

First Meeting of Human Rights Council

June 22, 2006

Expectations of Human Rights Defenders
Statement delivered by Nataša Kandić

Mr. Chairman,
Ms High Commissioner,
Your Excellencies,
Dear NGO Representatives,

I am very pleased to have been invited by a group of NGOs to address the opening session of the Human Rights Council as human rights defender. I have been awarded the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 1999. I am honoured to have an opportunity to directly acquaint members of the Human Rights Councils with expectations of Human Rights Defenders regarding promotion and protection of human rights, and especially protection of victims of serious human rights violations.

I am also delighted with the novelties in the Council's work, mainly with the creation of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, which will support the members of the Council to systematically oversee the human rights situation, give recommendations, and directly observe the application of those recommendations. As a Human Rights Defender, I am expecting the course of this mechanism's development and implementation to go in the direction of strengthening cooperation with NGOs, as well as in the direction of promoting Human Rights Defenders' role and importance in the protection of human rights and victims of human rights violations. I expect NGOs to be invited to take part in the process of building the model of cooperation between the Council and NGOs and give their contribution to establishment of an efficient model of cooperation in relation to the UPR.

It is extremely important for Human Rights Defenders that the Draft International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, as well as the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples be adopted and that the Council pays special attention to the right to know and right to justice with regard to the issue of missing persons, as well as the right of families and society to know the truth about the fate of the missing.

I would like to point out two issues, which I think should be subject to the Council's consideration. There is a need for the Council to strongly support the fight against impunity and establish justice in post-conflict and post-totalitarian societies. Even though, in the 61st session on 8 February 2005, the Commission on Human Rights discussed the independent expert, Diane Orentlicher's, report to update the Set of principles to combat Impunity there is a need for the Council's increased engagement,