

Advocacy Coalition on the UN Human Rights Council

Statement to the First Plenary Meeting of the Council

18 June 2006

The Advocacy Coalition on the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) is an independent coalition of human rights advocates and academics with expertise in human rights law, policy, or practice. It was formed to examine the agenda and work of the HRC and to analyze and assess its progress according to its expressed mandate and functions. The members of the Advocacy Coalition consider the establishment of the HRC a great opportunity to enhance the United Nations' human rights machinery and would like to help effectively further the promotion and protection of human rights. The first meeting of the Advocacy Coalition was convened at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York, on June 12, 2006, and identified six areas that will be crucial in defining the character and operations of the Council. The Advocacy Coalition suggests the following:

1. *Special Procedures, Working Groups, and Resolutions* – The special procedures and working groups of the Commission on Human Rights have served important functions ranging from standard setting to fact finding. These institutional arrangements should be continued. The Council should also continue to use resolutions critical of specific countries in a way that would improve country compliance and cooperation. Countries that refuse to comply with the standards or to cooperate with the Council and other UN bodies of human rights investigation and assessment should be considered for further attention and action, including resolutions.
2. *Access by and cooperation with civil society* – Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been crucial to the promotion of human rights and incorporation of human rights into the UN Charter. The Council should permit and encourage extensive access and participation in all aspects of the Council's work by representatives of independent NGOs and experts, based on clearly established guidelines and procedures, at a level no lower than that provided previously at the Commission on Human Rights.
3. *Indivisibility and interdependency of human rights* – The Council should make clear at the outset that its mandate includes the full spectrum of human rights, including economic, social, and cultural rights, whether in peacetime or in armed conflict. It should embrace this holistic approach and ensure that the review process and other activities of the Council address the fulfillment of *all* human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural.
4. *Universal Periodic Review Criteria* – In order to ensure equal treatment, the Council should identify the criteria and fair and impartial procedures to be used in assessing the states' compliance with the international human rights standards. It should

identify indicators of the fulfillment or violation of *all* human rights and evaluate the extent to which rights are enjoyed by *all* persons living within the jurisdiction of the state, without discrimination. In this endeavor, the Council should draw upon the work of UN agencies and other organizations on the development of reliable socio-economic, civil, and political rights indicators and benchmarks.

5. *Special Sessions* – The Council should use special sessions as needed, in particular to address conditions that enable human rights violations and require extra protection mechanisms that fall beyond the means of individual states. Review and assessment mechanisms should be broad in scope, addressing a range of state and non-state actors and issues, including international financial agencies, corporate responsibilities, international trade agreements, and foreign aid.
6. *The responsibility to protect human rights* – The Council should encourage discussion on the mechanisms of prevention of violations of and protection of human rights and contribute, as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, to the ongoing discussion on the operationalization of the “responsibility to protect.”

The Advocacy Coalition wishes the Council a productive session and hopes that the concerns and suggestions raised in this statement will be incorporated into its initial and future discussions. We look forward to supporting, monitoring, and contributing to the work of the Council to help the realization of one of the key aims of the United Nations. We will continue to meet, mobilize and inform our networks, and advance our concerns. The next meeting of the Advocacy Coalition will focus on assessing the Council’s progress in its initial weeks of operation with regard to these and other issues, as they arise.

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