

ADDRESS
BY Mr. GIANNI VERNETTI,
STATE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
TO THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
(GENEVA, MARCH 5, 2008)

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour for me to take the floor, on behalf of the **Italian** Government, on the occasion of the seventh session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Italy fully supports the statement of the Slovenian Presidency, on behalf of the European Union: we are determined to pursue our ongoing efforts to make a substantial contribution to the objectives of the Council.

Also, I would like to take this opportunity to greet the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Madame Louise Arbour, on behalf of the Italian Government. Allow me to renew Italy's sincere gratitude for her tenacious commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

this session of the Council falls in the year of the **60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. The Declaration marked a turning point in the history of human rights, enshrining in a single document the fundamental principles of human coexistence, regardless of cultural, religious, economic and social differences. Therefore, it embodies the 'common language' that everybody, States, international organizations, civil society organizations and private citizens, can speak when human rights are at stake. A 'language' that – as universally recognized – has attained the status of international customary law.

This is an important legacy the Declaration leaves to us. In the year of its 60th anniversary, we must once again strongly reaffirm the universality, the indivisibility and the interdependence of these principles. However, the contradiction between what is written in the Declaration and what happens in reality remains striking. It challenges every day our capacity and our determination to live up to the expectations the Declaration raised worldwide.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

The best way to honour the Declaration is to work towards the concrete implementation of its provisions. This session of the Council provides us with a good opportunity to address the most urgent and critical human rights issues and to strengthen the capacity of the Council to tackle them. We should not miss it by letting political or ideological confrontation overcome us. My Government has constantly advocated the defence of human rights through dialogue and cooperation. Moreover, we are convinced that the promotion of democracy and respect for fundamental rights can create the conditions for peace, security and prosperity. I hope that this spirit – which is the same spirit that inspired the Declaration sixty years ago – will guide us during this important session.

Therefore, I will recall our strong support to all forms of dialogue among cultures and welcome the organization during this session of a **panel dedicated to intercultural dialogue on human rights**, which will give us a unique opportunity to have an open discussion on issues of critical importance. Italy hopes that this initiative will enhance our mutual understanding and will have a positive impact on the functioning of the Council.

Italy is confident that the current system of special procedures aimed at protecting human rights, thanks to the decisions to be taken during this session, will be maintained and reinforced. **Country and thematic mandates** are indeed crucial tools for the Council's action. Moreover, some of them are of particular importance

as they deal with situations that require full attention and cooperation by the international community.

In this regard, I would like to mention the mandate of the Special Rapporteur of the Secretary General for **Myanmar**. Italy wishes this mandate to be renewed and strengthened so as to enhance the collaboration between the Government of Myanmar and the Special Rapporteur, recently resumed after several years of interruption. To this end we strongly encourage the Government of Myanmar to give a concrete follow up to the recommendations put forward in the last report of the Special Rapporteur. We believe that Myanmar must remain high on the agenda of the international community as well as of the Human Rights Council, also in the light of the latest developments concerning the announcement of the constitutional referendum to be held in May 2008 and general elections planned for 2010. We expect the process to be credible and inclusive and in full compliance with international legal guarantees and human rights standards. We also believe that the Council must remain seized of this issue, in line with the commitments undertaken at the Special Session on Myanmar.

Let me underline that mandates can also be an important vehicle of technical assistance and cooperation. Bearing this in mind, Italy will be working to extend the mandate of the Independent Expert on **Somalia**. There is an increasing need for addressing the current human rights situation in Somalia, characterized by, inter alia, a growing number of internal displaced persons and recurrent violence affecting civilians. The Human Rights Council must devote its attention to Somalia and find ways and means to keep the Somali crisis in the focus of the international community. Italy believes that the Independent Expert should continue to make his valuable contribution in this regard with the support of a resolution focused on cooperation and technical assistance, which could help the efforts of the Transitional Federal Government in this field.

The situation in **Darfur** remains worrisome. During the last session, the Council decided to request the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in

all the regions of Sudan to ensure effective follow-up and to foster the implementation of the recommendations identified in the first report of the Group of Experts. I would like to stress that the full implementation of the prioritized recommendations indicated in the Report is a crucial step towards the enhancement of the human rights situation in Darfur.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

Once again here in Geneva, I would like to renew Italy's strong commitment towards the universal abolition of the death penalty. The recent approval of a resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty by the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly is an extraordinary result which reflects the growing trend towards the abolition of the **death penalty**. At same time, the approval of the resolution is a starting point that must be followed by its concrete implementation worldwide. We are looking forward to the report that will be issued by the Secretary General. We hope that the Secretary General will be in a position to report significant progress in the implementation of the resolution. We are also interested in the possibility, which has been suggested by some interlocutors and actors in the civil society, of appointing a personality that might represent a reference for the international community in the pursue of a global moratorium of executions. To this end, my country will continue to work in close collaboration with the States that have supported the campaign for the UNGA resolution, and with those that did not share our commitment, but are ready to discuss this issue. Let me just recall that the resolution was supported by a cross-regional alliance, composed of countries belonging to all regional groups, which also proves how spread the anti-death penalty sentiment is today.

Allow me also to stress the importance attached by Italy to the issue of **education on human rights**, especially in the year of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration. Italy welcomes the work of the High Commissioner in this field and the various initiatives already envisaged both at the national and international level aimed

at strengthening public awareness about the Declaration. Education on human rights is a key component of their implementation and respect, as recognized by many important international instruments. In particular, I would like to underline the powerful role that international and national actors, including UN agencies, national institutions and media, can play in this context.

Finally, I would like to mention the priority that Italy attaches to the question of equitable access to safe water. In light of this commitment, Italy is determined to work actively to pursue its realization and will support an action at this session of the Human Rights Council.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

In concluding my speech, I would like to thank all of you for your kind attention, and extend my very best wishes for a successful session to all Delegations. We have a chance to prove that the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are still full of vitality and effective. We should not miss it.

Thank you Mr President.