



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

**FIRST SESSION OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**UNITED NATIONS – GENEVA
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Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Director-General, Madam High Commissioner,
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Friends,

Today we are all part of an historic occasion, the opening of the first session of the Human Rights Council. We are entering a new chapter in the United Nations' work on human rights.

In the days and weeks to come the world will closely follow and scrutinize this Council's work and its commitment to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the founding resolution, General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006. Today, the world is behind you, supporting you, urging you to live up to this commitment.

Let us briefly recall the steps we have taken together and the achievements that led us to today's event.

First of all, let us pay a special tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In his report "In Larger Freedom" Kofi Annan reinforced the vision of a United Nations founded on three pillars: development, peace and security, and respect for human rights, all mutually reinforcing. Without an effective human rights machinery, the United Nations as a whole would diminish in credibility. To place human rights on the same level as peace and security and development and to stress the interdependence of all three pillars was an historical contribution to achieve security in a broader sense, a life in dignity to all.

The 2005 World Summit – the largest meeting of world leaders ever assembled – endorsed the vision of the Secretary-General. At the Summit, our leaders took a number of decisive steps to strengthen the United Nations human rights machinery, including strengthening the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, mainstreaming human rights throughout the United Nations system and creating a Human Rights Council.

As you recall, I was mandated to conduct open, transparent and inclusive negotiations, to be completed as soon as possible during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, with the aim of establishing the mandate, modalities, functions, size, composition, membership, working methods and procedures of the Human Rights Council.

As you also know, I appointed two Co-Chairs to assist in this task, Ambassadors Arias of Panama and Kumalo of South Africa. One brought experience of the struggle for democracy in Latin America; the other brought experience of the struggle against apartheid. My appointment of two Co-Chairs from the global south was no coincidence. I have always taken issue with seeing human rights in the north-south perspective. The dedication of the Co-Chairs was instrumental in achieving the final result of the negotiations.

On 23 February, after thorough consultations, I presented a draft resolution on the Human Rights Council to the membership of the United Nations. As we all know, this text was adopted on 15 March. It was not an easy decision to bring this matter to a vote. But the alternative to a consensus decision – which was not possible – was in my mind continued negotiations and no Human Rights Council in a long time. It is worth remembering that the foundation

for our work with human rights within the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was also adopted by a vote.

Negotiating the establishment of the Human Rights Council was a challenge for all of us. We live in turbulent and difficult times. Issues of human rights lie at the heart of nations and are particularly sensitive. Member States, which spared no time and effort in these negotiations, felt strongly about certain issues. Ultimately, no Member State obtained everything it wanted. The adoption of the resolution meant compromising on several points. But – and to me this is critical – we never compromised on the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration.

We constructed a sharper instrument to promote and protect human rights. We now have a Council that is built on cooperation and dialogue, yet, principled and strongly anchored in human rights law. It is a Council that will review all Member States' fulfillment of their human rights obligations, thereby ensuring equal treatment of all.

By adopting this resolution – which represented the fruits of our combined labour and aspirations – the General Assembly of the United Nations demonstrated that it can take decisions which are relevant and meaningful to the peoples of the world. And this the Members States did despite the tensions and mistrust sometimes all too apparent in today's world.

The resolution on the Human Rights Council was also a victory for multilateralism. It showed that you, the Member States, require a strong United Nations role and engagement in human rights. Never before have we