

**@UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIENNA 14-25 JUNE 1993**

The first UN World Conference on Human Rights in 25 years is taking place at a time when human rights are at a crossroads.

Millions of people have been condemned to extreme poverty, disease and exploitation. Countries are disintegrating as war, famine and anarchy take their toll. Arbitrary arrest, political imprisonment, torture, killings and "disappearances" at the hands of the state have corrupted the life of scores of nations.

Social injustice and fanaticism are rampant and the international community has failed to protect those most at risk from oppression. We face the threat of a world devastated by the destruction of our environment.

The UN World Conference on Human Rights will be one of the largest high-level summit meetings where governments will focus exclusively on human rights since the last human rights conference took place in Teheran in 1968. It will also probably be one of the largest ever gatherings of the human rights movement - including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from around the world.

In this briefing pack, Amnesty International has outlined some of the key areas of debate, highlighted specific proposals for strengthening the UN system, and summed up some of the proposals being put forward by the non-governmental human rights community. We have also compiled facts and figures that reveal the dismal human rights record of governments around the world.

The World Conference on Human Rights is being convened by the United Nations with the stated aim of reviewing the UN human rights program and considering new directions and requirements for the protection and promotion of human rights in the decade ahead. Up to 4,500 participants, with representatives from some 180 governments, are expected to attend.

The World Conference is not the result of a great desire by governments to improve the protection and promotion of human rights. The preparations for the World Conference have been hampered by deep divisions about human rights between and within regional groups of governments. There is a fear that the inter-governmental meeting will fail to agree significant new proposals and will merely demonstrate that many governments are not prepared to make a serious commitment to promoting or protecting human rights nationally or internationally.

The agenda of the World Conference is very broad. The main agenda points are:

- commemoration of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People;
- the progress made in the field of human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on the identification of obstacles to further progress in this area and ways in which they can be overcome;
- consideration of the relationship between development, democracy and the universal enjoyment of all human rights, keeping in view the inter-relationship and indivisibility of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights;
- consideration of contemporary trends and new challenges to the full realization of all human rights of women and men, including those of persons belonging to vulnerable groups.

As well as the official conference, there will be a full and varied program of parallel activities organized by NGOs during the two weeks. An NGO Forum is being organized at the same conference site between 10 - 12 June and will enable representatives of national, regional and international human rights organizations to discuss issues they want addressed by the official conference. Many NGOs will be making specific recommendations to the official conference on ways to make the UN human rights mechanisms more effective. Amnesty International's own recommendations for reform of the UN, including the establishment of a Special Commissioner for Human Rights,

are contained in a major public paper – *Facing up to the Failures* – which has been submitted to the preparatory process.

There is a very deep sense of unease in the human rights community about the conference. There is a very real and urgent need to get governments to take practical steps that will extend human rights protection to people who are under threat. Reforms are desperately needed in the international machinery to investigate and deal with human rights violations wherever they occur. The World Conference in itself cannot be expected to redress the grave threat to human rights, but Amnesty International believes it to be an important occasion on which to press for change on the part of governments.

If journalists want further information about the conference and arrangements for it, including arrangements for media reporting, they should contact the United Nations:

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