

*Report of the
Tunisia Monitoring Group
on the eve of WSIS Tunis 2005*

Freedom of Expression in Tunisia:

The Siege Intensifies

September 2005

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A. INTRODUCTION:

This is the second report of the Tunisian Monitoring Group (TMG) and follows the latest of a series of fact-finding missions to Tunisia by members of the group in the run to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The first mission, of six TMG members, took place from 14-19 January 2005 and led to the first report "Tunisia: Freedom of Expression Under Siege"¹ published in February 2005. The report described our initial findings and set out a series of recommendations to the Tunisian government.

The second mission, of four TMG members took place from 5-8 May to mark World Press Freedom Day and to launch and publicise, in Tunisia, the Arabic version of the report.

The third mission, of nine TMG members, took place from 6-11 September 2005, and provided the basis for our first update on freedom of expression in Tunisia. This report is released two months before the WSIS Tunis Summit, 16-18 November 2005.

During the course of the three missions the TMG has now met with over 250 individuals and over 50 organisations and institutions including members of the government and opposition, public officials, government supported organisations, independent civil society organisations, human rights defenders, journalists, publishers, librarians, private broadcasters and others. During each of our missions we have sought and been provided with access to government representatives. We welcome this dialogue and we have engaged in a frank and open exchange of views.

During the latest mission we met with the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the Minister of Communication Technologies and the Director of the External Communications Agency. In our report we acknowledge that some improvements have been made or have been promised, notably with respect to further private radio and television concessions, commitments to removal of the "depôt legal" for periodicals and some improvement in prison conditions, but serious concerns remain with respect to all of these matters

However, since January 2005, we have disappointingly witnessed serious deterioration in other conditions related to freedom of expression in Tunisia, particularly with respect to independent organisations², harassment of journalists and dissidents, independence of the judiciary, and the imprisonment of the human rights lawyer, Mohamed Abbou, for

¹ <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg>

² We report, in particular, on the cases of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH), The Tunisian Association of Magistrates (ATM), and the Tunisian Journalists Union (SJT).

voicing his opinion in articles on the Internet. Cumulatively these changes lead us to conclude that the Tunisian government is seeking to further stifle dissent on the eve of the WSIS.

In such conditions, two months before WSIS Tunis 2005, Tunisia is not a suitable place to hold a United Nations World Summit.

We urge the Tunisian government to take very seriously the recommendations we are making in this report and to show a real and immediate intent to remove the practices we have identified that violate international human rights laws and standards to which Tunisia is a signatory.

We call on the international community to take responsibility in holding Tunisia to account on its international obligations, to insist on real commitment to change and to ensure that independent voices in Tunisia are treated with the respect and tolerance of a rights-based democracy and not the abuses that we consider more characteristic of a police state.

In the following sections we set out the principal developments that we have observed since our first report.

About the Tunisia Monitoring Group

The Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG) is a coalition of 14 organisations set up in 2004 to monitor freedom of expression in Tunisia in the run up to and following the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The 14 organisations are all members of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), a global network of 64 national, regional and international organizations committed to defending the right to freedom of expression.

The third mission of the TMG was composed of representatives of Article 19, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), International Publishers Association (IPA), Index on Censorship, PEN Norway, World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC).

Other members of TMG are: Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), International PEN Writers in Prison Committee, Journalistes en Danger (JED), Media Institute of South Africa (MISA), World Association of Newspapers (WAN).

B. FACTS ON THE GROUND

1. Prisoners of opinion

In the first report of the IFEX TMG we observed imprisonment of individuals related to expression of their opinions or media activities.

We recommended to the Tunisian government to release Hamadi Jebali, editor of the weekly Al Fajr and hundreds of prisoners like him held for their religious and political beliefs and who never advocated or used violence³.

We also recommended to end arbitrary administrative sanctions compelling journalist Abdellah Zouari to live nearly 500 km away from his wife and children and guarantee his basic right to freedom of movement and expression⁴.

We further recommended release of the six cyber dissidents known as the Youth of Zarzis⁵ who, following unfair trials, have been sentenced to heavy prison terms allegedly for using the Internet to commit terror attacks.

At the time of the second report we have witnessed no progress on our recommendations. On the contrary, the situation has worsened, in particular with the imprisonment of Mr. Mohamed Abbou.

We strongly reiterate these recommendations and furthermore we call for the urgent and immediate release of human rights lawyer Mohamed Abbou.

Mohamed Abbou

The imprisonment of Mohamed Abbou has been a chilling blow to freedom of expression and the independence of the judiciary and appears to be directly linked to Tunisian government efforts to suppress dissent in the run up to the WSIS.

³ Jebali and six other leading figures of the banned Islamic An-Nahda Party went on hunger strike on 15 September 2005 to protest their continuous imprisonment and ill treatment inflicted on them in the prison of Mahdia, nearly 170 km southeast of Tunis. It is Jebali's second hunger strike since April. He went on hunger strike on April 9, and ended it on 25 April 2005, following his transfer from a prison in Sfax in the south of the country to a prison in Mahdia, a city closer to his home in Sousse. His prison conditions slightly improved after the authorities ended the solitary confinement imposed for nearly 14 years on him and other political prisoners. Jebali's wife and daughters are denied the right to have a passport.

⁴ Zouari went on hunger strike on 1 September 2005 for the second time in nearly eight months.

⁵ Hamza Mahroug, Abdel Ghafar Guiza, Ridha Belhaj Ibrahim, Omar Farouk Chelendi, Omar Rached and Aymen Mcharek; imprisoned.

Mohamed Abbou's arrest on 1 March 2005 occurred less than 24 hours after a blocked Tunisian news website⁶ ran an opinion piece in which Abbou criticized President Ben Ali for inviting Israeli Prime Minister Sharon to attend WSIS in Tunis.

The basis given for Abbou's arrest, however, was another opinion piece written by Abbou in August 2004 denouncing torture in Tunisian prisons, and following the outcry generated by the images of torture on Iraqi prisoners in the US-run Abu Ghraieb prison in Baghdad. The piece drew a parallel between torture in Tunisian prisons and in the US-run Abu Ghraieb prison in Baghdad. This piece was run on August 2004 by the same blocked news website, which Tunisians manage to read as e-mail sent by friends and relatives living abroad.

Abbou was sentenced on 28 April 2005 by a criminal court in Tunis, after a hearing that fell short of international standards for a fair trial, to three and a half years of imprisonment for publishing in 2004 statements "likely to disturb public order" and for "defaming the judicial process." He was also found guilty of a separate alleged offence of "violence" in 2002 against a female lawyer apparently close to the government.

On 10 June 2005 a Tunisian appeals court confirmed his prison sentence following another trial, described as unfair by local and international human rights groups and Tunis-based Western diplomats. As a form of punishment, Abbou was imprisoned not in any of the prisons situated in Tunis or its suburbs where his wife and children live, but in the city of Le Kef, near the Tunisian-Algerian border.

Mrs. Abbou, who was reported to have been assaulted and knocked down by plainclothes police during the first day of the trial, denied that her husband attacked his female colleague in 2002. Abbou and his wife Samia went on hunger strike at the end of July to inform the international community about the repression inflicted on "those who voice their dissent" in Tunisia.

⁶ www.tunisnews.com

2. Internet blocking

In the first report of IFEX TMG we observed blocking of websites, including news and information websites, and police surveillance of e-mails and Internet cafes.

We recommended to the Tunisia government to stop the practice of blocking websites and to cease putting Internet cafes and Internet users under police surveillance.

At the time of this second report we have witnessed no significant change and no progress on our recommendations.

We maintain this recommendation and strongly urge the Tunisian government to make significant progress in advance of the World Summit on the Information Society. Tunisian practice on this issue is in direct contradiction with commitments made by Tunisia in the WSIS 2003 Declaration. Continuation of this practice will reflect very negatively on Tunisia at a Summit concerned with Internet governance.

In January 2005 we undertook technical tests⁷ on selected Tunisian Internet Service Providers. We identified systematic Internet blocking which we believe to be operated using Smartfilter software⁸. Internet blocking was applied to wide categories of sites, but also including specific Tunisian government defined URLs.

We have discussed Internet blocking with Tunisian government representatives and with government supported civil society organisations. They confirmed to us that systematic Internet blocking takes place however government representatives asserted that blocking of political and information sites was due to their "terrorist" or "hate speech" content. Government officials were unable to describe any judicial or regulatory process that would enable such assertions to be legitimately challenged in law.

In January 2005 we identified a sample of 20 sites that we assessed to be blocked for their political and information content and which did not appear to carry any information which could be considered illegal or harmful under

⁷ Technical support was provided by the OpenNet Initiative, a partnership between the Citizen Lab at the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, the Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, and the Advanced Network Research Group at the Cambridge Security Programme at Cambridge University.

⁸ Smartfilter is manufactured by Secure Computing Inc. a NASDAQ quoted company based in San José, California. www.securecomputing.com

international law. In September 2005 we undertook further tests of the twenty sample sites. We found that nineteen of the sites identified remained blocked in the tests that we conducted.

3. Censorship of books

In the first report of the IFEX TMG we observed blocking of the distribution of books and publications.

We recommended to the Tunisian government to release banned books, end censorship, and conform to international standards for freedom of expression.

At the time of the second report we have witnessed no significant change and no progress on our recommendation.

We therefore maintain these recommendations and specifically we recommend to amend Article 8 of the Press Code by lifting the obligation (for the printer) to deposit copies of a printed book with the local prosecutor's office, the Ministry of the Interior and the chamber of deputies.

The *dépôt legal* system is still shamelessly used as a hidden form of censorship of books in Tunisia. In a country that prides itself in producing 1,400 titles a year for a population of just over 10 million, there are actually only 200-300 new titles produced per year; the rest are mainly reprints and children's books.

Publishers which dare to publish books the authorities disapprove of not only see these books being blocked at the printer's (after having been printed), but also have to face other forms of harassment, including forms of fiscal harassment. For more, see the first IFEX TMG report.

4. Independent organisations

In the first report of IFEX TMG we observed restrictions on the freedom of association, including the right of organisations to be legally established and to hold meetings.

We recommended to the Tunisia government to respect international standards on freedom of association and freedom of assembly and to grant legal recognition to independent civil society groups such as the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT), the Tunis Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary, the League of Free Writers, OLPEC, the International Association to Support Political Prisoners, the Association for the Struggle against Torture, and RAID-ATTAC-Tunisia.

At the time of this second report we have witnessed no progress on our recommendations. We have also witnessed serious new attacks on legally recognised but independent organisations including the Tunisian League of Human Rights and The Tunisian Association of Magistrates. We consider these attacks to represent a serious deterioration in respect for human rights.

We strongly reiterate the recommendation that the Tunisian government must take steps to allow independent organisations to establish without the requirement for prior political approval.

In addition we call on members of the ruling party, the RCD, to cease their attacks on the Tunisia League of Human Rights (LTDH). These attacks are quite clearly and deliberately intended to undermine an organisation which continues to vigorously defend human rights in Tunisia and whose independence should be respected.

We further call on the Tunisian government to bring to a halt arbitrary administrative measures used to destabilize the Tunisian Association of Magistrates (ATM). These measures are clearly incompatible with the independence of the judiciary.

We also call on the Tunisian government to allow the Tunisian Journalists Union (SJT) to operate freely in conformity with Tunisia's commitments under international labour law.

The Tunisian League of Human Rights

The Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH) was prevented from holding its Sixth Congress, scheduled for 9-11 September 2005,

a meeting which members of the TMG had planned, for several months, to attend as international observers. On 5 September 2005, the Court of First Instance in Tunis ordered suspension of all preparatory activities for the planned Congress. The suspension remains in place pending examination by the court of a complaint filed by twenty people close to the government and ruling party and claiming to be members or heads of some of the LTDH chapters.

"It is the 23rd court ruling against the LTDH since November 2000," said Souhayr Belhassen, Vice President of LTDH who explained how a process of restructuring this group was put in place since 2001. She said the aim was to have fewer, but more active chapters. She acknowledged that in some of the chapters eliminated "there are some persons that are pro-government, but others are democrats who have lost their chapters too".

The Minister of Justice stated to the TMG that the matter was an internal affair of the LTDH, however, in a report carried by the state-owned national daily, La Presse, on 10 September 2005, the Secretary General of the ruling party (RCD), M. Hédi M'henni, was quoted in a statement which clearly indicated an endorsement by the RCD of the action being taken against the LTDH⁹. The state-owned press gave no coverage to the views of the LTDH leadership.

Members of the TMG witnessed, on 7 September 2005, how scores of plain-clothes police blocked the streets leading to the offices of the LTDH preventing entry including the passage of a TMG assistant. Following the TMG meeting with the Tunisian Minister of Justice a seminar with international speakers and observers was permitted to proceed on 8 September at the LTDH offices.

The TMG remains deeply concerned at the intense political pressure that is being placed on the independent LTDH by the authorities and by people close to the ruling party.

The Tunisian Association of Magistrates

Attempts to destabilize the Tunisian Association of Magistrates (ATM) and to encourage a minority group of judges close to the government to take control of the ATM started after its democratically elected board spoke out against attacks on lawyers following the arrest of their colleague, Mohamed Abbou, in March 2005 and associated protests. Lawyers, including the head of the Bar Association, Abdessatar Ben Moussa were reported to have been physically assaulted at the

⁹ « Il a affirmé que la Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme (LTDH) est un acquis national qu'il convient de préserver et de consolider en évitant les voies hasardeuses où certains veulent l'engager. » La Presse, 10 September 2005

Palace of Justice in Tunis by plain-clothes police. Elected members of the Board of ATM were subsequently denied the right to freedom of assembly and expression after the Justice Ministry decided to arbitrarily change the lock on the door of their office on 31 August 2005, and empowered a minority group of magistrates close to the ruling party to take control of ATM.

The Ministry of Justice issued a statement on 23 June 2005 in which it claimed ATM was hit by an internal crisis and its Board might be toppled. It also used the state-run media to attack the elected Board and to promote the individuals it was encouraging to take control of ATM. The state-run media not only refused to give the other side of the story, but also engaged in a smear campaign against the elected Board.

A minority group of magistrates have called for the disavowal of the elected Board and for a provisional committee to manage the affairs of ATM pending a further Extraordinary General Assembly to be held on 4 December 2005. According to the elected Board of ATM, at least twenty magistrates, including members of the Board, have been involuntarily transferred from their regular work place to different parts of the country for reasons "linked to their right to express their opinions and for their activities within the association and their commitment to achieve its goals".

The Tunisian Journalists Union

The Tunisian Journalists Union (SJT) was denied the right to hold its founding congress on 7 September 2005, in violation of the Tunisian Constitution and Labour Code, which provides for the freedom to form trade unions, and in violation of international labour conventions which have been ratified by Tunisia.

On 24 August 2005, Lotfi Hajji, President of the SJT was summoned by the Police District in Tunis and kept for interrogation for nearly five hours. He was told that SJT would not be allowed by any means to hold its first congress. The police officer also told him that a scheduled conference on Journalism and Trade Unions in the Maghreb countries would also not be allowed to take place. Hajji was not provided with any administrative papers or juridical basis that would allow SJT to appeal against the position of the authorities.

On 30 August 2005, the hotel with which the SJT had signed a contract said the conference room where the congress was due to take place needed to be repaired and therefore would no longer be available. This is a common excuse given by hotel managers to Tunisian independent groups when under pressure

from the police. Simultaneously, journalists working for both the public media and privately owned media were summoned by managers and editors and asked to choose between their job and the SJT.

On 7 September 2005, members of the TMG raised the case of the SJT with Minister of Justice. No adequate explanation was provided as to why SJT should not hold its founding assembly. In the afternoon of the same day, the TMG had planned a meeting with members of the SJT at the offices of their lawyer, Chwaki Tabib. Plain-clothes police prevented members of the Board of the SJT from entering the building despite insistence by TMG members that they were not prepared to meet the lawyers without the client present. The police were unable or unwilling to provide information as to the legal grounds for their action.

5. Journalists and dissidents

In the first report of the IFEX TMG we observed restrictions on the freedom of movement of human rights defenders and political dissidents together with police surveillance, harassment, intimidation and interception of communications.

We recommended to the Tunisian government to end harassment and assaults on human rights and political activists and their relatives and bring to justice those responsible for ordering these attacks and perpetrating them.

We also recommended action to be taken against interference by government employees in the privacy of human rights and political activists and end the withholding of their mail and email.

We further recommended to lift the arbitrary travel ban on human rights defenders and political activists, including Mokhtar Yahyaoui and Mohammed Nouri.

At the time of the second report we have witnessed no progress on our recommendations. On the contrary the situation has worsened in particular in the increased harassment of independent Tunisian journalists.

We reiterate our very grave concern at systematic harassment of journalists, activists and dissidents, and urge that immediate steps be taken to remove political surveillance and harassment of individuals engaged in the legitimate defence of human rights and the right to freedom of expression.

During its second mission scheduled to coincide with NGOs activities on World Press Freedom Day, IFEX TMG documented and witnessed attacks on freedom of expression and police harassment of journalists. Attacks on freedom of expression went hand in hand with renewed smear campaigns against human rights defenders and independent journalists.

President Ben Ali has decorated one of the smear campaigners, Abdelhamid Riahi, editor at Dar-Al Anwar news group on Culture Day on 27 May 2005. This news group, which is closely tied to the government, was granted on 29 July 2005 an award allegedly for its advanced "social climate" by the state-controlled Tunisian Association of Journalists (AJT).

Sihem Bensedrine

One of the main targets of harassment and intimidation is Sihem Bensedrine, editor of the online magazine Kalima and spokesperson for the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT). For weeks she has been the target of an insulting and obscene campaign led by privately owned papers, such as Ashourouq, As-sarih and Al-Hadath, papers often used by the authorities to settle scores with human rights defenders, political dissidents and journalists.

The TMG has strongly protested this outrageous campaign.

Lotfi Hajji

Lotfi Hajji, President of the Tunisian Journalists Union (STJ), became one of the most harassed journalists by the police since the establishment of the SJT in May 2004. He is still denied the national press card and also accreditation as correspondent of the Qatari satellite TV, Al-Jazeera.

The TMG is gravely concerned by these and other cases and considers there is no legitimate basis for these forms of harassment and intimidation of individuals whose views dissent from those of the government.

6. Broadcast pluralism

In the first report of IFEX TMG we observed lack of pluralism in broadcast ownership, with only one private radio and one private TV broadcaster, both believed to be loyal supporters of President Ben Ali.

We recommended to the Tunisia government to promote genuine pluralism in broadcast content and ownership including fair and transparent procedures for the award of radio and TV broadcast licences.

At the time of this second report we note and welcome the fact that a second private radio station has been licensed and that a private television station has also been authorised. We remain concerned however that there is no transparent licensing procedure in place and that the new services, while not under state ownership, have shown no signs of genuine independence.

We reiterate the need for fair and transparent licensing procedures and recommend an independent regulatory body be established to oversee licensing of independent broadcast media.

President Ben Ali announced in July the establishment of Radio Jawhara, the second privately owned radio station since 2003.

The owners of Radio Mosaïque, Radio Jawhara and Hannibal TV, the first private TV station established in early 2005, all appear to have strong ties with the Tunisian government.

Academics and researchers point out that pluralism in broadcasting cannot gain ground in Tunisia as long as there is no independent regulatory body operating according to fair and transparent procedures set out in law.

7. Press Freedom

In the first report of the IFEX TMG we observed press censorship and lack of diversity of content in newspapers.

We recommended to the Tunisian government to take serious steps toward lifting all restrictions on independent journalism and encouraging diversity of content and ownership of the press.

At the time of the second report we have witnessed a step in the right direction (27 May 2005 announcement to abolish « dépôt légal » for periodicals, which awaits translation into law), but no other progress on our recommendations.

We therefore reiterate these recommendations.

Further we urge that the 27 May 2005 announcement to abolish «dépôt legal» for periodicals be rapidly brought into law.

We also call on the Ministry of the Interior to respect Article 13 of the Tunisian Press Code enabling the establishment of newspapers and periodicals.

IFEX-TMG welcomed President Ben Ali's announcement of 27 May 2005 to end the "dépôt legal"¹⁰ procedure for periodicals. Two opposition papers: the weekly Al-Mawkif of the Progressive Socialist Party and the monthly Attarik Al-Jedid of the Renewal Party reported some immediate improvements. Printers have been instructed to release these papers for distribution and not to keep them waiting for two or three days. The announcement is still to be put into law therefore the improvements noted so far reflect only a more efficient operation of the existing system of prior censorship.

At the same time, the TMG has witnessed at first hand the authorities refusal to allow new independent journals. Mission members, Mark Bench, Executive Director of the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) and Alexis Krikorian, Director, Freedom to Publish of the International Publishers' Association (IPA) on 10 September 2005 accompanied Sihem Bensedrine, editor of the online magazine Kalima and two other contributors to the Ministry of the Interior in Tunis to register the declaration of the establishment of Kalima. In violation of Article 13 of the Tunisian Press Code the Interior Ministry official refused to acknowledge receipt of their request. It is the fourth time since 1998 that the

¹⁰ Legal submission procedure

Interior Ministry refused to comply with Tunisian law by handing Bensedrine a receipt acknowledging that she officially informed them of her request to establish a newspaper.

As far as content is concerned, the Tunisian print media is lacking in pluralism. Lack of criticism of the government and the absence of balanced and fair reporting are two important features of the papers owned by the state and the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), as well as by the private sector press. Privately owned papers continue to avoid coverage of issues which might anger the authorities, such as corruption and government attacks on human rights.

Even the Tunisian Association of Journalists (AJT), which is not independent of government, has produced a report highlighting deterioration of the press situation in the country. Neji Bghouri, an AJT Board member, was summoned by the police district in Tunis on 7 May 2005, and, together with two other members of the Board of AJT who reportedly authored the report, accepted to stop its further distribution.

8. Torture

In the first report of the IFEX TMG we reported credible accounts of recent use of torture by the security services with impunity.

We recommended to the Tunisian government to allow independent investigation into cases of torture allegedly perpetrated by security forces.

At the time of the second report we have witnessed some progress on prison conditions, but no real progress on our main recommendation. Despite progress, prison conditions also remain a source of major concern.

We therefore restate the February recommendation and urge that the Tunisian government take every effort to completely eliminate the practice of torture by the security services.

President Ben Ali announced in April 2005 a decision to ease the inhumane conditions inflicted for years on political prisoners. In particular he announced the ending of the practice of involuntary solitary confinement, imposed on prisoners like journalist Hamadi Jebali. In addition it was announced that the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) would be allowed to visit Tunisian prisons. The TMG and other international human rights groups have welcomed this.

On the other hand we are aware that prison conditions, in other respects, have not markedly improved and remain very poor. We continue to be gravely concerned that torture remains prevalent within the practices of the security services and that documented cases of torture are not being properly investigated or open to proper independent investigation.

C. CONCLUSIONS

As the WSIS draws nearer, attacks on freedom of expression and freedom of association have escalated since January 2005.

The circle of people targeted by such attacks has also widened. It is no longer the usual group of uncompromising human rights defenders, whom Tunisian authorities have been trying to silence by a number of means, including imprisonment, police harassment and confiscation of passports.

Journalists, magistrates, academics and others are making it clear that they too wish to assert and to exercise their right to the freedom of expression, particularly at a time when the country braces itself to host the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Many thought that the WSIS would be a good opportunity for the Tunisian government to start improving its human rights record and to loosen its grip over the media, the publishing industry and the Internet.

Despite a few positive steps forward, the Tunisia Monitoring Group concluded, during its third mission, that it would be extremely difficult to achieve real improvement in respect for the right to freedom of expression without an independent judiciary and respect for the rule of law, without an independent media to hold government and public servants to account, and without freedom of assembly and association.

Tunisians of different political trends who met with TMG members maintain that they deserve to live in a democracy and that progress in terms of rule of law and the right to freedom of expression needs to be backed by the international community. They argue that democratic countries in particular should speak out and insist that the privilege of hosting a United Nations World Summit requires a demonstrable commitment to upholding internationally agreed human rights.