

**Transcript of press encounter with General Assembly President Jan Eliasson**  
28 February 2006, New York

**President Eliasson:** We are in the midst of very intense consultations and negotiations on the final text, as I hope, on the Human Rights Council. As I said when I presented the text, this represents not only the best efforts of my two Co-Chairs, but also my own efforts. I have presented a text that I think is workable, a text that is principled and a text that can create a good human rights machinery. I stand by that. I think we should be proud of what we during these consultations have achieved together, in consultation with Member States.

The reactions that I have received have, all in all, been very positive. The majority of reactions that I received have been very encouraging. In fact, many Member States are telling us to not make changes in this text, but that changes will only lead to new amendments being presented and creating a very difficult negotiation situation. These positive signals come from Latin America, from Africa, from the Eastern European group, the Western European countries -- in different forms. Some of the reactions are not yet final, but all in all very positive. I should also have said Asia, of course.

So I am encouraged by the general reaction from the membership. Of course, there are also some skeptical and some negative voices, and I am sure you will ask questions about that. I have noted that, and we'll see how we can handle this issue. We take into account, of course, with great respect, all positions taken by Member States, and understand their concerns.

But I hope, as I said in my introduction, that when we look at this text, we do not only look at the individual aspects, the special parts of the text, but also the totality. And also that we see the wider ramifications -- what happens if we don't come to an agreement now on the Human Rights Council. And I hope that in this consideration we will be able to come to action as soon as possible. I will try still to move to action, but of course I need to take into account this reaction from the United States, which you are well aware of. That requires continued consultations.

So it's a period of very intense consultations. It's a serious moment for the United Nations. What is at stake, I think, is the reform process. What is at stake is the human rights dimension, which is absolutely necessary for us to have. The human rights dimension is the soul of this organization. And we have to make sure that we do it as fast as possible. And I've always said that we should act before the Human Rights [Commission] meets on the 13th of March.

**Q:** [inaudible]

**President Eliasson:** This is what we are trying to do. It's not easy, since I am also met by requests from several Member States not to touch the text, because if there is change in the text, then other amendments will be brought forward. And we come into a re-

negotiation which most probably would lead to a result which is far below what we already have achieved.

**Q:** So this means that in the end you're going to be willing to call for a vote rather than get a consensus, or are you still striving for consensus?

**President Eliasson:** A President of the General Assembly must always strive for consensus. In this case, it's a very difficult situation, a difficult challenge to reach that consensus. But I think we have an ongoing discussion on how we can deal with these issues, and I hope that we will be able to find formulas so that we can bring this to action. But of course, as President of the General Assembly, I am aiming always for consensus.

**Q:** Has anybody presented a compromise text?

**President Eliasson:** No, the warnings have rather been in the other direction – that compromises which open the text will lead to new amendments, and then very lengthy re-negotiation.

**Q:** The U.S. is now not saying line by line, but they want to re-open it between countries, rather than using yourself as a facilitator.

**President Eliasson:** Well, I was asked by the leaders in September personally – actually, the President of the General Assembly was asked to conduct open and transparent and inclusive negotiations, to be concluded as soon as possible during the 60th General Assembly. This is what our leaders requested, and I will work in that spirit as long as I have the confidence of the Member States.

**Q:** What is the time frame now for what you do, and what do you mean by “action”?

**President Eliasson:** I would, of course, hope to bring this draft resolution to decision in the General Assembly. That is my aim.

**Q:** When?

**President Eliasson:** I would hope to bring this, as I said, as soon as possible. I said preferably this week. But we now have, of course, a situation where we have a clear message of hesitation about going ahead. And for that I need to continue my consultations.

**Q:** So this is a postponement for days? Or this postponement -- the decision is for when?

**President Eliasson:** It's not a postponement. I have to continue the consultations to see when we are ready to go to action. I would hope that – as I said, we need to finalize this before the Human Rights Commission begins...

**Q:** [inaudible]

**President Eliasson:** Yes, they're well known positions. You have to ask the United States, but they're well known to all of you. [inaudible] and some other aspects. I think you should ask them about that. But they have made clear to me what the problems are.

**Q:** Ambassador, percentage-wise, how many Member States are on board, and how many are not?

**President Eliasson:** I don't have the numbers, but I received very good reactions from both Latin America, Africa. Not the final word yet; they're still in their own consultations.

**Q:** What about the European states?

**President Eliasson:** I don't have a number, but I think...

**Q:** A majority?

**President Eliasson:** It seems that a majority, a clear majority is in favour of this text.

**Q:** What about OIC?

**President Eliasson:** OIC also have conveyed positive signals.

**Q:** So only the U.S. is opposed [inaudible]?

**President Eliasson:** Not only the U.S. There might be other countries that have reservations

**Q:** [inaudible]

**President Eliasson:** We are in the midst of consultations...

**Q:** [inaudible] what countries?

**President Eliasson:** The U.S. has reacted, but there are also others that have signaled their doubts. They're still considering it. So I am in the midst of these consultations, and am just receiving now information about it.

**Q:** [inaudible]

**President Eliasson:** I don't have the numbers.

**Q:** Where is it that you see the possibility of bridging the gap with the United States, since your positions are too far away?

**President Eliasson :** Well, we are in an ongoing discussion of what is the best way forward, and I would hope that all countries realize that we take a grave risk if we go into

re-negotiation on the text. And that we will in different ways look forward to how the Human Rights Council will work, and by that we could satisfy some of the concerns.

**Q:** How detrimental is the re-negotiation from your point of view?

**President Eliasson:** We have worked on this for five months intensely. I spent the last three weeks, more or less day and night, on this issue. We have done our very best to find a formula which is principled. I am myself a human rights advocate. I wouldn't want to make compromises on dealing with human rights, but we have tried to find a formula which is also a cooperative mechanism that could bring about the majority of the Member States. This is a fair and balanced text in my view, and my feeling is that most of the Member States are now leaning in the direction of accepting this rather than opening up the negotiations where they will come back with their original negotiating positions. And by that we have a rerun of .....

**Q:** Ambassador Bolton said if that's the case, he would want to ask for a vote. Is this what you're sensing from the Member States?

**President Eliasson:** We haven't reached there yet. We're continuing discussions. I'm consulting with the Member States, including also informing them about the position of the United States. I'm receiving the reaction of other states to the American position. Then I will make a judgment about where we are after these consultations. We are in the midst of these negotiations now.

**Q:** [inaudible]

**President Eliasson:** That is something I will have to discuss with Member States.

**Q:** Do you expect to make this judgment this week or early next week?

**President Eliasson:** First of all, I'm still waiting for final reactions from different groups, both in Western Europe and Africa and so forth, and OIC. I'm seeing the Chairman of OIC this afternoon. It's a constant flow of information. When I have all of that information in, and their positions clarified to me, I can perhaps more clearly think in terms of numbers. Then I have to make a decision, in consultation with Member States.

**Q:** Can you make amendments to the text without reopening the document?

**President Eliasson:** That is a very difficult step for me to take, if that were to be taken. I think we should look at this text, and I hope that the text itself will have a power, and I'm sure that the more this text is studied, the more support it will get.

**Q:** (inaudible)

**President Eliasson:** Let's cross that bridge when we reach it.

**Q:** But we have reached it.

**President Eliasson:** This is a body of international negotiation. I'm sure that the United States is also interested in the reactions from other Member States to their position. This is a give-and-take situation for us all. We want to have a good and strong human rights body. Above all, we want a body that is accepted by this Organization. We can't risk the human rights work in the United Nations. This is what is at stake.

**Q:** (inaudible)

**President Eliasson:** We have in this proposal a number of ways that I would like you to be aware of. Not only do we go for the absolute majority to get Member States elected – it's not a simple majority -- but also there are such clear messages in this text: about the possibility of suspension of Member States; the fact that you are supposed to uphold the highest standards of human rights; the fact that there is direct and individual vote on the membership of the Human Rights Council; the fact that you have to accept to be reviewed, all countries have to be reviewed, if you get into the Human rights Council, without exception. You have to also cooperate with the Council, including the rapporteurships.

There are lots of requirements that are now put. This has never been the case in the Human rights Commission work. I want you, ladies and gentlemen, to notice that when we moved to the absolute majority, there was a much more meaningful discussion about what was expected for membership, and I'm proud to say that this has been met with such understanding by the wide majority of the members of the United Nations.

**Q:** Are you going to [inaudible] to the United States with all the people who don't want it reopened?

**President Eliasson:** I don't say that. I'm sure everybody's interested in the views of others. Isn't that a good rule in the United Nations?

**Q:** Can this be established without U.S. support?

**President Eliasson:** Let's not speculate on that. I'm as President very, very eager to reach a consensus decision. And in the end I hope the process will lead to a consensus decision. We need to have consensus about human rights in the United Nations.

**Q:** Have you been pressured by the United States?

**President Eliasson:** The word is not "pressured". I have received strong representation of the national positions from all directions. It's not an enviable position to be in...

**Q:** Have you seen Ambassador Bolton in the last day, and are you going to see him again?

**President Eliasson:** I haven't seen him in the last day, but we are in contact, and with his mission, of course, all the time. And we are working closely with all Member States, as we should in the United Nations.

Thank you very much.

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