

***** CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY *****

**STATEMENT BY
THE ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL ADVISOR TO THE
THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**TO THE
FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS
ROTORUA, NEW ZEALAND**

7 AUGUST 2000

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**DISTINGUISHED GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES, COMMISSIONERS,
COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS,**

**ON BEHALF OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, WHO
VERY MUCH REGRETS THAT SHE IS UNABLE TO BE PRESENT TODAY, I
WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS OUR THANKS TO THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM AND
THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF NEW ZEALAND FOR CONVENING
THIS FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING IN THE BEAUTIFUL, INVITING AND
HEARTWARMING ENVIRONS OF ROTORUA.**

**THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM IS VERY MUCH A PARTNER IN THE OFFICE
OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS' WORK AND CAN
TRULY BE REGARDED AS A MODEL FOR OTHER GROUPS OF NATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS TO EMULATE. THE HIGH COMMISSIONER APPRECIATES
AND FULLY SUPPORTS THE WORK OF YOUR FORUM. WE IN THE OFFICE OF
THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ARE THEREFORE DELIGHTED TO HAVE AN
OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DELIBERATIONS OF THIS
MEETING AND OTHER REGIONAL MEETINGS SUCH AS THE ONE HOSTED BY
OUR FIJIAN FRIENDS IN MAY.**

**AS YOU KNOW THE SETTING UP AND STRENGTHENING OF
GENUINELY INDEPENDENT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS
REMAINS ONE OF THE HIGHEST PRIORITIES OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER.
NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS ARE PLAYING AN EVER
INCREASING AND IMPORTANT ROLE – BOTH IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS
WITH GOVERNMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY AS ALSO ENSURING GOOD
GOVERNANCE AND STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW
BY PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AGAINST
UNWARRANTED ATTACKS AND THREAT.**

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS ARE INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN ACTUALISING AND GIVING MEANING AND EFFECT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL TO INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS. NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CAN, BY VIRTUE OF THEIR ACCESSIBILITY, TRANSFORM THE RHETORIC OF INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS INTO PRACTICAL REALITY AND PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE REDRESS FOR MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY.

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS HAVE TO PERFORM THEIR TASK IN A MANNER WHICH IS CONSISTENT WITH THE STANDARDS PRESCRIBED IN INTERNATIONAL TREATIES. THEY HAVE THE UNENDING TASK OF ACCOMMODATING THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL PECULIARITIES AND THE EXTRAORDINARILY DIVERSE CHALLENGES POSED BY LOCAL CONDITIONS, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ETHNIC, CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY - SO EVIDENT AMONG THE COUNTRIES WITHIN THIS LARGE REGION OF ASIA-PACIFIC.

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CAN ALSO CONTRIBUTE, AND COMPLEMENT GOVERNMENT REPORTS TO INTERNATIONAL TREATY BODIES, REFLECTING MORE FULLY THE REALITY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY. THEY CAN ALSO PROVIDE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM FROM WITHIN WHICH WOULD BALANCE THE CRITICISM COMING FROM INTERNATIONAL TREATY BODIES. NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CAN ENHANCE THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN SO DOING SUPPORT NATIONAL STABILITY AND SECURITY – THEREBY CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POTENTIAL OF EVERY HUMAN BEING.

THE THREE MAIN THEMES WHICH YOU PLAN TO DISCUSS DURING YOUR MEETING: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RIGHTS; THE

GLOBAL COMPACT AND HUMAN RIGHTS; AND THE WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, VERY MUCH REFLECT THE AREAS WHICH THE OHCHR TREATS AS OF UTMOST PRIORITY. I LOOK FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES WITH YOU AS WELL AS SEEKING PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THEM. EQUALLY IT WILL BE INTERESTING AND STIMULATING TO EXPLORE THE SYNERGY BETWEEN THE THREE MAIN TOPICS.

RECENT EVENTS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF INDEPENDENT, EFFECTIVE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WHICH CAN ACT AS A CHECK AGAINST REPRESSION AND PROVIDE A VOICE FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE BE SILENCED. THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE ALSO EXIST IN OTHER REGIONS AND YOUR EXPERIENCES WILL BE INVALUABLE TO THE LEARNING OF OTHERS.

THERE ARE SEVERAL COUNTRIES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION WHICH HAVE TAKEN THE LEAD IN SETTING UP NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS WHILE SOME OTHERS ARE ACTIVELY CONSIDERING SETTING UP SUCH INSTITUTIONS. THERE IS A GROWING REALISATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE REGION THAT NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE ABSOLUTELY VITAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW. THIS REALISATION IS BEING SPURRED BY THE OHCHR WHICH IS PROVIDING ADVICE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO VARIOUS COUNTRIES IN THE REGION. IT IS HOPED THAT THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS WHICH ARE ALREADY ESTABLISHED AND WHICH ARE IN THE PROCESS OF BEING ESTABLISHED WILL CONFORM TO THE PARIS PRINCIPLES.

AS THE HIGH COMMISSIONER PRESENTLY HOLDS THE POSITION OF SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE SHE

HAS ENCOURAGED THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PREPARATIONS FOR, AND DURING, THE WORLD CONFERENCE. AS YOU MAY BE AWARE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WILL BE WELCOMED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CONFERENCE AS FULL-FLEDGED OBSERVERS. IT IS HOPEFUL THAT THE DECISION TO HOLD THE CONFERENCE WILL SPUR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO DIRECT THEIR EFFORTS TOWARDS ERADICATING RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND RACIAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

TOGETHER WITH MY COLLEAGUES, I, THEREFORE, LOOK FORWARD TO OUR DISCUSSIONS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS IN THESE VERY BEAUTIFUL, ALMOST SYLVAN SURROUNDINGS. IN CONCLUSION I AM PARTICULARLY HAPPY TO FIND THAT THIS MEETING WILL CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN THE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM TO SUPPORT THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE ALREADY OPERATING THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS ALSO THOSE GOVERNMENTS PRESENT WHICH ARE CURRENTLY GIVING CONSIDERATION TO SETTING UP SUCH INITIATIVES.