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UN: Integrate Human Rights In to Security Council Work

(New York, December 10, 2002) – As the United Nations Security Council marks Human Rights Day with a debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, Human Rights Watch said the Council has made some progress incorporating humanitarian issues into its work, but it still

Often acts as if the United Nations human rights machinery is not there.

Human Rights Watch said the United Nations has begun to recognize that conflicts cannot be addressed effectively without considering human rights aspects, but it is vital to integrate human rights specifics into its debates and actions in conflict situations. Participants in today's open debate on protecting civilians in armed conflict will include High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio Vieira de Mello.

"It would be hard to find a more timely way to recognize the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," said Joanna Weschler, UN Representative for Human Rights Watch. "But the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the rest of the U.N. human rights machinery need to be household names around the Council every day of the year."

Over the past decade or so, the Security Council has made significant advances in the consideration of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, clearly acknowledging the connection between the protection of civilians, including vulnerable groups such as women and children, and the maintenance of the international peace and security. The Council has issued several resolutions and statements, held open debates and requested three reports from the Secretary-General. It has routinely

addressed humanitarian aspects of specific conflict situations it has been dealing with. But while the United Nations has made great progress in developing its operational thinking on the humanitarian side of the agenda, it still needs to better integrate human rights into its analysis and action.

Human Rights Watch urged the Security Council to:



incorporate human rights assessments in its debates on all conflict situations;

include human rights monitors in peace keeping operations and require human rights analysis in all Secretary-General's reports on specific situations;

routinely use human rights reports of UN special rapporteurs and independent experts on human rights as part of an early warning system;

invite UN special rapporteurs and experts to brief the Council on situations on its agenda;

undertake missions to countries with early signs of crisis;

make accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross abuses of human rights an integral part of peacemaking, peace keeping, and peace building;

prepare to exercise its International Criminal Court referral powers by developing a system under which complaints can be brought and assessed;

develop a policy of zero tolerance for any crimes or abuses committed by peacekeepers and prepare to revoke impunity granted to peacekeepers by resolution 1422;

assure full respect for human rights in the war against terrorism through the work of the Counter Terrorism Committee, and in particular, insist that counter terrorism measures adopted by states contain human rights safeguards so that they do not impact on non-violent political activity.

More Human Rights Watch analysis of this issue is available at: <http://www.hrw.org/un/> or

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