

CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST DOMINATES DEBATE

Following requests from a number of states, Agenda Item 7 was moved forward, so that it could be discussed on Thursday 6 March 2008. Item 7 dealt with the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and previously adopted resolutions on the matter. Some states had already expressed in their opening statements that it was a concerning situation, however some voices went up arguing that if previous resolutions had not been implemented, this discussion would be fruitless and moving the item forward on the agenda would be to the detriment of other dire human rights situations. This latter argument gained weight, given that four out of the six special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) so far convened have been dedicated to this conflict. Nevertheless, a large number of states expressed concern over the excessive use of force by Israeli troops. By the end of the day a resolution on the topic was adopted by a vote of thirty-three in favour, one against (Canada) and thirteen abstentions.



UNPO MEMBERS ATTEND SEVENTH UNHRC SESSION

Several representatives of UNPO Members have attended the end of the first week of the UNHRC. Notably, Mr. Munawar Laghari, who features in another article in this Monitor, attended the UN HRC to lobby on behalf of the Sindh. But also Mr. Mariqueo of the Mapuche and two delegates of the Oromo have attended the beginning of the session to lobby their causes. Other representatives are expected to attend as the session continues.



Mr. Munawar Laghari

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES ARE NOT ONLY A LATIN AMERICAN TRADE

In his oral presentation to the UNHRC on Monday 10 March 2008, Mr. Corcuera, Chairman of the Working Group on Arbitrary or Involuntary Disappearances, noted the Group's increasing preoccupation with disappearances in 'new' regions of concern which included Algeria, Iraq, Peru, the Philippines and the Russian Federation.

ANGOLAN DETENTION FACILITIES WORRY EXPERTS

Ms. Zerrougui, Chairperson of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, reported on Monday 10 March 2008 the findings of an official visit to Angola in 2007. Despite reforms a number of weaknesses still prevailed, especially over the weak role of judges in criminal proceedings. She expressed dismay that despite earlier agreements, the Working Group was not allowed to visit two detention centres, allegedly due the mistreatment and torture which is known to be rife in Angolan prisons. In a response, the Angolan representative blamed the difficulties concerning the planned prison visits on 'bureaucratic reasons'. Angola rejected the conclusions regarding the weak role of the judges and also expressed its wish to see corrections in the report regarding the current condition of the prisons in Angola. Furthermore, it re-emphasized the fact that there was no tolerance of mistreatment to prisoners. Angola declared that it would consider the recommendations of the Working Group but it remains to be seen how far implementation of the recommendations will go. In the discussion that followed the oral report by Ms. Zerrougui, several statements were made regarding arbitrary detention of indigenous peoples and minorities. Notably, the Society for Threatened Peoples called upon the Working Group to investigate allegations of Tibetans being arbitrarily arrested in Nepal.





SINDHI REPRESENTATIVE MEETS UNPO GENERAL SECRETARY

Mr. Munawar Laghari met UNPO General Secretary Mr. Marino Busdachin, in an informal meeting alongside the UNHRC on Friday 7 March 2008. They discussed various issues relating to the recent membership within UNPO of the Sindh. Mr. Laghari was present at the UNHRC to lobby on a number of issues affecting the Sindh. Food shortages, marginalization of Sindh and a lack of respect for human rights by Pakistan's President Musharraf stood high on his agenda and he pointed out the arbitrary detention and torture of Dr. Safdar Sarki - a Sindh human rights activist, who holds a US passport. According to reports, he was arrested by Pakistani forces in 2006 and has detained without charge ever since. Despite the seriousness of Mr. Sarki's fate, the issue has not been given sufficient attention at the UNHRC, according to Mr. Laghari.

LOUISE ARBOUR TO RESIGN

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Louise Arbour, presented her annual report to the UNHRC on Friday 7 March 2008. She informed the Council she would not be seeking a second term and would resign when the mandate of her first term ends at the end of June 2008. Ms. Arbour noted the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review and expressed pleasure at the renewal of agreements for the Offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, Colombia and Mexico and establishment of a West Africa office. Informing the UNHRC of her visits to Sweden, Slovenia, Mexico and Georgia she also highlighted positive steps in Nepal, Togo and Kenya in the field of human rights, and praising Australia's apology to its indigenous peoples for past policies. She criticized ongoing abuses in West Darfur and Sri Lanka. In closing, Ms. Arbour responded to criticism from some states, including allegations of bias, insubordination and hypocrisy in strong terms. Ms. Arbour made clear she would not allow such statements to be made and that anyone making such accusations degraded the Council and everyone working in the UN system.

SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE DISPLEASED WITH US, NIGERIA, AND INDONESIA

Mr. Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, expressed his regret on 10 March 2008 that during a visit to Iraq planned for October 2008 he will not be granted access to British and American detention facilities despite an earlier promise to this effect. A strange decision, given that the USA has stressed improvements in the conditions within its governed prisons since the scandal in the Abu Ghraib prison was reported in the spring of 2004. Following a visit to Nigeria, Mr. Nowak stated that he was appalled at conditions in which suspects are being kept for pre-trial detention.



Mr. Manfred Nowak

He did not express surprise that the widespread use of torture was ongoing, as multiple reports have pointed to systematic violence in Nigerian prisons before. Mr. Nowak did commend the improved situation of female prisoners in Nigeria however. Remarking on a visit to Indonesia in 2007, Mr.

Nowak noted that the country's criminal code still had not outlawed torture. The lack of independent monitoring bodies also worried him, as prison personnel and facilities were not scrutinized by an independent party. Indonesia rebutted Mr. Nowak's findings by declaring that he had not taken up a genuine dialogue with the relevant ministries and therefore Mr. Nowak did not fulfil his mandate, insinuating that he did not adhere to the previously adopted code of conduct for Special Rapporteurs.

THANKS

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