



STATEMENT

BY THE HON. ANTHONY ABELA, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS - MALTA

AT THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE

FIRST MEETING OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

GENEVA, 21 JUNE 2006

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you today on this auspicious First Meeting of the Human Rights Council. We are here gathered in our commitment to move on from the important role played by the Commission on Human Rights which for 60 years strove to promote and protect human rights.

The adoption of resolution 60/251 on 15 March 2006 by the United Nations General Assembly gave birth to a new organ - the Human Rights Council - and entrusted it with the noble and bold aim to further strengthen the United Nations human rights machinery, as mandated by the 2005 World Summit Outcome. This is a historic achievement and the result of a global effort that emphasizes the need to attend to human rights issues across the spectrum of multilateral activities. The negotiations that led to the establishment of the Human Rights Council have been open, transparent and inclusive. The elections of 9 May which formally selected the first forty-seven members, as well as the pledges and contributions made in the run-up to these elections, have shown that the community of nations is giving careful thought to this new organ. Significantly, the members elected have accepted to have their own human rights record reviewed.

Malta has supported and will continue to support this process of dialogue as well as the workings of the Human Rights Council itself. My country promotes democracy and respect for the rule of law including respect for human rights. These values form part of Malta's strategic objectives of its foreign policy, a foreign policy which necessarily reflects our realities and values which have fashioned our way of life.

Malta is an active member of regional frameworks such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE where it has consistently supported efforts that promote and protect human rights worldwide. We actively support all components of the United Nations' human rights machinery and are a party to United Nations human rights instruments, consistently observing our obligations. Malta has supported and contributed to the United Nations' ad hoc tribunals, particularly the establishment of the International Criminal Court and ICTY. Malta has been one of the main supporters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights since its inception and has participated in the work of the UN human rights bodies including the former Commission on Human Rights. In the new Human Rights Council, Malta has from the outset given its full support to Secretary-General Annan's proposal and it will continue to strengthen its commitment to this new body by promoting dialogue and cooperation as the primary means for protecting and strengthening human rights worldwide. It will also strive for the preservation and strengthening of the systems of special procedures which Malta considers to be one of the major achievements of the Commission on Human Rights. In this regard Malta will, in the new Human Rights Council, confirm its long-

standing policy of unrestricted cooperation with the United Nations' special procedures, including the readiness to receive their visits whenever and wherever. Malta will also continue to give special emphasis to the strengthening of gender equality, the rights of women, the rights of persons with disabilities and in particular the rights of the child. In this regard it will continue to contribute actively to the early successful conclusion of the negotiations on an 'International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and dignity of Persons with Disabilities'.

Malta also gives special attention and actively supports all efforts aimed at the protection of the basic human rights of children in the world as laid out in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child such as the right to survival, to develop to the fullest, to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. Malta will continue to support international actions and policies that respect the rights of the unborn child and will foster the best interests of children. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeks a proactive engagement in the activities of UNICEF and other international bodies and initiatives dedicated to the welfare of children.

Chair, Human Rights issues have a long, long way to be resolved world-wide. Torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, arbitrary detention, oppression of those of different beliefs and slavery are still with us today, in spite of mankind's many successes in other fields such as medicine and science. In the year 2006 we still have people forced out of their homes, discriminated

against on racial grounds, languishing in prisons and under house arrest for upholding political freedom, suffering as a result of inhuman conduct in wartime such as through the use of rape as a weapon of war and the abduction of children to be trained as soldiers.

The new Council, working with the other UN human rights machinery, particularly the revitalized Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, must address these issues, building on the cooperation of the Member States to achieve respect of their international obligations. The universal review mechanism will mean a review of all the member states' human rights obligations in a fair and equal manner. The fact that the new Council will be able to address situations of gross and systematic violations of human rights gives room for optimism. This is not an end per se, but a tool that should instigate change notably domestic change in those countries that continue to flout the human rights of their own people. The elected Member States have the onus thrust upon them to see that they not only oversee the observance and respect for human rights worldwide, but even more significantly within their own borders thereby setting an international example.

The Human Rights Council obviously does not reflect everything everyone wanted. Yet it is a start and should represent more than a simple cosmetic change to the Commission on Human Rights. As with all international instruments, it is the result of months of negotiations and concessions, of compromises and determination. As a body directly elected by the General Assembly, the new body has acquired greater transparency and legitimacy. It should not however be the only step in our desire to promote and protect

human rights. It is rather the Member States themselves that are called upon to make a difference, to let the voices of the peoples speak. The actions of the Member States themselves will speak louder, much louder than the commitments given at the Human Rights Council. The Council deserves to be a credible institution with solid foundations seeking to establish worldwide respect for human rights, the true foundation of a civilisation, where the respect for the other truly equates the respect for the self.

Mr. President,

As we inaugurate the Human Rights Council today let us remain committed to doing away with double standards and selectivity. Let us all live up to the commitments we have made in the resolution establishing this Council. We owe it to our own peoples and we owe to the millions of lives throughout the world for whom a new dawn does not bring new hope but new suffering at the hands of fellow man. We augur that, through its work and vigilance, the Human Rights Council will instigate a renewed change in the human spirit. May it's work also bring down the final curtain on man's cruelty to man.