

**FIFTEENTH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS  
FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (ICC)**

*Seoul, Republic of Korea  
14 September 2004*

*Statement by  
Mr. Morten Kjærum  
Chairperson of the ICC*

Mr. Kim Chang-kuk, President of National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea,  
Ambassador Campos  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen;

It is a great pleasure and honour to welcome you to the fifteenth session of the ICC. It is a meeting which takes place at a time of many *opportunities* as well as *challenges* and *difficulties*.

Today, in our midst I wish to welcome the High Commissioner, Ms. Louise Arbour, a renowned human rights scholar, jurist and practitioner. On behalf of the ICC I would like to express to her our deep appreciation to her commitment to the work of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) as represented by her presence at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference.

Her office is an invaluable partner of the ICC. This collaboration gives us a unique possibility for consolidating a strong partnership between international and national mechanisms for monitoring and implementing human rights. The advice and assistance of her National Institutions Unit is a prerequisite for our work.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea for the preparation and organization of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference. It sets the best possible framework for our discussions and creates the possibility for NHRIs jointly to develop approaches to common challenges. Thereby we will all harvest the fruits of your hard work.

An apparent opportunity is indeed the increased recognition of the concept of NHRIs. The mere fact that more than 100 countries have accepted the need for a specialized institution devoted exclusively to human rights promotion and protection creates a much needed core for the strengthening of the national protection systems. With the words of the High Commissioner this is a key development to ensure that our discussion of rights is moving “beyond the declaratory or the aspirational: rather, we are now well engaged in the application and enforcement of legal obligations.”

With this quick growth in the family of NHRIs also follows the challenge of creating transparent accreditation procedures that ensure respect and enforcement of the Paris Principles. The ICC has faced this challenge by developing draft rules of procedure for the Credentials Committee that ensure clear classifications for accreditation and clear procedures for handling the applications received. I appreciate the positive responses already received, and I hope that they will be adopted at this meeting. It is

our aspiration that this will also provide a framework to facilitate assistance to those institutions that have yet to comply.

In the accreditation process the independence of the institution is often the key issue. Time and again we have discussed the political pressures we face when depending on state funding, but we also need to develop thinking in relation to dependency on donor funding. A challenge is to create mechanisms to ensure that we remain in control of policy developments, to avoid undue influence by external donors with their particular interests and perspectives on human rights protection and promotion.

Needless to say, enforcement of international human rights is not only a question of quantity – the key to our success is to continue to increase the quality of our performance in each of our specific national contexts. With the increased recognition of the need for establishing NHRIs, we therefore have a unique opportunity to refine our working methods to ensure that the Paris Principles are not only respected but built upon.

This work has already commenced most apparent in the conclusions of the Roundtable reflecting on the Paris Principles last December, as well as the conclusions of the two Roundtables on NHRIs and the administration of justice and on the combat of racism and xenophobia. Furthermore, we are taking steps to follow-up on the recommendations reached at these and other meetings. An example is the new database available on [www.nhri.net](http://www.nhri.net) which includes documentation and analysis on the practice, procedures and methods of complaint handling used in NHRIs. It is my aspiration that this can be an inspirational tool for making operational the application of the Paris Principles.

It should be a key priority of the ICC to continue the further development and refinement of our working methods. One specific component of this work would be to further develop the National Human Rights Institutions Forum website to include analysis and documentation on the application of our working tools. For instance, interesting developments can be identified in NHRI responses to inquiries related to the advancement of economic, social and cultural rights, including in relation to discrimination. The collection, exchange and comparison of case law within this and other areas is one possible way of sharing and improving our practice.

Another common headline for these initiatives is the ICC prioritization of an increased follow-up on the recommendations of the international conferences as envisaged in the functions allotted to the ICC in our Rules of Procedure. At the same time these very Rules of Procedure also raise the challenge of identifying our role in relation to possible follow-up on relevant United Nations resolutions. We have

already achieved some progress in this area by devoting our thematic discussions at the international conferences of NHRIs to areas of specific concern. At the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference in Copenhagen, recommendations were issued on the role of NHRIs in providing early warning of the dangers of ethnic cleansing or armed conflict as well as in identifying and addressing new manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. At the 7th International Conference we will be addressing how to uphold human rights during conflict and while countering terrorism. There is a direct line from the meeting in Copenhagen to Seoul.

Dear colleagues, hand in hand with these visions and important achievements in strengthening the concept of NHRIs goes the opportunity it creates to increase the understanding of our unique institutional type. In this respect, one current challenge is our participation in the work of the Commission on Human Rights as well as other UN agenda setting bodies, which we will be addressing at this session of the ICC. Our contributions to the development of new instruments such as the international convention on the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities already demonstrates the important role we can play in feeding the national human rights challenges into international agenda setting. At the same time, the increased possibilities for access to the treaty bodies are an opportunity that we should seize.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea, for having included NGO participation in our international conference. A constructive interaction between NHRIs and NGOs is vital for the success of our common goal: the protection and promotion of human rights. The conference the last couple of days with the NGOs was constructive and I hope that there will be a continuation of the dialogue initiated here in Seoul.

I stand fully committed to work closely with you together with the Vice-Chairperson of the ICC to ensure that the ICC will meet our needs for representation at global level. We look forward to further developing these and other priorities with you. It is therefore with anticipation and gratitude that I welcome you to this 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ICC.

I thank you for your attention.