

number of positive developments, including: human rights-oriented changes in national legislation; enlargement of national human rights capacities, including the establishment or strengthening of national human rights institutions; special protection extended to women, children and vulnerable groups; development of human rights education programmes; and adoption of national plans of action.

On the universality of human rights, the report recalls that the World Conference on Human Rights not only reaffirmed universality and the related commitments of states but also unanimously endorsed the universality of all the basic principles that should guide the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. The universal ratification of relevant international instruments called for by the World Conference would provide the most stable and effective foundation for ensuring respect for and observance of human rights in all countries. On this point, the report notes that since the World Conference there has been an increase of nearly 28 per cent in new ratifications. Despite this increase, the number of countries which have not ratified the core human rights treaties remains distressing. Declarations announcing withdrawals from treaty obligations have also been received. Although isolated, these declarations are particularly disappointing since they oppose the general understanding of the World Conference that countries should take bold steps to strengthen their commitments under international human rights law. The report also notes that the call of the World Conference to avoid, as far as possible, the resort to reservations to international human rights instruments remains another area in which results have been less than satisfactory.

On international cooperation and coordination of human rights activities, the report recalls that the VDPA emphasized, *inter alia*: (a) the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights rests with governments; (b) the promotion and protection of all human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community; (c) the international community should cooperate towards a better implementation of human rights, prevention of human rights abuses, and eradication of the gravest human rights violations; (d) the international protection and promotion of human rights is effective only if based on the principle of the indivisibility and equal value of all human rights, including the right to development; (e) the interdependence between democracy, development and respect for human rights offers a fundamental framework for progress in the field of human rights; (f) the international and regional systems of human rights protection are complementary, and should support each other; and (g) non-governmental organizations should be fully recognized as partners in international cooperation for human rights.

The report refers to the VDPA reaffirmation of the right to development and the steps taken since 1993 to promote the realization of this right noting that governments have taken such actions as: adoption of national developmental programmes, special projects targeting poverty

alleviation in specific areas or with regard to specific groups, adopting a human rights approach to developmental activities; cancellation of the accumulated interest on debts owed by developing countries; and professional training for foreign citizens. The report notes that the High Commissioner for Human Rights has proposed that the General Assembly's Second and Third Committees work jointly to implement the right to development by focussing on the elimination of poverty, with particular emphasis placed on basic security, which is necessary to enable individuals and families to enjoy fundamental rights and assume basic responsibilities.

The Vienna Conference made it clear that it is not enough to condemn racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. Governments have taken steps to address this question, including through: prohibition of the incitement of racial hatred; combatting racist organizations; steps to halt the proliferation of hate propaganda on the Internet; penal regulation to punish discriminatory behaviour, hate crimes, and racial violence; and regionally based monitoring centres to combat racism and xenophobia. Special attention has been paid to education for tolerance and against discrimination. In many countries, special institutions have been created to develop programmes against bigotry and racism and in some countries special programmes have been implemented to demonstrate the value of capitalizing on linguistic and cross-cultural skills in the market and workplace. The report states that measures undertaken at international and national levels to combat racial and other forms of discrimination have not, however, produced satisfactory results to date and, further, that penal measures are not sufficient to effectively act against racial and other forms of discrimination and violence. Educational programmes to promote racial and religious harmony, community programmes to overcome mutual distrust, youth exchange programmes, technical cooperation to assist in law reforms and establishing appropriate institutions and procedures are examples of activities that should be developed worldwide. New manifestations of racism and other forms of intolerance require further research and elaboration of appropriate policies. Early warning should be followed by early action to prevent the outbreak of conflicts. The High Commissioner also noted the need to reinvigorate the Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

With regard to the equal status and human rights for women, the report notes that many states have strengthened the ability of women to exercise their rights through, for example: withdrawing reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; development of national plans of action that espouse the goal of gender equality by the year 2000; changes in constitutional and penal laws prohibiting domestic violence, sexual assault and female genital mutilation; enactment of emancipation policies; the establishment of governmental structures responsible for the management of gender-oriented policies; adoption of new laws to promote the political advancement of women