

**Closing Statement by the  
Secretary-General of the  
World Conference on Human Rights**

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Vienna, 25 June 1993

Mr. President,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Excellency,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

We have now reached the end of a long and arduous road which began some three years ago with the General Assembly's decision to convene a world conference on human rights.

From the beginning, the World Conference was seen as a dynamic process aimed at involving ever larger sectors of society in our quest for effective protection of human dignity. Here I think we can claim success. Our meetings here in Vienna have been a "World" Conference in the true sense of the term. People from every corner of the earth were represented and the subjects dealt with are the daily preoccupations of almost all our fellow human beings.

Never before have so many Governments representing so many diverse cultures and peoples given such indepth attention to human rights. Throughout the preparatory process and during the Conference itself, in our official meetings and in the NGO activities, intense debate and reflection by Governments in dialogue with other Governments, international organizations, national institution, the NGO community and human rights experts have dissipated many misconceptions and made real progress in mutual understanding. Common views and strategies have evolved from this growing consultation.

This mobilization for and participation in the Conference may well be one of its most significant outcomes, especially if it is enhanced in the future by more cooperation and coordination among the institutions and organizations active in the field of human rights and/or development.

I would also like to underline here the direct participation of the people concerned in the Conference itself. Children spoke directly to the plenary on the violations of their rights and their hopes for the future. Women also told us of the issues directly concerning them, as did indigenous people from all over the world. This Conference also benefitted from the substantive contribution of the United Nations treaty bodies, our special rapporteurs and working groups, United Nations specialized agencies and bodies and regional human rights organizations.

Governments were, of course, at the centre, for only Governments can undertake international obligations and only Governments are ultimately responsible for human rights protection.

The Conference itself was an act of reaffirmation and strengthening of the international standards proclaimed by the United Nations since its creation and the validity and importance of enhancement of the methods of implementation developed since then.

This must be understood to extend not only to the rights themselves, but also to the protection of those rights. We must act as energetically and with equal determination to protect the human rights of victims - especially of massive violations - no matter where they live, and regardless of their culture or religion. It is their right to protection, not our option to act or not. And I understand the concerns of those who see a lack of consistency in this matter.

We also have reaffirmed the crucial principle of equality and the need to fight all forms of discrimination, xenophobia, and intolerance. One of the greatest dangers to human rights is racism, racial discrimination and exclusion. These are cancers which begin by attacking the weakest members of the community, minorities, immigrants, refugees, indigenous people, and which can soon spread to destroy a whole society. It is vain to look for long-term economic progress in a society of exclusion and I wish to solemnly warn against the temptation of seeking short-term political gain through the language of exclusion.

The Conference's recognition of the interdependence and mutually reinforcing relationship between democracy, development and human rights is important. It will provide the foundation for future convergent action by international organizations and national agencies to promote all aspects of human rights. Further, the recognitions by this Conference of the right to development as a human right means that we can now turn from theoretical debates to seeking ways of giving reality to the right to development.

Mr. President, there are a number of other areas of progress which can be mentioned, such as:

### **Women**

On the issue of women's human rights, in response to the unprecedented call from a worldwide movement, the World Conference took historic new steps.

- The main policy message of the Conference is that equal status of women and the human rights of women should be integrated into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activity. All the human rights treaty bodies and the monitoring special Rapporteurs and Working Groups of the Commission on Human Rights should incorporate women's human rights concerns in their work. The role of Governments, NGO's and the United Nations Secretariat is very important in that respect. The Conference also calls for increased cooperation between the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, the Committee against the Discrimination of Women, UNIFEM, UNDP and other United Nations agencies.
- At the normative level, the Conference calls for the universal ratification of the Convention against the Discrimination of women by the year 2000, and the preparation of an optional protocol to this Convention introducing the right of petition.
- The Conference clearly saw violence against women as a human rights concern, as affecting women's fundamental human dignity. It calls for the elimination of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, the elimination of gender bias in the administration of justice and the eradication of any conflicts between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism. It also gave its support for the creation of a new mechanism, a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women at the Commission on Human Rights and called for the adoption of the draft Declaration on Violence against Women by the General Assembly.

- Finally the full integration of women at the policy-making level, both within the Secretariat of the United Nations and within the decision-making and expert bodies of the Organization has also been called as well as training for United Nations human rights and humanitarian relief personnel so that they are assisted to recognize and deal with human rights abuses particular to women and to carry out their work without gender bias.

### **Children**

Children's rights have also been given specific attention. The World Conference stressed that

- States should ratify universally by the year 1995 the Convention on the Rights of the Child and integrate it in their national action plans.
- Laws, regulations and customs harmful to the girl child should be eliminated.
- The Conference strongly supports the proposal of the Committee on the Rights of the Child for a study into means of improving the protection of children in armed conflicts and calls on the Committee to study the question of raising the minimum age of recruitment into the armed forces.

Here, Mr. President, we must remember the devastating effect on children of illicit drugs especially on the eve of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Trafficking.

## **Indigenous peoples**

The World Conference agreed to recommend to the General Assembly that it proclaim an international decade of the world's indigenous peoples. This will allow the United Nations to build on the measures taken in 1993 during the International Year and open a new chapter of partnership between indigenous peoples and Governments.

The World Conference also agreed to recommend that a voluntary fund be established to finance the activities of the international decade and it also supports the strengthening of the office dealing with indigenous peoples through adequate human and financial resources.

Finally, the World Conference agreed to update the mandate of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the main forum for indigenous people in the United Nations.

## **Monitoring**

In the area of monitoring,

- The World Conference has underlined the importance of preserving and strengthening the system of Special Procedures Rapporteurs/ Representatives/Experts and Working Groups of the Commission on Human Rights and has asked that they be provided with the necessary human and financial resources.
- The procedures and mechanisms should be enabled to harmonize and rationalize their work through periodic meetings and all States are asked to co-operate fully with them.
- In addition to the above-mentioned central provision, the final declaration stresses repeatedly the need for protection of all human rights as a priority objective of the United Nations and consequently the strengthening of national and international mechanisms.
- The call for additional resources for the Centre for Human Rights also includes special procedures and mechanisms and the final document specifically mentions that the Centre should be assured adequate means for this purpose.
- The existing Special Rapporteurs on torture and on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance have been specifically referred to and the decision of the

Commission to consider the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women at its next session has been welcomed.

### **Ratification and Reservations**

- The World Conference has demanded, not only for the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the speedy ratification of the other human rights instruments, but
- The Secretary-General and the treaty bodies should pursue a dialogue with states to identify possible obstacles to ratification and how such obstacles could be removed.
- Call for special attention to be paid in the 1998 review of progress achieved towards universal ratification of the treaties and their protocols.
- States should be encouraged to limit the number and scope of their reservations to human rights instruments and ensure that such reservations are not incompatible with the object and purpose of a treaty.
- States are invited to consider ratification of the International Convention on the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families as soon as possible.

### **Economic, social and cultural rights**

- The World Conference welcomed the appointment by the Commission on Human Rights of a thematic Working Group on the right to development with the urgent task to look into measures to eliminate obstacles to the Declaration on the right to development, and recommended that the possibility of elaborating an optional protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights should be given further consideration by the Commission on Human Rights.

### **Technical Assistance**

One major theme which runs throughout the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action is the need to strengthen the enjoyment of human rights through technical assistance. A number of specific areas in which assistance should be made available were pointed out including

in strengthening the institutions of democracy and human rights, the judiciary, in the protection of minorities, indigenous peoples and in promoting human rights education.

### **High Commissioner**

The World Conference recommended the General Assembly to give consideration at its 48th session to the question of the establishment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights for the promotion and protection of human rights.

### **Resources**

In terms of strengthening the resources of the Centre for Human Rights the Conference expressed its concern at the growing disparity between activities of the Centre and the human, financial and other sources available to carry them out, and requested the Secretary-General to take immediate steps, to substantially increase the resources for the human rights programmes from the regular budget and to take urgent steps to seek increased extra-budgetary resources.

Within this framework, an increased proportion of the regular budget is called for to be allocated directly to the Centre for Human Rights so as to enable it to carry out its activities effectively, efficiently and expeditiously.

Moreover, the Secretary-General and Member States are urged to adopt a coherent approach aimed at securing resources commensurate to the increased mandates.

### **Follow-up to the World Conference**

Three main recommendations have been made: that the General Assembly considers ways and means for the full implementation, without delay, of the recommendations contained in the Declaration of this Conference; that the Commission on Human Rights annually review the progress towards this end; and that the Secretary-General of the United Nations invite on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights all States, all organs and agencies of the United Nations system related to human rights, to report to him on the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration of this Conference.

The Conference also dealt with increased coordination on human rights within the United Nations system; persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities; migrant workers; enforced disappearances; the rights of the disabled persons; strengthening of

human rights; and human rights education. The Conference also placed special emphasis on the elimination of torture urging all States to put an immediate end to torture and to adopt the measures of prevention.

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Mr. President,

We have come to the end of the World Conference road and are about to begin on another; that of putting into practice the Conference's decisions.

The Declaration has set out for us a Programme of Action for Human Rights based on the principle of cooperation, the need to adopt a holistic approach to promoting human rights and the necessity of involving actors at all levels, international, national and local.

Cooperation is essential to the identification of problems, to finding appropriate solutions and the resources necessary for their implementation. But cooperation will only be viable if it is based on the reaffirmation of the principles and rules of human rights and a commitment not to tolerate violations.

A key lesson of the World Conference is that we must adopt a holistic and coordinated approach to promoting human rights. For example, in protecting the rights of the child we must look at the wide range of factors affecting the child's daily life; health, education, food, shelter, parental employment and remuneration, legal protection, protection from exploitative labour, treatment in the judicial systems, etc. Progress in one area can depend on advances in another. Without such a coordinated approach many well intentioned programmes could prove fruitless. Thus, the whole United Nations systems is potentially involved. As this is true for children, it is so for extreme poverty, migrant workers, women, persons with disability, among others.

The Declaration is in fact very rich in content and even a summary description of its different aspects would not be possible here. However, it does suggest a way of bringing all the various elements together so that they may have a positive impact on the enjoyment of human rights. Internationally, it recommends a comprehensive United Nations programme to help States build and strengthen their human rights infrastructure. That programme, coordinate by the Centre for Human Rights should provide at Government request a large number of services.

The World Conference also recommended the drafting of coherent and comprehensive plans of action for human rights promoting and protecting with Governments requesting technical



assistance in a wide number of areas. And the Conference recommended that each State considers the desirability of adopting national plans of action for human rights.

I believe that these suggestions could provide a framework of planning dialogue and cooperation and enable us to measure progress as we have never been able to do before.

Mr. President,

The new approach to promoting and protecting human rights together with the detailed programmes and targets contained in the Declaration will require some very significant changes in how we work in the United Nations. A close collaboration based on shared information, respect for specific competence and mutual confidence will have to be build up between the Centre for Human Rights and the various United Nations agencies and programmes.

But we will have to go beyond and incorporate into our thinking and planning the expertise, experience and resources of regional intergovernmental bodies, national institutions, universities and non-governmental organizations. In this regard, the World Conference has foreseen a greater role for non-governmental organizations, as well as international financial institutions, development agencies and the media in the implementation of the program of action.

The undeniable achievements of this Conference are due to the work and dedication of all who took part in this Conference and its preparation; you can be justly proud of your achievements.

I wish to thank all those who from near and far made their contributions, often in difficult circumstances, to the success of this Conference; and here, I think especially of our interpreters. May I wish you all a save journey home.

Mr. President, I wish to turn to you and to extend our deepest thanks to the People of Austria and their Government and the City of Vienna for having provided the hospitality and conditions of work which have contributed so much to our success.

We can leave Vienna with a sense of accomplishment and hope and with the knowledge that a solid foundation of principle, understanding and commitment has been laid for future progress. Human rights is becoming a common language of humanity. It is a slow process, especially for those who suffer violations or those who work for respect for human rights often at their own personal risk; and here I want to honor the courage and dedication of human rights workers throughout the world. They are essential to progress.

Finally, Mr. President, today, in adopting this Declaration, the Member States of the United Nations have solemnly pledged to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and to undertake individually and collectively actions and programmes to make the enjoyment of human rights a reality for every human being. Our undertaking here has been made in front of the eyes of

the World and history will judge us, not by the words on the pages of this Declaration, but by the sincerity of our efforts and the success we achieve in bringing about changes in the way people live.

We must not fail. For the credibility of the whole United Nations is at stake.

Thank you for your attention.