



# **IRELAND**

**Statement by**

**Minister of State for Human Rights and Development  
at the Department of Foreign Affairs**

**Mr. Conor Lenihan T.D.**

**At the Fourth Session of the Human Rights Council  
High Level Segment**

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**Statement by Mr. Conor Lenihan, T.D., Minister of State at the  
Department of Foreign Affairs with Special Responsibility for Overseas  
Development and Human Rights**

**UN Human Rights Council, Geneva**

**14 March 2007**

**Mr. President,**

I would like to thank you and the members of the Council for this opportunity to address the Council today.

I would like to associate Ireland with the statement made earlier this week by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the European Union.

I have noted in particular his remarks regarding the abolition of the death penalty. I would like to express Ireland's full support for the EU's position on this matter.

Last June, when this new Council had its first meeting, we were all very conscious that its establishment represented a great opportunity to improve the human rights architecture of the United Nations.

We hoped that the Council would be the vehicle for a decisive shift in ensuring the effective implementation of the human rights standards crafted by its predecessor.

People spoke of a fresh start and a new approach.

Despite undoubted positives, the Council has regrettably not yet fulfilled all of these expectations.

On occasion, it has shown itself to be timid where it could have been more resolute.

There is in many quarters an understandable anxiety that we will not make full use of the opportunity we gave ourselves last year.

**Signature and significance of International Instruments**

A considerable achievement of the Council that stands out is the adoption of the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances.

This was a landmark decision in the development of international law in this area and I would like to pay tribute to all those who were involved in the negotiations leading to its adoption.

I am very pleased to be able to announce today that Ireland will shortly be signing this Convention, which we fully support.

The other major step forward in terms of standard setting in 2006 was the adoption of the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly in December was a very welcome development and I look forward to the signature ceremony in New York at the end of this month.

### **Darfur**

Mr. President,

The limited time available to speakers this morning does not permit me to dwell on the many serious human rights situations in diverse parts of the world that are of deep concern to my Government.

I want, however, to address once again the grave situation in the Darfur region of Sudan.

The High-Level Mission mandated unanimously by this Council in December and led by a distinguished Nobel Peace Laureate has - in these very days - provided its Report.

The Mission confirms that the situation on the ground is characterised by gross and systematic violations of human rights and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

It goes on to state among other things that QUOTE "the principal pattern is one of a violent counter-insurgency campaign waged by the Government of the Sudan in concert with Janjaweed/ militia, and targeting mostly civilians. Rebel forces are also guilty of serious abuses of human rights and violations of humanitarian law"UNQUOTE.

I have visited the region myself and have conferred over a long period with numerous humanitarian and peace support personnel who are based there.

The Mission's findings have come as no surprise.

Last year, my Delegation stated in this Council that the fundamental seriousness of the situation in Darfur had not been exaggerated as some were suggesting at the time.

We said that far from improving, as others were claiming, the situation there was actually deteriorating. This view is now borne out.

Let me repeat what we have said here before. Ireland has no selfish political, military or other strategic interest in Sudan, its region or indeed on the African continent as a whole.

Our commitment to that part of the world is to promote peace, stability, sustainable development and respect for human rights.

Ireland has a longstanding and unshakable empathy and solidarity with the peoples of Africa.

There is no ulterior motive in what we have to say concerning the crisis in Darfur. We have provided over twenty million Euro for humanitarian relief and in support of the African Union Peace Mission, AMIS.

Let me acknowledge once again that the origins of the conflict in Darfur are complex. A resolution will not be easily reached or implemented.

However, the situation reported to this Council by the High-Level Mission remains a disgrace. The whole of Africa knows it, as do decent people everywhere.

The High-Level Mission has done its work thoroughly, basing its conclusions on information and documentation from a number of reputable sources, including not least the African Union.

It addresses its action recommendations to this Council, to the government of Sudan, to the armed rebel movements in Darfur and to the international community, including notably the United Nations Security Council.

This is no time to be timid. This Council should seize the opportunity to bolster its own credibility and that of the broad United Nations – which we all need and should uphold.

I urge the Council in the most heartfelt terms to act consensually in implementing the substantive recommendations addressed to it by the High-Level Mission.

It is long past time for the killing of African men, women and children in Darfur to stop.

## **Development and Human Rights**

Mr President,

Regrettably, we have seen in Darfur and other recent conflicts how rape continues to be used as a weapon of war.

This is unacceptable and Ireland is committed to working in partnership with our partners in civil society to eliminate this crime.

Such attacks leave both physical and emotional scars on the victims. The process of recovery is a long and slow one

Last week we celebrated International Women's Day.

Given the central role played by women in development and in the defence of human rights, the continued use of gender based violence throughout the world is all the more appalling.

The Irish Government is committed to advocating internationally for greater attention and resources to be devoted to the prevention of gender based violence.

Mr President,

As a Minister with dual responsibility for overseas development and human rights, I am always conscious of the connections between the two.

We cannot guarantee the full enjoyment of human rights without stability and development.

Increasingly it is also being recognised that we cannot achieve sustainable development without respect for human rights.

I recently had the pleasure of launching the first White Paper of the Irish Government on Development Aid.

This was a major review of our development aid programme and sets out our strategy for the coming years.

We will reach the UN ODA target of 0.7% of GNI in 2012. This year spending will exceed 0.5%.

One of the key elements in the paper is a recognition that our aid programme should further the realisation of human rights throughout the world.

Spending on development is spending on human rights.

The provision of access to education, health services, water, housing and better government to marginalised people and societies help them to realise their human rights on a progressive basis.

While no part of the world is totally free from human rights abuses, we recognise that the risk of human rights being violated is greater where political, economic and administrative systems are weak.

Therefore, our assistance is helping to strengthen and improve governance systems as a means to ensure the prevention of human rights abuses.

### **OHCHR Funding**

Mr President,

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to go from strength to strength in meeting the undoubted challenges of fulfilling its mandate.

In this regard, it is a pleasure to be able to announce that Ireland will increase its funding to the Office in 2007 by 15% over last year to a record level of \$5.13 M.

We have a particular appreciation of the post of the High Commissioner and the work of her Office.

As you will be aware, a former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, served as High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002.

We are especially supportive of the increased activities of the Office in the field of technical cooperation.

These activities are of vital importance in disseminating expertise and in capacity building.

## **Human Rights Council**

Mr President,

Much of this Council's time since June has been spent in building its own institutional architecture.

The Council must succeed in developing its institutional architecture in a manner which draws on the goodwill of all states.

The expectations of the Council among the broader community are very high and we must all strive to meet these.

In making our voting decisions for the elections to this Council last year, Ireland placed heavy emphasis on the pledges given by all candidates.

We will continue to do so and we encourage all members of the Council to abide by the impressive commitments they have given when standing for election.

One of the key innovations of the Council was the concept of Universal Periodic Review - intended to be a new means of engaging with each and every State to discuss how it could improve on its existing human rights performance.

However, the establishment of the new UPR should not prevent the Council from pointing to the neglect or wilful violation of human rights standards.

There must be room for the Council to be critical of national performance in this regard.

In the eyes of the world, it would simply not be credible for us to rule out in principle the possibility of holding the worst violators to account.

That said, such an option should continue to be exercised only in the most serious cases.

## **National HR Institutions and Civil Society**

National human rights institutions are a key part of the infrastructure needed at country level to ensure that there can be an independent voice to speak out in favour of human rights.

I know that the Irish Human Rights Commission will be among those attending this session of the Council and I welcome their participation.

We are giving them financial support to allow them to share their knowledge and experience with others so that there can be an exchange of experience on how best to operate as an independent national human rights institution.

Of course, as well as institutions, individual human rights defenders play a key role in ensuring that individual human rights are respected.

I would like to pay tribute to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders, Ms. Hina Jilani.

Her work is a very good example of well-focussed activities by a UN Special Procedure which are of tangible benefit to those on the ground.

Ireland will continue its partnership with civil society on human rights defenders in the context of this Council.

On this point, I would also like to pay tribute to Frontline, the Irish-based international NGO, which has recently been awarded the King Baudouin International Development Prize for its work in protecting human rights defenders.

I have long been an advocate of regarding civil society groups as vital partners in the area of human rights.

While we may not always agree on everything, their experience and knowledge is a very useful resource for all states.

Mr. President,

I wish you and all the delegates here today every success for this session.

There is no doubt that there is much hard work still to be done, but with constructive and sincere effort, I am confident that it can be a success.

Thank you.