

January 24, 2006

To: Permanent Representatives, Member States of the Convening Group of the UN
Democracy Caucus

Re: Human Rights Council Negotiations and Elections

Negotiations to establish a new Human Rights Council have entered into a final phase this month with the aim of creating the new body this year. We write to you, the steering group of a global association of democratic states committed to strengthening democracy and human rights around the world, to urge you to work together these next weeks to ensure that a stronger, more effective Human Rights Council replaces the Commission on Human Rights.

We applaud Mali, the current Chair of the Community of Democracies, for coordinating the November 17, 2005 statement submitted on behalf of the UN Democracy Caucus expressing support for the goal of a new Council, and for the negotiations being led by General Assembly President Jan Eliasson. We particularly appreciate the Caucus' focus on the need for members to uphold high standards in the field of human rights, the importance of addressing situations of gross and systematic violations, and the importance of special procedures and consultations with civil society. These are necessary components of a strengthened human rights mechanism.

At this critical juncture, the Convening Group should lead the Democracy Caucus to work actively in the negotiations for a strong and effective Human Rights Council. The attached January 19, 2006 letter to the 191 UN Members States, signed by 160 human rights and democracy organizations around the world, specifies the essential elements of the Council. We respectfully urge your government, and all members of the Democracy Caucus, to advocate for these essential elements in the negotiating sessions, in meetings of regional groups and organizations, the Democracy Caucus and other UN caucuses, and in bilateral discussions with other countries.

These negotiations represent an historic opportunity for the international community to renew its commitment to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They also represent an important test of commitment and will for democratic countries on the standards to which they have dedicated themselves in the Warsaw Declaration. We urge the Democracy Caucus to fulfill the pledge governments made at the Santiago Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies to strengthening the UN's capacity to implement the principles and practices of democracy by working regionally and multilaterally to build support for a strong Council. We also ask that you recall your pledge in Santiago to support the candidacies of countries to international and regional organizations that contribute effectively to the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights worldwide.

Sincerely,

Mohsen Marzouk, Coordinator
Al Kawakibi Democracy Center

Roberto Saba, Executive Director
Association for Civil Rights (Argentina)

Albert Musliu, Executive Director
Association for Democratic Initiatives (Macedonia)

Diane Ala'i, Representative to the United Nations
Bahá'í International Community

Viviana Krsticevic, Executive Director
Center for Justice and International Law (USA)

Charles J. Brown, President and CEO
Citizens for Global Solutions (USA)

Lucia Nader, International Relations Coordinator
Conectas Direitos Humanos (Brazil)

Elisabeth Ungar, Director
Congreso Visible (Colombia)

Francisco Soberon, Executive Secretary
Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos (Peru)

Richard C. Rowson, President
Council for a Community of Democracies (USA)

Ted Piccone, Executive Director
Democracy Coalition Project (USA)

Tanya Lokshina, Chairperson of Center
Demos (Russia)

Inna Pidluska, President
Europe XXI Foundation (Ukraine)

Ilona Mihaies, Executive President
Euroregional Center for Democracy (Romania)

Djingarey Maiga, Executive Director
Femmes et Droits Humains (Mali)

Jennifer Windsor, Executive Director
Freedom House (USA)

Sadikou Ayo Alao, President
GERDDES Africa

Layla Rajab Zayed, Chairperson
Gulf Center for Democracy Development (Bahrain)

Zohra Yusuf, Vice-Chairperson
Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (Pakistan)

Gabor Rona, International Legal Director
Human Rights First

Peggy Hicks, Global Advocacy Director
Human Rights Watch (USA)

Augusto N. Micalat, Jr., Executive Director
Initiatives for International Dialogue (Philippines)

Nicholas Howen, Secretary General
International Commission of Jurists

Nozima Kamalova, Chairperson
Legal Aid Society (Uzbekistan)

Smaranda Enache, Executive Co-Chair
Liga Pro Europa (Romania)

G. Rajasekaran, Secretary General
Malaysian Trades Union Congress (Malaysia)

Morton Halperin, Director of U.S. Advocacy
Open Society Institute

Andrea Sanhueza, Executive Director
Participa (Chile)

Natalia Taubina, Director
Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)

Howard Glenn, Executive Director
Rights Australia (Australia)

Tiziana Stella, Executive Director
Streit Council for a Union of Democracies

Roberts Putnis, Executive Chairperson
Transparency International – DELNA (Latvia)

Matteo Mecacci, UN Representative
Transnational Radical Party