



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

27 October 2005

Dear Mr. Buckley,

I would like to thank you for your letters of 2 September and 1 October 2005 concerning the situation of human rights in Tunisia and the suitability of holding the final phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in that country.

The decision to hold the second phase of WSIS in Tunisia was taken by the Council of the International Telecommunication Union, which is made up of 46 States from all regions of the world. In 2001, the Council accepted the offers of Switzerland and Tunisia to host the first and second phases of the Summit in 2003 and 2005, respectively. The United Nations General Assembly unanimously endorsed that decision.

I am convinced that the holding of this Summit in Tunis offers a good opportunity for the Government of Tunisia to address various human rights concerns, including those related to freedom of opinion and expression. Indeed, those rights are crucial for any country hoping to use information and communication technologies to advance their economic and social development. That great potential is at the heart of the entire Summit process.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to follow closely the human rights situation in Tunisia. The High Commissioner has proposed to the Tunisian authorities that they take several measures to remove obstacles to the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression and association. Those measures address some of the concerns you raised in your letter, including the release of all press-and-opinion-related prisoners, the right to free and unhindered access to print and electronic media, and an end to harassment of media professionals and human rights activists and the banning of their associations.

Mr. Steve Buckley
Chairman
International Freedom of Expression Exchange
Tunisia Monitoring Group
Toronto

In addition, through the special procedures and thematic mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights, 26 communications have been sent to the Government so far this year, the large majority of them addressing concerns related to freedom of opinion and expression and the situation of human rights defenders. And earlier this month, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression called on the Government of Tunisia to take a range of similar steps.

Finally, as with all conferences and summits held under United Nations auspices, Tunisia has committed itself, through a Conference Agreement, to providing accredited journalists and civil society groups access to the Summit venue.

I trust this information addresses your concerns and demonstrates our unwavering commitment to the rights and freedoms we both hold dear. I would be grateful if you would share this reply with the co-signatories of your letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan', written in a cursive style.

Kofi A. Annan