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Amnesty International Council Meeting ends with commitment to new human rights challenges

CAPE TOWN – Archbishop Desmond Tutu “signed up” to Amnesty International’s campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the organization’s International Council Meeting.

Addressing 500 Amnesty International members from around the world, Archbishop Tutu stressed the importance of international action in defence of human rights as demonstrated by the South African experience and thanked Amnesty International members for their work on human rights violations in South Africa.

In the meeting yesterday, Archbishop Tutu signed Amnesty International’s pledge book committing himself “to do everything in my power to ensure that the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become a reality throughout the world”.

The campaign to mark the anniversary of the Declaration was launched in Cape Town on 10 December – Human Rights Day – and over the next year Amnesty International members in some 100 countries will be asking people to make the same pledge and to take action for human rights protection.

The organization hopes to collect millions of signatures, which will be handed over to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan at the end of the campaign as an expression of global popular support for human rights.

The launch of the campaign preceded the 23rd International Council Meeting -- Amnesty International’s highest decision making body -- which closes today after a week of discussion about the organization’s strategies and policies.

The meeting took some 80 decisions, including:

- The organization confirmed the importance of promoting all human rights – including economic and social rights – at a time when some governments are taking a divisive approach to human rights

- The organization will increase its work on intergovernmental organizations, like the United Nations, and also work with agencies dealing with humanitarian, peace and development issues to reinforce the importance of human rights in those areas.
- Amnesty International will strengthen its work on the place of human rights in the economic field, including developing business codes of conduct.
- The organization will address governments which fail to take action on human rights abuses such as violence against women, including where the people responsible for those abuses are not necessarily state officials

“Both through our campaign on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and through key decisions of our council, Amnesty International wants to inspire a new generation of human rights activists and challenge not only governments but also others to stop abuses of the most basic rights,” said Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

The meeting also elected the new International Executive Committee, Amnesty International’s international board. The members include:

Colm O’Cuanachain - Ireland, new member
Mary Gray - USA, returning International Treasurer
Habiba Hasan - Pakistan, new member
Menno Kaminga - Netherlands, returning member
Robin Rickard - United Kingdom, returning member
Mahmoud Ben Romdhane - Tunisia, returning member
Cristina Sganga - International Secretariat, new member
Susan Waltz - USA, returning member, current chairperson
Samuel Zan - Ghana, new member
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