



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

United Nations Human Rights Council
7th session
(Geneva, 3 - 28 March 2008)

High-Level Segment

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 3 March 2008

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Dear Mr Secretary General,
Dear President of the Council,
High Commissioner,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor to address, on behalf of the European Union, the Human Rights Council upon the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* align themselves with this statement. The Universal Declaration continues to be "a common standard of achievement" - today just as much if not more than nearly sixty years ago when adopted. It continues to inspire us in our quest for human dignity and equality for all.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms has also achieved *universal recognition*. This is a cause for celebration. While we might still differ in the interpretation of some rights and freedoms, we especially continue to lag behind as regards their implementation. Full implementation of human rights remains a goal for all regions of the world and none can claim exclusivity or be patronizing with regard to human rights.

Mr. President,

This year we shall also be celebrating 15 years since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which established a blueprint for our understanding and our actions in the modern and global human rights context. The European Union fully subscribes to the interrelatedness and interdependence of all human rights: civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Based on the original UDHR vision, this anniversary year provides an opportunity to further reinforce this indivisibility of all human rights.

Later this year we shall also mark the 15th year since the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. At this solemn anniversary European Union also wishes to express its profound appreciation and admiration for the leadership and vision provided by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mme Louise Arbour, in the promotion and protection of human rights. We commend her for the expansion of the Office of the High Commissioner, including through providing a presence in the field, as well as for spearheading the integration of human rights into the wider United Nations system.

Mr. President,

I took part in the first session of the Human Rights Council less than two years ago, as well as last year's High Level Segment of the 4th session of the Council. I have witnessed the development of the Council, including the challenging process of institution building.

Last year was very important for the Human Rights Council. With the ability to meet throughout the year, with the possibility to create country mandates or to call Special Sessions - the Council is provided with a solid foundation to become the most important UN human rights body.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

Mr. President,

The European Union has been an early and steady supporter of the Council's Universal Periodic Review. We look forward to the start of the UPR this April. The EU member states will approach it in good faith, seriously and without complacency. It is hardest to take an honest look at one's own human rights performance and the UPR should help us do just that: by assessing our achievements, challenges and needs in fulfilling human rights norms and standards and by enabling the exchange of information, advice and best practices in this regard.

While the UPR will be addressing human rights situations in all countries, this clearly should not prevent the Council from looking into situations that due to their urgency or severity demand the Council's attention outside the UPR's framework. This will make or break the Council's credibility vis-a-vis the wider public. Let us not forget that the expectations of people around the world are high and that the Council shall be judged on the basis of its responsiveness and effectiveness in dealing with human rights issues and situations.

The European Union will continue to engage all interested states and other stakeholders in order to make the Human Rights Council a success. It should be a body capable of promptly and effectively addressing thematic and urgent country-specific situations and issues. The European Union will continue to work on the review of mandates for special procedures. We pledge to constructively engage in all forthcoming initiatives aimed at furthering human rights protection and promotion.

Mr. President,

At this session the European Union will be presenting initiatives to extend the mandates of the special rapporteurs for Burma/Myanmar and for the DPRK. The human rights situation in both countries merits the Council's continued attention. We will also work for extending the technical cooperation and assistance mandate for DR Congo and the mandate of the Independent Expert for Somalia.

The European Union is deeply concerned and will pay special attention to the deteriorating situation and the most serious violations of human rights in Sudan. We would like to commend the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for sending an inquiry mission to Kenya following the widespread post-election outburst of violence and look forward to soon hearing more about the developments thus far. We remain concerned about the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka, which warrants a human rights monitoring mission.

The latest developments in the Western Balkans also deserve our continuous attention: a new state has emerged out of a troubled history of the denial of basic human rights with regard to a whole segment of the Kosovo population. We expect that with its new status Kosovo will honour commitments in relation to the personal safety of all its citizens as well as the status and rights of all minority ethnic groups.

Mr. President,

Last autumn in New York the General Assembly adopted a resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. We welcome this pronouncement of the General Assembly, which is supported by 104 countries from all regions. It is another important step in the worldwide trend towards the final abolition of capital punishment.

Before concluding, Mr. President, allow me to refer also to the issue of intercultural dialogue, which the Human Rights Council will also be addressing. The visit of the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and the Inter-cultural Panel that the Human Rights Council will be holding later during its current session, will offer a good opportunity for our self-reflection on what each of us can do to enhance our mutual understanding and to strengthen the notion of the universality of human rights.

In the European Union the whole of 2008 is devoted to intercultural dialogue. I hope that our work at this Human Rights Council session will also be inspired by this year's slogan: Together in Diversity. I wish you, all the members of this Council, coming from different regions, to work and act together as one when addressing serious human rights violations. The state of human rights in the world today is our shared responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. President.
