

Press release

UN/ Optional Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

NGOs welcome historic step forward for the protection of all human rights

Momentous signing of the Optional Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at the United Nations.

New York, 24 September 2009 - "Justice for people whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated, took a decisive step forward today" said Muthoni Wanyeki of the Kenyan Human Rights Commission, as 20 States began signing the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at the United Nations.

Muthoni Wanyeki, representing a coalition of over 300 NGOs campaigning for the Optional Protocol, is taking part in the Treaty Event for Heads of State at UN Headquarters in New York. "The Coalition welcomes this significant beginning towards universal support for this historic mechanism: 33794 individuals and NGOs from 111 countries have signed a global petition calling on all States who are eligible to do so to become a party to the Optional Protocol through ratification." These individuals and NGOs also call on States to ensure that the Optional Protocol enters into force as soon as possible and is fully implemented without delay.

For the first time, the Optional Protocol establishes a mechanism to access justice at an international level for people whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated. Many people around the world, particularly those living in poverty and discriminated against, suffer violations of their rights and are denied justice at the national level. The Optional Protocol will enable them to seek justice at the international level and will also support efforts within countries to ensure that effective remedies are available to victims.

The Optional Protocol sends a clear and unequivocal message about the equal value and importance of all human rights - all rights should be protected, respected and fulfilled, fully and without exception.

Today's signing ceremony at the United Nations, was the result of decades of campaigning by NGOs and activists from across the world for economic, social and cultural rights to be implemented and enforced and for everyone, everywhere to have access to justice and effective remedies .

Notes to editors

The following States are signing the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights today at the UN in New York: Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Ecuador, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Luxembourg, Mali, Montenegro, Netherlands, Portugal, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Ukraine, Uruguay.

About the Coalition for OP-ICESCR (www.escr-net.org) :

The International NGO Coalition for an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights brings together individuals and organisations from around the world that support the development of an OP to the ICESCR. Our members include international NGOs, regional networks, grassroots activists, community based organizations, and individuals, all of whom have a common goal to promote an OP-ICESCR. Organisational members of the Steering Committee of the NGO Coalition include: Amnesty International (AI); Community Law Centre, South Africa; Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), Geneva; International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net), USA; FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), International Secretariat, Germany; International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Geneva; International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), France; International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia-Pacific (IWRAP Asia-Pacific), Malaysia; Inter-American Platform of Human Rights, Democracy and Development (PIDHDD), Colombia; Social Rights Advocacy Centre, (SRAC), Canada
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