

Principality of Liechtenstein

Mr. President

When I first addressed this new Council last June, I shared the high hopes that many of us placed in this body. Without being naïve about the difficulties ahead, we still believed that the mandate given to the Council by an overwhelming majority of Member States offered a unique opportunity: An opportunity to reshape the work on human rights and to place it on the basis of dialogue and cooperation, without neglecting its responsibility to address situations of gross and systematic violations of human rights. We still believe that this opportunity exists. But we are in no position to say that we have made very good use of this opportunity so far. Any comparison with the Commission on Human Rights is moot, since the Commission is history. Our yardstick must be the needs in the area of human rights and the letter and spirit of the mandate given to the Council by the General Assembly.

Mr. President

We share the concern about the situation of human rights in the occupied territories of Palestine and have supported several resolutions on this issue in the past. But we do not believe that this situation is the single most worrisome human rights crisis in today's world, as the current record of the Human Rights Council would lead to believe. Such a one-sided focus of the work of the Council leads to a skewed and thus harmful perception among the wider public. What is worse though is that some of the

decisions the Council adopted since its creation were precipitated and made without the necessary consultations that are essential to ensure the quality work we must strive for. The spirit of cooperation and dialogue envisaged by the General Assembly have thus not been translated into action by the Council.

Mr. President

Cooperation is a key issue we need to address at this fourth session of the Council - in two different ways. States - and those who serve as Members of the Council in particular - must make a stronger effort to reach out across their regions and to make sure that the broad understanding on human rights issues that we believe exists is also expressed in the daily work of the Council. But another type of cooperation is also urgently needed: Cooperation with the mechanisms of the Council and compliance with its decisions. This was a key issue in the creation of the Human Rights Council and proves to be one of the central problems the Council is currently facing. Our view is, very clearly, that anyone wishing to serve as a Member must be unequivocally committed to cooperation. In addition, however, this commitment must also be expressed through the willingness to demand such cooperation from others, be they Members of the Council or not. We have unfortunately observed a lack of commitment in this respect, and this trend must be reversed. Such a commitment is necessary to get the Council out of its cumbersome discussions on the follow-up to the decisions the Council has taken on the Middle East and on Darfur and will enable the Council to effectively address the situations on the ground which indeed require the attention of the international community.

Mr. President

Thankfully, there are positive signs as well. The Council has stepped up its efforts in the area of institution-building, and we are generally pleased with the quality of the work conducted on these issues over the past few weeks. It is essential that the Council comes to a swift conclusion on these issues. This new body must be equipped with a system of Universal Periodic Review which allows for a high-quality, intergovernmental consideration of the human rights records of each and every State. And we must create a system of Special Procedures that maintains the strengths of the old system - carried over for a year - and addresses its shortcomings. We believe that good and consensual solutions on these crucial topics are within reach and look forward to your leadership in this respect.

Mr. President

Over the past few years, we have been confronted with a widening gap between human rights standards and their implementation. We have created an impressive set of standards over the past few decades and have thus secured that human rights, together with security and development, is considered one of the pillars of the United Nations activities. But we have made very little progress in areas such as the operationalization of the right to development and allowed significant setbacks on human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as on the freedom from torture. It is this body, more than any other one, that has the task of narrowing and eventually closing this gap, both in the interest of the individuals worldwide which are deprived of the enjoyment of their rights and of the United Nations itself. The adoption of the Conventions on enforced disappearances and the rights of persons with disabilities were important steps forward. But we will be faced with an enormous credibility problem unless we can ensure that the agreement on standards is followed-up by their application in practice.

Mr. President

170 States favoured the creation of this Council almost one year ago, including all States that currently serve as Members. This was an overwhelming expression of support for a new way to advance the promotion and protection of human rights. We have not seen sufficient political will to translate this commitment into concrete action here in Geneva, at a time when it was most needed. The new Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and - most importantly - States must make it clear that they want this new body to function. We will never have a fully common understanding on everything that relates to human rights - inherently a highly political domain. But we should easily be in a position to recognize, collectively, that we will all lose, unless we make this a functional and effective body

I thank you.