

@WHAT WE WANT FROM THIS CONFERENCE

Human rights lie at the heart of some of the most pressing questions confronting humanity today.

Systematic political repression in many countries has not only blocked the development of public debate, political reforms and civil rights, but has also claimed an appalling toll of victims. In country after country, the threat of political arrest, detention without trial, torture, "disappearance", the death penalty, extrajudicial executions and other gross violations of human rights still hangs over dissenters and others across the political spectrum. Those who stand up for human rights have been especially targeted. They have been blown up in bombings, assassinated by death squads, abducted by security forces, tortured and killed in police custody.

Our challenge to Governments

1. We challenge governments to improve the protection of human rights in their own countries.

We are calling on every government to ratify international human rights treaties and to initiate a national review by an independent body of the way it has respected those treaties. We also want to see full acceptance of international monitoring and complaints procedures and the removal of limiting reservations to treaties. Efforts must also be made to improve the legislative and institutional framework for the protection and promotion of human rights, including public information and education and the training in human rights of law enforcement, the judiciary and other public officials.

We are also challenging governments on their records on human rights protection and will be using the occasion of the World Conference to do this.

2. We challenge governments to raise human rights consistently and impartially in their foreign policy and to commit themselves to improving the international structures for the protection of human rights.

We are calling on governments to reaffirm the universality and indivisibility of all human rights and that regional, cultural or other particularities can never be a justification for violations by governments of fundamental human rights.

We are calling for a strengthening of the UN's human rights program. This includes the establishment of a Special Commissioner for Human Rights.

We are also pressing for existing work done by the UN, such as the way it deals with issues like torture, summary or arbitrary killings and "disappearances" to be strengthened. Human rights need to be reaffirmed as a matter of legitimate international concern and governed by an international legal and procedural framework that all states should adhere to. Great attention needs to be paid to the human rights of vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples, minorities and children.

3. We challenge governments to defend the role of non-governmental organizations in protecting human rights.

Governments should recognize the essential role played by ordinary citizens and human rights groups and should ensure that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are able to operate freely and effectively and without reprisals. NGOs should not be seen as adversaries, but as legitimate actors in human rights work.

Facing up to the failures

Amnesty International's special report, *Facing Up to the Failures*, presents dozens of detailed recommendations for improving the protection of human rights by the United Nations. Copies are available from Amnesty International offices worldwide. The report's recommendations make clear the gulf that exists between the stated

commitment of governments to protect human rights and the painfully inadequate systems that they have established to make that commitment a reality. What emerges is a 10-point agenda for strengthening and improving human rights protection within the UN system:

1. Establish a Special Commissioner for Human Rights as a new high-level authority within the UN system to secure overall co-ordination of human rights initiatives and integrate them into all the UN's activities. The Special Commissioner could undertake or play a key role in the recommendations which follow.
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 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. Effectively address the rights of women, indigenous peoples and children in the UN human rights program.
7. Strengthen the methods and impact of the UN theme mechanisms, such as those dealing with torture, "disappearances", extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detention.
8. Improve the capacity of the UN committees set up to monitor the implementation of human rights treaties.
9. Ensure closer co-operation with other UN programs and activities which impact on human rights, such as the program on crime prevention and criminal justice.
10. Secure a significant increase in funding and other essential resources for the UN human rights program, including the Centre for Human Rights.