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2005 UN Commission on Human Rights: Monitor Needed to Protect Rights in Counterterrorism US, China and Russia Lead Efforts to Block Establishment of Special Rapporteur

(Geneva) As the international community is poised to establish a special rapporteur of the United Nations on protecting human rights in counterterrorism efforts, a small number of states -- led by China, Russia and United States -- are colluding to block the establishment of an effective mandate, a group of leading international human rights organizations said today.

In addition to these three permanent Security Council members, Australia, India and Pakistan have sought to undermine the initiative currently under consideration by the UN Commission on Human Rights meeting in Geneva.

Nearly four years after the September 11, 2001 tragedy and the Security Council mandate for robust international action to combat terrorism, and despite more than three years of discussion in the UN human rights system, China has argued that it is "too early" for establishing such a special rapporteur.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, most Commission member states, national human rights institutions, and a large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have endorsed the call for a United Nations investigator. The special rapporteur would monitor counterterrorism laws and practices for their compatibility with human rights, act to prevent human rights violations arising from counterterrorism measures and provide technical assistance to states.

The countries blocking the mechanism have demanded a number of unacceptable amendments designed to kill or hollow-out the mandate.

Mexico and many other states proposed the special rapporteur following a clear conclusion by Robert Goldman, the Commission's Independent Expert on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, that there is a pressing need for monitoring under a single mandate that has a comprehensive overview of the relationship between human rights and counterterrorism measures.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues and the International Service for Human Rights share the assessment of the Independent Expert that "a broad range of human rights have come under increasing pressure or are being violated by States in the context of ... counterterrorism initiatives".

The organizations called on the Commission to act now to address meaningfully one of the greatest human rights challenges presently faced by the international community.

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