

Human Rights Council: 12th Session: Item 4: Human Rights situations that require the Council's attention: General debate

New Zealand Statement - September 22 2009

Serious and urgent situations continue to require attention by the Council, which can contribute to progress in human rights. A number of country situations are of concern to New Zealand.

In **Fiji** a military regime continues to rule by decree. Under so-called "emergency regulations", the media is strictly censored. Church and community leaders are arbitrarily detained and intimidated. The largest religious denomination in Fiji has been prevented from holding its annual meeting.

The international community has called for genuine, independent and open political dialogue and a prompt return to democracy. While political stakeholders in Fiji have endorsed this, the military has refused to consider elections before 2014.

Since New Zealand last raised Fiji at the Council in June, Fiji has been suspended from the Commonwealth. Commonwealth Secretary-General Sharma noted that this action was taken with deep regret, following sustained efforts to engage the military government and encourage dialogue.

In **Sri Lanka**, New Zealand remains concerned about the situation of those in camps for Internally Displaced Persons. The Government of Sri Lanka should engage in a reconciliation process taking into account the legitimate aspirations of all minority groups.

New Zealand continues to be concerned about the human rights situation and absence of democracy in **Myanmar**. New Zealand reiterates its call for the immediate release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, in preparation for meaningful political engagement involving all parties.

New Zealand remains concerned about the human rights situation in **Iran**, in particular the execution of those who commit crimes as minors, restrictions on the right to freedom of religion, and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, including the Bahai. Violence directed against peaceful protestors following Iran's Presidential elections runs counter to the fundamental protections that states must provide to all citizens.

The humanitarian situation in **Darfur** remains a cause of concern to the international community. Human rights abuses by state and non-state parties to the conflict are reported to be continuing with apparent impunity.

New Zealand is concerned about the rights of women in **Afghanistan**. Despite progress in improving access to education and justice, more needs to be done to improve the rights of women. New Zealand has expressed concern to the government of Afghanistan about the recent Shia Personal Status Law, which appears to undermine the rights of women.

Thank you Mr President.