



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations
Office and Other International Organisations in GENEVA
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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF JUSTICE, LEGAL AND
PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS OF ZIMBABWE, MR PATRICK A CHINAMASA
(MP) AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL:
GENEVA : 19-22 JUNE 2006

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Mr Chairman
The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Louise Arbour
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Zimbabwe delegation joins those delegations that have spoken before me in congratulating and welcoming the establishment and successful inauguration of the Human Rights Council as a successor human rights organisation to the Human Rights Commission. We consider this a positive development. We embrace the new Human Rights Council fully cognisant of the fact that the legal instrument, which set it up, was the outcome of very wide and all inclusive consultations amongst member states of the United Nations.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the Members of your Bureau on your election as office-bearers for the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council. We wish you a fruitful tenure at the helm of this new ship, on its maiden voyage through some challenging and uncharted waters. Happily for you, all nations have a stake in your voyage.

From the ashes of the Commission has risen this new Council and we pray and trust that the new institution will, in the manner it relates to member countries and in all respects, meet our expectations. Lest we forget some of our expectations from the new dispensation ushered in by the Council are :

Firstly, that the new Council will succeed in fostering a culture of genuine worldwide commitment to the promotion and respect for human rights in their entirety encompassing, as they should do, both the political and civil rights, and the socio-economic and cultural rights, the so called development rights which we recognise as universal interdependent and indivisible.

Secondly, that the new Council will make it its business to depoliticise the pursuit of human rights issues. If we are to make headway in building a culture that promotes the respect for human rights we must work hard to exorcise the ghost of politics from human rights issues.

In the past, there has been a tendency to falsely allege against targeted countries, violations of human rights and to use such fabrications as pretext for hegemonic control and interference in the internal affairs of those countries. Notions of regime change should not creep into any discourse on human rights. It is our bold expectation that the Council will usher a new beginning that will see a sober, balanced and objective approach as opposed to the retributive style of the Commission. Your first test comes as you will be cajoled to pay attention to so-called "urgent situations" - by whom and for whom, where and why?

Thirdly, the reality that the world is facing today of big countries placing themselves above the strictures of international law and committing acts of genocide and other crimes against humanity with impunity must come to an end. We should neither recognise nor accept their role as self-appointed world policemen when they are in effect the worst violators of human rights. All countries, big or small, should have their human rights records fall under the watchful and impartial oversight of this Council. Violations remain violations whether committed by big or small countries and the consequences in the event of such violations occurring should be the same for everybody. There should be no sacred cows in the manner countries are called to book or made accountable for their actions. In short Mr Chairman, I am calling for non-discrimination in the manner alleged violations are investigated. The practice of selective persecution or condemnation or the raising of spurious allegations of human rights violations should be a thing of the past.

Fourthly, our sad experience with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) operating in our country in the area of human rights and governance issues is that they are set up and financed by developed countries as instruments of their foreign policy. They are wholly funded from foreign government coffers or through the quasi-government institutions of foreign governments. None are funded locally. Their objectives include destabilization and interference with the evolution of our political processes, undermining our sovereignty, creating and sustaining local opposition groups that have no local support base, and promoting disaffection and hostility among the local population against their popularly elected government. In short, across the board, NGOs in developing countries operating in the field of human rights and governance issues are not home-grown and are used invariably as conduits by developed countries to channel dirty money to destabilise governments of the Third World especially those that dare take an independent line in international affairs. Worse, Mr Chairman, is the increasing trend worldwide whereby NGOs clandestinely and non transparently set up in our countries by developed countries purport to speak on our behalf but instead of

pronouncing and advancing our interests they advance those of the people who set them up. Mr Chairman, I appeal to the new Council to observe this phenomenon and seek to correct it by coming up with a framework, which prohibits direct funding of local NGOs operating in the field of human rights and governance issues by developed countries and their agencies. If any assistance is desired to be given this should be channelled through the UN System in a transparent and open manner.

Fifthly, recognising that evolving a culture that promotes and respects human rights is a process not an event, there are high expectations from especially the developing countries that the new Council will offer a helping hand to those countries that need its assistance. The Council should play a facilitative role and engage member countries in meaningful dialogue. Countries will more readily co-operate in an environment where they are talked to as partners. Proneness to condemnation evokes negative responses which are not helpful to the promotion and respect of human rights. To this end, I appeal to the new Council to establish a well resourced technical unit to which member countries can appeal for technical and material assistance in the areas of legislation training and capacity and institution building.

Mr Chairman, Zimbabwe stands ready and commits itself to working closely with the Council. In line with other countries, we are a state party to a number of the most important Human Rights Instruments be they regional, continental or international. We need though, as a country to build our reporting capacity under these various instruments and for this we shall be turning to the new Council for assistance.

Mr Chairman, about three months ago, Government resolved to set up a Human Rights Commission to oversee the observance and promotion of the respect of human rights in the country. It is anticipated that a Constitutional Amendment to establish the Human Rights Commission will be introduced in Parliament within the next six months. Other initiatives, such as opening up dialogue with stakeholders in the human rights field, are being pursued so as to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights.

Allow me, Mr Chairman, to conclude my address by giving to the new Council the assurance of my country to respect the human rights of all its people without regard or distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language or religion etc as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations and in our Constitution. We reaffirm our commitment to cooperate with other member countries to make the story of the Human Rights Council a success.

Lastly, I wish to once again wish you, Mr. Chairman and all the members of the Council the best of luck in this most challenging time in the evolution of international human rights. You are in the process of making history and time will be the best judge.

I thank you for your attention.