

**HIGHLIGHTS OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY PRESIDENT OF GENERAL
ASSEMBLY FOLLOWING CONSULTATIONS IN GENEVA ON HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL**

Jan Eliasson, the President of the General Assembly who has just concluded two days of consultations at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on the Human Rights Council, said the General Assembly was in the midst of serious negotiations on establishing the Human Rights Council and it had wanted to listen to the human rights community in Geneva before those negotiations were finalized. He had also met with the specialized agencies, particularly working with the World Health Organization, UNAIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to prepare for a major meeting at the end of May, beginning of June next year in New York. He was impressed by the cooperation between the three bodies, and it was a good example of how the United Nations should work to establish cohesion and cooperation inside the system.

Mr. Eliasson said for him, Geneva was the city where he got closer to the realities. Geneva had the realities of humanitarian work, health, and refugees. He liked to remind Member States that they should bear in mind two realities during negotiations, one of the real problems and the other of the expectations, aspirations and dreams of making a better United Nations. That was why the United Nations was in the midst of a very very important reform process now.

"I would say, in fact, we are facing a test of multilateralism. The leaders of the world met in New York and established a document which we are now trying to implement," said Mr. Eliasson, adding that the five ongoing negotiations processes concerned the Peacebuilding Commission; a comprehensive convention on terrorism; management reform; the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council and development; and the Human Rights Council. The leaders in New York had decided to create a Human Rights Council and had requested the President of the General Assembly to conduct open, transparent and inclusive negotiations to be completed as soon as possible during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, by September next year. He had defined that as trying to finish negotiations by the end of this year so that there could be a smooth and effective transition between the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Council.

Mr. Eliasson said an options paper had been presented in New York following negotiations, but he and his two Co-Chairs had decided to come to Geneva for a round of serious consultations with the Member States and also to meet with the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They had received some interesting input from the consultations held yesterday and they would now spend the weekend in New York working on these ideas in order to present them to the Member States in negotiations starting next week.

"So we go into an intense negotiation on the basis of a paper which is influenced also by the consultations that we have had here. Those consultations I hope will be finalized by the end of the year so that we can produce a document, hopefully in consensus, which reflects what our leaders wanted and I think what the world wants when it comes to human rights," Mr. Eliasson said. Human rights belong to the area of security and development as

there could be no security without development, no development without security, but there could be neither without the respect of human rights.

In response to a question on progress made on membership of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Eliasson said it would be difficult for him to comment on the different options in the negotiations because it was the two Co-Chairs who were conducting the negotiations.

"We are now entering next week a very sensitive stage of negotiations. There are different views on the sides of the Human Rights Council," Mr. Eliasson said. Some countries believed membership should be around 30 members, while others suggested higher numbers, up to 70 or 80 members. There were also different views on the election method, whether it should be with a two-thirds majority or just a majority vote. "We know that this is a complicated negotiation, but it is important that we try to finalize it together before the end of the year."

Asked about some of the alternatives being considered about the new body, whether the Council would be permanent or how frequent its composition would be changed, Mr. Eliasson said there was a general agreement that the Council had to meet more often, and that it should be ready to have meetings on an emergency basis. As to membership, it was difficult for him to talk about this subject.

Answering another question, Mr. Eliasson said the main reason to move on quickly in the negotiations was the need to have a smooth and effective transition between the Commission and the Human Rights Council. There was one more reason which was the budgetary effect. There was a need to have the budgetary effect brought into consideration before the end of the year so that it could fit into the biennium budget of the United Nations which was decided in December. It was not quite certain when the elections for the Council would take place, and this depended on when they finalized and under what conditions they finalized agreement, but it was hoped to have the elections as early as possible. "I would hope that we would be able to have a new substantial meeting by mid-next year".

A journalist said that while listening to the consultations yesterday, he believed that the positions would not open the way for progress, but would rather take the negotiations three steps backwards. Was it a mistake to destroy the Commission on Human Rights without knowing exactly what its successor was? In response, Mr. Eliasson said that the General Assembly was following the decision by the leaders of the world to establish a Human Rights Council.

"Of course when you are in the negotiation, you bring up often the maximum negotiation positions. I think it is a healthy exercise to go through this now and see what we can achieve. I hope this will not be an exercise where you search for the lowest denominator, but where you search for a quality consensus as I call it, that would stand up the test of the Universal Declaration and the UN Charter," Mr. Eliasson said. "It is going to be a difficult negotiation." Starting next Wednesday, they would start intensive negotiations and would meet every second day and work from 9 a.m. until the evening to iron out the difficulties.

Asked about negotiations on the Peacebuilding Commission, Mr. Eliasson said he hoped they would be able to achieve results very early. The two negotiations that were really pressing now were the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. There were some remaining problems on the convention on terrorism, and he could not provide a

time line on that. Negotiations on the Economic and Social Council would go on into the spring, as would talks on management reform.

"What I warned the Member States very strongly is that they should and must avoid linkages", Mr. Eliasson said. "I think it is very important that we negotiate on the merits of each issue." At the same time, he respected requests for balanced progress and implementation.

"I think we are facing a test of multilateralism. I think the next few years are absolutely decisive, whether we will move in the direction of multilateralism or not. There are different other methods in dealing with world problems, unilaterally, or in smaller groups against other groups, and there is so much mistrust in this world. We now have to prove that multilateralism works", Mr. Eliasson said. "With this reform effort, with our leaders sending us this message that they want to reform the United Nations, deal with the development more effectively, deal with security more effectively, deal with human rights more effectively, we are now challenged to produce multilateral solutions. And if we do not pass that test of multilateralism, I think we are facing a very bleak future."

Asked if the creation of a Human Rights Council was enough to face the various human rights challenges if the Members would remain the same, Mr. Eliasson said the Human Rights Commission had produced very good results and practices, while other aspects had been publicly criticized. He was building on the positive things that the Human Rights Commission had done, and its positive contributions must be retained. When it came to criticism of selectivity and other standards, there was a general view that he picked up from the negotiations that one concept that came back in the statements yesterday was the "universal review", that human rights were universal and they should be applied universally. That was a strong concept. There were steps forward in the Outcome Document of the World Summit, and if the world lived up to them, it would be in a better shape. He also hoped that the role of non-governmental organizations would remain as strong as it was today.

In response to another question on whether this was a change of structure, or of human rights norms, Mr. Eliasson said he hoped they were in the process of strengthening norms in the human rights area progressively. The world leaders at the Summit meeting put the human rights issues on par with security and development. Today, at the end of the Cold War, the world was realizing that it had to put the human being and his well-being in the centre. The responsibility to protect, which the Outcome Document outlined, was a strong moral and political message. But this was in the hands of Member States. The United Nations was only a mirror and reflection of the world. There would have to be gives and takes in the negotiation process.

Answering a question on creating an equilibrium between powerful and weak countries in the new Human Rights Council, Mr. Eliasson said he hoped the Council would be able to strike a balance between on the one hand working in a spirit of cooperation and helping with capacity building and technical assistance, and on the other hand not shying away with dealing with grave violations of human rights very concretely.

Asked if new facilities for the Council would be needed, Mr. Eliasson said no new facilities would be needed, but there may be a need for more resources if the Council met more often. Asked further about the need to meet more frequently, Mr. Eliasson said it was a

political messages that human rights were dealt with all the time, not only during a six week attention span. There would also be more work to be done if they moved in the direction of a universal review. There were many variable formulas.

"Everybody realizes that there has to be continued attention over a year, how this is divided up, whether it is three or four segments, with some regularity, every second month or so, I cannot tell you, it is going to be decided later on. The main principle is that it is going to be an exercise which requires our continuous attention," Mr. Eliasson said.

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