Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations, S-3800
New York, NY 10017 USA

23 September 2008

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

On behalf of six non-governmental organizations, I have the honor to transmit to you this letter.

As you know, our organizations expressed high expectations regarding the selection and appointment of the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and we welcome your appointment of Navanethem Pillay on July 24, 2008.

We wrote to you throughout the process to stress the significance of this office and of appointing a capable, expert and courageous individual to the position. To this end, an appropriately transparent and accountable selection process was necessary.

We appreciate several aspects of the process:

- Your inviting Member States (and others) to suggest candidates, instigating an inclusive search process;
- The articulation of criteria, a demonstration of commitment to selecting a person of high regard, courage and independence;
- Establishment of a selection panel and announcing of its chair;
- Including individuals recommended by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) among the final candidates;
- The sharing of your three finalists with Member States before announcing your decision; and
- Your appointment of a woman from a pool of qualified men and women.

We commend you for these decisions, which we believe resulted in the appointment of a highly qualified candidate.

Nonetheless, we would like to see a more transparent and inclusive selection process, with significant participation from NGOs, in the future. We appeal to your strong leadership to apply the principles you employed to future high-level appointments, as appropriate. In particular, we would support the following elements.

Qualifications-based

- Issue formal job descriptions and criteria for position, to assist in the identification of candidates and facilitate your assessment of their competencies.

Accountability and Transparency

- There should be a set timetable for nominations, shortlists and final selection, to provide a framework for the selection process that ensures transparency and accountability;
- Greater transparency about Selection Panel – announce the Chair of the Panel and its timeline for decision-making, and abide by timeline;
- Release shortlist earlier in decision-making process to allow more time for feedback from Member States and NGOs;
- Greater transparency will result in less incorrect information and less damage control needed around time-wasting rumors.

Consultation

The process must be transparent and include wide consultations with key stakeholders, governmental and nongovernmental, including NGOs dealing with issues relevant to the post. In particular, it is vital that you:

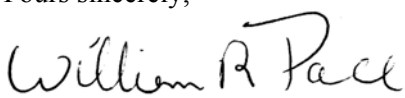
- Invite all Member States and other relevant stakeholders to suggest candidates for the position.
- Apply the framework, referred to in your letter of 24 March, of "consultations with the human rights support community" to other appointments to incorporate NGO input.
- Strengthen consultation procedures by consulting with relevant NGOs as early and as substantively as possible in the process of reviewing candidates and by establishing a mechanism for confidential input from Member States and NGOs, including comments on specific candidates.
- Provide or encourage, as appropriate, access of NGOs to the Selection Panel for substantive consultations, which will ensure the Panel has an adequate understanding of civil society's views, thus preventing surprise criticism of the appointee.

The steps you took in selecting the High Commissioner for Human Rights have the potential to substantially improve the practices used in filling many of the UN's highest offices. It is vital that you put into place processes that reflect the importance of high-level appointments to communities worldwide.

Moving appointment procedures in the direction of merit and qualifications, and away from political entitlement, is crucial for the UN to improve its effectiveness and increase its legitimacy. We realize that some governments will resist this change, but we will support you in this, and it could also confer enormous benefit to the international community for decades to come.

We would be happy to discuss this further with you.

Yours sincerely,



William R. Pace, Executive Director
Institute for Global Policy

Endorsing organizations:

Amnesty International
Democracy Coalition Project
Human Rights First
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Open Society Institute