



Statement on behalf of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay
(read by Amerigo Incalcaterra, Representative, OHCHR Regional Office for South America)

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Truth Commission in Brazil
Brasilia, 16 May 2012

I am honoured and moved to address this distinguished audience, through my Representative for South America, on such a momentous occasion for the history of this country. We hail the establishment of this Truth Commission as an essential and long-awaited step in the process of accountability for past human rights violations, which will help Brazilians to better understand their own history and to look forward to a future with guarantees against egregious abuse.

During an official mission to Brazil in November 2009, I drew attention to the need to initiate such a Commission. Today, this Commission is a reality. This development further demonstrates that in advocating for human rights worldwide, the only way for these efforts to be effective is by championing them at home. By institutionalizing the right to truth and memory for victims and their families, the Truth Commission should not only restore their dignity, but help to reconcile Brazilian society with its past and consolidate its democracy.

For these reasons, I would like to congratulate you all for the inauguration of this Commission today. I would also like to extend my warmest congratulations to the seven members of the Truth Commission, whose demonstrated professionalism and commitment will be the underlying factor for its success.

The right to truth is a well-established principle of international law. The experience of over 30 truth commissions worldwide during the past three decades has demonstrated their importance in healing societies' wounds and bringing the voices of victims to light. By highlighting the truth about violations that took place in the past, their causes and consequences, such commissions can also bring about needed institutional and policy reform in order to prevent future abuse.

But truth Commissions are one only part of a comprehensive transitional justice strategy, including also prosecutions, reparations, vetting and other accountability or reform programmes. They should not be construed as an alternative to replace prosecutions and to prevent justice from being done. The right to justice is the cornerstone of any democratic society.

Currently OHCHR actively supports transitional justice programmes in more than 20 countries worldwide. In this regard, I would like to offer the full support of my Office in assisting the Commission, including through training, technical advice and sharing international best practices on truth commissions.