

facilitate more systematic consideration of the impact upon human rights of particular trade and investment policies; urged the Secretary-General to undertake, if possible in collaboration with the WTO, a careful study of the potential impact upon respect for economic, social and cultural rights of the draft Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) being negotiated within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); emphasized the need for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop an enhanced capacity to monitor and analyse trends in relation to these issues; and called for regular briefings to be provided to the Committee to enable it to take full account of the relevant policies and trends in carrying out its responsibility for monitoring states parties compliance with their obligations under the Covenant.



## HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (HCHR)

### Statement to the 1998 session of the Commission on Human Rights

In her statement to the Commission (19 March 1998), Mary Robinson, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, made a number of observations including that:

- ◆ the Commission on Human Rights has become a body which relies heavily on the contribution of civil society, in the form of a large and vibrant NGO community;
- ◆ the right to development has been recognised as a right which synthesises all others;
- ◆ it is not possible to pretend that the achievements in the field of human rights have led to a significant decrease in the nature, gravity or number of human rights violations, as evidenced by: (a) the two genocides that have occurred in this decade; (b) the use of rape as a systematic weapon of war; (c) the fact that torture, arbitrary executions and disappearances are common; (d) the fact that hundreds of millions of people live in extreme poverty and suffer from malnutrition, disease and lack of hope; (e) the fact that widespread discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religious belief or sexual orientation continues; and, (f) an increase in obstacles faced in traditional receiving countries by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who are forced to work and settle in other countries;
- ◆ there has been a failure of implementation "on a scale that shames us all" — the impact of 50 years of human rights mechanisms, 30 years of multi-billion dollar development programmes, and of global rhetoric at numerous world conferences, has been totally and disappointingly disproportionate to the efforts invested;
- ◆ the gap in perceptions of what we mean by human rights needs to be narrowed if the commitment to promote and protect human rights is to become a reality;
- ◆ the High Commissioner has a responsibility to bridge that gap and adopt and foster a rights-based approach across the whole spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, to promote and protect the realisation of the right to development and to ensure the inclusion of human rights for women;
- ◆ the international community must do significantly more to implement the commitments undertaken at the World Conference of Human Rights in June 1993;
- ◆ universal ratification of the Women's Convention is unlikely by the year 2000, barring an increase in the pace of ratification;
- ◆ it is a matter of grave concern that a number of states, including members of the Commission, continue to withhold their full cooperation to special rapporteurs and others mandated by the Commission;
- ◆ the Secretary-General issued a strong moral call for action to end human rights violations, protect democracy and affirm that human rights are essential to meaningful development;
- ◆ the challenges facing governments to respond to that call include to: end violations against women, children, minorities, and migrants, and to end racial discrimination; ratify international human rights treaties; adopt national plans of human rights action and include human rights in national economic priority setting; ensure human rights education for all; establish national human rights institutions; and make progress towards eradicating poverty; and
- ◆ the challenges facing non-governmental organizations and individuals include to: reinforce education and information on human rights; develop wide partnerships and a broad approach for action on human rights; alert governments and UN bodies to dangers of violations; and make human rights and respect for human dignity a part of daily life.

### Reports on activities

The High Commissioner's report to the 1998 Commission (E/CN.4/1998/122) contains information on, *inter alia*: protecting human rights in a complex world; a medium-term plan (1998 - 2001) for the protection of human rights; UN reform; cooperation with specialized agencies and UN programmes; the restructuring of the human rights secretariat; improving the human rights machinery; the right to development; economic, social and cultural rights and the elimination of poverty; strengthening national protection of human rights; equality, tolerance, racism and racial discrimination; gender and human rights for women; protection for such vulnerable groups as indigenous peoples, minorities,