



Press Release: December 10, 2008

NGOs Celebrate Historic Adoption of Optional Protocol for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at United Nations

From the NGO Coalition for an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (www.opicescr-coalition.org)

New York, December 10, 2008 The United Nations General Assembly today adopted by consensus an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), establishing a complaints procedure for violations of economic, social and cultural rights. The adoption of the Optional Protocol represents an historic advance for human rights on the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. Forty-two years after a similar mechanism was adopted for civil and political rights, those who suffer from violations of their economic, social and cultural rights have finally been given equal status and their right to an effective remedy has been recognized, consistent with the provisions of the Universal Declaration.

The Optional Protocol will provide victims of economic, social and cultural rights violations who are not able to get an effective remedy in their domestic legal system with redress at the international level.

It is the result of several decades of work by governments, civil society, human rights experts and the UN human rights bodies to remedy a long-term gap in human rights protection under the international system. It has appropriately been described by Louise Arbour, the previous High Commissioner for Human Rights as “human rights made whole.”

Highlights of the Optional Protocol

Communications: States Parties to the Covenant joining the Protocol recognize the competence of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to receive and consider communications alleging violations of the economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the Covenant.

Interim Measures: The Committee may transmit to the State Party concerned for its urgent consideration a request that the State Party take such interim measures to avoid possible irreparable damage to the victims of the alleged violations.

Inquiry Procedure: If the Committee receives reliable information indicating grave or systematic violations of the Covenant, the Committee shall invite that State Party to cooperate in the examination of the information and to this end to submit observations with regard to the information concerned. The inquiry may include a visit to the territory of the State Party concerned.

Statements from Members of the NGO Coalition for an OP-ICESCR

Flavio Valente, Secretary General of FIAN International: “Finally, economic and social human rights will be on the same footing with civil and political rights that have already had an associated complaints mechanism for many years”

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FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen: “As we have seen for other rights, the development of an international complaint mechanism for victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights will enable the strengthening of redress mechanisms at the national level, and of policies specifically targeted to ensure the realisation of these rights, »

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Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) Executive Director Salih Booker: “This is a moment we have worked towards for many years. We celebrate today the creation of a procedure to challenge at international level abuses of the fundamental right to adequate housing.”

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