

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION  
(EAFORD)  
5 route des Morillons, CP 2100. 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
Telephone & Fax: 788.62.33

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty - ninth session (17 March - 25 April 2003)

**Item 17: Promotion and protection of human rights (b) Human rights defenders**

We, nongovernmental organizations, are encouraged to address effective ways for the future coordination and organization of the work of the Commission on Human Rights. Under the increasing pressure on every one year after year, we appeal for a serious re-examination, especially in relation to calling for more fairness toward organizations and the treatment of their representatives, the defenders of human rights.

Our organization is deeply concerned about the growing injustice that is affecting nongovernmental organizations lately. We recall better times of more appreciation and respect for the contribution NGOs made at the UN, when each organization with Consultative Status was assigned a reserved seat with its name tag, and when speakers had equal speaking time to that of governmental speakers...

Gradually, NGOs are losing even direct access as observers during meetings. We no longer have assigned seats and the majority of us have to stand at the end of the conference room waiting for our turn to speak. We are given two to four minutes to speak, whereas government/member speakers get at least double the speaking time.

This is an unacceptable situation. It contradicts the United Nations Charter, which states: "WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS"

It is obvious that the U.N. Charter addresses the people not the governments, and nongovernmental organizations serve a greater role as the true representatives of the people.

We meet here today to defend human rights, but we defend human rights against whom?? Is it not against some of the governments that violate these rights?? Thus, who must be heard in these meetings: nongovernmental organizations or governments? We are not against governments or trying to settle a conflict. All we are asking this Commission for is equal treatment of representatives of NGOs and governments to correct this unbalanced situation.

**April 2003**