

The following is an excerpt from the official meeting records of the General Assembly on March 15, 2006.

The complete transcript is available at
http://www.hrw.org/un/elections/pdfs/ga_mtg_en.pdf (English)
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http://www.hrw.org/un/elections/pdfs/ga_mtg_ar.pdf (Arabic)

Mr. Maungo (South Africa): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution establishing the Human Rights Council, as was envisioned by the heads of State and Government at the 2005 world summit. We congratulate you, Mr. President, and the facilitators, on the tremendous efforts made in that regard.

The African Group believes that the resolution is of great importance, not only for the African continent, but also for all the peoples of the world. It reaffirms basic human rights and fundamental freedoms and places an equal emphasis on all human rights — economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights.

We note with satisfaction that the important elements of cooperation and dialogue have been incorporated into the text and, furthermore, that the text recognizes the importance of eliminating double standards and selectivity.

We acknowledge that the text is a product of long negotiations and that it is more progressive than earlier texts. However, there are some principles that the African Group holds dear that have not been included in the text. Those principles were espoused by the African heads of State, and they provided clear parameters for the establishment of a strong, effective and non-politicized human rights council. We articulated those principles during the consultation process, and they are now well known to all. I would like to reiterate just three elements of those principles — this does not constitute an exhaustive list.

The first relates to the frequency of meetings. We had hoped for a schedule of meetings conducive to the participation of all countries, including smaller countries, particularly the least developed States. It is our hope that efforts will be made to ensure that assistance is extended to the least developed countries and other developing countries to ensure their participation.

The second element is the number of members of the Human Rights Council. We had hoped for a larger number than that set out in the resolution that has been adopted in order to provide more opportunities for more States to participate.

The third element is development. We had hoped that a stronger development agenda would be articulated. However, you, Mr. President, have yourself stated so eloquently that the sum of the resolution is greater than its parts. Hence, while the text does not fully meet all of our concerns, we firmly believe that if its provisions were fully implemented in all of their aspects by all countries, in good faith, that would strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights internationally.

It is our expectation that at the review conference to take place in five years' time, there will be an opportunity to take into account the position of the African Group, to which we have just referred.

The African Group welcomes the adoption of the resolution. We therefore undertake to fully cooperate and work closely with the Council to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we are committed to enhancing and improving the work of the newly established Human Rights Council.