

0001 hrs gmt Monday 19 April 1993

HUMAN RIGHTS WORLD CONFERENCE
COULD TURN BACK CLOCK

Amnesty International appeals to
governments to take action

The upcoming World Conference on Human Rights set for June could end up turning back the clock on human rights protection unless governments act now to rescue it, Amnesty International's secretary general said today.

"With less than two months to go before the start of the conference, governments are in deadlock over how to move forward on human rights protection," Pierre Sané said in an open letter to heads of state and government released at the start of the final preparatory meeting in Geneva.

Six regional and preparatory meetings have already taken place over the past two years, yet they have come up with virtually no new ideas for tackling human rights problems. And while the regional meetings in Tunisia and Costa Rica restated some basic principles of international human rights protection, the final regional meeting in Thailand took a more narrow and defensive view of those rights.

"The first major international conference on human rights for 25 years should take bold steps forward for human rights protection, but at this rate the conference will take no concrete steps at all to deal with today's pressing problems – like poverty, armed conflict and government repression. At worst, it will start to undermine the very concept that human rights are universal and indivisible, and erode the international system set up to protect human rights.

"This is why I am today sending an open letter to heads of state and governments urging them to make the conference in Vienna a launching point for new human rights initiatives that move forward and not backwards on human rights," Sané said.

The letter sets out a 10-point agenda for action and calls on governments to act now to turn the conference into a landmark event for human rights protection:

1. Establish a **Special Commissioner for Human Rights** as a new high-level authority within the UN system.
2. Establish an effective **UN early warning system** to identify potential human rights crises.
3. Create an efficient **UN emergency response** system to enable the international community to react quickly and constructively to serious violations of human rights.
4. Strengthen the **UN technical assistance program** for human rights to help countries develop long-term programs for human rights protection.
5. Include human rights issues and specialist expertise in **UN conflict resolution** and **peace-keeping** efforts in order to protect victims and promote long-term stability.
6. Address **neglected issues**, such as the rights of women, indigenous peoples and children, in the UN human rights program.
7. Strengthen the methods and impact of the UN's **theme mechanisms**, such as those dealing with torture, "disappearances", extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detention.

8. Improve the capacity of the UN Committees set up to monitor the implementation of human rights treaties.
9. Ensure closer cooperation with other UN programs and activities which impact on human rights such as the program on crime prevention and criminal justice.
10. Increase funding and other essential resources for the UN human rights program, including the Centre for Human Rights.

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