



1ST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Vartan OSKANIAN,
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*Geneva, June 21, 2006***

Mr. President,

I congratulate you on your selection, and the new Council on this, its inaugural session. The third pillar of the UN – human rights – is now on a par with the other two – peace and security, and development. Humanity's stake in each of these interdependent aspects of life has been affirmed by the creation and mandate of this council.

Securing protection and respect for human rights will, arguably, continue to be the most tortuous and contentious of the UN's three challenges. This principle assumes for each member state responsibility for one's neighbors as well as for oneself. And this, in a world where distance does not determine who your neighbor is.

Globalization and the electronic media enhance our knowledge and increase our liability. It is as easy to look into our neighbor's living room as our own. To hear the screams next door and do nothing will be as difficult as ignoring uproar at home. We are now the first generation who simply cannot afford to do so. And ironically, we are the first generation that is able to afford to systematically, fundamentally address the problems – and even the crises. We can muster the time, skills and resources to construct a new pro-active, daring, spirited international system that not only has the moral authority but also the tenacity to protect the powerless.

This, combined with national programs and institutions, with resolve and muscle, can work wonders. After all, the world is held together, however precariously, by the vision, leadership and struggle of its leaders. If we are committed to a world of justice, equality and rule of law, then each new institution, each new decision, each new mandate will move us toward that end.

Mr. President, I know that the struggle to empower individuals so that they believe in their individual and collective civil and human rights, has as much to do with economic and social progress, as it does with education. I know that it is only when the preconditions for a full and free life of dignity are in place, only then are markets powerful engines of development, only then is critical infrastructure sustainable, and only then do individuals stand up to demand and protect individual and collective human rights. I know that prosperity and stability depend on collective decisions, critical infrastructure and united action. I know that by helping raise productivity and escaping endless cycles of poverty, we will have done more to provide

individuals with the tools to defend their human rights than all the declarations and conferences combined.

In Armenia, we are tackling this greatest challenge through a public-private partnership that will engage the government of Armenia, Armenia's business community, the international community and individual countries, as well as our generous Diaspora, to embark on eradicating rural poverty through a comprehensive, integrated approach. Our intent is to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and to replace hopelessness and desperation with a sense of self-worth and security.

We will do this within our borders, to the extent that we can. For regional and global security, however, we count on this new body to demonstrate a new readiness to react promptly to prevent serious human rights abuses. This is incumbent at a time when technology makes each abuse and vulnerability immediately felt and shared, yet politics prevents societies from doing for each other what trusting friends would automatically do – reach out, defend, protect, pressure and rebuff.

Armenia has and continues to promote stronger international mechanisms to prevent and eradicate the crime of genocide, and all of its precursors – including efforts, too often successful, at not just cleansing a region of its indigenous people, but also erasing their memory. Armenians have survived and gone on to live through each of these attempts. Even today, in the 21st century, we have watched helplessly as the spiritual and cultural markers of our people are decimated. This violation of the memory and spirit of centuries of Armenian existence on lands which are today Azerbaijan's is cynical and dangerous. These huge, exquisite, unique stone crosses which were both sculpture and tombstone are now gone – 2,000 of these medieval markers were destroyed just a few months ago. The gravemarkers are gone, and Armenian and international fears that Azerbaijan's authorities might in fact not be serious about peace have been reinforced. After all, their organized, violent, armed response to peaceful calls for self-determination two decades ago, was the first attempt at ethnic cleansing in the soviet space and ignited the conflict which remains unsettled today. This most recent manifestation of organized violence, in a place where no Armenians live today, and far from the Nagorno Karabakh conflict area, tells us that neither Azerbaijan's methods nor its intent has changed. Such unambivalent, callous demolition of culture and history also destroys trust and peace.

If Azerbaijan's one step forward, one step back approach in the negotiations was simply alarming, their recent, desperate offers of autonomy are concrete examples of a retreat from the letter and spirit of these talks, and clearly not in sync with international trends. Offering autonomy to a people who have for nearly two decades been in control of their lives on their own historic lands is at the very least, self-deception. We hope the talks will go forward in a way to provide everyone involved with a real hope for lasting peace.

Mr. President, we are proud that over the last decade and a half, we have served as members of the Human Rights Commission, we have acceded to significant conventions, and have created a variety of institutions, including the Office of the Human Rights Defender. We have issued an open invitation to special procedures and are open and ready to co-operate with the UN Human Rights mechanisms. This is good for each country, as it is for a vigilant world.

Thank you.