Report of a Brainstorming Session held by the 
Nordic Institutes of Human Rights at 
Laugarvatn, Iceland, 9-10 June 1991¹

Gudmundur Alfredsson, Morten Kjaerum and Allan Rosas as Rapporteurs

Standards, Compliance and Technical Co-operation: Substantive Issues before the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights

Introduction

The Nordic Institutes of Human Rights have for several years organized seminars dealing with a series of topical issues. This time around, the Eighth Nordic Human Rights Seminar, the Eighth Nordic Refugee Law Seminar and the Fifth Seminar on the Small Nations of the North in Constitutional and International Law were held jointly at Laugarvatn in Iceland from 6 to 10 June 1991. As part of these Seminars, which were held in co-operation with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, the Institutes convened a two-day Brainstorming Session about issues which could be discussed at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights.

The Brainstorming Session did not adopt any recommendations. It did not even adopt this report which simply records the issues and ideas brought up during some 12 hours of wide-ranging and free-wheeling discussions. The report is not in any way intended to present a conclusive or exhaustive listing of human rights issues which deserve further examination. Likewise, the order in which the ideas are recorded is one of chronology rather than of agreed-upon priorities, and chapter headings are inserted for the sake of convenient reading.

Mr. Jan Mårtenson, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights and Secretary-General of the World Conference, delivered an opening address to the Brainstorming Session. He described the background to and legislative history of the World Conference, outlined the contents and direction of the United Nations Human Rights Programme, emphasized the triangular approach taken by the Centre for Human Rights in implementing the Programme, and expressed his satisfaction at the decision made by the
organizers of the Nordic Seminars to launch a collection of ideas which could in turn be of benefit to the preparatory process leading up to the Conference.

About 70 participants from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as from the Faroe Islands, Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and the Sami Nation attended these seminars and, by extension, the Brainstorming Session. The participants - who came from the academic community, the Human Rights Institutes, and other non-governmental and governmental organizations in the Nordic region - took part in the deliberations in their individual capacities.

Messrs. Asbjørn Eide (Norwegian Institute of Human Rights) and Goran Melander (Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in Sweden) chaired the Brainstorming Session, Messrs. Gudmundur Alfredsson (United Nations Centre for Human Rights), Morten Kjaerum (Danish Centre of Human Rights) and Allan Rosas (Institute for Human Rights in Finland) acted as rapporteurs.

General Assembly resolutions 44/156 and 45/155 and Commission on Human Rights resolution 1991/30 lay down in broad terms the purpose of the 1993 World Conference. As seen by the participants at the Brainstorming Session, the purpose is to review and assess the United Nations Human Rights programme; to define and enhance the human rights dimension in the overall work of the United Nations; to identify areas and to make future-oriented recommendations for possible improvement in the interpretation of standards, methods of implementation, and other promotional activities; and to make use of the opportunity which the new cooperative spirit in world affairs, the spread of democratic institutions and the introduction of human rights in participatory development processes offers for the strengthening of human rights at international, regional and national levels.

In the light of the stated purpose of the World Conference, the Brainstorming Session set out to collect a wide range of ideas about possible topics for discussion and study during the process leading up to the Conference. The emphasis was very much on substantive and procedural improvements and on innovations in the human rights programmes and activities undertaken by the organization system-wide. The World Conference should not duplicate the work of the Commission on Human Rights or of other intergovernmental organs which deal with human rights, thus avoiding discussion about country situations and alleged violations.

I. Adherence to human rights instruments

The efforts to promote ratification of and accession to international human rights treaties should be enhanced. It was noted that many human rights con-