Reflections on the future of the UN’s human rights pillar

Thursday, 4th September 2014, 15h00-18h30
Restaurant Vieux Bois, Avenue de la Paix 12, 1202 Geneva
#HRPillar

Speakers:

Introduction / co-chairs
H.E. Mr. Alexandre Fasel, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Switzerland
Ms. Harriet Berg, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Norway

Looking ahead to the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Council (2016): What can be done to strengthen it?
H.E. Mr. Luis Alfonso de Alba, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the International Organisations in Vienna; first President of the Human Rights Council

Glion Human Rights Dialogue 2014: key messages, ideas and next steps
Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Universal Rights Group; UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran

Strengthening the Human Rights Mechanisms
Professor Michael O’Flaherty, Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees, Universal Rights Group; former Vice-Chair, UN Human Rights Committee

Beyond Geneva: taking human rights into the field and human rights mainstreaming
Mr. Richard Bennett, Director, Asia-Pacific Programme, Amnesty International; former Representative in Nepal of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Background

On 20 December 1993, the General Assembly voted to create the post of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, acting on a recommendation from delegates to the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna earlier the same year. On 5 April 1994, José Ayala-Lasso, an Ecuadorian lawyer and diplomat, became the first UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Twenty years on from these momentous events, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has changed considerably, as have the scale and complexity of the tasks it performs. On 6 June this year, the General Assembly approved Prince Zeid Ra’ad Zeid al-Hussein of Jordan as the sixth High Commissioner. The evolution of OHCHR has come against a backdrop of equally significant changes to the wider international human rights system. In 2006, member States took a significant step in strengthening human rights as one of the three pillars of the United Nation's Charter and established the Human Rights Council as the UN's apex human rights body. Since then the Council has grown significantly in confidence and stature, as have its mechanisms.

We believe it is important, as the world celebrates the OHCHR's 20th anniversary and looks ahead to the Human Rights Council's 10th anniversary, to reflect on the international human rights system's many achievements, to identify challenges, and to find new and innovative solutions that will allow the international community to address those challenges and continue its impressive development.

With this in mind, in May this year, the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, hosted a high-level two-day retreat in Glion, Switzerland, designed to provide an open platform for dialogue and fresh-thinking on the future of the international human rights system. The event – the Glion Human Rights Dialogue 2014 - brought together a cross-section of over 60 experts from the Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies, states, OHCHR, the wider UN, NGOs, media and academia to generate ideas for further consideration. The meeting was held under ‘Chatham House’ rules. A non-exhaustive summary of some of the key themes, discussions and recommendations from the retreat have been compiled into an informal document that will be presented during the 4th September event.