

ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

6TH ANNUAL MEETING, SRI LANKA

NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT

New Zealand is committed to the promotion of human rights internationally. Our Official Development Assistance programme has a strong focus on poverty reduction and recognizes that human rights and development go hand in hand.

In the Asia Pacific region, New Zealand actively supports human rights cooperation under the auspices of both the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Asia Pacific Forum.

New Zealand has supported the development of the APF from its inception and has provided annual contributions to the costs of both APF workshops and the annual meetings. We were also pleased to contribute to the production of the informative video on APF that we watched yesterday.

We are impressed with the growing maturity of the APF and look forward to its transition towards a more independent entity. We are also encouraged by the growth of national human rights institutions in the Asia Pacific Region and welcome the addition of Mongolia as a new member this year. National Human Rights Institutions play an invaluable role as sincere watch dogs for governments and society.

With regard to New Zealand's support for the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Asia Pacific region, we are currently working with OHCHR on the preparations for a workshop, as part of the Asia Pacific "Beijing Framework". This "Human Rights Education Workshop" will focus on raising awareness of human rights issues in the Pacific.

On another level, New Zealand also takes the opportunity to promote human rights through practical capacity building projects, specifically financed by our "Good Governance" programme. This is a broadly focused programme that recognizes that all of the economic, political and administrative processes of a country are important elements of development and the strengthening of human rights.

An example of a recent New Zealand-funded project funded was the CEDAW report-writing workshop for Pacific Island Countries held in Auckland in February this year. Both government and non-government representatives attended this workshop. It aimed to provide countries with practical assistance for the preparation of their reports to the CEDAW Committee. The workshop also helped to increase awareness of the Convention amongst those Pacific Island Countries that have not yet ratified it.

In an effort to maintain a robust human rights culture, the New Zealand government commissioned an independent evaluation of the human rights protections in New Zealand. This has resulted in a Human Rights Amendment Bill, which will be considered by parliament soon. Amongst other things, the changes will include a strategic shift in focus for the New Zealand Human Rights Commission towards human rights education and advocacy, while retaining a separate role in relation to its complaints function.

The New Zealand Government has also committed to the development of a national plan of action on human rights, in consultation with interested parties, for the promotion and protection of human rights in New Zealand. Work will begin on the development of this plan of action next year.