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**IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251
OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED “HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL”**

**Written statement* submitted by the Aland Islands Peace Institute, a non-
governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 February 2007]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Åland Islands Peace Institute (Finland), an NGO working with international law and conflict prevention, wishes to make use of its consultative status and make a written submission concerning the future working methods of the Human Rights Council. We acknowledge the important steps already taken in the establishment of the Human Rights Council (HRC), in particular the commitments and pledges made by states parties when being candidates for the Council as well as the continued application of existing consultation arrangements for NGOs made by ECOSOC under Article 71 of the UN Charter. We acknowledge also the efforts made and spirit of cooperation shown by the President of the HR Council.

The coming year, and in particular the 4th and 5th sessions of the HRC, will be crucial in shaping the core procedural rules and working methods of the HR Council and we wish to take this opportunity to submit our practical proposals and considerations:

Cross-regional work

We believe that the HR Council should aim at achieving *objectivity and continuity* in its work. Objectivity is crucial in order to avoid the old time accusations of politicisation and double standards faced by the HR Commission. The foremost tool for such objectivity and non-polarisation is the ability to work over geographical region clusters. We call on the States Parties to work with and make proposals across the regions and across any kinds of economic, political, religious or other differences. One concrete way for following such a course of action would be to refine the existing practice of inter-sessional, inter-regional working groups for preparation of the various points of the agenda and with possibility to invite both independent experts as well NGOs whenever appropriate. So, for instance, a working group would have a special responsibility to follow the work and reports of a specific (or, clusters of thematically grouped) Special Procedure, to prepare any summaries of discussions or recommendations or other action as may be necessary.

Special sessions

As to *special sessions*, we believe that special sessions should be convened quickly and easily at the initiative of the Chair, a number of the members of the Council, the High Commissioner for Human Rights or the Secretary General. The HR Council has already shown its ability in this regard, but we hope that the procedure be refined not least as regards the wide potential existing as to possible outcomes of special sessions. The goal should always be that HR violations are addressed immediately and are alleviated. Adopted resolutions are one possible outcome but a summary of discussions with points of crucial concerns and authorisation of a working group or a special rapporteur to monitor, or an initiative for a discussion by the General Assembly or Security Council may be other options.

Special procedures

With regard to *continuity* we would like to address the issue of Special Procedures. We find that it is currently difficult to identify clear focuses and priorities in the work of the Council. Through a more effective grouping of related Special Procedures, such focuses could be more easily visible. We believe that the general rule should be that there are not more than approximately 20 Special Procedures reports per session – as opposed to about

40 reports discussed by the Council during its second and third sessions – , that such reports are grouped thematically and that Special Procedures are normally retained for no longer than five years. Such a limitation should not apply for situations of gross and systematic violations. The mandate holders of special procedures should be guaranteed *complete independence*.

As to the content of the work of the Council we believe that the Council should *combine a country oriented approach and a thematic approach*. The possibility to appoint country specific special procedures should be retained and strengthened, as it is a major tool for the protection of human rights. One possibility is to address human rights situations in an entire region (such as for instance the critical zone stretching from Chad to the Horn of Africa and Northern Uganda) and another to combine a close and explicit examination of country situations under thematic headings (such as small arms, rights of prisoners or rights of migrant workers). What is crucial is that the work of the Council, including its Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Report, complement and strengthen the work already done by the Human Rights treaty bodies. One of the great advantages of the work of the Council is its regular use of state visits and on site inspections. This is something that could be further developed in search also of ways to further strengthen the national implementation of human rights obligations.

Universal Periodic Review

Finally, as regards the Universal Period Review (UPR), we find that the HR Council should again be preparing the plenary discussions in working groups, include the information available through the entire corpus of Treaty Bodies, have a task in enquiring the reasons for non-ratification of the core human rights treaties, as well as making country visits to collect information. The UPR should start off work by examining the members of the Council and then follow up as well the pledges made by these countries when they were candidates for the Council. Follow-up mechanisms to the regular reviews should be foreseen from the outset, involving independent experts. NGOs should be entitled to submit information to and have contacts with independent experts entrusted with the preparation of reports and with follow-ups.

Close cooperation with the Peace Building Commission

As an organisation working with issues of conflict prevention and peace, the Åland Islands Peace Institute believes that the Human Rights Council should work closely with the newly established Peace Building Commission and institutionalise regular contacts both at the level of secretariats as well as presidents and members. In those contacts the issue of the position of women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations should receive a prominent position, following also SC Res. 1325 (2000)
