

**10th Annual Meeting
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
24-26 August 2005**

Asia Pacific Regional Cooperation - Government Reports

Ms Wendy Matthews
Second Secretary
New Zealand Embassy, Beijing

Statement by the Government of New Zealand

Mr Chairperson, I would like to begin by extending New Zealand's thanks to our Mongolian hosts, and to the Forum Secretariat, for their hospitality and organisation of this meeting.

Mr Chairperson, New Zealand is committed to regional cooperation to promote and protect human rights.

The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights recognised that regional arrangements play a fundamental role in promoting and protecting human rights. The Conference endorsed efforts to strengthen such arrangements and to increase their effectiveness, and emphasised the need to establish them where they do not already exist.

The Asia Pacific region is one area where historically no such mechanism has existed. New Zealand values the work of the Asia Pacific Forum in helping to fill this gap. There has been encouraging growth in the number of NHRIs in the region. A strong national institution is a critical part of the human rights architecture: it educates and empowers the people to know about and demand their rights; and it holds the government to its international commitments. Also, there has been an increase in networking and practical cooperation. This is critical in a region where lack of popular awareness about human rights and lack of capacity to implement them, are two of the biggest barriers to improving the realisation of human rights. The Asia Pacific Forum has been one of the main players behind these improvements.

New Zealand too is contributing to regional efforts to promote and protect human rights. We have supported the Asia Pacific Forum in its endeavours and in its strategic partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Forum. We have also welcomed and supported the Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights establishing a presence in the Pacific. We are actively engaging with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and her review of the United Nations Framework for Regional Cooperation on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia Pacific Region. In particular, we support her Office's recommendations to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of that framework.

Mr Chairman, New Zealand welcomes the Asia Pacific Forum's focus on torture at this year. New Zealand is a staunch defender of the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill treatment. Our most recent report to the Committee Against Torture in May 2004 found that there was no torture in New Zealand and that no breaches of the

Convention had taken place. New Zealand wants to see other states ratify the Convention if they have not already done so and to implement it in good faith. New Zealand was also an early signatory of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and we are currently working towards ratifying it. We welcome the emphasis of this protocol on implementation and its focus on prevention. We recognise the important role that truly independent and empowered National Human Rights Institutions can play in preventing torture and would note, in closing, that the New Zealand Human Rights Commission has been identified as New Zealand's Central National Preventive Mechanism.

Mr Chairperson, New Zealand looks forward to continuing the strong relationship we have with the Asia-Pacific Forum. I thank you for the opportunity to address this distinguished meeting.