



INTERVENTION BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
BRAZIL,
AMBASSADOR CELSO AMORIM

High Level Segment
of the First Session of the Human Rights Council

Geneva, Switzerland

June 19, 2006

Check against delivery

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Madam High Commissioner,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come here with a message from President Lula: a message of commitment to human rights in Brazil and in the world at large. Brazil has received with a profound sense of responsibility its election to the Human Rights Council.

The creation of this Council is one of the great achievements of UN reform. It is not the end of the process. We expect that similar progress can be made in other areas, in particular as regards the revitalization of the General Assembly and the representativeness of the Security Council.

Mr. President,

I am particularly pleased to see you at the helm of this first Council Session. Apart from being a recognition of your outstanding skills as a diplomat, your election as the first President of the Council pays a well-deserved tribute to the commitment of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean nations to the cause of human rights.

A very concrete example of this commitment has been the dedicated efforts that many countries of our Group have deployed in Haiti. We have been supportive of the struggle of the Haitian people to ensure not only security but development and social welfare, within a democratic framework.

The Human Rights Council must build on the achievements of the Commission. It must persevere in the pursuit of full respect for human dignity, without preconceived attitudes or political biases. Here, the true voices of the victims of discrimination and human rights violations must be heard.

Six decades of Commission work have provided abundant examples of how counterproductive a purely confrontational strategy may prove. Singling out countries, while leaving aside others for political reasons, leads to isolation and radicalization, as well as a sense of lack of fairness, with no benefit to the victims of abuse.

In human rights, there are neither masters, with nothing to learn, nor pupils, with nothing to teach. We can all learn from each other.

The Human Rights Council should be the place for the encounter of civilizations. Inclusive national societies, capable of dealing with diversity, are those in the best position to grow and prosper. The same applies to the international community.

Human rights and democratic practices imply respect for the will of the citizens: ours as well as our neighbours'. They must contribute to development with social justice. The right to life is paramount. No right of a commercial nature should be invoked against the right to life and health.

Among the several forms of violation of human rights, torture is a particularly abominable one. Tolerance – it is often said – is one of the virtues of democracy. But even tolerance has its limits. No one, anywhere in the world, can be tolerant in relation to practices of physical or mental ill treatment, which can lead to permanent injury or death, often self-inflicted.

On 26 June, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, Brazil will deposit the optional declaration contemplated in the Convention against Torture, allowing the consideration of petitions submitted by individuals.

Hunger and disease can also in their effects be seen as forms of anonymous torture, imposed by unjust societies – or even by the international society itself – on individuals. Those affected by such scourges are in no position to enjoy other civil and political rights. Combating poverty and illness is also a way of promoting human rights and of reinforcing democracy.

This is why Brazil, under President Lula's leadership, has been committed to the design of innovative mechanisms for development financing and to the elimination of historical distortions that affect the international trading system.

This is also the thought behind domestic programmes designed to mitigate and eventually eliminate the effects of poverty and unfair income distribution in our own country. The “bolsa família”, the “electricity for all”, the programmes of support for small farmers, the projects on the elimination of child labour are all part of the effort to alleviate the burden of the poor in Brazil. By fostering education and greater self-reliance, they shall have a structural impact on the possibilities of actual enjoyment of human rights by millions of people.

Human rights must be safeguarded from all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, religion, gender, age, political opinion, social origin, physical capacity or sexual orientation.

We are particularly engaged in efforts to combat racism and promote social equality to the Afro-descendant majority in our country. Brazil will be hosting next July the Regional Conference of the Americas against Racism. Also, at the regional level, we have been in the forefront to establish a new and stronger Convention on Racism.

We will conclude Brazil's accession to the main international human rights instruments. We are now in the process of obtaining congressional approval to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers.

Mr. President,

To meet so many expectations, we need the Human Rights Council to be both effective and proactive. The task of building upon the legacy of the Commission on Human Rights rests on us.

I bear in mind, for instance, the Special Mechanisms system and the wide-ranging, fruitful dialogue between the Commission and non-governmental organizations.

It is essential that the Council adopts as soon as possible the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Forced Disappearance and a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Similarly, the Council should stimulate discussions about an Optional Protocol on the right of petition in cases of violation of cultural, social and economic rights.

The significant participation of civil society representatives in debates and working groups of the former Commission was a very positive aspect. We should strive to ensure an even greater participation by those organizations in the activities of the Council.

Mr. President,

One of the greatest challenges to be faced by the Council members will be the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism. It signals a healthy change of course in relation to the politicized, over-selective focus on the human rights situation in specific countries.

For years Brazil has advocated a truly universal, balanced and unbiased approach to human rights worldwide, by means of a global report to be prepared by an impartial team of UN experts – men and women of undisputed reputation -, based on multilaterally defined criteria and parameters.

All 191 members of the General Assembly should be subject to review on equal footing. This review should not only identify the difficulties, but also point out the good practices which deserve support and dissemination.

Country resolutions would only occur in exceptional cases of gross violations, in situations which are both grave and urgent.

Mr. President,

The creation of the Human Rights Council offers us a unique opportunity to instil new life into the consideration of human rights in the UN system. Our objective must be not so much to condemn, but to promote; not to run after political victories of one sort or another, but to ensure that every individual – man and woman, old and young – can enjoy life free from fear, hunger or disrespect. Cooperation has to take the upper hand over victimization. And ideals – precisely those that were inscribed in the Universal Declaration – must prevail over political expediency.

Thank you.