

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**61st ANNUAL DPI/NGO CONFERENCE
REAFFIRMING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL: The Universal Declaration at 60**

**CLOSING CEREMONY
FRIDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2008
5:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.; UNESCO, PARIS, SALLE I**

**Statement of Kiyo Akasaka Under-Secretary-General for
Communications and Public Information**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends and Colleagues,

We are reaching the end of our conference. It has been a full and exciting three days. We came to Paris to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration. As I have moved around the conference during the past days it has been heartening to see the active participation of a diverse range of participants including member States in all the conference activities. The conference activities have also reaffirmed that the Declaration is alive and as relevant today, as it was 60 years ago when it was adopted. Our conference discussions have covered a diverse range of human rights topics and it has been interesting to hear the 30 articles of the Declaration being referred to often and by such a range of participants.

We came here with the goal of reaffirming human rights and integrating the Universal Declaration in our lives and those of people all over the world. This Conference has been noteworthy for its spirit of collaboration and cooperation. [Why don't we have more of this sort of constructive conference on human rights, and anti-racism in Geneva, New York and everywhere] and above all, its sharing of experiences and practices through the many personal stories we heard at times appalling, and always very moving, that have emerged over the past few days. From the story tellers of the NGO Raconteurs Corner to the prisoners of conscience, from the participants who have lived on the streets of big cities, to those engaged in the daily fight against discrimination including widows in some cultures, those with disabilities, or of a different sexual orientation and other vulnerable marginalized groups; all came to Paris to have their voices heard.

I listened to the issues related to psychiatric patients. The messages were clear. Human dignity must be upheld, and indifference is the worst enemy to the good. And we cannot forget those who actually took part in drafting the Declaration and are still with us today Stephane Hessel our keynote closing speaker and Karel Vassak whose stirring presentation on the opening day is still a conversation piece. All these individuals have shared their stories, testimonies and experience.

Everyone has had the opportunity to learn and understand more about human rights and how to engage and make better use of the existing human rights mechanisms and instruments. As we leave Paris many of the victims of discrimination who were among us will have the opportunity to become more empowered as agents of change within their communities, and for us, this will be the greatest encouragement for our work to do more to make a difference. For our part, the UN will continue to work for the promotion of human rights as one of the major pillars [on our agenda,] together with you, the people of the NGO [community].

We came to Paris to be re-inspired and re-invigorated for the continuing campaign to make human rights for all a reality in our daily lives. I hope that we can take back with us the energy to do more and the spirit of collaboration that we have engendered here over the past few days, so that as one NGO has noted, we can truly begin the process of partnering across regions, continents and local communities, as there is still much work to be done. Let's make a difference for a better world.

[For more on our activities please look at our website, www.un.org and in particular, the “Know Your Rights 2008.org” which is full of useful information on human rights issues.]

[BEGIN FRENCH]

J'ai à présent le grand plaisir d'inviter l'Ambassadeur de France Stéphane Hessel à prononcer le discours de clôture. Héros de la résistance française, l'Ambassadeur Hessel est un vaillant et farouche défenseur des droits de l'homme. Il a également représenté avec beaucoup de panache et d'adresse la France aux Nations Unies. L'Ambassadeur Hessel est une personne exceptionnelle, qui peut se targuer d'avoir fait partie de l'équipe internationale de rédacteurs de la Déclaration universelle. Nous sommes enchantés d'avoir l'Ambassadeur Hessel avec nous aujourd'hui. Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, vous avez la parole.....

[END FRENCH]