

**Press encounter by UN General Assembly President Jan Eliasson
On the elections for the Human Rights Council**

(9 May 2006, following the morning plenary meeting of the Assembly)

President Eliasson: We have now almost finalized the elections. It took less time than we had expected, I must say. We had all regions except the Eastern European group finishing, and you have seen the results. They reflect the will of the Member States. It is a reflection of the United Nations, the whole body of the United Nations. I will not comment on any individual country's performance, only to underline, as President of the General Assembly and negotiator during the Human Rights Council negotiations, that I find it very important that all Member States have made pledges and commitments to human rights which they are expected to live up to, and also that they have accepted, by their membership in the Human Rights Council, to be reviewed, that their human rights record is to be reviewed. This is an innovation, and it is important that we have established this principle, that all members of the Council are to have their human rights record reviewed.

I believe that this resolution on the new Human Rights Council constitutes a new departure for the work on human rights in the world. And I am sure that our colleagues in Geneva will now intensify their preparations for the Council meeting, which will start on the 19th of June. They have important tasks ahead, to prepare for that meeting -- a responsibility that I know they will shoulder. I think, all in all, we should be very satisfied. We still have one round this afternoon, with the voting on the remaining three seats for Eastern Europe. And then we will know which exact countries will be the 47 members of the new Human Rights Council.

To me this is a truly historic occasion, that we are establishing the new Council, and that we have as a basis a strong resolution, with great legitimacy in the UN system. As you recall, it was voted by a vote of 170 "yes" votes, 3 abstentions, and 4 "no" votes. And I think that that constitutes the legitimacy needed for the very important work of human rights. Let us remember that the three pillars of the United Nations are security, development and human rights. Without security, no development; without development, no security; but without respect for human rights, no lasting security, no lasting development.

I thank you for your attention, and thank you for your interest in this very important pursuit of the United Nations.

Question: Mr. President, what do you feel about what Ken Roth of Human Rights Watch said a few minutes ago, that although this was an improvement, there still are some of what Human Rights Watch considers human rights abusers in there. He mentioned Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Russia and China. Do you think that's a fair criticism -- that there's been progress but not enough?

President Eliasson: I would not mention any of the Member States. I would want you, though, to also look at the list of the candidates for the Human Rights Council -- the countries that decided to run, and the countries that decided not to run. And, as I said, it is important that all members of the Human Rights Council have accepted to have their records on human rights reviewed, and that they have to live up to the pledges and commitments that they made during the campaign. But I will not comment on individual countries. Thank you.