

Observed 2

Human Rights Council – 12th Session

Item 4 – Human rights situation that require the Council's attention

22. September 2009

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by
H. E. Ambassador Christian Strohal
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Austria**

Mr. President!

Austria fully aligns itself with the statement made by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

The Human Rights Council's mandate to address human rights situations requiring our attention constitutes a paramount responsibility entrusted to us by the GA (resolution 60/251). No country has a perfect human rights record. We all need to work constantly and self-critically to address our shortcomings and do better for the promotion and protection of human rights. This fact also obliges us to address situation openly which are of particular concern to us in order to enter into a dialogue on how to improve the implementation of international standards on the ground.

Therefore, we want to address four situations where we do not see the necessary political will and determination to improve the protection of human rights effectively.

We have to express our deep and continuing concern about the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of **Iran**, in particular the many reports of violations and excessive use of force by security forces after the elections. We are concerned about the fate of numerous Iranians who participated in peaceful demonstrations and who are reported to be mistreated and abused. In judicial proceedings against those arrested the most basic rights of the accused are not being respected. Trials fall seriously short of international and even Iranian standards. We call on the Government of Iran to respect its international obligations, in particular under the ICCPR, and release the political prisoners who have merely exercised their right to freedom of assembly and speech.

We also remain concerned about the discrimination and harassment of religious minorities, in particular the Ba'hai and the situation of seven members of their informal leadership in detention. We call on Iran to release the detained individuals and uphold the right to freedom of religion. Several UN special procedures have requested visits to Iran. We call on the Iranian Government to honour their obligation by allowing such visits.

We continue to be concerned about continuing human rights violations in **Sri Lanka** even as the civil war was declared over by the Government. The dire situation of the about 250.000 IDPs, which are detained in internment camps and are not allowed to move freely, needs to be addressed urgently. They must be treated in compliance with international standards. Action needs to be taken to rapidly facilitate their voluntary, dignified, and safe return. Furthermore, the resuscitation of the old Press Council Act which foresees to fine or arrest critical journalists is a clear threat to an independent media. Lasting peace in the country can only be achieved if the Government reaches out to the entire population and ensures equal rights for all.

We would like to recognize all efforts made by the Government of **Afghanistan** to improve the rights of women in the country. However, we are appalled by the last UN report on persistent violence against women, especially the extensive and increasing level of violence directed at women taking part in public life, as well as the "widespread occurrence" of rape against a backdrop of institutional failure and impunity. State institutions have to deal with this and to protect women effectively. We welcome the work on new legislation, which must be in line with existing international standards, in particular CEDAW.

The human rights situation in **Sudan** has not decisively improved over the last months. We acknowledge that large scale conflict has decreased in Darfur. We are however deeply concerned about the situation of more than 2 million internally displaced people in this region. In particular we are disturbed by the ongoing attacks on women and children and remain concerned as to the persistent impunity, in particular with respect to rape and sexual assaults on women. We hope that with the newly established mandate of the Council as well as the upcoming appointment of a new mandate holder, progress can be made swiftly. We urge the Government of Sudan to cooperate closely with the new mechanism in order to bring real change on the ground.