



**PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE  
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**FIRST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT**

**(GENEVA, 19 - 22 JUNE 2006)**

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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**DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GREECE**

**GENEVA, 19 JUNE 2006**

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The creation of the Human Rights Council constitutes a landmark for the UN Human Rights System.

First of all I would like to fully subscribe to the statement made this morning by the Austrian Presidency on behalf of the European Union.

The Greek government welcomes the establishment of the Human Rights Council, responsible to contribute effectively to the prevention of human rights violations, to respond promptly to human rights emergencies and to provide guidance and assistance to all countries in order to achieve the highest standards of human rights protection. An effective and efficient Human Rights Council will certainly give human rights the central role foreseen by the Charter and will further enhance the credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN human rights system.

It is perhaps now the time to recall some milestones in the Human Rights history.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been the source of inspiration of all subsequent international human rights instruments. It is a fact that the pivotal concept of the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights was already embedded in this historic text. The Commission on Human Rights has subsequently promoted other key concepts, such as the rule of law or the inter-relationship between human rights, development and democracy. Other landmark contributions to standard-setting include instruments against torture as well as, more recently, the draft Convention on Enforced Disappearances.

Beyond standard setting, the contribution on the Commission on Human Rights has been instrumental in developing new procedures for the protection of human rights. In that context, I would like to highlight the importance and the valuable contribution of special procedures.

Furthermore, the Commission has been a unique forum allowing NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions to voice their concerns and to share their experiences. I am confident

that the new Human Rights Council will continue to ensure the same active participation by civil society.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to reaffirm Greece's commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights, in accordance with the UN Charter. In this context, we have ratified all major UN and regional human rights instruments. Greece has contributed and continues to actively participate in the work of relevant UN bodies, as well as in UN Conferences in the field of human rights. We closely cooperate with UN human rights treaty bodies, as well as Special Rapporteurs, and take their recommendations into serious consideration.

More specifically in recent years, Greece has taken important steps in the field of human rights protection. May I recall that in 2001 the Greek Parliament adopted, by an overwhelming majority, a series of constitutional amendments, with a view to fully integrate into our fundamental law contemporary international standards, including those resulting from recent case-law and practice of UN and regional bodies.

By way of example, may I particularly refer to the new provision on affirmative action in favor of women, which reproduces almost verbatim the relevant provision of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Moreover, Greece has adopted, in 2002, a comprehensive legislation to combat trafficking in human beings and to ensure protection of and assistance to the victims of this scourge. A comprehensive National Action Plan has been launched to this effect, in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs. Those instruments have already yielded positive results.

Greece is determined to actively pursue this policy, in order to seriously curtail and, hopefully, eradicate trafficking in human beings, in close coordination with neighboring countries. In this context, an important Agreement for the protection and assistance of children victims of trafficking has recently been concluded with Albania.

In 2003, Greece has introduced the institution of the Children's Ombudsman, entrusted with the task to promote and protect children's rights. Significant amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure have also been adopted, in the light of relevant recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, an important legislative text against domestic violence is currently being prepared.

May I underline the importance my country attaches to the contributions of national institutions to the promotion and protection of Human Rights. In Greece such an institution has been operating since 2000, in close coordination with the Greek Ombudsman, and in full conformity with the Paris principles. All draft laws concerning human rights are transmitted to the Commission for comments prior to the submission before Parliament. The same applies to all draft reports to the UN Treaty Bodies. Greece is thus actively contributing to the important initiatives taken by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the field.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN Commission on Human Rights, which has been succeeded by the Human Rights Council has actually done a lot. However, it is a far cry for us to state that we are fully content with the current state of affairs. The violation of human rights, perpetrated on a direct or indirect way, continues to constitute a stigma for world society. The most fundamental human right, which is the right to life, is being encroached upon on a daily basis through acts intended to serve various interests, fanaticism and terrorism. The protection of individual freedoms is thus succumbing to transient expediencies with the relevant consequence of putting our reliability at stake.

A lot of work lies ahead of us in our common effort to fulfill the expectations that victims of human rights violations place on the new Council. I take this opportunity to assure you that Greece will continue to work in a constructive spirit with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the Human Rights Council will have both the strength and the capacity required to effectively respond to modern challenges in the field of the promotion and protection of human rights.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.