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United Nations: Global human rights situation needs full-time High Commissioner

Amnesty International expressed concern at today's United Nations decision to temporarily combine the post of United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the new post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, to which Mr Sergio Vieira de Mello, the current High Commissioner, has just been appointed by the UN Secretary-General.

"The global human rights situation more than ever requires the full attention of an authoritative High Commissioner, something that cannot be ensured through acting arrangements, no matter the personal capabilities of the individual who will cover the post during this period," Amnesty International said today.

The position of High Commissioner for Human Rights is of vital importance for the protection of human rights throughout the world. It should not be combined with any other senior position, however uniquely qualified the individual in question may be to hold both. The arrangements just announced risk undermining the prestige, authority and effectiveness of the position.

"Mr Vieira de Mello has the skills and field experience to be a successful Special Representative for Iraq, and his most recent experience as High Commissioner for Human Rights should position him well to raise the profile of human rights in Iraq. Our concern is that acting arrangements to head the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are not appropriate given the importance of this office," Amnesty International added.

The appointment to this important new post, created by the Security Council in resolution 1483 last week, is made for a period of four months, and is apparently renewable.

"If there is any indication that this four-month appointment will be renewed, we would urge UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to start the appointment procedure for a new High Commissioner for Human Rights immediately."

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