



STATEMENT BY
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DENMARK
AT THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Mr President,

Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council,

Mrs High Commissioner

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Initially I wish to endorse fully the statement by Dr. Rupel on behalf of the European Union.

Mr President,

With almost 200 member states, the United Nations family represents a unique and unrivaled melting pot of cultural and political diversity. It is the World's first and foremost forum for dialogue among nation states.

Human rights are universal. That is why it is so important that we have the Human Rights Council as the central platform to promote universal adherence to human rights and as the key forum for dialogue within the United Nations on human rights issues. Furthermore, it should be used to reduce misunderstandings and mistrust among different opinions, civilizations, cultures – and religions. The need for dialogue cannot be disputed. This includes dialogue on freedom of expression and

freedom of religion and it means accept of differences of opinion and respect for religious feelings.

Mr President,

It is up to us – the member states of the United Nations – to secure that the Council indeed becomes this central platform. It requires full use of the toolbox developed since the establishment of the Human Rights Council.

One of the yardsticks in this regard is the Universal Periodic Review to be launched next month when sixteen states are up for review. We feel confident that the Universal Periodic Review provides a unique tool in the protection and promotion of human rights through monitoring and dialogue. In this sense Denmark sees the Universal Periodic Review as a confidence building measure.

Non Governmental Organizations and National Human Rights Institutions are important stakeholders in observing and warning about human rights violations all over the world. We are therefore very pleased with the role foreseen for NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions in the Universal Periodic review. We hope they to the fullest possible extent will become actively involved in this process. Whether

they represent specific concerns such as the rights of indigenous people, or are more broadly founded, their participation is an important element in making the Universal Periodic Review credible and facilitating dialogue.

Another yardstick will be the review at this session of Special Procedures mandates. We need to strengthen – not weaken – the Special Procedures, their independence and efficiency. They are the eyes and ears of the Human Rights Council, but are not always appreciated by states under scrutiny. All states must cooperate unreservedly with them in good faith and take their recommendations seriously. We will counter all efforts to weaken Special Procedures mandates.

Mr President,

Our preoccupation with making the Human Rights Council work, must not deflect our focus from another central human rights institution: The High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is of paramount importance to preserve the independent functioning of this office. All attempts to encroach the independence by micromanagement or any other means must be consistently redressed. Denmark will actively render our support in this regard.

Mr President,

Our society is based on democratic values and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Freedom of expression is one of the core human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and is a necessity in democracy. It is a right also enshrined in the Danish Constitution where censorship is prohibited. It secures the right for all citizens to express their opinions on all matters and to exert influence on the shaping and changes of the very societies in which we live.

The concrete exercise of the freedom of expression may not always be convenient for our governments. Such is democracy.

And dissatisfaction with a concrete exercise of the freedom of expression can **never** justify death threats or indeed killing another person. In a democratic society based on the rule of law everybody must play by the rules. Decisions on whether the law is violated pertain to the courts and not to the government.

It goes without saying that in a democratic society freedom of expression is one of those rights that have to be balanced against other rights.

Mr President,

In connection with the recent re-publication of a cartoon of the prophet Muhammad it has become clear that many Muslims have felt their religion offended.

Let me emphasize that the position of the Danish Government is clear: We condemn any action that attempts to demonize people on the basis of their religion or ethnic background. We expect all religions to respect each other. And we respect Islam as one of the world's major religions as well as their religious symbols, as we respect all religious creeds and communities.

Mr President,

The Danish Government takes the concerns voiced by large numbers of Muslims very seriously. We have seen demonstrations in several countries, and we listen to the intense debate going on in various fora. We appreciate that those who feel hurt have exercised their democratic rights and expressed their anger in most instances by

peaceful means. This is the way forward: Dialogue, collaboration and cultural understanding – not an endless spiral of misunderstandings and further polarization. That is why the Danish Government continues to actively promote a number of dialogue initiatives at all levels – between governments as well as among civil societies.

Denmark is already actively engaged in the Alliance of Civilizations. Let us use also this new laudable and important forum as a global platform for discussing how to overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions and polarization. In the community of man there are differences between cultures. We shall see these differences as an asset, not as an offence and learn to live with and respect these differences. But these differences must stand on common ground and that common ground is human rights.

Mr President,

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration sixty years ago, new ways and means of actively exercising the right of freedom of expression have become available. The age of globalization with its access to the Internet and satellite television have provided opportunities that could not be imagined just a few years ago. We have vast

and fast, formal and informal means of communication. News travel fast indeed - faster than ever before. It is an irreversible trend.

This development – which I welcome – also challenges the boundaries of human rights and create dilemmas. It can thus at times bring the protection of human rights at odds with the feelings of many people in different societies because what we feel most for may differ.

Mr President,

In this 7th session of the Council we have a broad agenda before us. We wish this Council to prove its role as the central human rights body. We wish it to deal with all issues of concern. This includes both thematic issues and situations not permanently on the agenda, but requiring the Council's attention, where we have to stand up to our responsibility and cooperate and support each other in improving human rights situations.

By way of concluding let me leave you with the following observations:

For many years we have been talking about a “culture of impunity” – and tried to redress this culture. It is important to continue to do so unabated. But it is at least equally important to combat what I see as an emerging “culture of indifference” – a culture where we remain indifferent to the sufferings of other people, to violations of their human rights. Through human rights we must alleviate and combat the sufferings in the world. We can easily create more sufferings, but our task is to prevent the sufferings of individuals and the conflicts of the World.

Thank you.