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General Assembly President to confer with Pope Benedict XVI on human rights

16 June 2006 – United Nations General Assembly President Jan Eliasson will meet tomorrow with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican where they are expected to discuss human rights issues.

The meeting, at the Pope's invitation, comes just two days before the inauguration of the new, strengthened UN Human Rights Council, which replaces the much-criticized UN Human Rights Commission, seen by many as ineffective.

Mr. Eliasson will make a keynote address to the Council on Monday, as will Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Ahead of the meeting Mr. Eliasson noted that the Council's creation showed that Member States can overcome differences and deliver outcomes relevant to the people of the world. "I expect the members of the Council to address the challenges before them with the same constructive spirit and commitment. We must show the world that the Council means a fresh start in the United Nations' work for human rights," he said.

The inaugural session, set to last until 30 June, will bring together high-level representatives from over 100 countries and see delegates begin concrete work to allow the Council to flesh out features that make it a stronger and more effective human rights body than its much-criticized predecessor.

These include its higher status as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, its increased number of meetings throughout the year, equitable geographical representation, and an examination of the human rights records of its own members.