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STATEMENT BY
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OF THE
REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY
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Madame High Commissioner, Mr. President, Excellencies,

I welcome and appreciate the opportunity to participate at this session of the Human Rights Council once again. Hungary aligns herself with the statement made by the Presidency of the European Union, delivered by the Foreign Minister of Slovenia.

This main session of the Human Rights Council comes at an important moment in the history of defending human rights. 2008 sees the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as 15 years of the existence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Human Rights Council is best placed to celebrate the breakthrough the Universal Declaration represented at the time of its adoption, and has ever since. This double anniversary provides us a unique chance to look back, and take stock, of what we have achieved since 1948.

Over the past 60 years, humanity has made extraordinary progress in the promotion and protection of human rights, largely thanks to the creative force generated by the Universal Declaration, which is undoubtedly one of the most influential documents in history. It is remarkable that it is full of idealism, but also of determination to learn from the past and to not repeat the same mistakes. The Universal Declaration put human rights, for the first time in history, as universal values at the center of international relations. It was the first international recognition of the idea that every human being, everywhere, and under all circumstances, is entitled to his or her human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The values of the universality of human rights, the ideals of justice and human dignity as enshrined in the Universal Declaration, were reaffirmed at the Vienna World Conference in 1993. States have also reaffirmed their commitment to the provisions of the Declaration at the 2005 Millennium Summit.

As the High Commissioner observed, this reaffirmation shouldn't come as a surprise. The Universal Declaration inspired the constitutions of about 90 states and the charters of more than 60 international human rights instruments, which constitute a comprehensive system of legally

binding fundamental treaties. All states have ratified at least one of the nine core human rights treaties, and 80 per cent of them have ratified four or more.

Mr. President,

On the agenda of the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review has the potential to make a difference. The UPR mechanism is based primarily on the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even in the absence of ratification by the reviewed state of a certain international instrument, the Declaration is the source to turn to. In order to create a lasting legacy, and for it to turn out to be a serious, credible and useful instrument, the UPR process must be effective, transparent as well as efficient. The cooperative approach of the review process, paired with a genuine and self-critical stance on the part of the state under review, holds the promise of making a real impact.

The UPR mechanism, together with the treaty bodies and the special procedures, makes the system of human rights protection complete and functional. This system has a far-reaching capacity for review and assistance.

Hungary will follow with keen interest the proceedings of the UPR mechanism. At this juncture, we would also like to signal that we will not avail ourselves of the privileges accorded to states in the institution-building package. Thus, Hungary will not request that one of the Troika rapporteurs be from our own regional group, nor will we request the substitution of a rapporteur. We hope that others will act likewise.

Mr. President,

Over the past year, we witnessed the start of the review, rationalization and improvement of the mandates of special procedures. Some important achievements have been made, but a lot still remains to be done. As one of the main achievements of the former Commission on Human Rights, the system of special procedures provides a unique and irreplaceable web of protection for civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. All efforts should be aimed

at improving, and where necessary, rationalizing this system. It is imperative that the review of specific mandates does not take place in isolation, and that we have an overriding vision as to how the system should look like at the end of the review process. Special procedures mandate holders should continue to be accorded full support and cooperation during this review period in order to avoid any protection gap for the victims of human rights violations.

Mr. President,

Now let me share some thoughts with you on an issue close to my heart. My country supported and welcomed the consensus resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council last September on establishing a Forum on Minority issues. As the successor of the former Working Group on Minorities of the Commission on Human Rights, the Forum is expected to provide a more elaborate space for dialogue and exchange of views between all the stakeholders, including the representatives of minority communities, on the subject. I truly believe that, in our era, the challenge before us is to strengthen the recognition of the fact that minorities are a source of inspiration and collective enrichment to the countries where they live. Guided by the principles laid down in the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, we express our firm conviction that the Forum will be widely recognized, efficient and result-oriented.

Another aspect I would like to highlight is the significance of the full and unfettered participation of non-governmental and civil society organizations in the work of the Human Rights Council. I believe that, although several improvements have been made with regard to the participation of NGOs in the institution-building package adopted last June, additional efforts need to be made in order to facilitate further progress. In this regard, we would definitely see the purpose of widening the possibilities for interaction for NGO representatives in the UPR process at the working group level, too. The participation of civil society in our interactive debate to this end would further enrich the dialogue, and would bring the Council's work closer to the actors at the national level.

Mr. President,

I would also like to commend the work carried out by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Hungary is pleased with the direction the Office took under the able guidance of Ms. Louise Arbour. We are also grateful for, and appreciate, the enhanced dialogue between the High Commissioner and member states, which enables us to closely follow the activities of the OHCHR.

Hungary welcomes the transfer of the seat of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women to Geneva. After 25 years in existence, the Committee held its first session in Geneva in January 2008. This development is special to me since I was among those women foreign ministers who originally proposed and supported this move. The relocation of the Committee to Geneva provides, in our view, a significant step towards a more consolidated human rights treaty body system, with all treaty bodies now fully serviced by the OHCHR.

As other Women Ministers, I am convinced that the Human Rights Council has an essential role to play to strengthen the human rights of women. Its resolution on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations provides a crucial framework:

- to encourage the international community to pay systematic attention to the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,
- to urge all stakeholders to take into full account both the human rights of women as well as a gender perspective in the Universal Periodic Review,
- to request all special procedures and other mechanisms of the Council to systematically integrate a gender perspective into the implementation of their mandate and to include in their reports information on human rights of women.

We as Women Ministers extend our support to the Office of the High Commissioner, whose work on the advancement of human rights of women we appreciate fully.

Mr. President,

Before concluding, I would like to touch upon a recent personal experience of mine. It was indeed stimulating for me to participate in the first Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Madrid this January. Hungary commends the role that Spain and Turkey have played in convening the event, as well as the role of the UN High Representative for the AoC and former President of Portugal, Mr. Jorge Sampaio. Regarding the meeting in Madrid, I assure you that the importance of the inter-religious and inter-cultural approach taken at the Forum to make our world a better and more secure place may serve as an inspiration to this Council as well.

Mr. President,

The story of the Universal Declaration is still unfolding before our eyes today. There are millions who are still denied the full realization of their human rights, and to them, we have a moral obligation to show that the Declaration is not merely a dream, but a reality they can achieve as well. In this regard, our vision remains the same: to empower the powerless and to give a voice to the voiceless under the watchful eyes of the Human Rights Council. Therefore, Hungary stands ready to fully cooperate in ensuring the complete and effective protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

Thank you, Mr. President.