



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE IN GENEVA

STATEMENT
BY
LATVIA

H.E. Dr. Artis Pabriks
Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Ms. High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. President, I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation for the tireless efforts by you and the Council's Vice-Presidents in guiding the work of this body, as well as thank the High Commissioner, Madame Arbour, for the unconditional support of her office to the Council.

The world needs an efficient intergovernmental body that deals with human rights. The United Nations as the only truly global organisation is uniquely placed to promote the respect for human rights. Therefore, we must mobilise all our strength to ensure that the UN is known and respected for its adherence to the principle "responsibility to protect". Responsibility to protect was strongly endorsed by the Heads of States in the 2005 Summit Outcome Document, and we must spare no effort to develop this principle into a powerful international tool that ensures there is no impunity for shameful failure to act. We must also remember that responsibility to protect means the protection of the vulnerable, not of the political interests of the Government. Tragedies like the one still continuing in Darfur clearly show the urgent need to afford this responsibility the highest priority. Undoubtedly, the protection and promotion of human rights - first and foremost, is the responsibility of any national State, but an effective Human Rights Council is one of the essential elements for ensuring this human responsibility. Therefore, we must make a common effort to achieve the goals we set for ourselves when we decided to create the Council.

It is evident, also from the recent experience of my own country - Latvia - that all efforts by the Government to honour this responsibility and to make protection and promotion of human rights its highest priority have immediate beneficial impact on the country's development and security, and we are happy to share our expertise and lessons learned.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the first year of the work of the Council, and we are reaching a critical stage in finalising the decisions on the modalities of its work and on the reform of institutions associated with the Council. In this regard, Latvia fully aligns itself with the statement made by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the European Union.

Latvia highly values the important innovations introduced in the Council - the standing nature will make it more responsive to human rights emergencies, to ensure rapid response to crisis situations. The first year of work has proven that. The introduction of a 'universal periodical review mechanism', in its turn, provide an objective peer review of the human rights situation in each state, starting with Members of the Council. We hope there will be a genuine dialogue with one aim - to further promote human rights in the country under review. I would also like to reiterate our hope that along with these important innovations, the best features of the former Commission on Human Rights - the system of special procedures, expert advice and complaint procedure, will be preserved and further developed by the Council.

Mr. President,

Unfortunately, during the year since the establishment of the Council we have observed a worrying tendency of failure to co-operate with its mechanisms. Since such a failure undermines the credibility of the Council, we must address it without delay. One way of doing that would be to revitalize the initiative of standing invitations to all mechanisms of the

Council. In this regard I wish to confirm that the standing invitation Latvia issued in 2001 with respect to the special procedures of the then active Commission on Human Rights remain valid with respect to the Council and its mechanisms. I also wish to propose to the Council to develop a plan of action aimed at universalization of the standing invitations by encouraging all States, particularly those 28 Member States of the Council that have not yet done so, to join the 56 countries from all regions that have already pledged to extend full co-operation to the relevant human rights mechanisms. We hope to be able to present a detailed proposal in a near future and invite all like-minded countries to join this initiative.

In 2005, the world leaders agreed to double the budget of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights over the next five years. It is also my country's firm belief and commitment to strengthen the UN's capacity in the protection and promotion of human rights. It is with this recognition of the paramount role the Office plays in helping States to build their capacity and providing the technical assistance where necessary, Latvia plans to double its voluntary contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We will apply the same policy with respect to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. We hope that the quality and real impact of the work carried out by these offices will persuade member states to authorize further increases in the financial support they provide to the Offices in the years ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is our belief that investing in national human rights mechanisms is an important tool for promoting human rights through positive engagement. Twelve years ago the Latvian Human Rights Office was created, and Latvia became the first country in the Central and Eastern Europe where an independent human rights office had been established according to the so-called Paris principles. During the years of operation the Latvian Human Rights Office has done tremendous work. In order to bring human rights protection to a new level, on 1st January 2007 the new Ombudsman Law came into force, whereby an Ombudsman institution is established on the basis of the Latvian Human Rights Office, thereby building on its past achievements. The main task of the new institution is to monitor the implementation of the human rights obligations and, as a new element, to promote good governance. I believe that a strong, independent and effective Ombudsman institution or national human rights office is a long-term investment in promotion of human rights and strengthening democracy for any country.

Mr. President,

During the next several months we will face the difficult task of making the Council fully operational. We will only be able to succeed if we summon the political will to arrive at viable and sustainable solutions. None of the Council Member States will be able to attain absolutely everything they desire from the reform process. We should not view the negotiations for these reforms as a zero-sum game. It is natural for different countries to have different priorities and different approaches, but it is surely in our common interest to adopt an inclusive approach to the reform process and to strive to achieve positive changes, to make the Human Rights Council work up to its promise and potential.

Thank you, Mr. President