

10 December 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Opening of the Inter-Active Panel to Commemorate the Sixtieth Anniversary of  
the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Heads of State and Government,  
Distinguished ministers,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Representatives of United Nations organizations and bodies,  
Representatives of non-governmental organizations,  
Brothers and sisters,

Welcome to these two interactive panel discussions on the themes, "Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and "The full implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: challenges ahead and ways forward". We have decided to commemorate the signing of this seminal human rights instrument by convening a broad and open discussion on the need to identify obstacles, challenges, lessons learned and suggestions for ensuring the full and effective enjoyment of all human rights for all individuals and peoples. To this end, we have invited as panellists distinguished personalities from the different geographic regions, directors of United Nations bodies, such as former High Commissioners for Human Rights, civil society leaders, academics committed to the cause of human rights, which is the cause of justice, equity, democracy, conservation and protection of the environment and human development.

Those in attendance include representatives of Member States and civil society organizations. We are convinced that the responsibility for ensuring respect for human rights lies principally with States, but not exclusively with them, since responsibility is also shared by companies, transnational corporations, banks, private and civil institutions in general, the communications media, communities and individuals.

The Office of the President of the General Assembly will continue to promote dialogue, discussion and interaction among States and between States and society as its contribution to the search for solutions to the major problems confronting the world today, such the deterioration of our ecosystems, numerous crises, hunger and the ethical dilemma facing mankind. We do not want these debates to be only forums for discussion. We want them to result in blueprints for action, resolutions of the General Assembly, the blazing of trails for building a new economic and social order that puts an end to the logic of the concentration of capital, wealth and knowledge and signals the beginning of a new logic of inclusion, participation and democratization of institutions and incomes, in which all nations and persons can aspire to the highest standards of living. This is the essence of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights: education, health, employment, housing, culture, food and recreation for all human beings.

Allow me to introduce the panellists and moderators of the two debates.

The first debate is on the theme “Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and we will have the honour to hear from:

Mary Robinson: After serving as President of the Republic of Ireland from 1990 to 1997, she was appointed United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 1997, a post which she occupied until 2002. In 2006, she was elected President of the Ethical Globalization Initiative, an international organization established to pressure Governments that are signatories to international agreements for the protection of human rights to honour those agreements.

Denis Mukwege, a medical doctor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who has dedicated his life to providing social services to the poorest. In particular, he has worked with rural women, children and older victims of the civil war and with victims of sexual violence. He is a symbol of the fight against violence against women and today he will be receiving the United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights.

Carolyn Gomes, a Jamaican human rights lawyer. She is the Executive Director of Jamaicans for Justice. Working with many national and international groups, she has defended the human rights of Afro-Caribbean persons. She too will be receiving the United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights.

The moderator of the debate is Julia Dolly Joiner, the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs since 2003 working in the fields of democracy, governance, human rights and humanitarian affairs. Before that, she held various civil service posts in Gambia, including Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Public Administration.

Later, in the second debate, we will discuss the theme “The full implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” challenges ahead and ways forward”. We are honoured to have with us:

Maude Barlow, of Canada, who is a Human Right to Water activist and author of various books, including “Blue Gold”. She is Chair of the NGO Council of Canadians and co-founder of the Blue Planet Project, which works internationally in defence of the right to water. In October, I had the honour to appoint her senior adviser on water-related issues for the sixty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Ghassan Salame, of Lebanon, a Professor of International Relations at the Institute for the Study of Public Policies. He was an adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on questions related to cultural diversity and was also Minister of Culture of Lebanon.

Lauri Malksoo is one of the principal experts in the field of international law and human rights standards in Estonia. Since 2002, she has been an adviser in the Office of the Ombudsman of Estonia, an independent institution that monitors respect by the Government and by individuals for fundamental rights and freedoms and for the principles of good governance in Estonia.

The moderator of this debate is:

Eduardo Gonzalez, a Peruvian sociologist who is an expert in the field of transitional justice and who also has experience in the promotion of human rights and technical assistance in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Before working for the International Center for Transitional Justice, he worked with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru. Before that, he was a leader in activities to promote the international coalition of non-governmental organizations in support of the International Criminal Court, a civil society campaign organized to ensure the implementation of the Rome Statute.

Welcome all of you to the United Nations and I now give the floor to Ms. Joiner.

Thank you very much.