

OUTCOME OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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The offer to contribute to the next annual volume of the "Sri Lanka Journal of International Law" in felicitation of Dr. Joseph A.L. Cooray's notable speeches and writings on matters relating to the protection of human rights is a very challenging one which I accepted with great pleasure.

My association with Joseph Cooray as members of the Human Rights Committee gave me the opportunity to learn constantly from such a resourceful and experienced constitutional lawyer. His contribution to the work of the Human Rights Committee was a matter of appreciation by all of us, and it continues to be a source of inspiration for those who are still participating in the work of the Committee. Many of his thoughts were indeed relevant to the substantive work of the World Conference on Human Rights, which took place in Vienna, Austria, from the 14th to the 25th of June, 1993.

I want to preface what I am going to say about the World Conference on Human Rights by quoting from a statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, delivered on March 29 this year at the regional meeting for Asian preparation for the World Conference.

Human rights has been today one of the cardinal challenges of civilization. People no matter where they live, increasingly demand respect for their human rights and judge the institutions of society by how well they respond to these demands. Food, shelter, employment, education and access to health care go hand in hand with demands for respect for culture, equitable and effective justice, the right to participate in government, to express one's thoughts freely and to live one's own moral and spiritual convictions. The challenge is not only felt on the national level, where the institutions of society are more fully developed. The international community has also to face the issue of how well to contribute to the effective enjoyment of human rights. This is the central objective of the World Conference and its preparatory process, the final stages of which we are entering.

The World Conference, coming at a time of greatly expanded expectations over possibilities for international action, must reflect on more profound reforms in our human rights system. In almost all areas of U.N. activity, old barriers to acting have fallen and new forms of U.N. involvement are being pragmatically invented; this should also be the case with human rights. And here, I would like to suggest as our