism, racism, apartheid and other injustices of our time. This joining of efforts across multiple frontiers testifies to the shared aspiration of peoples everywhere to live with dignity, free from want and fear and free to aspire, to achieve and to be full participants in the promotion of the common good.

For the countries of the Caribbean Community, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is quintessential in its expression of that shared aspiration and as a statement of the rights and freedoms to which each and every individual is entitled. It is a veritable common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations, affirming the inherent dignity and equality of human beings everywhere.

Great progress has been made in our individual and collective pursuit of that common standard. CARICOM citizens live in free and open societies rooted in a tradition of democracy and respect for human rights and the rule of law, conditions we consider vital to the development of inclusive, stable and prosperous societies.

But challenges and gaps remain in our shared endeavour, at the national, regional and international levels, to secure the fullest enjoyment by all peoples of the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled. In our own region, the enjoyment of these rights is threatened by poverty, drugs and violent crime, among other things. In various parts of the world, we continue to witness persistent and flagrant violations of human rights. People today still face discrimination based on their race, gender, religion, language, belief or ethnic origin. Violence against women is on the increase in

many States, even as women become the targets of rape and other forms of sexual exploitation in situations of conflict. Moreover, many people remain mired in extreme poverty and hunger, which are today aggravated by the conjuncture of volatile food and fuel prices and the global financial crisis. Deprived of their human dignity, many are today denied the opportunity to live lives free from fear and want. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to articulate and implement measures to effectively address and overcome such challenges, to potentiate the right to development and to redress the inequities that hinder the full realization of the promise of the Universal Declaration.

In this regard, CARICOM is of the firm conviction that a comprehensive approach is imperative, rooted in the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of human rights, whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social, pursued in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and founded on the recognition of the interdependence of our collective efforts to attain conditions where peace and security, development and human rights can flourish.

In joining wholeheartedly in this milestone commemoration, the countries of the Caribbean Community pay special tribute to the recipients of today's United Nations Human Rights Prizes and pledge to work assiduously for the fulfilment of the promise embodied in the Universal Declaration, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker for this meeting. I now declare concluded the commemorative event devoted to the observance of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I would like to inform members that the General Assembly has received a written message from the President of the Russian Federation, which was earlier distributed in the General Assembly Hall.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 64.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I would like to inform members that the Assembly will consider the reports of the Sixth Committee as the first item on the agenda for

tomorrow, Thursday, 11 December, at 10 a.m. Also at that meeting, the Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 65, entitled, “Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance”; agenda item 107, “Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit”; and sub-item (f) of agenda item 114, entitled

“Cooperation between the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries”, and to take action on draft resolutions submitted under those items. In addition, the election of seven members of the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission, under sub-item (b) of agenda item 104, which was scheduled for tomorrow, has now been postponed to Monday, 15 December 2008.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.