



NORWAY

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1ST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

STATEMENT BY

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Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We find ourselves at a historic juncture – a turning point that holds great possibilities for the United Nations, and for the millions of people affected by its mandate.

Promoting and protecting human rights are, along with peace, security and development, principal objectives of the United Nations. In this session, we have the opportunity to embark on a new path in our work for human rights. We have the opportunity to rediscover common ground and find new ways forward. People across the globe, whose human rights need to be protected, have great expectations of us. We must not fail.

Mr Chairman,

Respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law is an end in itself. Our efforts to achieve these objectives need no other justification than the dignity of man. At the same time we know that respect for human rights reduces conflict and enhances social and economic development.

Our work has come a long way. We should not lose sight of what has been achieved. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, we managed to put in place an impressive body of legal instruments, norms and commitments. These instruments enjoy broad support and have inspired provisions in constitutions and national laws. They have led to the creation of national and international mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission on Human Rights has played a crucial role in defining the legal basis for the human rights machinery that is now driving the enforcement of internationally recognised human rights norms at the international, regional and national levels.

Mr Chairman,

Considering this impressive body of law, it is impossible not to be struck by the gap between obligations and actual implementation. Our task is to make sure that the framework of legally binding obligations is implemented and respected. Our point of departure has to be crystal clear – human rights are universal, and no country can disclaim their responsibility and the rights of their citizens.

The responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights lies with each and every state. However, striving to achieve human rights is also a collective endeavour. We, as governments, must accept that human rights abuses are issues of legitimate international concern. This Council has an important role to play in this regard. We must protect the victims of human rights abuses, and draw attention to human rights violations where they are not otherwise addressed. Particular attention must be given to vulnerable groups affected by conflict, and to the hundreds of millions of people deprived of their basic social, economic and cultural rights as a result of poverty.

National conditions and capabilities differ. We should therefore strive to build a credible culture of dialogue and cooperation to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights. Dialogue should not however preclude constructive criticism when this is required. Regardless of the difficulty of its task, the Council on Human Rights must never refrain from addressing severe human rights problems, whenever and wherever they occur.

We must act on the close linkages between human rights and conflict. Gross human rights violations are invariably an advance warning as well as a by-product of armed conflict. Protecting human rights under these conditions is vital. The inadequacy of our response is seldom more obvious than in situations of armed conflict. The efforts by the international community to prevent and alleviate human suffering caused by unrest and war are often too little to late. The Human Rights Council has an important contribution to make in this regard.

The nature of human rights challenges has changed over the years. International terrorism has forced us to reflect on the balance between human rights and the need to protect individuals from acts of terrorism. Human rights should never be a trade-off in the fight against terrorism. On the contrary, democracy, the rule of law and human rights are essential components of any successful long-term strategy to combat terrorism. Our commitment to these norms is put to the test in times of crises. There can be no doubt that the prohibition of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment is non-derogable under international law.

Mr Chairman,

We know that there are many challenges to be faced in our work in the new Council. However internal criticisms and diverging views are not necessarily a sign of weakness. In an organisation encompassing 191 Member States, it is evident that we will have to deal with situations and issues where we have different views.

The Members States of the Human Rights Council will be held accountable to their commitment to abide by the highest human rights standards. No country will be beyond scrutiny. At the same time the Council has a strong mandate to deal with the human rights of all people in all countries. The Council cannot look into every corner of the world at the same time. This must not prevent it from addressing legitimate concerns in states that are not currently being examined under the Universal Periodic Review.

We must retain and strengthen the best of what we have established in order to effectively implement human rights. This includes the system of the special procedures and the active participation of national institutions, NGOs and civil society. The commitment and engagement of NGOs are essential in the challenges we face within the field of human rights. In the review process of mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the Commission, we find it essential that the independent role of the special procedures is maintained.

In the work of the Council we would also like to see that enhanced focus is given to the essential work of human rights defenders, who are at the front line of promoting human rights worldwide. In line with the UN Summit's resolve to support further mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system, Norway encourages all relevant UN bodies, in particular at the country level, to further strengthen their engagement to promote and protect human rights, including through giving due consideration to the important role of human rights defenders.

Mr Chairman,

The political will and commitment of the Member States and the international community will be as important for our success to making the new Council a better tool for meaningful promotion and protection of human rights, as any changes in structure and working methods. To this end, we, as an observer state, believe it is essential that questions about the modalities of the Council and its working methods are dealt with in an open and inclusive process.

I pledge our full support for the challenging task of making this new body a strong and effective one. Norway will particularly emphasize the importance we attach to the early adoption by the Human Rights Council of the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We are of the opinion that the adoption of the draft declaration will strengthen promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. Once the declaration is adopted, it can potentially serve as a comprehensive framework for partnership between States and indigenous peoples.

Mr Chairman,

The establishment of the Human Rights Council presents a unique opportunity to reinvigorate efforts to protect human rights. Millions of people across the globe are watching to see whether we succeed or fail in this endeavour. The serious work we all pledged to take up when we adopted resolution A/60/251, to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, must now begin.

Thank you.