

Mr. Chairman, Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba
Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege to address this assembly on the very first day of this new body, a day of historic significance for the cause of human rights.

The decision to establish Human Rights Council taken by our Heads of State and Government, last September in the World Summit, was a remarkable step to strengthen the protection and the promotion of human rights worldwide.

The new Human Rights Council, when compared to the former Commission, entails substantially more than a mere change in name. We believe the Human Rights Council can improve significantly the UN's existing capacity to protect and to promote human rights.

The polemics and the criticism - some times unfair - directed towards the Commission, mainly in its last phase, should not diminish its valuable work and achievements. In fact, the Human Rights Council will be able to draw upon its useful acquis. The Commission should be remembered as a fundamental body, which has had a positive and lasting impact in promoting human rights and codifying human rights standards, the last ones being the draft International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances and the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which we hope will be adopted in this session.

The twentieth century proved that the denial of human rights has been at the root of many conflicts. Let me praise the efforts of all those Special Rapporteurs, human rights experts of the Commission on Human Rights and field monitors of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose work has been fundamental in preventing human rights violations that might otherwise have escalated into armed conflicts.

The creation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office were major steps towards the improvement of the UN Human rights machinery. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work done by this Office and the positive role played by Mrs Louise Arbour in supporting the functioning of the UN human rights machinery and institutions.