

10 December 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of  
Human Rights**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Madame Deputy Secretary-General,  
The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
The President of the Human Rights Council,  
Brothers and Sisters,

On 10 December 1948 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today we celebrate its sixtieth anniversary, recognizing it as a basic source of rights and freedoms and an ethical and legal standard that calls on us to recognize and respect the dignity, freedom and equality of all human beings, without discrimination on political, social, religious, ethnic, age or other grounds.

At a point in history marked by the maniacal, suicidal selfishness of an increasingly discredited system aimed at the ever-increasing concentration of wealth and power, the Universal Declaration tells us that the values that should govern the new world socio-economic order are justice, solidarity, equality and the recognition that we are all members of the human family. These same values have always formed the foundation of all religions and ethical-philosophical traditions.

Today we reaffirm that human rights are not the exclusive birthright of any particular group, class or segment of society. Civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights belong to all people, men and women alike. These rights cannot and should not be ranked in a hierarchy: all of them are important and all must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis.

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to accept the fact that human rights are progressive and evolving. As human beings have become more aware of their living conditions and have identified injustices, they have risen up to demand respect for their human dignity. It is this demand that has brought about the successive recognition of human rights in each country's legal system and in the United Nations system.

There are many examples of the transformational power of human rights: the abolition of slavery; the recognition of individual rights, collective rights and rights of solidarity; the recognition of full equality

between men and women; and the codification of the rights of the child, of persons with disabilities and of migrant workers and their families, among others.

We are here today not just for a pro forma commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but to bear witness to the fact that human rights are a living, dialectical and transformational force that enjoins us to strive together to eradicate the ills that plague contemporary society, such as the converging international crises, climate change, the deterioration of our Mother Earth, human trafficking, all forms of violence, all forms of terrorism, including State terrorism, and abuses against women and children, among other worldwide scourges.

Human rights are the paradigm for the twenty-first century. States must, therefore, renew their commitment to prevent any further massive or individual violations of human rights. We must stop such violations and redress the historical damage we have caused to all those who have suffered abuses anywhere in the world.

When we see the world through the lens of human rights, we cannot tolerate the fact that more than one billion people live on less than one dollar a day and 2.8 billion live on less than two dollars a day; 923 million people go hungry; tens of thousands of women and children are victims of human trafficking; nine million hectares of forest are lost each year; individuals are illegally detained, subjected to torture and to cruel and inhuman treatment and deprived of their right to prompt and impartial justice; and foreign military bases are established in sovereign nations.

On 14 November 2008 a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was carried aboard the space shuttle in specially protected packaging, and will be stored in space indefinitely. Our challenge is to instill the letter and spirit of the Declaration in the hearts of all people, including political leaders and decision-makers, and in the foundations of the new world economic architecture.

If human rights are to be the present and future archetype, then international relations and economic, educational and institutional models will have to be consistent with the rights to education, food, health, housing, secure employment, clean water, self-determination and peace, among other rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a source of international law, should guide us in the process of adapting and democratizing the United Nations. All dictatorships must end, including dictatorship in this house. Power should not be concentrated in a few, but should be shared by all. So let us continue to strengthen the Group of 192 Member States that make up this General Assembly.

In the 60 years since the Declaration was adopted, we have created many agreements, covenants, plans, programmes and institutions in the field of human rights, but this is not enough. We must make further efforts to strengthen human rights oversight, monitoring and implementation mechanisms. All States must take the measures needed for the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, so that we can translate legal formulas into real-life plans for our peoples.

We must work harder to implement human rights treaties and resolutions. Human rights are all-encompassing and holistic. Their enjoyment and implementation is primarily a responsibility of States,

but all individuals and public, civil and private institutions share responsibility for promoting and upholding them.

Article 28 of the Declaration provides that “everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized”. This requires that we put an end to the insolent opulence of the few and the extreme poverty of millions in order to build a just society that respects all forms of life.

I take this opportunity to urge Member States to ratify regional and universal human rights agreements so that these rights will be a commitment shared by all.

Today we will honour some human rights heroes and heroines who, as I have said before, are symbols of persistence, valour and tenacity in their resistance to public and private authorities that violate human rights. They constitute a moral force to put an end to human rights violations and an inspiration to seek another type of society, another political system, another economic model, another world where all persons will be treated as brothers and sisters, without discrimination, exclusion or destruction of life in all its forms.

Considering that today is also the tenth anniversary of the Declaration on human rights defenders, the example of these men and women prompts me to call on States to protect the life and integrity of all those who promote and defend human rights.

Inspired by resolution 62/171 proclaiming 10 December 2008 as the beginning of the International Year of Human Rights Learning, the human rights education campaigns undertaken by Member States and United Nations bodies and agencies should be continued and expanded to create a universal culture of human rights in which everyone expects and upholds respect for human rights.

We must continue to make headway in the recognition of new rights such as the right to water and the right to sustainable development, sovereignty and multiculturalism for indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples, among other rights.

In the interest of recognizing new rights, today we will adopt the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

We can build a better world if we observe and fulfill the human rights of all individuals and peoples everywhere in the world.

Thank you.