

Today, the biggest threat to security in the Great Lakes is, in my view, the prevailing culture of impunity. The periodic cycles of extreme violence that these countries have undergone can not be broken unless Governments demonstrate that perpetrators of human rights violations will be held accountable. In the case of Burundi and the DRC, this will require reversing both the current trend and years of past practice.

Some newly elected officials in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi are currently struggling to counter this trend. They will need support and steady commitment to the principle that amnesties cannot be granted for the gravest human rights violations. This is not only a matter of principle and of international law, but also an indispensable prerequisite for durable peace in the region. Human rights are not abstract legal concepts to be deployed as political tools but are safeguards that are vital to ensure that all individuals all over the world can enjoy their rights and freedoms.

Officials I met throughout the region, including the Heads of State, acknowledged the human rights challenges they face and that their institutions are in need of assistance in putting an end to violations of human rights. This willingness to engage – and this honesty in accepting uncomfortable realities – should further compel us to strengthen partnerships to combat impunity and establish justice and the rule of law, thus setting solid foundation for human rights, security and development.

We the undersigned, **civil society** organizations are gravely concerned by the widening **human** rights crisis and growing culture of impunity that cripples our country. We have made many representations regarding our concerns to the government of Sri Lanka through all appropriate channels. We have also approached the international community and the Office of the High Commissioner for **Human** Rights for support to prevent the **violations**. In the course of our work we encounter the unarmed civilians who are the victims and survivors of many brutal acts of violence and violation of rights on a daily basis, and join them in their search for justice and redress. The national mechanisms for protecting and promoting the **human** rights of all Sri Lankans have failed to provide justice and truth to the victims and affected communities, and given way to a culture of silence and impunity. Although there are several reports documenting the **violations**, the victims and survivors of most **human** rights **violations** are often afraid of making a formal complaint for fear of reprisals. This is especially true in cases of violence against women. Even in cases where complaints are lodged and in which eye witness and other reliable testimonies and evidence are available, the authorities have systematically failed to carry out effective and impartial investigations and inquiries that could lead to indictments and convictions of perpetrators of **human** rights **violations**. This has resulted in strengthening the culture of impunity and terror that actively deters victims and survivors of **human** rights **violations** from seeking justice and redress.

The Government has responded to mounting criticisms regarding **human** rights **violations** by appointing several Presidential Commissions. Among them is a one man Commission of Inquiry into Disappearances, the Presidential Commission of Inquiry to Investigate and

Inquire into Alleged Serious **Violations** of **Human** Rights which includes the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP). None of these commissions have effectively engaged with the victims and affected communities nor have their investigations resulted in deterring **human** rights **violations**. There have been serious questions raised regarding the methods of work and independence of these mechanisms, as well as **grave** concerns regarding the lack of a credible witness and victim protection programme. Our main concern is that these commissions are symbolic, but empty gestures, that have failed to address the on-going **human** rights **violations**. In April 2008, the IIGEP announced that they would conclude their role as observers, pointing to “a lack of political will to support a search for the truth.”

Each day we learn of manifestations of grave human rights violations in all parts of the world. We cannot remain silent on these violations. The EU is alarmed at the deterioration of human rights and humanitarian situation in Sudan, particularly in Darfur, where violence against civilians, including the recent killings, and the culture of impunity remains of grave concern. We call for an immediate end to the ongoing violence and violations of human rights, including sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. We urge all parties to put an end to impunity and to fully cooperate in the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions on Sudan, in particular resolution 1593(2005). It is of the utmost importance that human rights monitors and humanitarian workers have access to all those in need. The EU reminds the leadership of the Sudanese Government of its collective and individual responsibility to protect its citizens and to guarantee respect for human rights.

The human rights situation in Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a continuing cause for grave concern. As the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK has underlined, there are serious challenges in regard to, among other things, the rights to food and to life, the right to security of the person and humane treatment as well as political rights such as freedom of expression. While the country is a party to various human rights treaties and has engaged with the monitoring bodies under those treaties, there remains a deeply alarming divide between formal recognition of human rights and their substantive implementation.

We deplore the negative attitude of Uzbekistan towards several suggestions for an independent, international investigation into the events. The EU remains deeply concerned about the development of the conflict in Sri Lanka, which has led to escalation of the violence and increasing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including extrajudicial killings and disappearances and displacement of over 200,000 people. The EU underlines again the need for thorough and credible investigation and monitoring of the alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in order to end the culture of impunity and guarantee that law and order are respected.