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Address by

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High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**23rd SESSION
INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION AND
PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (ICC)**

23 March 2010

Geneva

Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished representatives of National Human Rights Institutions,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the pleasure and honour to welcome you to the 23rd Session of the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs, (ICC). First and foremost, I would like to pay tribute to the ICC Chairperson, Ms. Jennifer Lynch for the strong leadership she has demonstrated over the past years, and recognise all the achievements made by the ICC, including its incorporation into a legal entity in 2009. I realise that this is your last ICC conference, as Chairperson. I wish you the very best in your future endeavours and take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Rosslyn Noonan, from the New Zealand Human Rights Commission who has been nominated as the next ICC Chairperson. I look forward to working closely with you in supporting the work of national human rights institutions globally.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your agenda reflects the extent of your engagement in the promotion and protection of human rights, with substantive topics and themes, such as women's rights, administration of justice, business and human rights, human rights education, as well as dealing with the regional developments and challenges and international human rights mechanisms. All these topics fall within the core functions of NHRIs that have a particularly prominent role in addressing the most critical human rights issues at the national level including through promotion of the rule of law and ensuring accountability.

Mandates differ across NHRIs but all contribute directly or indirectly to the prevention of human rights violations, such as torture, arbitrary detention, gender discrimination, and human trafficking. Such functions are particularly crucial in post-conflict situations when restoring normalcy requires comprehensive strategies, including options for transitional justice, as well as redress and remedy for the victims. NHRIs are increasingly called upon to contribute to reconciliation processes, and the rule of law. I am pleased to note that a great deal has been achieved over the past years, and NHRIs are focusing more and more on core protection issues and the administration of justice within their respective countries.

NHRIs have a central place in the national human rights protection system and are crucial partners for OHCHR. My Office accords priority to the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs with due regard to the Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions known as the Paris Principles. OHCHR is also engaged in improving United Nations system-wide coordination on NHRIs, and supports the increased interaction of NHRIs with the United Nations and regional human rights mechanisms. OHCHR encourages the sharing of good practices among NHRIs, supports the strengthening of their regional networks, and facilitates their access to United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and other relevant partners.

Support to NHRIs is a crucial component of OHCHR's contribution to the implementation of international human rights standards at the national level. Over the years several technical cooperation programmes and agreements with a view to strengthening the capacity of NHRIs have been implemented. UNCTs have been

instrumental partners in our work to establish and strengthen NHRIs and provided support to NHRIs through various technical assistance programmes worldwide.

OHCHR, through all its field presences and with the support of the National Institutions and Regional Mechanism Section in Geneva, continued to provide advice and assistance in the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs, in close coordination with the regional coordinating bodies of NHRIs as well as primarily UNDP and other UN partners. I would like to express our appreciation to Ms. Helen Clark, the Administrator of UNDP, who is with us here today. We are grateful that she was able to participate in this meeting and further consolidate our on-going collaboration in support of the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs, in close cooperation with the ICC network.

As a contribution to enhance the quality and effectiveness of this support, UNDP and OHCHR decided to develop a practical tool that aims to provide guidance on “how” to support NHRIs, from establishment to consolidation, building on existing materials, methodologies, operational framework and practices in the area of NHRIs, in the context of the UN technical assistance. The Secretary General, in his 2009 *Report on national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights* to the General Assembly, welcomed the development of the Toolkit as a way to foster “strong partnerships system-wide to build on the capacities and expertise of United Nations entities” in supporting NHRIs.

Additionally an OHCHR Survey was carried out by OHCHR in 2009 to take stock of the current state of NHRIs around the world and to enhance OHCHR’s efforts – in partnership with other stakeholders – to strengthen the functional capacities of NHRIs. The findings of this Survey will be used to establish priority areas of support required by NHRIs which the UN will seek to address in line with the needs of the NHRIs

Ladies and gentlemen,

Much advancement has been made in recent years in the development of international human rights law and standards. However, one of the most significant challenges to the full realisation of human rights still remains the practical implementation of these standards at the national level. A process that can be hindered by weak or dysfunctional governing institutions, structural and institutional impediments, armed conflicts, long-standing discriminatory laws, or corruption and impunity. I am pleased that part of your session will entail a discussion on follow up of recommendations from the international system because NHRIs are instrumental in monitoring their States implementation and domestication of international human rights norms. In this context I welcome the participation of the ombudsman institutions and reiterate the call of the Secretary General all for greater cooperation between NHRIs and ombudsman institutions for the improvement of national human rights frameworks. The Secretary General also encouraged ombudsman institutions to comply with the Paris Principles and interact and work collaboratively with the ICC network.

I am impressed by the growing interest and participation of NHRIs in sessions of treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review process. Information received from NHRIs and other national actors adds great value to the

discussions and even more to the recommendations addressed, for the attention of a State party. Furthermore, several recommendations from the UPR process considered NHRIs as the most important independent institutions to monitor the implementation of recommendations resulting from this process.

It is also noteworthy that several recent international human rights instruments, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OP-CAT) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), give NHRIs a potential monitoring and implementation role. It is crucial therefore that States parties strengthen the mandate and capacity of NHRIs and adequately finance them in order to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively.

In 2009, OHCHR assisted the ICC to review the compliance of almost 20 NHRIs with the Paris Principles. As of today, out of some 100 NHRIs in the world, 65 are accredited with A Status by the ICC. I wish to re-emphasize the importance of NHRIs compliance with the Paris Principles, in order for them to attain and maintain credibility, *at the national, regional and international levels. OHCHR will continue to support this process by working closely with the ICC.*

Dear colleagues,

OHCHR accords great importance to regional human right mechanisms and a focal point for this purpose has been set up in the National Institutions and Regional Mechanism Section. I strongly believe that NHRIs have great potential in facilitating cooperation between the UN and regional human rights mechanisms and support States' reporting obligations and ideally facilitate implementation of international and regional human rights norms at the national level.

I applaud the efforts of all those NHRIs that attended and actively contributed to the *Consultations on Regional human rights mechanisms held in 2009 in their respective regions*. I understand that in Asia too NHRIs have been closely involved in the establishment of ASEAN human rights body. The Secretary General has noted the symbiotic relationship that NHRIs have with regional human rights commissions and courts and called for NHRIs' cooperation with regional human rights mechanisms, such as organs of the African Union, the Inter-American System and the European human rights mechanisms, and the development of regional human rights norms and jurisprudence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to once again commend the active participation of NHRIs in the Durban Review Conference in April 2009 and very much welcome the NHRIs' commitment to continue to support the implementation of the Durban Declaration and *Plan of Action (DDPA) and the Outcome of the Review Conference on countering racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*. I call on all NHRIs to include this important issue in their action plans and further substantively contribute to national processes to facilitate the realisation of the DDPA within your respective countries.

Finally, OHCHR will continue to support the establishment of strong NHRIs and to increase the effectiveness of NHRIs' regional coordinating bodies. For instance, this year, in collaboration with the ICC and the Scottish Human Rights Commission, OHCHR will support the 10th International Conference, on 7-9 October 2010, in Edinburgh, with the theme *Human Rights and Business: the Role of NHRIs*.

I look forward to the outcome of this meeting, and wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.