

Thalif Deen

FALL'S LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO SAVE DRAFT PACT

11 Jun 93

■ The Secretary-General of the World Conference on Human Rights, Ibrahima Fall, yesterday made a last-ditch attempt to save a final draft conference document peppered with more than 200 brackets signifying disagreements.

'We have little or no hopes of arriving at a consensus document because the disagreements seem virtually unbridgeable,' one Third World diplomat told Terra Viva yesterday.

Continuing the discreet behind-the-scenes ambassadorial talks he has been hosting since the last meeting of the Preparatory Committee charged with paving the way to the Conference in Geneva, in April, Fall submitted a four-page document entitled 'informal conclusions on the informal consultations on the final document.'

The new proposals in the document are intended to help resolve what Fall labels the five 'key controversial issues' delegates will confront Monday.

The five disputed issues singled out in his paper are: 'universality vs particularity', 'self-determination', 'obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights', 'development, democracy and human rights' and 'institutional reforms of the UN

human rights programme.'

In his paper, Fall implicitly admits there is not even a semblance of consensus on one of the most politically sensitive issues of the day: conditionalities.

'On... whether or not to accept conditionalities on technical assistance on the one hand and on development, democracy and human rights on the other, and in particular between technical assistance and human rights, it is my feeling that the discussion should continue in Vienna to enable a consensus,' he said.

Another Fall conclusion is that 'the right of self-determination is a fundamental and inalienable right of all peoples.'

He told a closed-door informal meeting of officials that there 'appears to be consensus' on the need for increased resources for the UN Centre on Human Rights, although his document provides no numbers.

On the other hand, it does call for a new 'World Fund for Human Rights' and regular pledging conferences for human rights, with the first one in Vienna.

After the Fall briefing, one delegate commented: 'We were not expected to either accept his informal conclusions or reject them. From what we could gather, he was only trying to be helpful. But I think it was a good try in a rather lost cause.'

As a result, when delegates arrive for the opening of the Conference, they will pick up from where they left off at the Geneva Preparatory Committee. Nothing more, nothing less.

Flags of the world's nations outside the World Conference on Human Rights



Ihsan Bouabid

ALBERTINA SISULU CALL FOR ACTION

11 Jun 93

■ 'We expect this Forum to have results which are action-oriented,' said Albertina Sisulu, president of the NGO Forum that she opened yesterday.

'Peaceful, organized pressure by the people, expressed through the NGOs, can change thinking in the world, can change the political status quo. This has been shown by recent and current events in various regions,' the South African human rights campaigner said.

Sisulu is the first woman to have been elected to chair an event of this magnitude. She said she felt honoured, along with 'millions of women in the world,' to accept the post.

Added Sisulu: 'I would be failing in my duties as President of this World Forum, if I forgot to congratulate the women of the world for their success in moving the UN, the governments and the NGO community to put the issue of "Women's Human Rights" on the agenda.'

'The time has come for the world to know and to recognize the role women are playing and can play in world politics,' she stressed.

Women were well represented among the speakers at the opening session of the Forum. They included Malawi's Vera Chirwa, freed from detention in January 1993, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, opposition leader in Bangladesh's parliament, Issam Abdelhadi, head of the Union of Palestinian Women, and a spokesperson for NGOs representing the handicapped, who declined to give her name.

Guatemala's Rigoberta Menchu, 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, had also been expected to address the meeting, but at the end of the session, Sisulu explained that her absence was linked to the 'current events in her country.'

The Secretary-General of the World Conference on Human Rights, Ibrahima Fall of Senegal, condemned the tendency to view

human rights in different ways depending on the region or country.

'How can one not highlight and condemn the practice, and even the policy, that obtains in all regions of the world, and which consists in a selective approach to and implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms consecrated by international legal instruments,' Fall said.

This policy of double measures, 'whether it affects economic, social and cultural rights and privileges, civic and political rights only, or whether it is the expression of an illusory choice that gives exclusive priority to economic, social and cultural rights, seriously wounds' human dignity, which is 'global, and thus indivisible.'

Sheikh Hasina agreed with Fall, saying that in Bangladesh, 'we have only won political freedom, but the much bigger war against poverty and backwardness has just begun. Human rights, of which right to development is an integral part, is still a distant goal for us in Bangladesh, therefore human rights have many dimensions.'

She added that 'this universality of beneficiaries means we must critically review our existing machinery and methods of protecting human rights internationally.'

'Each human person, regardless of her or his race, religion, culture, language, or geographic location, must benefit from the same effective protection of human rights by the UN,' the Bangladeshi opposition leader said.

With this in mind, the NGOs have made a package of proposals for revising existing mechanisms, in particular to allow for greater flexibility and efficiency of the specialized instruments and organs of the UN.

However, Ibrahima Fall stressed that 'if much progress was done in the idea of strengthening existing institutions and mechanisms, we still have much resistance from states against creation of new ones. I am sure that your forum will bring us proposals and inputs for better progress.'

More than 1,300 NGOs from the five continents are attending the three-day Forum.

Jonathan Power

IF TIMES WERE RIGHT

11 Jun 93

■ This is the moment some of us have been waiting for for a very long time – the World Conference on Human Rights – the first chance in modern times for the people of this planet to say in one loud, clear, collective voice: 'No false imprisonment – No torture – No disappearances in the night – No summary executions – No exploitation of child labour – No child prostitution – No degradation of men and women by letting them rot in hunger, destitution and poverty.'

Yet, Vienna, host to this gathering, for all its magnificence and charm, exudes a palpable air of evasive unease. It is uncannily like being back in the shadowy years, immediately after the Second World War, when furtive Orson Welles-types rendezvoused under the giant Ferris wheel and sold contraband penicillin and then, when fingered, made their getaway through the city's ancient sewers.

Today, the furtive figures are diplomats arriving with hidden agendas for the sabotage of human rights – at the very least intent on stifling any more intrusion into what they are doing in their own countries, at worst turning the great 1948 document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, inside out and upside down by winning a resolution asserting that civil and political rights cannot be fully granted (granted? – freedom from fear is an inalienable right) until economic, social and cultural rights have been achieved. In other words, don't mention the word 'freedom' until we have a Gross National Product approaching \$15,000 per head.

Diplomats representing the hard line prefer to hide from the world what the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances recently published – 17,000 reports of 'disappearances' in a single year – people whisked from their homes and loved ones by the



Diplomats arrive at the World Conference on Human Rights. They faced days and nights of intensive discussion

secret police, never to be seen again.

Likewise, they want to have ignored what the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture reported last year: the number of cases he hears about is continuously growing and, despite all the action taken at the international level, 'only failures can be recorded at the national level.'

It is such reports that persuaded UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to admit in his last annual statement on the work of the UN: 'The UN has not been able to act effectively to bring an end to massive human rights violations.'

'Faced with the barbaric conduct which fills the news media today the UN cannot stand idle or indifferent. The long term credibility of our Organization as a whole will depend on the success of our response to this challenge.'

This conference should be, if times were right, the occasion for a bloody battle between those members of the UN that want to bring the light of day to bear on the abuse of power and those who want to keep their doors and shutters closed while they continue to trample on those with whom they disagree.

Tragically, the latter appear to have won the early rounds in the preparatory meetings that led up to Vienna. The democracies

– whether they be Western or Third World (and it should never be overlooked that more people live under democratic rule in the Third World than they do in the West) – appear not to have the stomach for a real fight.

One thing has changed for the better – the blossoming network of voluntary human rights groups, whose formidable legions are pouring into Vienna by the plane-load. Not just the well-known – Amnesty International and Americas Watch – but small, local organisations, like the 'Thai Union for Civil Liberty', 'Task Force Detainees-Philippines', and 'Kosovo Human Rights Watch'. There are 300 of these from Asia alone.

Crammed into bed and breakfasts, or if lucky, put up in the homes of the Viennese burgers, they are agitating for such things as an international Penal Court to try gross violations of human rights, a Special UN Commissioner for Human Rights who would have the authority for speedy action, a special rapporteur on women, the world's single largest most discriminated against group, ratification of the Conventions on Torture and the Rights of the Child, and an improved UN capacity for fact-finding and a rapider response in emergencies.

These are all sound practical ideas. They need to be backed by votes – and with cash. We watch and we wait. And we see what emerges from the Vienna shadows.

IPS Staff and Internet

NGOS REBUFF UN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

11 Jun 93

■ In an extraordinary challenge to governments on the eve of the World Conference on Human Rights, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) decided yesterday to expose country abuses by name.

The decision, taken at the plenary on the first day of the NGO Forum, disregards one of the conditions set by the UN when it approved the convening of the conference.

Delegates applauded when Edith Ballantyne, President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and an NGO co-chairperson, made the announcement. But she agreed her hand was being forced, and her fellow-organizers were unhappy at the decision. Manfred Nowak, director of the Vienna-based Boltzmann Institute that coordinates NGO activities, described the move as 'provocative and unwise'.

Others warned that if governments are mentioned in the Forum document, it may not be adopted by the whole World Conference. Meanwhile, in another controversy, the organizers of the Forum agreed to withdraw 5,000 copies of the timetable of NGO events and activities that will run parallel to the World Conference, because

Non-governmental organizations succeeded in raising the temperature at the World Conference



it also referred to countries.

The UN has agreed to reprint 2,500 copies of a sanitized version. NGOs have also been forced to take out scores of references to governments from the brochure.

'If they (NGOs) feel they can use denunciations to further amplify their message, they may achieve the short-term purpose. But it ... defeats the fundamental objective of the Conference,' said John Pace, Conference Coordinator. UN officials also insist that the NGO parallel activities have to come under UN rules because they are taking place on UN territory. NGOs dispute this and say the UN had no right trying to control NGO activities that are independent of the official meeting.

As well as personally upsetting to several Forum organizers, the dispute reveals the extremely wide differences that exist among NGOs over the goals of the World Conference. Some clearly feel the Conference should not duplicate the UN Commission on Human Rights and list abuses, but rather try to cooperate with governments in strengthening the UN human rights protection system. They feel the Conference has a crucial task in building North-South consensus and addressing the shortcomings of the UN. But others – particularly grassroots groups from developing countries that are under pressure – view it as the ultimate betrayal. 'If NGOs give in to governments, they lose their soul,' said Franca Sciuto, chairperson of the Rainforest Foundation.

Pierre Sané, the Secretary-General of Amnesty International, agreed. In a powerful statement to the Forum plenary yesterday afternoon, Sané pointed out that if the debate is about murder and torture, governments have to be mentioned.

While they were pondering these two conflicting visions, NGOs were urged to be more confrontational by Philip Alston, a witty, sharp-tongued professor from Australia who is Chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. He said NGOs are too civilized, too well behaved in the UN, too deferential to UN procedures.

Carmen Alicia Fernandez

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE PLEAD FOR ATTENTION & SENSITIVITY

12 Jun 93

■ Representatives of Asian and American indigenous peoples have come to Vienna armed with the hope that the World Conference on Human Rights will make other residents of the planet sensitive to their problems.

Thousands of kilometres and different geographical realities, historical experiences, customs, traditions and languages separate them, but the estimated 300 million indigenous people worldwide face common problems.

They range from the invasion of their lands, massive forced migrations and discrimination to disrespect for their cultures and their socio-economic and political organizations.

'Meeting my brothers from Latin America, North America and Asia has been a painful recollection of abuses experienced at the hands of the so-called civilized men,' Euclides Pereira of the Indigenous Council of Roraima told IPS.

'We all face the same problems in varying degrees and we are prepared to struggle to resolve them,' he said.

They intend to wage this battle with the weapons provided by 'civilization' – paper and words – and have been preparing global and regional documents which they will present today at the forum.

They have also been busy drafting the presentation each region will make at the conference plenary next Friday, a day devoted to the International Year of Indigenous Peoples and Aboriginal Communities.

'The point we are discussing here is the right to life of aboriginal peoples, of persons who need their land and their traditions to live,' Pereira stressed.

Jesus Bello, representing the Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto



Indigenous people made their demands heard - sometimes dramatically

Ayacucho in Venezuela, said his priority was real recognition by the international community of the terrible living conditions indigenous people face throughout the world. 'They are the most marginalized of the marginalized,' he said.

According to official figures, more than 90 per cent of the world's indigenous people live in severe poverty.

Their jobless rate is as much as six times that of their co-nationals and they have reduced access to basic services such as electricity and health care.

And NGOs representing indigenous communities in Asia and the Americas have denounced the disastrous effects on their peoples of structural adjustment programmes that governments have imposed in the past few years under pressure from multilateral agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Indigenous peoples are claiming their right to own the lands where they have lived from time immemorial and which were seized through colonization and militarization.

'Issues and concern for indigenous peoples can no longer be ignored, isolated or suppressed.

'They are an integral part of the national and international political agenda and have to be understood and addressed at

that level,' Asia's indigenous peoples said in a declaration.

'Development aggression involves the encroachment on our lands for logging, mining, hydroelectric dams, geothermal and nuclear energy projects, including nuclear waste dumping, national parks, industrial zones, agribusiness projects and tourism,' the indigenous peoples said.

Most of the indigenous groups see the land as an element that is closely linked to their survival and spirituality.

They are demanding modifications to or compliance with national laws granting them community ownership of their lands and environmental norms that prohibit the indiscriminate exploitation of the natural resources they contain. Past experience has made the indigenous groups extremely wary.

Warned Pedro Rodriguez of Costa Rica: 'during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (June 1992), we were treated like stars.

'The role of native peoples as guardians of Nature was exalted, but no declaration was issued on our behalf.

'We refuse to be used again and that is why we need the support of all the NGOs present here, so that we can put strong pressure on the system,' he added.

Asia's indigenous peoples stressed that 'as the traditional custodians of the region's rainforest, land, water and the resources therein, which are being exploited ruthlessly, we

RICHARD REOCH

assert that our relationship with Nature is sustainable and there is much that the world can benefit from our experience.'

Indigenous groups view respect for their cultures and traditions and the demarcation of the borders of their territories as fundamental for the maintenance of their respective identities.

They said they wished to transmit this patrimony to future generations, adding that this is what motivates the demand that their children enjoy the right to a form of education that is bilingual and adapted to their cultural patterns and economic and social needs.

Their demands also include favourable conditions for international trade in the products of indigenous peoples and property rights to their cultural goods.

The annual market value of medicines derived from plants discovered by indigenous peoples and handed down from generation to generation exceeds 43 billion dollars, reaped mainly by transnational pharmaceutical companies.

Their cultural artefacts are also pillaged and marketed.

The indigenous peoples have proposed that their international year be extended to a decade, during which medium and long-term plans can be drawn up for the benefit of their communities.

They have also asked the UN to speed up work on an indigenous rights charter, and said they hoped a High Commissioner or Special Commission on indigenous affairs will be created and headed by someone from their group. 'Someone who understands our way of thinking,' said Rodriguez.

Brazilian Amerindians intend to propose a world conference on the Amazon, indigenous peoples and the environment, which would put pressure on their country to take real measures to protect the so-called 'lungs of the Earth'.

'All this will result in better living conditions for the world and the necessary democratization of the UN,' said Amarildo Calon of the Coordinating Unit of Brazil's Amazonian Amerindians.

Ihsan Bouabid

ARAB NGOS IN AGREEMENT ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

12 Jun 93

■ Arab human rights activists have found it difficult to organize their activities at the NGO Forum, but arrived at a common position on women, Palestine and other key issues.

The Arab NGOs also succeeded yesterday in harmonizing their position on the need to strengthen UN mechanisms for improving human rights protection.

They highlighted the importance of recognizing women's rights through national laws as well as in social practice, emphasized the universality and indivisibility of human rights and stressed that fundamentalism threatens these rights, particularly those of women.

The NGOs were hit by some organization problems which they blamed partly on the fact that they have been classified both in Africa and Asia and partly on their inexperience in international meetings.

'There is a problem of conception due to the fact that the issues of human rights and their protection are relatively new in the Arab area, but (there is) also... a conflict of generations and leadership of the non-governmental movement,' Naji Jamal Eddine told Terra Viva.

Jamal Eddine is a member of the National Bureau of the Moroccan Human Rights Organization (OMDH).

She said that some of the region's NGOs are still made up of 'former ministers or ex-ambassadors who have a political discourse that does not correspond to a vision of independence worthy of an NGO.'

The Moroccan rights advocate added that Africa was prevented from having a more diversified representation at the forum because of a lack of subsidies.

Only 26 NGOs officially registered at the forum come

from Africa, whereas 76 had attended the African PrepCom, held in Tunis in November 1992.

A word of warning came from the director of the Tunis based Arab Institute of Human Rights, Fred Fennich, who is also a member of the Forum's Joint Planning Committee.

He said that 'it is necessary to depoliticize the Arab NGOs since some of them came with the idea of defending specific cases, losing sight of the very objective of the World Conference on Human Rights.'

However, he was also critical of stubborn governments.

He said 'what is urgently needed is to face up to the steps backward announced by some states which, under the argument of cultural and social particularities, wish to reduce women's rights,' he added.

Fennich also announced that the Arab NGOs will publish an information bulletin in Arabic, titled 'Vienna 93', which will be printed by the office of the Union of Arab Lawyers in Vienna throughout the World Conference.

The concerns he raised had also come up at a regional conference organized in Cairo in April by a coordinating committee of Arab NGOs.

The Cairo conference, in which 60 rights organizations participated along with national and regional trade union movements and federations, had backed cultural specificity and national sovereignty where they serve the promotion and respect of human rights, but 'opposed such approaches if they were used to negate basic human rights or lead to their abrogation.'

NGOs throughout the Arab world found consensus on women's rights



Iain Guest

NGOS FACE EXCLUSION FROM CRUCIAL DRAFTING COMMITTEE

12 Jun 93

■ Asian governments were locked in a confrontation with West and East Europe yesterday over whether non-governmental organizations should be invited to participate in drafting the all-important final document of the World Conference on Human Rights.

According to observers, coordinators from the five regional groups met throughout Friday with the President of the Conference in an effort to reach consensus over NGO participation.

Western delegations, together with the East Europeans, are said to be under instruction from their capitals to permit NGOs to participate at the Drafting Committee, one of three conference bodies established on Thursday. The Asians, however, are opposed to any NGO involvement at the Drafting Committee.

The Latin American and African groups were both said to be divided, although leaning towards NGO participation.

Chances of consensus

Delegates were still meeting late Friday as Terra Viva went to press, in an effort to reach consensus.

Reed Brody, Executive Director of the Washington-

based International Human Rights Law Group, said that the issue was crucial for NGOs.

'It's partly symbolic. We must have the right to be present,' said Brody. 'But there's also a practical issue. To be effective, we need to know what's happening. This process has to be transparent.'

By 9pm a possible draft decision was circulating under which NGOs would be allowed to make one oral presentation at the beginning of the drafting committee, on 'questions within the scope of their activities'.

Further presentations to the drafting committee could be allowed later as appropriate. This appears to violate Rule 56 of the conference rules of procedure, which states that the plenary and other committees will be open unless the plenary decides otherwise.

Stumbling blocks

West and East European delegations were reported to be still opposed to this possible compromise.

Some observers were predicting a split between the Asians and other regional groups after yesterday's meetings.

'Of course they (NGOs) have to participate,' said Boris Svetogorsky, from the Uruguayan delegation. 'Why did they come here if they're not going to have a say in the final declaration?'

Cuba took a similar line, although it has generally opposed any strengthening of the UN's human rights bodies.

'Participation of NGOs in the drafting committees is going to be the real proof that we paid real attention to their work,' said Jose Perez Novoa, head of the Cuban delegation.

Sources said a meeting of the African regional group Thursday morning revealed divisions. However, the group as a whole agreed that NGOs would continue to be a formidable pressure group throughout the conference.

Echoing Cuba, they appeared to be leaning towards the position that it would be better to have the NGOs involved rather than run the risk of having them angrily denouncing the entire process.

Independent participation

NGOs from Latin America and Asia made it clear that they will not let governments exploit their presence to claim credibility for the conference, and then bar them from participating.

Ravi Nair, from the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre in New Delhi, said that the dispute was part of a wider pattern that has seen 17 Asian NGOs denied accreditation to the world conference.

Several others have had invitations withdrawn.

'We're concerned that governments are trying to restrict our interventions in the meeting,' NGOs are finding it harder to press their case for greater access because they are increasingly divided within their own ranks.

The Joint Planning Committee (JPC), which is under growing pressure from Southern NGOs for mishandling the controversy over mentioning country abuses, has neither the mandate nor the time to lobby governments.

Several options are now under review, including the disbanding of the JPC. Until the NGOs can agree on a coordinating mechanism, the lack of a formal channel among the NGOs will continue to weaken their case.

NGO participation at the drafting could be doubly important precisely because the draft Conference document (98) is so unsatisfactory.

As reported in Thursday's Terra Viva, Ibrahim Fall, the Conference Secretary-General, has presented a draft outlining possible areas of consensus. Fall's draft avoids controversy and runs to just over four pages.

Even so, it has failed to break the deadlock.

The concern is that once the horse-trading begins, crucial items will be left out or sacrificed. Their omission from the World Conference Declaration could easily weaken existing procedures or standards.

(Peter da Costa and Carmen Alicia Fernandez contributed to this report)

Terra Viva

THE CURTAIN GOES UP

14 Jun 93

■ Well over five thousand people are expected to attend the World Conference on Human Rights that opens here today. By the beginning of the year, many of them, including the journalists who would be covering it, still had only the sketchiest of details about the event.

Yet the outcome of the conference will have a direct effect on the future of the human rights of all people. It will review the human rights to which all people are entitled. It will confront the fact that governments throughout the world are violating people's basic rights every day. And it will play a major role in determining whether governments are prepared in future to protect those rights and to accept improved international scrutiny of their human rights records.

The conference cannot be expected to produce anything that has binding legal force on governments. Nor will its decisions have the power immediately to compel the UN to take action on anything.

However, since the conference has been called for by the UN General Assembly, its results will go back to that body – in which government representatives will be expected to endorse the conference outcome formally and to

authorize UN action.

To determine whether anything was actually achieved or if there were any setbacks – it will be important to see what is encoded in the final statement. While individual pressure groups will look for specific wordings, there are at least five general issue areas:

ONE FAMILY?

Will the fundamental concept of one human family survive? Will all human beings still be entitled in theory to the same rights regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national origin, property, birth or other status? Will all governments henceforth be expected to apply the same human rights standards in protecting the rights of their citizens? These ideas – the current position in international law – are usually bound up in the use of the term 'universal' when describing the rights of people.

Or will 'universality' be replaced or modified by recognition of regional or cultural 'diversity' and 'particularity'? This would be a major change in international human rights standards. It would be in the interests of many governments to see such a change, since they could then argue that practices for which they have previously been condemned under internationally agreed norms are henceforth acceptable as part of their distinct region or culture. This would, in effect, leave individual governments free, not only to determine the human

The opening day of the World Conference



RICHARD REICH

rights of their own citizens, but also to choose the standards by which their policies should be judged by others.

WHAT RIGHTS?

When the conference is over, what will the term 'human rights' actually mean? Will the current range of human rights, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to which all people are now entitled, survive? Will 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' continue to be the twin pillars upon which the protection of human rights is based? The current position in international law, whereby all people are entitled both to civil and political rights and to economic, social and cultural rights, is normally encapsulated by describing the two sets of rights as 'indivisible' and 'interrelated'.

Will the final conference declaration clearly include this interpretation? Or will priorities be ascribed to different sets of rights? Will very different interpretations be included illogically in the final statement, indicating that the debate is still far from resolved? Or will there be a complete failure by governments to agree on any formula at all on the issue of indivisibility?

This may prove to be the key ideological debate of the conference, drawing in ever sharper terms the battle lines along which an increasingly bitter conflict will be waged.

WHAT PROTECTION?

Will the conference agree to recommend any specific improvements in national or international human rights protection?

It does not have the power to make changes itself, but it can recommend that the UN General Assembly take decisions or set up a study into specific proposals. The more specific the conference wording, the more successful the outcome is likely to be. Will the conference recommend that the General Assembly study proposals for a UN Special Commissioner for Human Rights, for appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Women or for the creation of an International Court of Human Rights?

The UN General Assembly has invited all the Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups that deal with human rights to make recommendations for improvements in the UN human rights system. Will their proposals be taken seriously and included in the final statement?

The protection of human rights, however, does not rest solely with the international community. The primary responsibility lies with each individual government.

Will the conference explicitly call on all governments to enter into legally binding treaties and other commitments that would make respect for human rights legally enforceable? Will it call on governments to accept and/or introduce complaints procedures for their citizens?

WHAT RESOURCES?

Will the conference make detailed recommendations on increasing the funds given to human rights protection within the UN system?

Will there simply be loose wording urging increased resources and calling on governments to make 'extra budgetary' contributions?

Or will there be proposals that, if agreed by the UN General Assembly, would significantly raise the working budgets for the UN Centre for Human Rights and the funds available to the Special Rapporteurs who act on issues like torture and on disappearances and summary and arbitrary executions?

WHAT ACTION?

Will there be any indication at the conference that government behaviour is going to change? For example, one proposal is for each government to set up its own independent, public review of its human rights record and practices. Will such an idea be taken up and endorsed by governments here – and then put into practice right afterwards? Will governments indicate that they are prepared to establish or strengthen national institutions for the protection of human rights?

Will they start to view human rights organizations as partners in the struggle for human rights, rather than adversaries?

Most pressing of all, will the toll of victims start to decline?

Thalif Deen

FUNDS NEEDED FOR THE UN'S HUMAN RIGHTS CRUSADE

14 Jun 93

■ The United Nations says it is desperately in need of money to investigate human rights abuses throughout the world.

'As far as financial resources are concerned, the Centre is in a very difficult situation,' Ibrahima Fall of Senegal, the head of the Geneva-based Centre, told Terra Viva.

Fall, who is also the Secretary-General of the World Conference on Human Rights, complained that only one per cent of the UN's regular budget and about 0.75 per cent of UN personnel were earmarked for the Centre.

'With such a small amount of money and personnel, how can you deal with all the human rights violations in the world?' he asked.

This year alone, the Centre has received more than 125,000 complaints about violations, nearly triple the complaints received for all of last year.

The number of reported 'disappearances' has also increased well above 1991 and 1992 figures.

The need for increased financial resources to battle human rights violations is one of the issues before the conference.

Fall said that there is unanimous agreement among delegates on the need for increased funds. But there is a division of opinion over how this money should be raised.

In an informal paper circulated to delegates here, Fall says that the proposed increase should come both from regular budgetary sources and extra budgetary sources.

These extra budgetary sources should be created through a new World Fund for Human Rights and the strengthening of existing voluntary funds.

Fall is also urging that regular pledging conferences for human rights be held, with the



More money is needed for the UN's human rights operations

first one to take place in Vienna later this year.

Currently, the money for the Centre comes only from the UN's regular budget through assessed contributions from the 183 member states.

Fall said he had no objections to private foundation funding as long as there were no conditions attached to it.

'The only condition is that there should be no condition,' he said.

Meanwhile, Fall is asking the conference to recommend that human rights officers be assigned if and when necessary to regional offices of the organization.

The primary purpose is to disseminate information and offer training, and other technical assistance in the field of human rights.

He has also asked the conference to recommend that the Commission on Human Rights, the International Law Commission and the Sixth Committee (Legal Committee) of the UN General Assembly expedite studies related to the possibility of the establishment of an International Human Rights Court and an International Criminal Court.

Ramon Isberto

END GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA

14 Jun 93

■ In an unprecedented move, the World Conference on Human Rights agreed in principle to pass a resolution urging the UN Security Council to take 'the necessary measures to end the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina'.

The assembly of delegates, led by the foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), approved the proposal without objections following a dramatic appeal by the Bosnian foreign minister Haris Silajdzic.

Speaking extemporaneously, Silajdzic said that even as the delegates were meeting to discuss human rights, thousands of people were dying in the streets of his bloodstained country. He ended with a emotional call for 'action, today, now.'

At a news conference, President Elija Izbegovic appealed to the international community once again to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims.

'Twenty thousand have been killed. More than one million people have been expelled, thousands of towns and villages have been destroyed,' he said.

Izbegovic appeared tired and irritated, showing the effects of many rounds of apparently fruitless talks with foreign ministers of countries attending the meeting.

Bosnian women protest outside the Conference



Asked whether lifting the arms embargo would inflame the crisis, he said: 'How can it be worse than it is today?'

The extraordinary appeal by the Bosnian foreign minister took the meeting by surprise. But the OIC countries took advantage of the opening.

The foreign minister of Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the OIC, got the ball rolling with a strong endorsement of the Bosnian appeal.

He was followed by the foreign ministers of El Salvador, Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt, Austria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, Syria, Mali. It was the foreign minister of the Dominican Republic who moved that the proposal be approved, if no one raised objections.

'The credibility of all of us who work for human rights is at stake,' said Austrian foreign minister Alois Mock.

The final wording of the resolution will have to be reworked Wednesday. Tuesday night, the draft resolution referred to 'necessary measures', which fall short of 'all necessary measures' which is taken in diplomatic parlance to mean military force.

In any event, an appeal to the Security Council by the conference could, if it is taken up, mean that the UN body invokes human rights violations directly in decisions on Bosnia.

At present, the council invokes violations of humanitarian law as the basis of its actions. Many human rights advocates say this limits the council's legal ability to recommend intervention.

The appeal is also notable because the conference is not supposed to be taking up individual-country cases.

Carmen Alicia Fernandez, Juan Gasparini, Ramon Isberto and Alecia McKenzie

RIGHTS ARE UNIVERSAL AND INDIVISIBLE

16 Jun 93

■ European ministers at the World Conference on Human Rights added their voices Tuesday to an appeal to strengthen UN efforts to monitor human rights and called for the establishment of a High Commissioner in the field.

Speaking for the European Community (EC), Danish Foreign Affairs Minister Niels Helveg Petersen said that setting up the High Commissioner post would 'provide a break-through in the endeavours to reach and assist the individual victim of human rights violations.'

He said that the Community was committed to the cause of human rights and 'have made this goal an integrated part of our national policies as well as our policy vis-à-vis other states.'

Referring implicitly to 'ethnic cleansing' in the former Yugoslavia and to the recent racist attacks on immigrants in EC member states such as Germany, Petersen said the Community has always been and continues to be opposed to all forms of racism and racial discrimination.

'We lose no opportunity to condemn these odious practices, and we are appalled by the crimes now being committed in the name of so-called racial or ethnic purity,' Petersen said.

Meanwhile, other European ministers also called for the strengthening of UN mechanisms to monitor human rights. 'The promotion' and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be brought back to our centre of attention. It should be given its rightful place in the UN system,' said the Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Dr P.H. Kooijmans.

'It is of the utmost importance that resources available for human rights promotion and protection increase

considerably and that the Centre for Human Rights, including its liaison office in New York, be strengthened,' he said, adding that the task of officials of the Centre of Human Rights had become an impossible one.

Kooijmans, too, called for the establishment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights and recommended that Fall be considered for the job. Other delegates, such as US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and human rights groups such as Amnesty International have urged the UN to create this post.

His remarks were echoed by the German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, who said that Germany would work with its EC partners towards creating the High Commissioner for Human Rights post.

'The idea is not a new one. But the moment has come to create such a body. It would show the seriousness of our intentions', Minister Kinkel said.

He also urged his partners in the developed world to create conditions that would contribute to the development of Third World countries.

'We should recognize the fact that economic conditions make human rights an inaccessible luxury for a large part of the world's population,' he said.

Reflecting the thrust of its general diplomacy, Australia took a position aimed at bridging the gaps between the positions of developed and developing countries.

In his speech, Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs Gareth Evans stressed that the World Conference on Human Rights needs 'to reassert that human rights are universal and indivisible' and that 'states cannot any longer credibly erect barriers to (international) scrutiny.'

This is a stance taken by the West which has caused great discomfort among developing countries who fear human rights will provide a ready pretext for intervention.

But Evans also said that the developed world will have to give 'full recognition and emphasis to economic and social rights - rights which have

been sadly neglected in the past 25 years.'

South Korea's Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo, in a speech to yesterday's plenary noted that five years ago, South Korea may have been counted on to stand along with Indonesia and China as presenting a vigorous defence of the human rights record of Asian states.

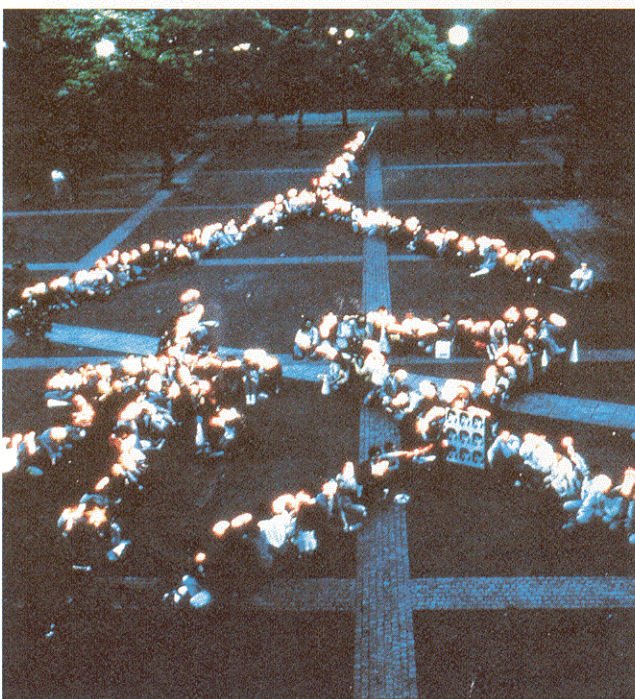
But these days, with former dissident Kim Young-Sam as president, Seoul is singing a different tune.

Like other Asian countries, Korea sees the need to take specific regional and national circumstances in promoting human rights.

But it stressed that 'history shows us that special circumstances do not justify human rights abuses. Lack of development can never be used as an excuse for any abuse of human rights.'

He also expressed strong support for human rights NGOs, saying 'more often than not, NGOs can be more responsive in the implementation of human rights than governments.' The Korean foreign minister also batted for the establishment of an office of a High Commissioner for Human Rights.

"Human Rights" spelt out by torch light in Japanese



RICHARD RECOCH

Latin American delegations participating in the Human Rights conference joined ranks yesterday, stressing the link between economic, political and social rights.

In statements to the plenary delegates from Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico and Peru disagreed however on the question of how human rights violations should be monitored. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Fernando Ochoa said the region would present a strong front at the Conference. 'We are going to fine tune the strategy but, in principle, we all have the same stand on the need to link political, economic and social rights and to democratize the UN,' he said.

'We recognize that economic, social and cultural rights are difficult to attain, but they are essential prerogatives for communities and individuals to have normal lives,' said Correa.

He stressed that the monitoring of civil and political rights cannot continue to be a condition for the granting of conditions for development and insisted that the conference should provide the tools for a new world order in this sphere.

But it is precisely on the question of these tools, which range between creating new UN institutions and beefing up existing systems, that divisions between Latin American countries come to the fore.

Message addressed to the World Conference on Human Rights by the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates

We, Laureates of the Nobel Peace Prize,

Considering the important objectives of the World Conference on Human Rights,

Bearing in mind the inherent interrelationship between the maintenance of peace and the observance of human rights,

Address the following message to the World Conference.

1. One of the fundamental lessons of our times is that respect for human rights is the key to peace. There can be no real peace without justice, and lasting peace must be founded upon a universal commitment to human kinship. National interests must be subject to international obligations.
2. In all cases where peace is broken and armed conflict occurs, it is essential that, as a mere minimum, the norms of international humanitarian law be respected by all parties to the conflict. Also the community of nations must continue its progress towards complete disarmament.
3. The world is still witnessing mass violations of human rights which in themselves are a threat to peace: torture, political killings and summary executions, arbitrary detention, disappearances, all these are phenomena which can no longer be tolerated. There is an international responsibility to ensure that those who commit such crimes are brought to justice.
4. The death penalty constitutes a cruel and inhuman punishment and should be abolished throughout the world. Once abolished by a state it should never be reintroduced.
5. As a result of human rights violations and armed conflict the number of refugees and displaced people is acquiring unprecedented dimensions. Human solidarity is imperative to ensure their protection and assistance. At the same time there is a need to address the root causes of such movements of people and a need for action to facilitate their return and their social re-integration under dignified conditions and to ensure their security.
6. The only way to permanently resolve the conflicts which are still racking the world is to address the main causes for human rights violations. Ethnic conflicts, the rise of militarism, racial, religious, cultural and ideological antagonism and the denial of social justice will be overcome if all people are raised, educated and nurtured in the spirit of tolerance based on the respect for human rights, as manifested in the various human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations system.
7. Human rights include economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. Those rights are indivisible and interrelated. They are universal in character. Genuine peace can not be achieved without due observance of all those rights including the right to food, employment, health, education and a safe environment.
8. The right to food is of primordial importance. Governments must make the production and distribution of food their primary concern. Without adequate production of food and equitable distribution any human rights system will collapse.
9. Also, peace, fragile as it is, must be based on social justice, adequate economic progress and the right to self determination. It is, therefore, the duty of the governments of all nations to create international and national conditions in which the inherent dignity and worth of the human person are truly respected and the individual human being is given the possibility to develop his or her potential to the fullest with special attention paid to women, children and also disabled persons whose rights have been traditionally undervalued. Political systems based on genuine democratic participation of all are best able to ensure that aim. In that context the legitimate rights of indigenous peoples must be fully respected.
10. As we enter the 21st century it is time to give a new impetus to the vision enshrined in the United Nations Charter for a world of peace and justice. Such a world must be based on observance of human rights and the achievement of economic and social progress. In this context the important role which NGOs have to play in that regard must be recognized and supported.

A WORLD COURT FOR ETHNIC DISPUTES

17 Jun 93

■ It was Mahatma Gandhi who used to say that one could assess civilization by the manner in which it dealt with minorities. Ralph Dahrendorf, the eminence grise of European education, more recently made a similar point in an address before that remarkable London campaigning power-house, the Minority Rights Group.

'Defence of minority rights is the litmus test of liberty and the rule of law,' Professor Dahrendorf said, and went on wryly to note: 'Ruling interests and beliefs need no protection; power protects though it may corrupt as well.'

A Martian arriving today could be pardoned for thinking earthlings had never confronted minority-rights issues until Yugoslavia exploded, so bewitched and bewildered they appear to be by the experience. The Cold War was a frozen blanket that enveloped the world, pressing into deep hibernation every other human dilemma.

Now it is back to normal weather. Luckily there was life before the Cold War and our parents and grandparents left for us some remarkable institutions of international peacemaking and words to go with them.

One is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed in 1948 at the General Assembly of the United Nations, a document more comprehensive than the Magna Carta or the Declaration des Droits D'Homme, and more demanding than the Declaration of Independence and the Communist Manifesto. It covers every aspect of human well-being and delineates the relationship of human beings with their governments. It is probably the most important single document that humanity

has yet produced.

Nevertheless, for all its fine prose about the rights of man, it is merely a declaration of intent. It is not binding.

What we need, rather quickly, is a means of being able to lift its words off the page to apply to situations like Yugoslavia before they spin out of control. Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, who used to be the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, once made an interesting proposal for giving it effect. He recommended establishing a Special UN Representative for Humanitarian Questions, whose task would be to 'forewarn, monitor and depoliticize potential conflicts.'

This was over 10 years ago, and his advice has yet to be taken. To assist in the work, there would be a corps of 'humanitarian observers' who would go into areas of tension and grievance and, long before they come to the boiling point, work as a go-between, negotiating, talking and working to defuse the circuits of conflict.

I would add another proposal to Prince Sadruddin's, to supplement his diplomacy and conflict resolution with the adjudicating power of a Court of Ethnic Disputes.

A nation being rent asunder or an ethnic group under threat could come to the court and ask for a ruling on whether the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights were being followed. Are the boundaries of our province fair? Are the rights of language, education and political representation given to the minority group by the majority group reasonable? Are there reforms of law or administration that the court could suggest to make the situation more equitable?

We already have a World Court

with its 15 judges drawn from the four corners of the world and nominated by the UN Security Council. Over the years it has done valuable work in adjudicating financial claims, seabed disputes and even the hot political potatoes like who is the rightful ruler of Namibia and does the US have the right to mine the harbour of Nicaragua's main port?

But only states can appear before it. Not individuals. Not ethnic groups. It is a great pity. If individuals could, the World Court would be able, for example, to try the Libyans accused by Britain and the US of blowing up an airliner over Scotland. It could also be the international penal court for those accused of war crimes and genocide in ex-Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Iraq.

And if ethnic groups could appear before it, it could perform the invaluable task of giving a dispassionate but caring view of the rights and wrongs of what, invariably, are complicated, multi-sided conflicts. Its deliberations would buy precious time in which Prince Sadruddin's monitors could work on the ground. Its pronouncements, like all judicial pronouncements, would give those ruled against an honourable ladder on which to climb down.

Courts – think of the Indian Supreme Court ruling on the Union Carbide mass poisoning or the US Supreme Court on school desegregation – may not always solve problems, but they help defuse political dynamite and give honest men and women another day to work things out without recourse to violence.

Ethnic and nationalist disputes lie behind many of the world's conflicts



FACT-FINDING UNDER SIEGE

17 Jun 93

■ Some much misunderstood gentlemen have been meeting on the fringes of this conference over the last three days. They represent the UN's 24 human rights fact-finding procedures. Squeezed into an absurd timetable and shunted from office to office, they are not having a good conference. But then, they have not had a good two years.

The Commission's fact-finders are living proof of man's inhumanity to man – and of the confusion that is gnawing away at this conference. They cover torture, 'disappearances', religious intolerance, arbitrary detention, summary execution, and internally displaced, as well as some of the world's most repressive regimes. Western governments see them as essential safeguards against abuse – as long as they keep clear of the West.

The Third World views them as agents of Western intervention – masquerading under the guise of human rights.

Earlier this year, prior to the 1993 session of the UN Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh's ambassador in Geneva threatened to 'impeach' all UN Rapporteurs. At the Commission, Iran proposed regional quotas for Rapporteurs, in order to reduce the number of Europeans and Latin Americans.

The Iranians also asked that their reports be limited to 32 pages and published well in advance of the Commission. The proposal was accepted. In practical terms, it means they have precisely four months in which to complete a year's work.

The UN investigators are under almost as much pressure from the UN. They are chronically short of resources; back-up staff are shunted around offices, kept on demeaning short term contracts, and forced to share equipment.

On May 18 last year, in utter



The UN cannot act without verified human rights reporting

desperation, 17 investigators sent an unprecedented appeal to the UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, warning that the lack of resources could have a 'damaging' impact, and reminding him that lives were at stake. It took two months for Under Secretary-General Richard Thornburgh to respond: there was nothing he could do.

They deserve better. It is not simply that the fact-finders have included one former Prime Minister and three former or present Foreign Ministers. Nor is it because they have had experiences that most journalists would envy. It is, rather, that they have a vital contribution to make to the system-wide search for peace that was presented with such conviction by UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali here this week.

In sharp contrast to the 1980s, when the Rapporteurs were understandably viewed as agents of Western interventionism, they also have much to offer the Third World.

While accepting that the Secretary-General's new 'integrated' approach to peace has produced some exciting and innovative new initiatives, this Conference has also begun to identify gaps and shortcomings. UN peace-keepers in Bosnia and Somalia cannot investigate human rights abuses without compromising their neutrality.

When the World Bank and UN Development Programme try to promote human rights,

they are accused of serving the goals of Western donors. Countries in transition, like South Africa, also present dilemmas: how does the UN expose violations while retaining credibility as a peace broker? The very question illustrates the importance of human rights fact-finding in this confused, post Cold War era.

The Commission's Rapporteurs are still exposing government abuses. But they are performing a far wider, more important role.

Pedro Nikken is analysing the UN's human rights monitoring operation in El Salvador (ONUSAL) – a plan that he helped to draft. Tadeusz Mazowiecki's field monitors have begun to monitor abuses in the former Yugoslavia that UNPROFOR cannot touch. They have investigated mass rape, the siege of Srebrenica and the UN 'safe areas' plan from a human rights perspective. In contrast to the sadly limited mandate of UNPROFOR, Mazowiecki himself has a mandate to cover Croatia and the troubled Yugoslavian provinces of Kosovo, Sandzak and Vojvodina.

Their range is extraordinary, and they complement the Secretary-General's agenda for peace. Impunity is an enemy of peace-building, but it can also jeopardise peace negotiations.

The Commission's Working Group on Disappearances has developed a doctrine on impunity, and contacts with forensic scientists, that could allow the UN to address this key issue, without

compromising the actual negotiations.

Perhaps most important, human rights Rapporteurs can spot the signs of ethnic conflict and discrimination, thus alerting the rest of the UN system to future conflict. Early warning is one of the holes in Mr Boutros-Ghali's strategy of preventive diplomacy.

The Commission's fact-finders can also advance the Third World's agenda:

- Mazowiecki's reports on Yugoslavia are exposing abuses against Muslims and so going some way towards meeting the concerns of Islamic states.

- The Commission has appointed a Rapporteur on xenophobia and racism – with a clear mandate to investigate attacks on foreigners in West Europe.

- Another Rapporteur will look at the Occupied Territories – and so offer the Arab governments a chance to appraise the peace process.

- The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention offers governments and NGOs a chance to campaign on behalf of groups like the HIV-infected Haitians at the US base of Guantanamo.

- Yet another new Rapporteur, on freedom of expression, will be able to examine the Third World's charge that the West permits racists and skinheads to hide behind free speech.

Here is a resource, but it is being barely realized. This simple fact should feature in the Conference Declaration, minus brackets. Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali should take note. So should the 1994 session of the UN Human Rights Commission: the corpus of fact-finders should be expanded to cover gender-based violence; minorities; UN peace-keeping; development aid and conditionality. They may cause embarrassment. They may criticize UN colleagues. But they hold the key to a less 'selective' role for the UN in implementing universal human rights standards. Instead of being shunted around offices and treated like a contagious disease, the UN's corps of fact-finders would be seen for what they are – ombudsmen for peace.

Iain Guest

THE GREAT MEDIA DIVIDE

19 Jun 93

■ Zaire, more than 50 times the size of Belgium, has two journalists accredited to the World Conference on Human Rights; Belgium accounts for 16 – eight times the number from the African country.

It could be argued that Zaire, a former Belgian colony, is a long way from Austria while Belgium is figuratively just down the road. But the big difference in the number of journalists from the various regions covering the meeting reflects a much deeper problem than mere distance.

The figures provide another glaring example of the North-South divide at the World Conference. Of the more than 1,760 journalists accredited up to Wednesday, roughly three per cent come from Africa, while 70 per cent come from Europe, according to figures from the UN Department of Public Information.

Journalists from Asia and the Pacific comprise 8.6 per cent of the total. North America accounts for 12 per cent, the Near and Middle East for nearly three per cent, roughly the same as South and Central America.

Although the figures are not entirely representative – since Austria has a 508-strong contingent here and some Third World journalists work for Western news organizations – the North-South disparity is still marked.

For instance, the UN has received 212 accreditation requests from the United States and Canada, compared with 51 from all of South and Central America.

The difference reflects the financial problems that journalists from the Third World have in travelling to conferences of this kind, says Thomas Netter, Media Liaison Officer with the UN Department of Public Information.

'I think the key to this is money, it's not lack of interest,' Netter said. 'It's always that way, even when the events take place in Africa or South

America.' To ease this problem, the UN provided travel and per diem expenses for 15 journalists from developing regions, including Eastern Europe, but Netter acknowledges that this is not enough.

'I think the UN should do more', he said, but added that he had never seen such a diverse press group.

Some journalists from developing countries agreed that lack of funds was a major problem.

Maria Joana Teixeira Mateus of the state-owned Radio Nacional d'Angola said her trip had been funded by the French mission for cooperation in Angola. Otherwise she would not have been able to attend.

'Developing countries just don't have the money for this', she said. 'That's why there are so few African journalists here'.

One Caribbean correspondent argued that the 'world system' should find some way of accommodating journalists from developing countries. 'The obvious disparity in numbers is ridiculous', he said.

But a human rights activist, Alessi Wilson of Togo, said the problem was more one of government restrictions on the press in some countries.

'It is indeed striking that there are so few African journalists here, but when you realize that so much of the media is controlled by the state then you have part of the reason,' he said, adding that the one Togolese journalist he had met worked with government-owned media.

Many African journalists also run the risk of imprisonment if they depart from the official line, which contributes to the overall problem.

But the West, too, works to

exclude journalists. Austria, for instance, refused visas to several journalists from developing countries. The question of state control is a current topic among Latin American reporters here.

Argentinian journalists have circulated a petition calling on the government of Carlos Menem not to clamp down on press rights as the government seems set to do.

By Friday, the Union de Trabajadores de Prensa de Buenos Aires had gathered 1,400 signatures, which perhaps shows that there is solidarity among the journalists themselves.

Still, when news stories finally appear in the mainstream press, the North-South issue raises its head again. Peter Mackler, a correspondent with Agence France Presse, says that most reporters have 'demonized' China and not listened enough to Asia's point of view.

The high number of Western journalists means that the world community will probably get a one-sided view of the conference, say some journalists. They argue that mainstream media such as the International Herald Tribune and CNN are available worldwide, while media from the South are confined to their regions.

'It's always the same story,' says Tunisian journalist Soufiane Ben Farhat. 'The world is more than ever before divided between North and South. The same issue at the conference occurs at the media level as well.'

But Jane Duke, a reporter from Blue Danube Radio, was more optimistic. 'Everyone here is great', she said. 'All the journalists are getting on like a house on fire.'

Peter da Costa

DRAFTERS TO BURN MIDNIGHT OIL

21 Jun 93

■ Drafters bogged down by multiple disagreements over a final World Human Rights Conference document will work late tonight to meet a midweek deadline.

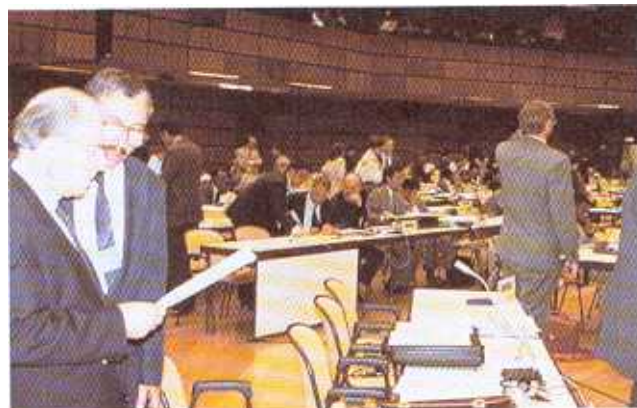
The night session, ordered by drafting committee chair, Brazilian Gilberto Saboia, responds to delegates' fears that the biggest gathering on human

conflicts and brought in its wake duplication that may prove costly.

'The problem is the way the work was divided', a European diplomat told Terra Viva. 'If you look into the text, what is dealt with in Chapter Two as principles also has action-oriented statements. And in Chapter Three, which is about programmes of action, there are also statements of principle.'

Members had compromised Friday when they adopted a text reiterating the universality of human rights while also asserting 'the significance of national and regional peculiarities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds'.

In addition to progressing on



Progress towards consensus took many hours of difficult negotiation

rights in 25 years could fail to produce a far-reaching final document when it ends Friday.

Concern is growing among analysts that five days of argumentative closed-session meetings have done little more than patch agreements over a handful of paragraphs in PC 98, the 47-page working document riddled with some 200 brackets of disagreement.

They warn three days are too few to settle such contentious issues as new human rights mechanisms, ways of implementing the right to development, and the UN's involvement in peace-making worldwide.

Last week Saboia created a core group within the committee to deal with sensitive implementation issues, leaving the rump to inch through a chapter on principles.

But many complain the division of labour has opened new

the rights of women, indigenous peoples, children and the disabled, the group agreed in principle over the weekend on paragraphs concerning the right to development and cooperation between states and organizations in promoting and protecting human rights.

They also settled a row over defining 'gross human rights abuses' when they accepted a compromise text devoid of specifics.

Accord on these issues lifted hopes that a final consensus on the entire document was possible.

'What I saw on Friday and Saturday was truly encouraging', a senior African diplomat said. But members of the core group charged with drafting a programme of action say the most difficult hurdles are still to come.

'The feeling is, even if very active progress is being made in pieces of the document, the whole doesn't fit. It should be a comprehensive document,' one European said.

Region	Number of Countries	Applicants	Percentage
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Africa	21	54	3.1
Asia & Pacific	14	152	8.6
Europe	31	1243	70.5
Near & Middle East	9	51	2.9
South & C. America	13	51	2.9
North America	2	212	12
Total	90	1763	100

The mood was not helped by rumours that the host government, concerned infighting would scupper a comprehensive agreement, had prepared a watered down face-saving two-page document of general principles acceptable to all delegations.

'We are strongly saying no such document exists,' an Austrian delegation spokesperson said Sunday. 'We will not compromise on a strong final declaration.'

United States delegates also insisted they knew nothing about such a document when asked about reports that they were the originators of the alleged draft. The African group, which analysts say is keen to see a final document emerge from Vienna, spoke out strongly against an alternative text.

'The idea of having a smaller declaration of two or three pages came up in the working group,' an African diplomat revealed.

'We don't know which country is behind it but it was totally rejected,' he added.

African Group president, D. Don Nanjira, who is part of the core group, said he was 'as determined as ever to see the conference succeed'.

'We may be tough, but we are also... flexible. Africa will be the last region to accept the blame for making the conference fail.'

Developing countries however insist they will not be bowed in their opposition to conditionalities for aid which leave them at the mercy of northern donors.

'Under no circumstances will there be an agreement over the conditionality issue', one key drafter told Terra Viva. 'The idea of conditionality has to be left out completely, and there will be no compromise on that'.

Aid recipients also rejected a proposal from Nordic countries which excludes them from involvement in drawing up guidelines for specialized UN agencies such as the UNDP.

Among Western proposals likely to be rejected by most southern delegations are the creation of a UN human rights commissioner and the expansion of the UN peacekeeping mandate, according to conferees.

Ihsan Bouabid

THE RIGHT TO LIFE

21 Jun 93

■ Development cannot be separated from the right to good health, says Aleya El Bindari-Hammad of the World Health Organization (WHO).

'The health consequences of many developmental activities have not been sufficiently studied. There has been a failure to make significant positive impact on the highly vulnerable groups that comprise nearly one-fifth of the world's population,' she observed.

Bindari-Hammad is a special advisor on health and development policies. For more than four decades, the WHO has been trying to implement an Article in its constitution which states that 'the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.'

But two-thirds of the world's population is denied even a minimum level of health care, she told Terra Viva.

The result is that their contribution to the development process is minimal since they are preoccupied with the problems of survival.

'If we are not careful, we shall have to face a global health crisis of serious proportions,' which could cause 'unnecessary human suffering, social discontent that may lead to civil

The right to good health starts at birth



disorder, and political instability,' the WHO representative warned.

Among the most vulnerable in this unequal world are women, she said.

'Girls are born with a biological advantage over boys which makes them more resistant to infection and malnutrition, but this is in many instances cancelled out by the social disadvantages,' Bindari-Hammad noted.

In many countries in the developing world, girls get less food to eat, and are burdened with housework unlike boys, who get a chance to go to school.

This gender inequality is a human rights violation, says the WHO official.

Dorothy Blake, who also spoke to Terra Viva, stressed that a nation's health status is an indicator of its commitment to human rights.

Governments must ensure every individual the right to health care and to be informed as early as possible about certain diseases like AIDS. Failure to do this must be recognized as a rights violation, she argued.

AIDS is a glaring example of the inequality between industrialized countries and developing nations, says Blake.

Ninety per cent of all the money for AIDS is spent in developed countries even though 80 per cent of the victims are from the Third World.

WHO statistics also show that most of the 5,000 people infected by the HIV virus worldwide each day are women.



Terra Viva

A GLASS HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

22 Jun 93

■ By the light of how things looked only three days ago the conference is making rapid progress towards producing a document it need not be ashamed of, even if some of the worthwhile proposals aired here, like a High Commissioner for Human Rights, are likely to be shunted off to the General Assembly for further consideration.

But by the light of Pierre Sané of Amnesty International, the proverbial glass is not even half full.

In a week that has seen the Bosnian Muslims abandoned to their fate after the most intimately televised and reported conflict in human rights history, this is more than an understandable point of view. Outrage is a necessary commodity in a process such as this conference, when dark suited delegates drive around in dark cars with tinted windows and argue their thoughts in windowless rooms.

We are tempted to go with the second sentiment. Yet although it is sometimes a mystery to us, we are aware that the small

Outside the conference hall protesters keep up the pressure, reminding delegates of the human tragedies taking place elsewhere

grinding wheels of conference procedure are actually beginning to churn out a document that takes the world consensus on human rights an important step forward.

The Asian countries, that put up such a strong fight in the preparatory meeting in Bangkok and in the early days of the conference here, have had to retreat. The language now being agreed on 'universality', and the importance of human rights is far removed from the Bangkok verbiage.

Indeed, as the notorious brackets have begun to be peeled away from the initial text, we can see emerging the makings of a fairly pristine document of principles, one that will not disgrace its forbear, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We should never forget that this magisterial document was approved in 1948 by a UN membership that only numbered 50 plus and excluded China, whereas the Vienna one stands a chance of being approved by over 180 members, including China.

This is progress.

Nevertheless, we still regret that specific objectives are not meeting with wide enough approval for a general consensus to line up behind them: the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a Human Rights Court, a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and so on. But it is not fair to blame only the Asian hard-liners (other Third World regions are more supportive) when the West did such a bad job in the year before the conference in marshalling support for such ideas. Even its own public opinion was ignored, much less the rest of the world's.

The fight for an honest recognition of the fundamental importance of human rights still has a long way to go. But at least this conference is not, as we feared it might at the beginning, winding the clock back; and, we perceive, if enough people, delegates and NGOs keep pushing, may yet wind it on a revolution or two.

This conference may not change the world – but it won't leave it as it found it either.

Ihsan Bouabid

WOMEN'S ZEAL UNMATCHED IN VIENNA

24 Jun 93

■ The commitment shown by women's representatives here is paralleled perhaps only by the abuses women are subjected to. The abuses are legion, as was evidenced by the testimonies of 33 women at the Global Tribunal on Violations of the Human Rights of Women, held on 15 June.

Among those who testified was Gabriella Wilders, a young American. When her mother died some years ago Gabriella, then 12, was told by her stepfather that the brain tumour that caused her death was a rare, hereditary disease which would also kill her if she did not undergo special therapy. The therapy he proposed to this middle class girl in one of the world's most advanced countries was to have sexual intercourse with him each night.

She was abused in this way throughout her adolescence. 'If I refused, he would say I was committing suicide,' she explained.

Other women had more visible scars from the abuse they suffered.

Margaret, a 29-year old Ugandan woman, is still undergoing medical treatment. Her husband returned home drunk late one night in 1990 and demanded a meal. He set her on fire after she explained to him that it would take two hours to prepare the fire and the meal, that it was already late and that she had to calm their baby, who was crying.

The burns on the body of Perveen, from Pakistan, were also caused by her husband. He doused her with kerosene, set her alight and then abandoned her, taking their children with him. With tears in her eyes, Perveen showed the tribunal photos of her children. Under Pakistani law they stay with the father and she has no visiting rights.

Many others have not lived to speak of the abuses committed against them. A recent US

government report showed that about 50 per cent of all women murdered in that country were killed by their spouses or boyfriends.

In some countries governments and religious leaders have invoked tradition in their relentless war against women's struggles to end abuses, such as genital mutilation in some African and Asian nations.

'Why is it that only when women want to bring about change for their own benefit do culture and custom become sacred and unchangeable?' wondered Sudanese doctor Nahid Toubia.

In a joint statement, the tribunal's four judges said the testimonies proved 'beyond any doubt that violations of women's rights continue to be cruel and pervasive on a world scale.'

They stressed that the 'widespread failure to recognize, honour and protect women's rights poses a challenge to the credibility and justice of international human rights law.'

A body of recommendations the women have submitted to the official conference includes calls for the creation of an international criminal court for women.

They also called for the reinforcement and implementation of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the adoption by the UN General Assembly of declarations banning violence against women and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violations of women's rights.

Women led the way at the World Conference; their spirit and organization were unparalleled



Iain Guest

IN SEARCH OF A NEW DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

22 Jun 93

■ Tucked into a briefing last week by Ibrahim Shihata, the head of the World Bank's Legal Division, was a remarkable piece of information: the bank has just established an internal unit to hear complaints by those who feel that they have been adversely affected by bank projects.

This is a frank admission by the most powerful, confident, and elitist member of the UN family that its lending may not always help the cause of human rights.

In a sense it is old news. The bank has conceded that controversial projects like the Narmada Dam in India and the Polonoreste project in Brazil are damaging the environment. But this is surely the first time that the bank has offered such a mea culpa at a major UN human rights meeting.

If this conference achieves nothing else, it has started to bridge the gap between development aid and human rights. The bank, IMF and UN Development Programme have been introduced to the peculiar world of human rights: cacophonous NGOs and arcane concepts like the 'right to development'. The human rights community, for its part, has seen the colour of money: powerful, autonomous lending agencies with the means to change the world.

Here is a marriage waiting to be consummated. It is one, moreover, that offers a way out of several of the vexatious issues – conditionality, 'right to development' – that are undermining this conference. The problem with the 'right to development' and other economic rights is that they are irrelevant. They may resonate in rarefied Geneva, but as yet they have no bearing on the favelas of Rio or starvation in Somalia. Human rights needs

Peter da Costa

PROBING RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

24 Jun 93

■ African NGOs have called for the setting up of an independent, globally-funded body with power to investigate and rule on human rights abuses.

NGO representative Ngande Mwanajiti said in a statement the body was necessary to 'confront the issue of structural and institutional injustice which account for the record levels of human rights violations in Africa'.

The proposal was part of a position statement on racism, xenophobia, ethnic violence and religious intolerance drafted by representatives of some 50 African NGOs delivered to a plenary session of the Conference.

According to the statement, the new body should be a 'a world-funded independent body that should have investigative and jurisdictional powers to take legal and restitutive action in verified cases of impermissible degrees of human rights abuses and violations, especially in genocide.'

'Education and research should form the cornerstone of such an international institution'.

The NGOs also recommend 'a UN-sponsored activity to help merge individual members of African constituent communities with the NGOs to the point where it should be possible to lead to a democratic and peaceful restructuring of social, cultural and economic power in Africa'.

The intervention constitutes a strong affirmation of the principle of universality of human rights 'regardless of the political, economic or cultural systems'.

While it prioritizes the condemnation of racial discrimination and religious intolerance in Africa, the statement also speaks out against the rising tide of xenophobia in the West.

commitment to 'good governance'. When groups like the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights call for 'good governance' they mean the freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest, accountability by public officials, and freedom of association.

But the bank's document to the conference talks of creating an 'enabling environment' for economic growth. This need not imply respect for human rights. Many Asian nations have achieved formidable rates of growth precisely because they jailed unionists, suppressed dissent, and exploited children.

The tension between the bank's social responsibilities and the economic imperative has emerged starkly over the Narmada Dam project. The bank began supporting the project in 1985. Over the next seven years, however, NGOs and even bank missions found that the bank's own guidelines were being ignored and that Indian tribals were being expelled, often violently and without compensation.

Worried by the furore, the bank took the unprecedented step of commissioning Bradford Morse, the former UNDP Administrator, to review the project. In a stunning rebuke, Morse agreed that the bank's directives had indeed been violated and urged the bank to think again. After one last attempt, the bank followed his advice. On 29 March, 1993, it was announced that the Narmada project would proceed without the bank's involvement.

While bank critics welcome this decision, they also feel that the bank has undercut its impact. India will lose the 170 million that was remaining on the Narmada loan. But shortly before the bank withdrew, it promised India a \$3.1 billion package through its soft-loan agency.

The simple fact is that the World Bank is under immense pressure to lend. India, Brazil and China are hungry for food and energy, and wield considerable political clout. It does not help that the bank is taking back more from the Third World in repayments and interest than it is lending.

Is there common ground?

The answer is yes, if both sides understand the other's limitations. It lies in a new development strategy.

This new approach bypasses conditionality. It combines human rights, respect for the environment, democracy and development – and does so in a practical manner. It means respecting indigenous rights, popular participation, and even the rights of future generations to a clean environment. It means a new partnership between the UN, governments and NGOs. It calls for increased development aid.

There is plenty here to appeal to hard-nosed economists as well as starry-eyed idealists. The World Bank's 1992 Development Report accepts that preserving rainforests makes economic sense and that indigenous peoples who live in them are guardians of the world's genetic material. The bank long ago recognized that education and health raise productivity – even if the immediate economic benefits may be hard to measure. Why should it not accept that a democratic society which respects rights is also a productive one?

Sustainable human development will require adjustments from both sides. The World Bank and UNDP deal through governments and treasuries, and also favour huge projects. They will need to deal more with grass-roots groups.

A start has been made. Thirty one per cent of the bank's projects involve NGOs. World Bank projects are reforming justice systems and training police.

The lending banks need to build on this and seek advice from the human rights community – NGOs, and UN bodies like the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which has issued thoughtful comments on issues like forcible resettlement.

NGOs will also need to compromise. Nothing raises one's profile like World Bank bashing: NGOs will need to talk as well as shout.

Vienna may not consummate the marriage between human rights and development, but it has certainly revealed enticing possibilities.



The links between development and human rights were central to debate at the World Conference

lending agencies like the World Bank and UNDP.

Equally, the World Bank has been tormented over Narmada and Polonoreste long enough to know that it needs human rights. For too long, the lending agencies and international financial institutions have expelled tribals, cut education spending, and bankrolled repression in pursuit of short-term economic growth. They need to assume greater social responsibility.

They are beginning to move. The bank has introduced internal operational directives on the environment which also benefit human rights. One calls for the bank to protect indigenous peoples. Another calls for compensation for anyone displaced by a bank project. A third calls for environmental impact assessment. The bank has also made a commitment to 'good governance'.

But no one should underestimate the obstacles that lie ahead. The bank's Articles of Agreement specifically forbid it from interfering in the political affairs of its members. This is one reason why the bank does not condemn compulsory resettlement as such, but seeks rather to minimize the damage.

The same is true of the bank's

Peter da Costa

CONFERENCE VOTES ON BOSNIA

25 Jun 93

■ Islamic countries won their fight yesterday to have the World Conference adopt a controversial draft special declaration on Bosnia-Herzegovina when 88 countries voted 'yes'. Host nation Austria was the only western country to vote in favour of the draft declaration, which calls for the lifting of a UN arms embargo on Bosnia. The Russian Federation alone voted 'no'.

Of the 143 countries participating in the plenary vote a group of 54 – those supporting the position of the United States, the European Community and others who had argued against a separate declaration on Bosnia – abstained.

Three of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – the United States, Britain and France – abstained, with Russia voting against and China failing to participate.

A draft declaration on Angola, tabled by Africans who insisted the conflict in the south-west African country receive equal treatment with Bosnia, was then adopted without a vote by some 180 delegations.

Reliable sources said the African group, whose Angola declaration had been shelved after the Geneva PrepCom because delegates agreed to avoid country specific issues, cut a deal with OIC countries

to guarantee that in the event of a vote each group would support the other.

The majority of African delegations voted 'yes'.

The vote on Bosnia was described by the head of the Pakistan delegation and OIC Contact Group Chair, Agha Shahi, as a message to the UN Security Council whose sanctions against Bosnia, he said, had amounted so far to only 'paper resolutions'. 'We want to know if the Security Council is so concerned with Third World countries.

'We seem to count for nothing. We want to impress on them our deepest concerns... especially protection of smaller states and human rights,' he said. He also accused the Security Council of employing double standards, asking whether there 'is such a great difference' between Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the situation in Bosnia.

Opponents complained bitterly that the vote was a 'breach of the principle of consensus'. They had argued the Bosnia question, already the subject of two UN resolutions, was outside the competence of the conference.

Australia, which abstained in the vote, urged the conference to restore the consensus principle in the interests of securing a final document.

Now delegates fear hard won progress in drafting may now be scuppered by the Bosnia vote.

The question now being asked is what impact, if any, the vote will have on the Bosnia problem.

The plight of Bosnian refugees, like these, stirred the conscience of the Conference



Richard Reoch

THE SILENT SHOES OF BOSNIA

25 Jun 93

■ For the past ten days a pile of filthy shoes has lain on the polished floor of the Austria Centre. They have lain there in silence, unexplained.

There is no poster, no leaflet, no banner. Most who pass by them stop briefly and walk on. The shoes remain largely

Vienna I counted 139 shoes in all. There are rubber flip flops, shoes with woven rope soles, a pair of little green and blue trainers that must have come off a child of five or six, several people's house slippers and a single dirty little moccasin that has no mate to match.

There's a pair of worn-out bedroom slippers and a cheap green wellington trimmed with imitation fur.

Near the bottom of the heap is a very tiny pair of pink pull-on slippers: child's size 37 says the label, made in Taiwan. They are peeking out from under a woman's high-heeled shoe, once white, now crushed in the pile.



The silent shoes of Bosnia

untouched – a lifeless jumble of leather, rubber and torn fabric.

Slowly the word was passed from delegate to delegate: these are the shoes of Bosnia. Near the pile of running shoes and boots is the table of the Bosnian women's committee. Muniba Harvenic fled Sarajevo in April, forced to leave her husband and two sons behind.

When I asked her about the shoes, she knelt beside them and started to pick through them. Most are caked with mud or crushed or torn. On top are heavy workingmen's boots stripped of their laces and a pair of ladies' winter boots. 'They are all from a single camp,' says Muniba.

'We asked one of our women to go there after it was emptied. She brought out the shoes of the dead.'

In the little pile these women have brought with them to

'Men's shoes. Women's shoes. Little babies' shoes,' says Muniba. 'They are all here. All dead'.

The story of the last 18 months of almost an entire population can be deduced from this muddled jumble of footwear. There are shoes that survived the severe winter. Shoes of people who were taken from their homes in their nightclothes. The shoes of people rounded up in the heat of summer.

The remains of the bodies of these victims are still being sought. Only these shoes, inanimate and helpless, testify to the fact that their owners were once in the camp.

The only memorial is this heap of second-hand footwear. Mute and unmarked, it is as powerful a symbol as any at this conference. 'If you still do nothing,' says Muniba, picking through the ghastly shoes, 'we will start to bring the corpses here for you to see.'

CLAIRE FERMOY

ASYLUM UNDER SIEGE IN EUROPE

25 Jun 93

■ In a conference where official and non-official delegates are trying to find common ground on sticky issues like 'universality' and 'conditionality', one group of people whose woes have gone unheard are the refugees.

There are an estimated 18 million refugees worldwide and another 20 million internally displaced persons who have not left their countries.

However, the principle of asylum is under siege with many governments, particularly in Europe, tightening rules to curb the influx from countries of the former East Bloc.

There are 1.4 million refugees in Europe alone. One-third of them are in Germany where last year 440,000 people applied for asylum.

European Community home ministers who met in Copenhagen early this month affirmed the 'safe third country' principle. Under this clause, refugees who pass through countries considered 'safe' may be denied asylum in Western Europe.

Many governments also argue the increasing wave of right

Racism and xenophobia are on the rise in Europe. Even the right to asylum for refugees is under threat. Here young Turks demonstrate in Germany

wing extremism has forced them to enact laws to allow only the 'genuine' refugees in.

But, says Anne Fitzgerald of Amnesty International, 'If governments are manipulating it to refuse refuge to the politically persecuted, then they are guilty of human rights violations.'

The 'third country' clause has come under fire not only from refugee activists but also from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Steffan Bodemar, UNHCR representative in Vienna, recently described the clause as 'disadvantageous from the standpoint of legal protection for refugees'.

Bodemar, speaking at a seminar on Austrian refugee policies, said the officials often make only the most superficial assessment of the safeness of safe countries and that merely being a signatory to the Geneva Convention on Refugees may suffice, regardless of their actual human rights records.

The second clause that has come to be widely used in Europe is the 'manifestly unfounded claim'. Officials can reject any application on the basis that it is manifestly unfounded, although it might not have anything to do with the asylum application itself. For example, in Austria, the cases of those who arrive without travel documents or with false documents are rejected.

Refugee organizations have also criticized European moves to keep the refugees fleeing the horrors of the Bosnian war out of their countries.

Except for Germany and Austria, European countries have accepted few refugees.

NGOS MAKE PLANS BEYOND VIENNA

25 Jun 93

■ On Thursday, NGOs remaining at the World Conference met in their penultimate plenary session and adopted a post-Vienna strategy.

This means that, regardless of what comes down today from governments, there will be at least one concrete achievement of the World Conference: a mechanism through which the NGOs which met in Vienna can continue the networking and coordination begun here.

More concretely, it means that the efforts to incorporate national and regional NGOs into some kind of international system – the lack of which has long kept them on the outside – are paying off.

Nonetheless, everyone realises that this is just the beginning of a long-term strategy for voice and vote in international decision-making for grassroots NGOs.

The consensus of the plenary was to extend the term of office of the current NGO Liaison Committee for a six-month period, with each represented constituency having the right to decide – after discussion within their own caucuses – on whether to elect new members to represent it or re-elect the current representatives.

Each constituency also has six months to reflect on the kind of a mandate they would like to see assumed by a more permanent linking committee, should such a body emerge half a year from now.

For the present, the mandate of the continuing NGO Liaison Committee will be limited to maintaining contact between the regional and issue specific constituencies; disseminating positions of the various constituencies amongst them all; and pursuing the question of NGO access to UN mechanisms.

The plenary requested Human Rights Internet, based at the University of Ottawa, to serve as the Secretariat for the

Committee for the next six months. Internet has accepted the honour – or burden – of that responsibility.

A Beyond-Vienna strategy, or a more permanent mechanism of NGO cooperation, will not be easy to achieve. It is clear that no one wants a super NGO to coordinate the work of fiercely independent grassroots, national or regional organizations.

Indeed, in yesterday's discussions in plenary, Asian representatives made clear that their first priority is to strengthen national and regional initiatives – and that a global linking could only occur from such solid regional bases. Others emphasized the importance of consolidating networking within their own regional or issue-specific caucuses.

But there are some roles that a global NGO network could assume, beyond that of negotiating more access for NGOs to the international system.

One, in particular, is the possibility of a global network speaking with a common voice in defence of human rights defenders, threatened, harassed or otherwise persecuted for their human rights work.

NGOs can, and should – as they have at this Conference – press, unconditionally, for the completion and adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders, and for the adoption of a convention to protect human rights workers on the frontlines.

Since human rights NGOs do not have a trade union or professional association to represent them, they might be able to consolidate their efforts, on this one issue at least.

Another function for such a global NGO network would be facilitating the sharing of information between regional and issue-specific constituencies, and the building of solidarity where consensus is possible.

Modest as such objectives may appear, to get even this far would be a major achievement. If such cooperation is realized, it might justify the millions of dollars and the hours of effort that have been expended on this World Conference.



ROGER HUTCHINGS/NETWEL K