

My experience during the 61st Session of the UN-Commission on Human Rights by Andrianasolo Sylvia

The Human Rights Commission, which is the principal body of the System of the United Nations in the field of Human Rights held its sixty first session in Geneva, from March 14th to April 2nd, 2005. This Commission is made up of 53 Member States elected by the UN Economic and Social Council for one limited mandate (3 years) and renewable. The Commission meets each year in Geneva during six weeks. More than 5000 Delegates participate, representing Member States or Observers and Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations.

I came without a real knowledge of the situation when one speaks about Human Rights. I did not even know that there was on a world level a body which takes into account all the daily violations on children, young people, students, women and all the categories of persons. I could not imagine me that my country and even all the countries of the world take part in a similar body and give an account of their activities in their respective territories as regards the respect of Human Rights. I could not either imagine that if one country does not respect the Rights of its citizens and even those of the other countries, it can be summoned to order or even sanctioned by UN and the entire International Community. I arrived with much curiosity and enthusiasm and I wanted to really know what is this Human Rights Commission, I had heard so much about. My experience and my discoveries could be the subject of long six weeks history that I could tell you in several written volumes. But I will limit myself only to these few lines which I want to share with you.

After the procedures of accreditation (obtaining my pass, Badge of accreditation of the IYCS) I was initially impressed by the length of the corridor leading into the Room where the UN Assemblies take place and where were held the works of the Commission on the first week; I was even more impressed by room XVII, where we worked the last five other weeks. And also I cannot deny I was stunned by the magnificence of the Palais des Nations itself, because I noticed that it was a large labyrinth where an inexperienced visitor can easily lose its way if not accompanied.

During the works of the session, I realised that the Commission is a kind of World Parliament of the Humans Rights and fundamental Freedoms of the human being and that no one person nor one State cannot escape from it. All is known and said there on all the levels without exception nor distinction as regards the rights of the human person.



Andrianasolo Sylvia, Alex Owona & Manoj Mathew, IYCS Representatives at the 61st Session of UN-Commission on Human Rights 2005, Geneva.

During the first week, after the opening of the Session and the adoption of the Agenda of the Commission, at the High Level Segment I saw many dignitaries of the various countries of the world. Poor countries and rich countries, emerging countries or developing countries all were treated with the same reference no differences were made whether they were Ministers or governmental representatives. All came to speak about the evolution and progress in the field of

Human Rights in their country and the world. Some did not fail to criticize the violation of Human Rights in other countries or even spoke about reforms within the United Nations Human Rights' or evaluated the activities of the UN High Commission on Human Rights. And each time a country was indexed by a dignitary (Ministers) of another country, there was always the possibility for the country concerned, to reply.

For the five remaining weeks, the work of the Commission took another form which I did not expect to see. I believed to be in another world by all that was done as of the first days. It is after I am accustomed. Indeed, all the countries, whatever their size, just as all the governmental groups, international institutions and organizations, NGO's, the defenders of Human Rights and even the IYCS made freely hear their voices and without fear.

On the various points entered on the agenda, I could note that there were many Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs on various mandates in certain countries (specific territories) or thematic mandates (violations of Human Rights in the world). I noticed that in all the points, the Member States or Observers took the floor either to support the point of view of the Special Rapporteur or the Expert or to

criticize it. In certain cases, they stood up to present the situation in their country, to defend themselves when they are criticized, or to criticize other countries or to summon them to respect the established order.

As for the adoption of the Resolutions/Decisions, many negotiations were always going on whether in the main room or in parallel. At the time of the voting, and according to cases' which were presented, in fact only the fifty three Member States had the last decision by their vote.

I noticed that the organizations of the Civil Society or quite simply in U.N. terms, the NGO's have a great influence and an important role during the Commission. Indeed, NGO's present written interventions on all the points of the Agenda and these are taken into account like official documents of work and distributed as such. They also freely make oral interventions presented during the plenary sessions just like the States. I could especially observe their important role on two levels. On the one hand, they speak on behalf of the populations or groups which they represent and they criticize the policies of the States which violate or do not respect the Human Rights. On the other hand, they take part in the development of certain policies through their interventions as much as through lobbying. During our interventions on behalf of IYCS, for example, we made not only criticisms with respect to certain situations, but also, on several occasions, recommendations to the Commission to improve the daily life of young people. What struck me on this level, was how much many NGO's but also some Government representatives were interested by our interventions; people would come to us and request for documents, would question us on IYCS and our activities. We were highly congratulated on our intervention on point 17 on the World Education Program on Human Rights. After our intervention some organizations came and proposed a future collaboration. I realised then how important for us it would be to participate in this type of networks.

As regards communication, there is great transparency in all information's given. All the interventions and documents presented during a session are immediately put in the web page and sent to the UN press service, so as to enable the whole world to know what is really happening during the Commission Sessions. Unfortunately YCS members in Africa do not have an easy access to Web and so do not get all these informations.

In fact I participated also in several meetings with personalities and institutions of the UN System that I hope will benefit our Movement. I also met with the Secretary General of the WOAT (a very important organisation against torture) and whose president is a former member of IYCS International Secretariat.

Conclusion

After my experience in the 61st Session of the UN Human Rights Commission I can say that I have fully understood the importance of the mission of YCS at grass root level since our activities are essentially activities comprehend in the field of Human Rights. As Pan African coordinator I understood that we, as YCS's are activists and defenders of Human Rights; we do still have a lot to learn about ourselves and our commitment within YCS's activities at grass root level and also about the level of the Pan African activities and at international level. I was able to confirm that IYCS had a great influence at International level in the past and now thanks to his participation in the UN System. An influence based on experience and expertise acquired through its long history and that we must nowadays formalise by creating our own representative Office at the UN but also by transmitting to all the YCS National Movements and regional and sub-regional Coordinations our experience and knowledge. It would be necessary to enable all regional teams to take part in the works of this commission and, what would be really good would be to let all regional representative participate together in order to define a vision and a common policy for the formation and information of all our national movements and for the future of our Movement. This would contribute in fact to our better understanding and exchange of experience and for the financement our own future projects too.

This experience was very fruitful for me, personally and will enhance my work at the Pan African level. I did indeed discover and learn a lot of things but I know I still have to learn more and more on this field. In sharing my experience my message to all YCSers is that they should commit themselves in all activities at grass root level, do not be afraid and become aware they are, through our fundamental option for the poor and the oppressed defenders of the Human rights that have to take their mission in the student milieu and in society conscientiously to give testimony of Jesus Christ.

Andrianasolo Sylvia

IYCS Pan African Coordination

**Visit the website of the
Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights
for resource materials and information.**

www.ohchr.org