

Foreword

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Human rights are the very heartbeat of freedom, which in turn is a basic right. Every human being born into this world is entitled to these rights, which are distinct from privileges, by the mere virtue of being born. It is therefore the duty of every human being to promote, protect and uphold these values. It is therefore of utmost import to have in place principles, structures and systems to ensure that these rights that are provided for and protected under the United Nations Charter and other international human rights treaties are available to all without hindrance in order to allow humanity to blossom and flourish to its fullest potential without fear or favour.

Human nature as it is has internalised and demonstrated a character of the more dominant entity bestowing upon itself the privilege, sometimes interpreted as the right, to control and often exploit the weaker one. This shortcoming calls for checks and balances such that the manifestation of freely inherited rights that shape the human condition – liberty and freedom – is not only enjoyed by every human being but is also protected and dispensed justly.

The United Nations Organization as the embodiment of the conscience of the world has taken due cognizance of this fact, hence the creation of the Human Rights Council under its aegis with the aim of promoting and protecting human rights around the world. This task, however, requires the establishment of structures and processes in order to achieve the ultimate goal of serving justice. Any deficiency in this crucial role is tantamount to failure of the system.

Eric Tistounet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and author of

several books, has long worked in the area of human rights. He has all the experience and expertise, indeed 'the right', to comment on the system and its structure. Through the chapters that have been dedicated to specific functions, lived and evaluated experiences as well as pointers at the shortcomings in the provisions of the system, the reader will gain insight into the organization's structure and the functioning methods of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

This aptly titled book takes an overview of the entire framework and then dissects the whole body to give a deep, critical and clear definition of the role each chapter plays towards the functioning of the system. Just like the human anatomy, which consists of complex systems that work in unity and coordination with one another to make the human body function correctly, the author has outlined the distinct parts of the Council's structure while describing the connecting features of the whole system. At the same time, there is no hesitation in highlighting the inadequacies and the ensuing difficulty in sometimes achieving the main objective owing to gaps in the structure or some weak links that do not provide enough support to hold the whole body together.

The author has shared his experience as a keen observer of the system and also as an insider from within, now looking on from the outside – a good vantage point. A deep understanding and good grasp of the topic is evident in the description of the background and the evolution of the system while providing an in-depth analysis. Such a task can only be undertaken by someone who deeply cares about the system and its role of preventing the violation of human rights everywhere and of serving justice.

The uniqueness of this book lies in the fact that the author is not a researcher with an interest in the area of human rights, but someone who has been part of the system in place and has an insider's understanding of its workings. This piece of work and the commentary therein can therefore be considered as authentic and as reliable as can be. Previous works on the United Nations Human Rights Council have focused mainly on the procedural description and explanation of the Council's work. In the quest to better understand the hows and whys of the system, the author goes deeper into the way procedures are formulated and laid out, thereby extracting a critical view of the methods which offers indications to the reasons for the end results.

At a time when institutions and systems are being called upon to be accountable for their actions, this work is very timely and relevant. As an institution, the United Nations is still a key body for international security and cooperation. The author has therefore not limited himself to the explanation of structures but has also added a human element to it by touching on stories such as the Rwandese and Cambodian genocides, besides other conflicts around the world. The author deserves full credit for authenticity and generosity of spirit manifested by the desire to better equip the institution to deal with future challenges.

In constructing a piece of work with a purpose, the author lays down the facts and then raises a set of questions intended to stimulate the reader into critical thinking. It therefore plays a dual role of informing and causing the reader to stop for a moment of reflection. This indeed is a very important aspect of this work, critical for any discussion on systems and reforms. The work will serve as an important tool for institution policy makers and scholars alike who will find the information very useful for their arguments regarding such structures.

The style and substance are commendable and it does make a good read for the curious and could serve as an important source of information for the more analytical mind.