MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS RULE OF LAW PLEDGE

STRASBOURG, 18 February 2005: High-level representatives of the Council of Europe (CoE), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations (UN) today pledged to work together to promote the rule of law.

Rule of law was a prerequisite for maintaining and building peace, consolidating democracy and promoting sustainable development. Highlighting the central role of rule of law in conflict prevention, the protection and promotion of human rights and other issues, such as human displacement, they urged close cooperation between partner organisations and stressed the importance of social cohesion for achieving long-term stability in post-conflict societies.

Participants reiterated the need for a common and effective framework for responding to terrorism in accordance with the rule of law, including respect for human rights, and where applicable humanitarian law, and highlighted the importance of protection to be given to victims of terrorist acts.

Emphasising the value of preventive strategies, they recognised the importance of arms control and disarmament as part of the global fight against terrorism. They also stressed the need for universal adherence to and implementation of international treaties against proliferation of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons to complement global counter-terrorism efforts.

They identified the urgent need to step up the fight against racism, xenophobia, intolerance, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and any other forms of discrimination and called for full implementation by States of the relevant decisions taken by the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Welcoming the Council of Europe's on-going work in the legal field, the meeting took note of ongoing activities regarding a draft convention on the prevention of terrorism and other international legal instruments under preparation.

Participants underlined the successful interaction and co-operation of International Organisations in the field on issues related to legislative transparency, the independence of the judiciary, ombudsmen and national human rights institutions as well as reform of legislation, justice and prisons.

The meeting identified areas for further co-operation in the field, highlighting the importance of coordinated approaches by the International Community to create and capitalize on synergies. Such interaction should be further complemented by
more systematic exchanges on respective programmes of activities, taking into account experiences in other areas.

Participants commended collaboration between the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union and other regional organisations, as well as their respective Parliamentary Assemblies, in dealing with the effects of the tsunami that affected South East Asia.

They highlighted the need for closer cooperation in reinforcing existing international mechanisms to deal with the effects of major disasters both in Europe and at the global level. They also advocated coherence and complementarity of efforts to avoid collision of mandates and ensure the effective use of available resources.

The annual High Level Tripartite meeting, chaired by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Terry Davis, was also attended by a Representative of the OSCE’s Chairman in Office, the Director of Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Director General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the European Union, represented by the European Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, the International Organization for Migration and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

It was agreed that the United Nations Office in Geneva would host the next meeting in early 2006.

The High Level meeting endorsed a report on a Target-oriented meeting held the previous day which had agreed to enhance joint efforts to protect and promote freedom of expression.

They noted that this meeting had provided a forum for exchanging information about ongoing and planned activities, as well as for identifying possibilities for enhanced cooperation. It had recognised that the threat of terrorism should not be used as an excuse to impose restrictions on freedom of expression or freedom of information.

The meeting had also advocated pursuing efforts to promote the rule of law as it relates to political, civil, economic and social rights, and to mainstream gender issues.

Participants had called on the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society to recognise freedom of expression and freedom of information

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1 Representatives from the UN system including DPA, UNECE, UNESCO, OCHA, DPI, UNDP, UNHCR, UNHCHR, also attended the meeting.
as fundamental principles for the establishment and development of the information society.

They had noted that decriminalisation of defamation was considered an effective means to enhance freedom of expression and information if, in parallel, the level of pecuniary sanctions for libel and defamation was also monitored.

With regard to freedom of expression during election campaigns, preventive action in the form of special training for journalists, members of electoral commissions and other relevant actors had been emphasised.