



UNITED STATES MISSION TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Speech of U.S. Ambassador Warren W. Tichenor
To the Human Rights Council
June 21, 2006

Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Human Rights Council. And Mr. President, I salute you for your dedication to the vital work and great ideals of this institution.

Following the inception of the United Nations in 1945, the United States has been a leader in working towards meaningful engagement on human rights issues throughout the United Nations. Mr. President, we pay honor to former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the United States delegate to the first United Nations Commission on Human Rights who was one of the driving forces in creating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She described the very concept of human rights as "the measure of mankind's evolving ethical sense."

Mrs. Roosevelt, it seems to me, had it exactly right and the United States has been at the vanguard of human rights protection and promotion – both at home and around the globe ever since and..... this remains the calling of our time.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has noted: "fulfilling the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and building vibrant democracies worldwide is the work of generations, but it is urgent work that cannot be delayed." This week – the Human Rights Council – begins that task anew. We have made a new beginning but we have only begun this Council's task of promoting and protecting human rights around the world.

This body has accepted the responsibility to fulfill the mandate to promote and protect human rights for people the world over. The impressive pledges put forth by Member States as they stood for election to the Council bear witness to that fact. It is a high bar that has been set and one worthy of the important work before us.

In my short time in Geneva, I have met many of you, and have been impressed with your commitment and dedication to working to ensure that the United Nations

Human Rights Council fulfils its promise. It is in this spirit that the United States reaffirms our historical commitment to advance the cause of human rights and human dignity around the globe. But promises and good intentions are not enough. Now is the time for words to be met by actions. Those suffering from oppression or unrealized aspirations for freedom in the world are counting on the international community to give them hope, and to meaningfully improve their lives.

As our President said in his second inaugural speech, "From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman has rights and dignity and matchless value..." It is these principles, so central to our nation, that are at the core of our strong determination to work constructively with our friends in the international community, across regional groupings, with Council members, observers and colleagues in non-governmental organizations alike to help ensure this Council is as strong and as effective as it can be. The United States wants this Council to succeed and we will work hard to make that happen.

The United States believes that through active cooperation and strong support for existing institutions, such of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the international community can heed the call of Member States seeking help to build human rights protections and rule of law. We know beyond doubt that with such cooperation countries can make strides towards improving the human rights of their citizens. We need only look toward the government of Sierra Leone to see the positive benefits of a cooperative relationship between the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and individual governments. We urge Council members to focus on how nations seeking to improve their human rights records can be vigorously and concretely supported.

While cooperation and dialogue can achieve much in the advancement of human rights, the Council needs also to stay true to its responsibility to speak for those patriots who have had their voices silenced. People like Aung San Suu Kyi, whose 61st birthday, 2 days ago, was spent under house arrest on the day this Council convened. It is interesting to note that in 1948 Ms. Kyi's home country of Burma was among the first countries to vote for the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is our sincere hope that together through this new Council we will be able to put an end to the kind of deterioration in the protection of human rights that we have seen over the years there and elsewhere.

We look forward to the Council having the ability to respond to a broad range of human rights issues as they arise through more robust and flexible mechanisms. In

the longer term, this would include passing country-specific resolutions in situations that demand action, particularly where States refuse help from the international community.

Now is the time to build a solid foundation for the Council. Like many of you, we believe that during this initial session the Council Member States in partnership with observers and civil society representatives should focus on the important procedural and organizational matters that will enable the Council to fulfill its mandate efficiently and effectively going forward into the future.

It is in the hands of the Council, and those working with you to meet the challenges before us. The Human Rights Council gives us all an opportunity to make a positive change in the world for people who are oppressed and are denied freedom. The United States want to see the Council succeed in the promotion and protection of human rights. This Council will be judged by the victims of human rights abuses and by its ability to protect the world's vulnerable populations. It is our sincere hope that this new Council will live up to its solemn duty. The United States remains absolutely firm in its commitment to engage fully in this historic endeavor.

Thank you Mr. President