



Center for Women's Global Leadership

March 16, 2006

The Center for Women's Global Leadership welcomes the vote by the UN General Assembly (GA) on March 15, 2006 adopting an historic resolution that creates a new Human Rights Council within the UN system. The Council will replace the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the body that currently sets and advances human rights standards in the UN. The 47-member Human Rights Council raises the level of human rights within the UN as it will function as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. The GA will elect the 47 countries who will be members of the Council on May 9th of this year. The Council is expected to begin its work on June 19th in Geneva, where it will be based.

The Commission on Human Rights will finish its work during its current session, which began on March 13th and was suspended temporarily while the GA resolution to create the Council was under discussion. As of this writing, it is expected that the CHR will reconvene on Monday, March 20th, however, it remains unclear whether the session will continue as a shorter session that will be procedural or transitional in nature. This information will be posted on www.cwgl.rutgers.edu and the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/, as soon as it is determined.

The new Human Rights Council will meet at least three times a year (including an annual main session) for a total of at least 10 weeks and will have the capacity to convene extra sessions as needed to address gross and systematic violations of human rights more quickly. It will conduct what is called universal review of the human rights records of all UN member states, including those who are members of the Council itself. It will address human rights themes related to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and will promote mainstreaming of human rights within the UN system.

The resolution creating the Council preserves NGO participation and the system of special procedures (independent experts called special rapporteurs who focus on specific countries or themes, and working groups on specific topics), although both will be reviewed in the first year of the Council's work. This has been one of the concerns of women's NGOs which have increasingly utilized these mechanisms to advance women's rights, and it is important that human rights advocates pay close attention to this review process to ensure the continuation (and on-going evolution) of the work of independent experts and that the participation of NGOs in the Council remains at the levels currently allowed in CHR processes, which are higher than those of the General Assembly.

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 170 countries in favor; 4 against: US, Israel, Marshall Islands and Palau; and 3 abstentions: Venezuela, Belarus and Iran.

The text of the resolution that creates the Council (**A/RES/60/251**) can be found at www.reformtheun.org/index.php/articles/1954

Detailed information about the Council, including country statements based on the March 15 vote, can be found at www.reformtheun.org

The Center for Women's Global Leadership will continue to monitor and report on these developments, especially as they pertain to women's human rights. www.cwgl.rutgers.edu

