

2005 WORLD SUMMIT

HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING | 14-16 SEPTEMBER 2005



» ENSURING HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

The newly established Democracy Fund, the proposal to create a Human Rights Council, and plans for the expansion and strengthening of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reflect the current drive to bolster the UN's work on democratic governance and the protection of human rights.

Under its Charter, the promotion and protection of human rights is a principal mission of the United Nations. Since 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has stood as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations," and has served as the inspiration for a rich body of international human rights law developed under UN auspices. In addition, the many human rights monitoring mechanisms established by the UN through the years have helped to identify abuses, raise awareness and encourage compliance with these international standards.

In Secretary-General Kofi Annan's report in advance of the Summit, he argued that no drive for development or security would succeed without respect for human rights. Along these lines, Member States are working on proposals for strengthening the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and establishing a new Human Rights Council.

REVITALIZING THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS MACHINERY

The challenge of moving to a new era of human rights implementation will entail thoroughgoing cultural change. Under consideration by Member States is a plan to establish a standing Human Rights Council. The Council would replace the Commission on Human Rights and raise the institutional profile of human rights in the United Nations system. This new intergovernmental Council would help ensure sustained attention to the Organization's human rights mission. (*See background on "Creating a UN for the 21st Century"*.)

In order to build up the international human rights machinery, Member States are considering in advance of

» FACTS AND FIGURES

- » The UN acts on thousands of human rights complaints each year, through its human rights treaty bodies, the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- » The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948 without a dissenting vote.
- » Less than 2 per cent of the UN regular budget goes to the human rights programme of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Office currently must rely heavily on voluntary contributions for most of its activities.
- » There are currently seven major human rights treaties, each with its own monitoring and implementation mechanisms: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention Against Torture; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.
- » The UN Programme of Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights has provided assistance for human rights and the rule of law to countries around the world for more fifty years.

the Summit a plan to strengthen the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and its field offices. This would include support to the Office's work in the areas of technical assistance, capacity-building, monitoring and protection, and an increase in the Office's regular budget. The proposal also envisions a more active role for the High Commissioner in the work of the Security

Council and a proposed Peacebuilding Commission — as spelled out in the Plan of Action prepared by the High Commissioner and submitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General as an annex to his *In Larger Freedom* report (see www.ohchr.org).

UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND

In July 2005, the Secretary-General announced the establishment of the UN Democracy Fund for countries seeking to establish or strengthen their democratic systems and practices. The Fund will complement existing activities of the United Nations, enhance coordination among them, and improve the Organization's capacity to respond to requests for assistance from governments and non-governmental organizations. Some Member States have already made contributions to the Fund, and others have announced specific pledges.

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

A proposal under consideration by Member States in advance of the 2005 World Summit would urge them to agree to be fully accountable to protect their own citizens, and to recognize the world's shared responsibility to take collective action when authorities are unwilling or unable to protect their citizens from genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes.

STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW

The UN's year-2000 Millennium Declaration (see www.un.org/millennium) reaffirmed the commitment of all nations to the rule of law as the framework for advancing human rights, human security and human development. As stated in the Secretary-General's



FACTS AND FIGURES

- » An average of 18 requests per year for help with democratic elections have been acted on by the UN's Electoral Assistance Division between 1992 and 2004.
- » In the last year alone, the UN provided electoral assistance to more than 20 countries worldwide, including Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq and Palestine, bringing the total number of countries assisted to nearly 80.

report, *In Larger Freedom*, new laws must be put into place, old ones must be put into practice and institutions must be better equipped to strengthen the rule of law.

In negotiations preceding the Summit, it has been proposed that Member States support the establishment of a Rule of Law Assistance Unit, to strengthen technical assistance and capacity-building in this field. The Secretary-General has also made the extension of human rights norms a hallmark of his tenure, urging ratification and full implementation of international conventions, specifically those relating to the protection of human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law.

Member States are also currently discussing measures to fight impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes through cooperation with the International Criminal Court, the ad hoc war crimes tribunals and other mechanisms for international justice.