

0001 hrs gmt Monday 19 April 1993

**OPEN LETTER TO HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT  
FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S SECRETARY GENERAL**

The world today is confronted by ever growing numbers of pressing human rights questions.

Millions of people are suffering from poverty, diseases and ruthless exploitation. Countries and communities are being torn apart by war, famine and anarchy. Every day thousands of lives are being devastated by political imprisonment, torture, "disappearances" and killings in countries where state officials feel free to act as they please.

These are the issues which governments should be tackling in the run up to the first United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in 25 years to be held in Vienna in June. The challenge is to reaffirm the world's commitment to basic rights, and to find bold new ways to protect those rights into the next century.

With the World Conference less than two months away, however, governments have still not risen to that challenge. They could, in fact, end up turning back the clock on human rights protection.

The six regional and international preparatory meetings held over the past two years have come up with virtually no new ideas for tackling those human rights issues. While some governments have reaffirmed their commitment to universal and indivisible human rights, others have called into question the very notion of common human rights standards that apply to everyone, reinforced and protected by an international framework which governments should respect.

At this rate, this landmark conference will achieve nothing to deal with those crucial human rights issues -- and may even risk eroding the international consensus that all men, women and children are entitled to the same rights around the world.

I am therefore appealing to heads of state and government to take the necessary steps to drive the conference forward -- and to ensure that the conference does come up with the desperately needed new initiatives to deal with human rights in today's world.

I am calling on heads of state and government to take 10 specific steps set out in Amnesty International's agenda for action:

1. Establish a **Special Commissioner for Human Rights** as a new high-level authority within the UN system to coordinate the UN's human rights initiatives and integrate them at the highest level into all the UN's activities. The Special Commissioner could also 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 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.**

**In the fruitless debates that have dragged on over these months, some governments have sought to argue that a distinction of priority must be drawn between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. To allow this division to happen will be a great setback for the ideals so eloquently proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The inherent dignity of all human beings requires respect, without discrimination, for the full rights of all.**

**Although there is desperately little time left, there is still the final, fourth meeting of the Preparatory Committee in Geneva between 19 and 30 April in which to press home these points and do productive work. I appeal to every government to give the World Conference the highest priority and to make sure that it is a landmark event that results in positive, constructive and action-oriented proposals to advance human rights protection.**

**EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT MONDAY 21 APRIL 1993**