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**Address by Ms. Louise Arbour
United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights**



**On the Occasion of the 1st session of the
Human Rights Council**

Geneva, 19 June 2006

Mr. President,

Allow me to join in the good wishes extended to you by the Secretary-General and to express, in particular, my gratitude to you for the leadership that you have already demonstrated on the itinerary to this historic moment.

Monsieur le Secrétaire général, Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs.

Je suis très honorée de me joindre à vous en cette mémorable occasion.

58 ans après la proclamation de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme, nous sommes à l'orée d'une ère nouvelle. De grands espoirs reposent sur ce Conseil qui devra marquer le passage d'une période d'affirmation des idéaux et des normes des droits de

l'homme, vers une période qui consacre leur mise en œuvre de façon efficace.

La reconnaissance graduelle, mais constante, des droits de la personne humaine n'aurait pas été possible sans les femmes et les hommes qui ont consacré leurs vies et leur travail à la poursuite de ces idéaux. La création d'institutions, telles que la Commission des droits de l'homme et maintenant le Conseil, concrétise leur vision, et démontre également que les idéaux peuvent non seulement être une source d'inspiration, mais aussi un héritage durable pour tous.

Yet no institution maintains its legitimacy in perpetuity without the driving force and courage of re-invention. A reinvigorated vision for human rights is at the heart of the Secretary-General's agenda for reform, which the World Summit endorsed. In one of history's felicitous confluences, the Secretary-General's vision met with the determination of

the President of the General Assembly, and of his predecessor, to champion the reform project and ensure that it would become a blueprint for real change.

And now we have a new opportunity to map out a path that would serve not only the purposes of consolidation and norm-setting, but crucially also that of progress in these norms' universal implementation and enforcement. Victims of human rights abuses all over the world, and future generations will judge us by our willingness and ability to shed the comfort of habit, to fight inertia, reject expediency, and fulfil promises with action.

Our foundations are sound, as they are rooted in ideas that the test and grind of time could not erode. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's formidable intuition of what constitutes the scaffolding of human rights is as relevant today as it was more than sixty years ago. President Roosevelt's four freedoms—freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom

of expression and freedom of worship—challenged us to promote liberty through democracy, justice and an equitable distribution of resources, and to create an environment tolerant of dissent and difference, enhancing opportunities for all to live a life with dignity.

We have come a long way in understanding the essential contours of that challenge and in identifying how to address all its ramifications. Today, there can be no doubt that human rights; peace and security; and economic and social development represent the three mutually reinforcing, interlinked pillars of the United Nations and the prerequisites for our collective well-being.

Our quest for the realization of all rights, human security, universal welfare, and tolerance is a perpetual pursuit which requires a sustained commitment. Despite our growing global base of financial and human capital, increasingly sophisticated technology, and the experience of