



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE IN GENEVA

STATEMENT BY MR ARTIS PABRIKS
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

61ST SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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Mr. Chairman,
Ms. High Commissioner,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to extend my congratulations to all elected officers of the Commission and wish you all success in conducting your work. I also would like to align the Latvian delegation with the statement made earlier by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

Particularity of the work of this session of the Commission is that it takes place in the light of current discussion about the future of the Commission, which is triggered by the High Level Panel recommendations on the reform of this august body. This reform will inevitably attract our interest far beyond the forthcoming six week period.

The Commission on Human Rights is the only Commission from all of ECOSOC, which is considered by the Report, and that highlights its importance. Latvia shares the underlying concern expressed in the report regarding the composition of the CHR. At the same time, we are of the opinion, that before starting extensive discussion about the composition, the place of the CHR in current legal and institutional frameworks of the United Nations needs to be properly assessed. In our view, it would not make the work of the Commission more efficient, nor human rights more universal, if a body with universal membership would be subordinated to a body with limited membership, ECOSOC. At the same time, today we face the reality that country's human rights record plays minor role in its election to the CHR. That, in our view, does not allow to the Commission to address human rights issues adequately.

Another area of Latvian interest is the work of the Sub-commission, which is an integral part of the UN Human Rights mechanisms. A CHR resolution on the Sub-commission, which will be introduced by Latvia this year, will contain some proposals which should improve its functioning.

Mr. Chairman,

This past inter-sessional period of the CHR has been characterized by some significant events. We highly praise the work of the High Commissioner, Ms. Louise Arbour. The activities of the Office of the High Commissioner have expanded significantly and we see positive trends in that process, as the capacity of the Office is being strengthened.

Latvia, in particular, welcomes the activities of the Office towards the coordination of the work of treaty bodies, technical assistance programs and the efforts of the Commission's special procedures. Such coordination, in our view, will not only increase the effectiveness of the use of the Office's limited resources, but also will provide significant practical assistance to the countries themselves. In this manner, technical assistance programs would focus in those fields, which have been identified

as most problematic by the Special Rapporteurs and Treaty bodies. At the same time, it would reduce the possibility that countries would receive different recommendations from the Treaty bodies and the Special Rapporteurs.

We believe that one of the most valuable tools of the Commission, as well as the UN human rights system in general, is the periodic examination of State reports on the implementation of various human rights instruments. However, one has to acknowledge the difficulties faced by the treaty bodies now, particularly the failure of many States to honor their reporting obligations and the delays and backlogs in the work of various committees, which often consider reports long after they have been submitted.

Latvia follows with interest the reform of treaty bodies and is delighted that tangible results have been achieved already at this stage, for example, the adoption of guidelines within the expanded core document.

Mr. Chairman,

Latvia is the country, where different national, ethnic and religious groups have peacefully co-existed throughout the centuries. Religious groups, which had been persecuted somewhere else, had been able to find their asylum in Latvia. This year was marked by the fact, that for the first time after the renewal of independence, asylum seeker in Latvia obtained Latvian citizenship through the process of naturalization.

Last summer the Latvian Government adopted a National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance and allocated funds to begin its immediate implementation. This program is meant to address various forms of intolerance, including anti-Semitism. The program includes activities in education, public awareness raising, research and monitoring, work with NGOs and media as well as strengthening Latvia's anti-discrimination legislation.

The issue of anti-Semitism deserves our attention almost everywhere that human rights are not being adequately observed. Latvia will further support the initiatives of international organizations, whether universal or regional to combat this form of intolerance. For example, Latvia considers the establishment of the post of Personal Representative of the Chairman in Office of the OSCE for anti-Semitism as an important initiative.

In this light, we welcome the activities and the report of the UN Special Rapporteur, Mr. Doudou Diène, on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The report gives a clear illustration that, more often than before, joint activities of the Special Rapporteur together with other rapporteurs, for instance, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders, are needed to address anti-Semitic activities carried out by neo-Nazi organizations.

Mr. Chairman,

As a country which, according to the third annual worldwide index of press freedom published by "Reporters without Borders" last year, is listed among the top ten countries in the world with the greatest press freedom, Latvia remains worried and is closely following the situation of civil society, independent media and NGOs in Latvia's EU Eastern neighborhood where Human Rights defenders have been particularly vulnerable. We are concerned that countries in Latvia's EU Eastern neighborhood have not positively reacted to the requests of invitation from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on promotion and protection of Human Rights defenders.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the years the Commission on Human Rights has proved to be one of the most important forums for debate on human rights standards and compliance monitoring throughout the world. The continued relevance of the Commission is attested to by the ever-increasing number of participants, including NGOs and National Human Rights institutions. But we must also recognise that the Commission is not the sole actor on the human rights stage and that closer cooperation among States and various international organizations is essential in order to achieve our common goals with the limited resources at our disposal.

Latvia is unequivocally committed to upholding human rights and freedoms, and has presented its candidature for election to the Commission on Human Rights for the term 2006-2008. We believe that membership in the Commission entails not only the privilege of adopting decisions but also the responsibility to be a model for other States, both regarding cooperation with the Commission and its mechanisms and in supporting activities of the UN in promoting human rights.

Thank you.