

# INTRODUCTION

This is the second year that Human Rights Internet, in partnership with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), is publishing the annual report, *For the Record: The United Nations Human Rights System*. The report is a summary of the human rights documentation produced, and the human rights activities undertaken, by the United Nations, from 1 January to 31 December, 1998, organized by country as well as thematically.

A key purpose of the report is to facilitate access to the UN's very substantial output of human rights material so that the information is readily accessible to governments, non-governmental organizations, researchers, journalists and others. The hope is that this will facilitate informed policy-making in the area of human rights, whether by governmental, inter-governmental or non-governmental actors.

While much of the documentation on which this report is based is now available on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and/or on the Optical Disk System (ODS) of the United Nations, to get country-specific information about UN action in the field of human rights involves visiting a plethora of different web pages, as well as the ODS, to locate the relevant documents. *For the Record* greatly facilitates that task.

As with the 1997 report, the 1998 report has been produced in three different formats: in hardcopy as a set of six volumes; on the Worldwide Web, with full hyperlinks to all the original documentation; and as a CD-ROM for dissemination in the South.

Last year, we produced the report in Canada's two official languages, English and French, but were only able to provide hyperlinks to the English documents on our website, since very few French documents were accessible to us at that time. This year, because the UN has been posting documents in French as well as English, our website and CD-ROM are fully bilingual.

The response we had to last year's report was so positive that we made the commitment to produce this as an annual report. Moreover, since *For the Record* on our website has been receiving over 100,000 hits per month, we decided to post sections of the report on the web as soon as documents become available and are summarized. Therefore, in 1998, we began to produce a "rolling report". During 1999, we intend to speed up that process to an even greater degree.

The 1998 report, like the 1997 one, maintained a focus on the main bodies that take action in the area of human

rights — on the work of the Commission on Human Rights which meets in (March/April), the Sub-Commission (August), ECOSOC (July), the Third Committee of the General Assembly (November), the sessions of the treaty-bodies (whenever they meet throughout the year), and actions or decisions of the Security Council and UN field presences whenever these are relevant. In future years, we intend to expand the coverage to encompass the work of other bodies and agencies in the UN system — particularly since human rights is now being integrated throughout the UN system.

Once again, it is important to stress that, while we must of necessity summarize actions and decisions of UN bodies and mechanisms, we have striven to present the material objectively and with no editorial comment.

Because of the size of the report, we are again presenting it in six volumes to make it manageable for those who want the report close at hand when they attend relevant UN meetings. Vol. 1 (which includes this introduction) also contains: the Thematic Section of the report; the Appendix describing UN bodies and mechanisms; a calendar indicating when the different mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights are up for renewal; and a calendar indicating when treaty-bodies plan to consider the reports of specific countries. The other volumes are geographically organized: Vol. 2, Africa; Vol. 3, Asia; Vol. 4, Latin America and the Caribbean; Vol. 5, Central and Eastern Europe; and Vol. 6., Western Europe and Other.

## Acknowledgements

This report has been produced by Human Rights Internet (HRI) — an international NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, headquartered in Ottawa, Canada — working closely with the Division of Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and International Women's Equality of DFAIT. The research, writing and editing, as well as the development of the website, was done by an HRI team which included: Mark Erik Hecht, HRI's Deputy Director who acted as the project coordinator; Jan Bauer, researcher/writer; Karen Austin, Steve Mason, Nell Stewart and Christina Torsein, HRI interns; Britt Elliott, Paul Williams and Solange Benoit, research and documentation; Claude Roy and Paul Cowles, website implementation; and Laurie S. Wiseberg, HRI's Executive Director.

The commitment to this annual report of The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, has been of central importance.