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Review of UN rights council an opportunity to boost effectiveness, Assembly told



Amb. Sihasak Phuangkitkeow of Thailand, president of the 47-member body

3 November 2010 – The upcoming five-year review of the United Nations Human Rights Council should help it make a greater difference on the ground, reacting more swiftly and effectively to chronic and urgent abuses, the body's president told the General Assembly today.

"We must not lose focus of what we aim to achieve", Sihasak Phuangkitkeow of Thailand, president of the 47-member body, said as he presented its annual report to the Assembly.

Mr. Phuangkitkeow said that last week's first session of the open-ended intergovernmental Working Group for the review process, which was mandated by the Assembly, presented an opportunity to build on achievements and make improvements.

The review, he said, aimed to identify ways for the Council to streamline its work to ensure that its time and resources were effectively used. It will also highlight the need to better coordinate the relationship between the work of the Council and that of the General Assembly on rights issues.

Once the process is completed — no later than June next year — it will feed into a separate Assembly-led process that weighs the Council's status within the United Nations system, Mr. Phuangkitkeow added.

On other developments covered in the report, he said a total of 72 decisions and three Presidential Statements had been adopted during the reporting period, which ran from September 2009 to June 2010.

Among the most pressing issues on the Council's agenda during that time were post-earthquake recovery in Haiti, the attack on the Gaza flotilla and the situation in Somalia.

Panel discussions held by the Council benefited from a wide range of expertise from its Advisory Committee and other bodies, and from hearing first-hand experience of, among others, victims of trafficking.

He said the Universal Periodic Review had successfully reviewed 127 countries, which was two thirds of the United Nations membership, noting the Council had secured 100 per cent participation by States under review thus far.

In the area of standard setting, he said the Council advanced its work on issues relating to women's human rights, including maternal mortality and morbidity and gender equality, among as well as on the rights of children.

Other thematic issues covered included the impact of the global and financial crisis on human rights, including the rights to truth, to protect journalists in situations of armed conflicts and the adverse effects of toxic human waste on human rights.

Opening today's discussion, which heard from more than 36 Member States, General Assembly President Joseph Deiss of Switzerland said the annual report of the Human Rights Council stressed the importance of human rights as a third pillar of the United Nations mission, alongside peace and development

While recognizing the vital contributions the Council has already made, he said that it was now important to review the body's work, bearing in mind both the Council's mandate and the need to make necessary adjustments.

It was his intention to complete the review process during the Assembly's sixty-fifth session, a task that would require effective collaboration between Geneva and New York. "I am pleased with the commitments undertaken in that regard," he said.

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