

Statement by Geneva for Human Rights

Item 6 - General Debate

Friday 18 March 2011

This statement is made on behalf of 29 NGOs from Geneva and abroad: Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, AWOMIZ, Baha'i International, Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies, Center for Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Child Rights Information Network, CIFEDHOP, CODAP - Youth Resource Centre on Human Rights, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Corporacion Humanas, Democracy Coalition Project, Edmund Rice International, FIACAT, Forum Human Rights, Four Freedoms Forum, Franciscans International, Geneva for Human Rights, Human Rights House Foundation, Human Rights Law Resource Centre, Human Rights Watch, International Commission of Jurists, International Service for Human Rights, Marist International Solidarity Foundation, NGO Group for the CRC, Save the Children, School as an Instrument of Peace Cote d'Ivoire, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation, UPR Info, World Vision.

Mr. President,

On the 24th of February, the Human Rights Council completed the Review of its Work and Functioning. All stakeholders invested a significant amount of energy and resources towards a review that suggested promising results and created high expectations from civil society around the world. Unfortunately, in its final stages, the process was diluted to a mere 'fine-tuning' exercise as opposed to a thorough Review. The adopted Outcome of the Review and Functioning of the UN Human Rights Council did not introduce major improvements in any area, including the Universal Periodic Review. Many proposals made by various stakeholders that were specifically aimed at strengthening the UPR were dropped over the course of the Review.

Mr. President,

37 NGOs from Geneva and around the world came together last October to put forward a collection of proposals to improve the UPR process. This Joint NGO Contribution was submitted to the first session of the Open-ended intergovernmental working group in October 2010 and contained seven key issues upon which actions needed to be taken to strengthen the UPR. Although some proposals contained in this Contribution were supported, others - very strong ones - were disregarded. Hence, there is no provision in the Outcome to ensure well-prepared, inclusive and meaningful national consultations. It is also regrettable that the UN compilation and stakeholders' summary will not be introduced during the UPR working group, and will consequently not be given the same importance as the National report. Moreover, the Outcome fails in requiring recommendations to be specific and action-oriented in order to guarantee their meaningful implementation. In regards to the follow-up, although the Outcome makes provisions for consultations with stakeholders, it does not contain any mechanism or modality to assess such a follow-up. Finally, non-ECOSOC NGOs will continue to be excluded from the adoption process despite their full participation in the initial submission of information.

Mr. President,

We believe that the UPR process has a much greater potential than currently reflected in the Outcome of the Review. It is now the role of the Human Rights Council and States to make best use of the Outcome and improve the mechanism by doing.

We therefore call on all States and the Council to continue, through the second cycle, working on strengthening the UPR in order to ensure transparent and meaningful national consultations, improved opportunities for civil society and thorough assessments of implementation of UPR recommendations.

I thank you, Mr. President.