

At Human Rights Council, UN expert calls for uniform application of international law



Alfred de Zayas, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

13 September 2012 – A United Nations independent expert today urged world governments to work to achieve an equitable and democratic international order in which law is applied uniformly among countries.

“An international order in which only a few powerful players take all the decisions, often disregarding the consequences for the less powerful, is hardly democratic,” [said](#) the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Alfred de Zayas.

Presenting his first [report](#) to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Mr. de Zayas added that countries must refrain from the threat or the use of force and promote a culture of dialogue to address current disparities in the international system.

“This vision can be achieved by respecting the United Nations Charter as the World Constitution, by applying international law uniformly and not à la carte,” he said. “An international democratic order is one where all peoples have the opportunity to participate in global decision-making. We must build on the principles of self-determination, sovereignty, and respect for national identities and universal human dignity.”

In his report, Mr. de Zayas proposed reforms in the international arena, including in the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, while also stressing that the riches of the planet must be equally shared and not controlled by a few countries or cartels. “Fair trade is possible, as are transfer of knowledge and technical cooperation based on mutual benefit,” he said.

The Special Rapporteur pointed to the international financial crisis as an indicator of inequality in the international order, and called for transparency and accountability in the markets, emphasizing that markets cannot be the “private playground of financial bankers”, and instead need to understand their role as “a public responsibility.”

In addition, Mr. de Zayas underlined that a more equitable and democratic international order requires not only international efforts but also domestic reforms which promote social justice and narrow the gap between rich and poor, strengthen the rule of law, and encourage freedom of expression.

“Progress in democratization at the domestic level is necessary to ensure a correlation between the true wishes of the people and the governmental measures, including foreign policy, that affects them,” he said.

Current obstacles to achieve a more humanistic international order include “the status quo mentality and general inertia” as well as “vested interests and privilege,” Mr. de Zaya noted, adding that a change of paradigm away from short-term economics is needed along with a rethinking of values and human rights.

Independent experts, or special rapporteurs like Mr. de Zaya, are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back, in an unpaid capacity, on specific human rights themes.

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