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UN Louise Arbour: All Countries Deserve Scrutiny when it comes to Human Rights, Including Cambodia

UN human rights chief says all countries deserve scrutiny

No country is immune from human rights problems and therefore they can all benefit from cooperating frankly with international rights mechanisms, the top United Nations official for the subject said today.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour told the UN Human Rights Council, which is meeting in Geneva, that all nations should cooperate more with her Office and with other mechanisms.

"I am persuaded that more openness and receptivity on the part of governments bring additional benefits and resources in facing up to human rights challenges," he said.

Her comments came in an address to Council delegates that followed the presentation of her annual report yesterday.

In that report Ms. Arbour said a key test of whether the Council is working better than its derided predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, would be the functioning of the "universal periodic review," the new mechanism that will allow the rights records of all States to be scrutinized.

Today the High Commissioner also discussed her Office's country-specific reports on the situation in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Colombia.

In the case of Afghanistan, although the troubled country is making serious efforts at improving its performance across many areas, including security and justice, its transition from war and misrule has been overshadowed by the re-emergence of conflict with the Taliban and related forces last year.

"Increased violence impedes much needed development aid from reaching the population," she said. "This compounds the condition of grinding poverty that affects the vast majority of Afghans," adding that women still suffering from widespread discrimination and arbitrary detention and torture are reported regularly.

But she added that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission "continues to do excellent work, despite risks due to the security situation," and her Office was supporting it.

In Cambodia, Ms. Arbour's Office was giving priority to what she described as "persisting patterns of impunity and to issue faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as other groups and individuals defending human rights."

She also stressed the need to push for a more independent and professional judiciary, as well as to encourage the creation of legislation more in line with Cambodia's international human rights obligations.

Colombia's persistent armed conflict and high levels of drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime have made it much harder to protect human rights in the Latin American nation, the High Commissioner said, noting that guerrillas continue to take civilian hostages.

"Human rights defenders, including trade unionists and social leaders, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, displaced persons, women, children and journalists, are among the most affected," she said.

Overall Ms. Arbour emphasized the importance of tackling impunity around the world, as well as fighting discrimination in all its forms.

The Council is also currently considering reports on such topics as the defamation of religion, racism, children in armed conflict, the right to development, missing persons, and the death penalty.

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