



SLOVAKIA

**7th Session of the Human Rights Council
High-Level Segment**

Address by

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and
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Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I make this statement in my combined capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia.

First, let me speak on behalf of the Council of Europe whose mission is to defend human rights, rule of law and democracy at all-European level.

This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2009, the Council of Europe will celebrate its 60th anniversary as well. While the Council of Europe's vision is essentially a regional one, Europe does not and must not live in isolation. From the beginning, the Council of Europe's human rights work was inspired by and is deeply indebted to the Universal Declaration. As far back as 1950, the European Convention on Human Rights was adopted by European governments resolved "to take the first steps for the collective enforcement of certain of the rights stated in the Universal Declaration". Other human rights instruments were added in subsequent years, such as the European Social Charter, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Since its creation, the Council of Europe has been able to develop a strong regional system of human rights protection and we are keen to share our experience with others so as to advance our common objective of full respect of everyone's human rights.

In March 2007, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted decisions in which they agreed to take further steps to enhance synergy between the activities of the Council of Europe and those of the United Nations on matters relating to human rights. Over the past year, as a result of these decisions, much progress has been made by both organisations in stepping up this co-operation.

Let me highlight, at this point, some of the fields in which co-operation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe has been and could be carried out in the future:

Human rights education: several joint programmes and projects have been successfully carried out. Moreover, the Council of Europe has recently joined with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNESCO to implement the UN Plan of Action (2005-2009) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

Children's rights: the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse was opened for signature in October 2007. The Convention, along with an initiative currently being launched to promote positive parenting and ban corporal punishment in Europe, complements the recommendations of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children.

Human rights defenders: earlier this year, the Committee of Ministers adopted a Declaration on the protection of human rights defenders and promotion of their activities. Marking the 10th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, it recalls this Declaration and invites the Council of

Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to work closely with, inter alia, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

In an exchange of letters between Madam High Commissioner Lousie Arbour and Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe last year, it was agreed to set up six-monthly meetings between staff members of the Office of the High Commissioner and those of the Council of Europe with a view to exchanging information about their respective activities and identifying possible areas of co-operation. Madam High Commissioner visited Strasbourg in April of last year, where she addressed the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. She also gave an address at the opening of the judicial year of the European Court of Human Rights in January 2008.

Racism and Intolerance: the Council of Europe is very active in combating racism and intolerance, in particular through its European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). ECRI is ready to increase co-operation with the UN in the field of racism, for example by inviting the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance to one of its plenary meetings.

It is only natural for the Council of Europe to contribute to the Universal Periodic Review. Upon invitation by the Office of the High Commissioner, our organisation has already provided information relevant to the human rights situation in each of the member states of the Council of Europe selected for review during the first and second sessions. I am hopeful that such contributions will continue so that the process can benefit from the vast experience of the Council of Europe in monitoring the compliance of member states with human rights standards and can build upon the conclusions of the Council of Europe independent human rights monitoring mechanisms. The Council of Europe also stands ready to assist member states in the implementation of recommendations to improve the human rights situation that will result from the UPR process. All this will lead to consistency in the protection of human rights, particularly in the European region.

The increasing commitment to enhancing co-operation in the human rights field that the United Nations and the Council of Europe have shown over the past year has been very encouraging. We must continue in the same vein, working together whenever the opportunity arises, so as to obtain the best possible synergies in pursuing our common objectives. At the same time, the Slovak Chairmanship fully supports a broader framework of co-operation between our two organizations as set out in the regular bi-annual resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly. In this regard, my country will work towards submitting another draft resolution on mutual co-operation to the 63rd UN General Assembly and participate actively in the drafting process.

Mr. President,

I would now like to make a few observations on the current developments within the Human Rights Council from the national point of view of Slovakia.

We consider the present session of the Council a very important one for the future work of this young body. Now that the institutional building process has been concluded, the Council must focus on the fulfillment of its substantive mandate, which is to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

In our opinion, the Council must be capable to quickly respond to crisis situations. Any recommendations adopted by the Council should be oriented toward pragmatic solutions and lead to concrete improvements realized in co-ordination with other UN bodies, international organizations and concerned countries. In this regard, the idea of elaborating an early warning mechanism deserves our attention.

We are pleased that the process of the review, rationalization and improvement of the mandates of special procedures has been well under way. Slovakia pays great attention to the system of special procedures, which are often called eyes and ears of the Council. During this session, new special procedures mandate holders will be appointed for the first time. We are also looking forward to the election of members of the Advisory Committee.

As for the Universal Periodic Review, we consider it the most distinctive feature of the new Council from its predecessor and suppose it should become one of its main "trademarks". We are all aware of the high expectations linked to the new review system. This is a window of opportunity for the Council to establish itself as an effective and credible body of the UN system. There should be no delay and we do hope that an objective, efficient and transparent process gets under way as soon as possible. The first and second sessions of the UPR working group will be followed with particular interest as they will set an example for all future proceedings. The review of countries should be conducted in an objective manner and fully in compliance with the UNGA resolution 60/251 and the Institutional package adopted in the Council resolution 5/1. We would also like to underline the importance of involving independent experts within the UPR process.

Before concluding, I would like to draw your attention to the candidature that the Slovak Republic has submitted for the forthcoming May elections to the Human Rights Council. Slovakia was never a member of the former Commission on Human Rights and we hope to obtain a seat in the Council for the first time during the term 2008 to 2011. In this regard, we would like to underline the need to provide for an adequate geographic rotation within the Council.

Both at national level and internationally, the Slovak Republic is fully committed to the universal protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. I do strongly believe that my country is well capable to contribute in a constructive manner to the everyday work of the Council. Supposing that Slovakia's bid would be successful, we want to act in the spirit of dialogue and co-operation among member countries while having in mind the basic objective to advance the cause of human rights worldwide.

In this sense, let me wish you every success in your deliberations and the work of the 7th Human Rights Council regular session.

Thank you for your attention.