



**STATEMENT**

**BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR OLUYEMI ADENIJI, CON**

**HONOURABLE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,**

**FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA**

**ON THE**

**OCASSION OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**GENEVA, 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2006**

**Check against Delivery**

**Mr. President,**

On the occasion of the first session of the Human Rights Council, this High Level session assumes special significance.

2. In the next few days we should set the tone that confirms that we are not inaugurating only a change of nomenclature of an organ but a firm determination to make a new departure in our handling of human rights issues throughout the world. Let it be clear from this beginning that we intend that the creation of the Human Rights Council will indeed be a landmark achievement in the promotion and protection of human rights. Human rights defenders around the world and the victims of human rights violations will henceforth be able to look to this new body to provide real and effective remedy to the incidents of violations in any form. The international community will now expect and indeed even demand that the old ways of doing things be discarded in favour of a real and concerted action on the part of the new Council.

3. To be credible we have to be determined to make the Council to be objective, firm and timely in its response to human rights situations in any part of the world without selectivity. The fact that the Council is to meet no less than three times a year is a critical and reassuring provision as that would allow for more timely response to unfolding human rights situations. Council members have a heavy responsibility to create the right structures and procedures for a Council that marks a fresh start in the UN's efforts to promote and protect human rights in all countries, and that sets aside past practices of selectivity, double standards and excessive politicization.

4. **Mr. President,** permit me to congratulate you on your election to preside over this historic session with the attending responsibility which you are well qualified to discharge. I should also pay tribute to the Secretary General of the United Nations, His Excellency Kofi Annan, for his vision and foresight in initiating those far-reaching reforms of



the United Nations of which the creation of the Human Rights Council is a major element.

**Mr. President,**

5. The first year of the Council will be one of transition, but also a unique occasion to build a principal human rights body that delivers results quickly, impartially and effectively. The Council's first year is likely to be frenetic. It will be particularly important in developing the "Universal Periodic Review" and also in establishing a tradition of sound judgement in choosing the best means of addressing different human rights situations from various options available. The Council is to sit for ten weeks between its establishment and the end of first year. Of course, this means an enormous load on State delegations and NGOs. But it is work that is essential to get the Council off to a sure and positive start. The effectiveness of the Council will depend on the work programme to be agreed upon during this maiden session of the Council and the immediate next session.

**Mr President,**

6. One of the most important innovations of the HRC will be the universal periodic review of human rights record of Member States. This form of peer review mechanism is a process which Africa has adopted and has been practising for the past three years. It allows for transparency and self- assessment. It also places responsibilities on the Member State not only to observe the tenets of human rights, but seen to be doing so. Human rights are all about observance of domestic and international covenants. It is about respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights of citizens. Therefore, the principal actors in this endeavour are none other than States who have singed up to international covenants and should have adopted national legislations in order to domesticate the provisions of the covenant.

7. The universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council should therefore be carefully considered in all its ramifications so that at this outset the mechanism is set out in such a way that it serves the



purpose it was intended - universality of application, pragmatic criticism or censure of violators of human rights, observable transparency and non-confrontational way of seeking change in behaviour by States. My delegation will support the call for the creation of two Inter-Governmental Working Groups during the inter-sessional periods to devise procedures, formats and modalities of the UPR and review all mandates including that of the Special Rapporteurs, Sub-Commission and 1503 procedure at this first Session. On the work of the Council's Bureau, my delegation believes that developing consensus through coordination with Regional Groups should continue to be the basis of decision-making in the Bureau.

**Mr. President,**

8. It is regrettable that despite the progress made in economic and scientific development, the rights of vast numbers of people continue to be violated on systematic and regular bases across the world. A vast majority of people still live in abject poverty in a world bursting with affluence. Preventable diseases and malnutrition kill children in the millions while the world has the resources to end this scourge. Conflicts are allowed to kindle and rage unabated while they could be prevented if statesmanship and sober judgement had been deployed to their resolution.

9. As we face the great challenges of promoting and protecting human rights, it is imperative that an agreeable balance between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights is found. This we believe can only be effectively achieved if a nexus between all segments of human rights is established. Otherwise, the discussion of human rights especially in their civil and political contents alone would be meaningless. The achievement of political stability and conflict resolution in most countries is intrinsically linked to economic development.

10. Therefore, donor countries should accelerate delivery on their promises to compliment the efforts of developing countries particularly African countries to realise the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); for which a considerable increase in Overseas Development Assistance



(ODA) is essential and that compliance with the agreed commitment of 0.7% of gross national income for ODA should be a matter of priority.

**Mr. President,**

11. Creating the right environment for the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms require the establishment of durable democracy, good governance and effective operation of the rule of Law. In due regard of these imperative factors, my Government has taken the requisite steps to consolidate its nascent democracy while ensuring that extensive political and economic reforms are undertaken.

12. The promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part of Nigeria's foreign and domestic policy. At the domestic level, human rights, civil, economic and political liberties as well as gender equality are promoted and protected by the Nigerian Constitution. At the Federal level, the National Human Rights Commission was set up to undertake mainstreaming and integration of human rights in governance. Nigeria also possesses a vibrant civil society and a free press, which plays an important role in the promotion of human rights, both at the national and international levels. The Government and civil society also engage in regular dialogue on a range of issues relating to human rights.

**Mr. President,**

13. In conclusion, permit me to restate that human rights embody an international consensus on the minimum conditions for attaining a life of dignity. We therefore reiterate that states have the responsibility ultimately, to protect the lives and dignity of their citizens. In pursuing this principle, no distinction should be made between civil and political rights on one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights on the other. They are all intertwined, indivisible and inter-related. The denial of the one is tantamount to the denial of the other. We must therefore, resolve to make the international instruments on human rights workable and enforceable within our borders and globally.

14. We expect the new Council to avoid the acrimonious debates and resolutions based on entrenched positions but seek for dialogue and cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law world wide. On our part I assure the Council that Nigeria will abide by the voluntary pledges and commitments we have made to promote and protect human rights in our country.

15. Thank you.