

United Nations Inter-governmental Bodies Under Governmental Pressure

Participants at a recent press conference held June 14, 2005 at the Swiss Press Club in Geneva, with Danielle Mitterand (Chairwoman of the France Libertés Danielle Mitterand Foundation) presiding, brought up for discussion and censure the political pressure and extreme measures taken by the Iranian government to silence activists for Human Rights within the United Nations.

They also denounced a major dysfunction within the UN which has resulted in several representatives of NGO's as well as members of the Iranian National Resistance Council being denied access to the Human Rights Commission.

In an open letter to Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN, the participants demanded the immediate and unreserved lifting of this ban and the nomination of an impartial investigating commission to determine the causes of, and persons responsible for, this dysfunction.

For several years, Iranian authorities have been increasing their interventions with United Nations authorities in order to prevent Iranian activists from gaining access to the UN and, in particular, to the Offices of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva for fear that they would reveal to the international community the grave human rights violations and the reality of the situation in their country.

Since March 2004, in a case of flagrant diversion of international procedures and mechanisms, the Iranian government has falsely fabricated "international warrants of arrest" for several people, one of whom was a France Libertés representative to the UNOG. Thus, six Iranian-born human rights activists have been denied access to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva on the basis of supposedly real, but actually false, international arrest warrants, delivered by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and forwarded to INTERPOL as well as to the Director General of the UNOG. These persons have been, for the past 20 years, refugees in various western countries who are well-known for their peaceful activities in the cause of human rights. Several of them are currently naturalized citizens of the countries in which they reside.

Even though these measures have not been acted upon, neither by the countries of residence of the interested parties nor by Switzerland, host country for the UN at Geneva, they still represent a grave attack on the rights of their victims and put at serious risk the right of each NGO to freely designate its own representatives to meetings organized under the auspices of the United Nations.

As far as the UN is concerned, the goal of these attempts has been attained since, beginning with the 60th session of the Commission on Human Rights, the people cited in these false warrants have been denied access to the UN in Geneva.

The community of Non-Governmental Organizations has, on several occasions, expressed its extreme unease with this situation, but no real explanation has been provided by the UN authorities in either Geneva or New York as to reasons justifying

the banning of these people despite their accreditation by the NGOs. To date, these unjust and unjustifiable bans have not been lifted.

This situation risks giving rise to a dangerous and paralyzing precedent which could, in the future, allow any government to easily abrogate to itself the right to selectively prevent certain NGO representatives from participating in the work of the Human Rights Commission, thereby determining who could provide the UN with information concerning the situation in a given country.

Numerous irregularities as well as a lack of transparency, hesitation and incoherence, are thus added to the inability to provide an explanation for this injustice and for the lack of firmness when faced with a state like Iran, 51 times condemned by the UN bodies for its systematic violation of human rights and international law. Directly concerned, the NGOs, supported by prominent lawyers and personalities, denounce the lack of determination when faced with such an unacceptable situation and demand an immediate lifting of the ban imposed unjustly on these human rights defenders, as well as respect for their own rights, recognized by the ECOSOC, by virtue of resolution no. 1996/31.

During the press conference, Ms. Danielle Mitterand stated: “The role of the NGOs is precisely to give voice to direct witnesses to the exigencies of the state. If one deprives them of this role, the UN becomes no more than a club of governments. The affair of the Iranians within the UN presents a precedent which is prejudicial to the credibility of this role. If the UN wishes to continue to function, it must return to the original first phrase of its charter “*We, the people*”.”

Mr. Christian Ferrazino, Vice president of the administrative Council of Geneva indicated: “The city of Geneva is pleased to give its support to this initiative. It had taken in as a friend the most celebrated of these refugees, Kazen Radjavi, who had become an eminent professor here and who had succeeded in having the regime of the mollahs condemned in 9 consecutive resolutions. Sadly, his assassins have not always been punished.”

Mr. Mark Henzelin underlined: “This affair is rather comical from a judicial standpoint. The Swiss justice department has most carefully examined these famous red notices of INTERPOL and has determined that they are loaded with such material and factual errors, poor descriptions of the incriminated persons, and errors of manifested dates that there is a very strong suspicion of political maneuverings which makes them not worth pursuing. It is paradoxical that the UN takes them seriously.”

Mr. Eric Sottas, Secretary general of the OMCT (World Organization Against Torture) pointed out that: “The NGOs have less and less voice within the commissions of the UN where the States take longer and longer for their speeches, relegating the NGOs to a very short speaking time (a presentation of 3 minutes at the end of the meeting.) How then can they continue to assist in the promotion of human rights in a United Nations dominated by States which don’t respect human rights in their countries? This affair is very serious because of the precedent it offers, one which will be exploited by all dictators.”

Mr. Beate Kraugerud, Norwegian lawyer for Mr. Parviz Khazai – one of those named in an arrest warrant – former ambassador of Iran to the Scandinavian countries, and, currently, Norwegian citizen, said, for his part: “I have several times demanded an explanation from INTERPOL but they have never precisely responded. I can, myself, prove that my client was physically in Norway at the very moment when he is accused of having committed an assassination attempt in Iran.”

Mr. Flaherty, an international lawyer based in Geneva emphasized that the functional immunity of the United Nations was at risk if the ideas of natural justice could not be respected.

Recalling the assassination of his father, Professor Kazem Radjavi 15 years ago near Coppet by a commando sent from Teheran with “service passports,” the lawyer Stephanie Radjavi stated: “Following physical terrorism, the regime of the mollahs now applies an institutional terrorism to the UN.”

As the Secretary General of the UN states in his report “*In Larger Freedom*,” it is important that the NGOs be able to mobilize together: “Hence, the cause of larger freedom can only be advanced by broad, deep and sustained global cooperation among States. The world needs strong and capable States, effective partnerships with civil society and the private sector, and agile and effective regional and global intergovernmental institutions to mobilize and coordinate collective action. The United Nations must be reshaped in ways not previously imagined, and with a boldness and speed not previously shown.” He further states concerning the current Human Rights Commission and proposed Human Rights Council in particular: “The Commission on Human Rights suffers from declining credibility and professionalism, and is in need of major reform. It should be replaced by a smaller standing Human Rights Council, as a principal organ of the United Nations or subsidiary of the General Assembly, whose members would be elected directly by the General Assembly, by a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.”

The Press Conference of June 14, 2005, was organized with the support of France Libertés – Foundation Danielle Mitterand, the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT), the Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Among Peoples (MRAP), the Conference of Non-governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (ONGO), the Women’s Human Rights International Association (WHRIA), the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples (LIDLIP), New Human Rights (NDH), and the National Federation of International Immigrant Women Association (NFIWA).

Geneva, June 14, 2005