



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/12/NGO/32
8 September 2009

ENGLISH ONLY

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Twelfth session
Agenda item 4

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE THE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION

Written statement* submitted by Liberal International (LI), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

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

[28 August 2009]

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

Human rights violations in DR Congo, Russia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Singapore and Myanmar¹

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly expresses the rights to which all human beings are respectfully entitled to. In Article 18 and 19, the Declaration states clearly: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” and that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.”

Unfortunately in many parts of the world today, human rights violations and infringement of fundamental freedoms are still taking place.

Liberal International would like to address the grave situation and appeal to the Human Rights Council to pay greater attention particularly to the following countries:

DR Congo

Liberal International notes that an increase in armed conflict deepened the human rights and humanitarian crisis in North Kivu province in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo). Armed groups and government forces committed war crimes and other serious human rights violations. By the end of the year, one in four of the population of North Kivu was displaced by conflict;

Considering that sexual violence in DR Congo is frequently used as a weapon of war; and that as a war crime, the weapon of sexual violence de-stabilises normal community life. This de-stabilisation prohibits a society returning to daily practice in the longer term, and prohibits reconciliation between communities;

This grave situation must be addressed, and calls on all governments to strengthen the MONUC (United Nations Organisation Mission in DR Congo) peacekeeping mission and to support the International Criminal Court’s work in bringing those responsible for war crimes to justice;

Russia

Condemning human rights violations, in particular civil rights – these rights are entrenched in any democracy and should therefore never be under pressure;

Urging Russia to fulfil its commitments as member of the Council of Europe; Peaceful demonstrations (opposition parties or civil rights activists) can no longer be prohibited, an investigation should be conducted into the murders of journalists and human rights activists and Russia should be fully cooperative in finding a solution for the considerable delay in human rights cases (25,000) at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg;

¹ Until 1989 referred to in the UN lexicon as Burma as it is still referred to within Liberal International

Iraq

Referring to the Human Rights Watch report of 17 August 2009, LI appeals to the Iraqi authorities to begin investigations into the recent killings of men suspected of homosexual conduct and to punish the perpetrators;

Afghanistan

Considering that the pressure imposed by the former Taliban government has been lifted for a few years and that a transition to a democratic republic is well under way and supported by the international community, LI urges the Afghan government to carefully monitor respect of women's rights. Furthermore any further diminishing of women's rights should be curbed, hereby referring to, for example, the law permitting Shia men to deny their wives food and sustenance if they refuse to obey their husbands' sexual demands;

Tunisia

Noting with concern the increasing incidents of intimidation, harassment and acts of brutality against those expressing views critical of the Tunisian government in the lead-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections due to take place in October 2009;

Noting that Government control still weighs down on most of the media to a certain extent, leaving little room for a lively debate on current affairs. Journalists deal with repressive laws, bureaucratic harassment, the withdrawal of state advertising, corruption, police violence, political trials and even torture;

LI stresses that freedom of expression, association and assembly are the pre-requisites for the free debate which is indispensable in pre-election period.

Action:

Calls on the Tunisian authorities to end the harassment of and attacks on human rights defenders and to allow a free debate on the upcoming elections and the human rights situation in the country;

Appeals the HRC to insist that the Tunisian authorities uphold their obligations under Article 8 of the Tunisian Constitution and Articles 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Tunisia is a signatory, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association respectively, and urges the Tunisian government to immediately end its repression of dissent and its intimidation, harassment and brutality against human rights defenders;

Singapore

The International Bar Association (IBA) produced a report in July 2008 after it held one of its annual conferences in Singapore. In that report, the IBA stated that:

“The judiciary in Singapore has a good international reputation for the integrity of their judgments when adjudicating commercial cases that do not involve the interests of People's

Action Party (PAP) members or their associates. However, in cases involving PAP litigants or PAP interests, there are concerns about an actual or apparent lack of impartiality and/or independence, which casts doubt on the decisions made in such cases.”

That same year, half a dozen individuals were found guilty of contempt of court in three separate cases. The five Singaporeans and one US citizen were imprisoned.

In addition, the editor of the Wall Street Journal was ordered to pay approximately 5,000 Euros for contempt of court in three articles that appeared in the newspaper.

In March 2008, a group of activists participated in a peaceful protest against price hikes and the million-dollar salaries of the ministers. Led by Chee Soon Juan, the group was arrested and the activists were prosecuted for taking part in an assembly and procession without permit.

Action:

Notes the Attorney-General's Chambers' complicit role in its suppression of freedom of expression, assembly and procession and urges the Attorney-General's Chambers to stop prosecuting activists in Singapore;

Stands in solidarity with the persecuted democracy activists and censures the Singapore Government for its use of public institutions against the Singapore Democratic Party and its associates;

Urges the judiciary to adhere to its commitment to uphold justice in the city-state without prejudice, fear or favour;

Myanmar²

Noting the unjust trial against pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, LI condemns the military regime for sentencing Aung San Suu Kyi to a further 18 months based on illegitimate charges against her.

Condemns the continued detention of members of the opposition National League for Democracy and other activists fighting for democracy;

Noting with concern the continued human rights violations against the people in the country including destroying more than 3,000 villages under the military's campaign of killing, torture and rape against ethnic minorities, resulting in one million refugees having fled the country, 3,000 of which fled recently to escape from military attacks on Karen armed groups, whilst hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people are struggling to subsist in the jungles;

Noting the fact that rape is systematically employed as a weapon of war against ethnic minority women;

² Until 1989 referred to in the UN lexicon as Burma as it is still referred to within Liberal International

Noting the failure of the military junta to respond in a timely manner to international humanitarian aid and disaster relief to the tens of thousands of victims of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008;

Nothing the failure of the military junta to recognise the results of people's choice shown in the elections held in 1990, when the National League for Democracy won over 80% of the votes. The military junta drafted the 2008 Constitution without participation of the opposition and the elected members of Parliament. The Constitution was further approved in a referendum held in an unfair and unjust manner. The military junta continued to push for the general elections in 2010 based on the illegitimate constitution.

Noting the military regime has failed to respond to the consecutive resolutions of the UN General Assembly since 1991, as well as reports of UN Special Rapporteurs and demands of the UN Secretary General and his special envoys to the country over the past 18 years.

Action:

Calls on the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to coordinate a collective action plan. The international community, including the US and the EU, has stated the importance and urgency of the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners the country.

Calls on the military regime to work towards national reconciliation in an inclusive political process;

Unless the military junta cooperates and responds to international calls for the release of political prisoners and an inclusive political dialogue, LI urges the international community, particular the UN, to:

Impose stronger targeted sanctions against the military regime;

Impose arms embargoes on the government in Naypyidaw in response to the military junta's offences and gross violation against the civilians;

Conduct a mission of inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity in Myanmar.

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Directory: H:\@DPU\Human Rights Council\12th session\@NGO
written statements\Item 4
Template: G:\MACRO\OFFI2000\Cover Pages\E.dot
Title: 0312788
Subject:
Author: IN
Keywords: E/CN.4/2003/L.8
Comments: Final
Creation Date: 9/8/2009 8:24:00 AM
Change Number: 3
Last Saved On: 9/8/2009 8:28:00 AM
Last Saved By: bremont
Total Editing Time: 6 Minutes
Last Printed On: 9/8/2009 11:46:00 AM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 5
Number of Words: 1'545 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 8'530 (approx.)