



THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Mr. Chairman,

We have indeed made tremendous headway in the advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms in recent years. This may be attributed in large part to the leading role the UN has played not only in establishing human rights standards but also translating them into reality. The progress made has brought respect for human rights to the very fore as a central issue in international relations. Human rights truly have now emerged as one of the three pillars of the UN, in keeping with the original aspirations of the architects of the Charter. Indeed, the reaffirmation by Heads of State and Government of their commitment to this noble aim through their outcome document in this very building served as a clear demonstration that respect for human rights is now recognized as a central issue. And we continue to take steps forward: we are well under way to reform the UN human rights system to better protect and promote human rights.

And yet by no stretch of imagination can we say that our work is complete. While the overall picture may be one of forward progress, regrettably severe abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms in some parts of the world continue to be a source of grave concern to us. In many parts of Africa, protracted conflicts threaten not only the right to freedom from arbitrary detention and torture but even the fundamental right to life. The situation is aggravated by a lack of resources and capacities for the protection of human rights in the region. This is a challenge we have yet to overcome.

Many other regions of the world give us cause for concern. Whilst there have undeniably been positive steps towards political, legal and social reform across the Middle East in recent years, ongoing conflict and continued violence cast a dark cloud over the region. Asia has seen the roots of democracy spreading widely with the establishment of democratic systems of government in an increasing number of nations. Yet this is hardly the whole picture : the reality is that dictatorships persist in some countries and the continuing abuses of human rights is a specter which continues to haunt the peoples of some states.

Mr. Chairman,

The stark realities in various parts of the world clearly demonstrate that we are still on the path toward full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have made good progress but there remains a long and winding way ahead of us. While it may be true that despotic regimes are steadily decreasing in number throughout the world, too many people are still living under the shadow of oppression in various corners of the globe. My delegation is seriously concerned about the violations of human rights committed by these regimes. In particular, the situation is very unlikely to improve in the near future insofar as they continue to reject the requests of the international community for dialogue and cooperation. We urge those repressive regimes to pay heed to the outcries of the people whose fundamental freedoms and human rights have been denied for too long. We would call upon them to exercise sound judgment and to take urgent steps to improve their human rights situations. By translating the recommendations of the UN into action they will gain greater recognition in the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that the primary responsibility for implementing human rights lies with national governments. It is only through actions at the state level that the ideal of human rights can be realized in the daily lives of people.

The Republic of Korea fully recognizes the importance of state initiatives. Compliance with the international guidelines has continued to be one of the highest priorities in the human rights policy of the Korean government. This year, the government took a truly groundbreaking step in improving human rights of women by abolishing the family headship system. With this measure, the emblem of the male-dominated society was removed. In so doing the government played a

leading role in dismantling the very architecture of discrimination against women in our society. In the field of criminal affairs also valuable steps have been taken : criminal procedure law has been reformed, introducing new provisions designed to enhance the protection of human rights of victims as well as suspects in criminal cases. The government has also enhanced the relevant systems to ensure that foreign nationals can stay in Korea without experiencing unfair discrimination. In addition, the Government of the ROK is now undertaking an overall review of the present situation regarding its signing of the international human rights treaties. Committed to moving ahead further, we have had the resolve to embark on a candid examination of the reservations which the Korean government has had, embracing a more human rights-oriented view.

Another tangible step forward has been the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission. Since its launch in 2001 it has indeed played a pivotal role in the protection and promotion of human rights as an independent institution. It is now formulating recommendations for the National Human Rights Action Plan for the period of 2007 through 2011, which are due to be finalized by the end of this year. Once we have set these recommendations we envisage that they will prove a valuable guideline in our efforts, taking us closer to the establishment of a long-term and comprehensive policy framework for the promotion and protection of human rights in Korea.

In addition, the Commission has made an invaluable contribution to the advancement of human rights in the ROK by offering recommendations to the Government on the major human rights issues which are the focus of controversy. Such issues we currently face in Korea include those of non-regular workers, the enactment of an Anti-discrimination Act, right to information, to name a few. Yes, we face challenges, but we are making genuine efforts to overcome them. In fact, as of the end of 2004, about 90 percent of the Commission's recommendations were actually implemented by the Korean Government.

Mr. Chairman,

As the Secretary-General indicated, the cause of human rights has reached a new stage. The age of declaration, during which our focus had been on articulating, codifying and enshrining rights is now giving way to one of implementation. However, with the repeated failures to promptly deal with massive widespread violations of human rights around the world, the UN is often criticized as dysfunctional and unresponsive to the actual needs of people. The need for reform of the three

central pillars of the UN human rights system, namely the treaty bodies, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the inter-governmental machinery, should be addressed without further delay. The full participation of stakeholders will be vital.

My delegation looks forward to the further step forward of the creation of the Human Rights Council during this session. As a standing body with a broad mandate and wide-ranging powers to effectively address grave human rights violations, it would have a truly vital role to play and we earnestly hope to achieve this not later than the first half of next year.

Secondly, we support the proposals of the High Commissioner as set forth in the OHCHR Plan of Action. The goals and strategies proposed in the Plan do indeed point us in the right direction for strengthening the Office as a pivot in the UN human rights machinery. We also recognize the need for more resources to step up the work of the Office in accordance with the Plan.

Thirdly, the importance of contributions made by treaty bodies in securing the effective implementation of international human rights instruments cannot be stressed enough. Nonetheless, the system must be streamlined and strengthened, so that the treaty bodies can better carry out their mandates with greater efficiency. In this sense, we welcome the recent progress in the consultations among all stakeholders as well as the draft guidelines by the OHCHR.

The Republic of Korea has been an active participant in the discussions on the reform of these three pillars, willingly sharing ideas with other members and pooling our wisdom as we unite in our efforts to move towards the right direction. We are determined to continue to play a full part in this process which we strongly believe is of utmost importance.

Thank you.