

STATEMENT BY
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DENMARK

AT THE TENTH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Check against delivery

Mr. President,
Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council,
Madame High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I wish to endorse fully the statement by Minister Schwarzenberg on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. President,

Last December we celebrated the milestone adoption 60 years ago of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We stressed its fundamental importance then as well as now, and we celebrated the achievements within the field of human rights seen over the last sixty years.

For many people around the world, the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration are only a dream – not a reality in their daily life. The 60th anniversary of the universal Declaration therefore does not leave room for complacency. Its celebration must not be allowed to overshadow the regrettable fact that the human rights situation in many parts of the world is still precarious. Executions of minors, use of torture, restrictions on the freedom of expression, persecution of persons because of their religion or race are only but a few of the grave violations faced by many.

Let us use the 60th anniversary to confirm our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Let us make it our common goal that the universal rights be enjoyed by all human beings in all corners of the world irrespective of origin, race, color or religious belief.

Mr. President,

It is the responsibility of all states to promote and protect the human rights and to ensure that the universality of human rights becomes a reality throughout the world.

We - the member states of the United Nations - must therefore work together to secure that the Human Rights Council serve as the intended central platform for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Last year I pointed to two important yardsticks to this end: The Universal Periodic Review and the review of Special Procedures mandates.

Measuring the past year's work against these two yardsticks, I am pleased to welcome the completion of the first rounds of Universal Periodic Review – the UPR. Around one third of the member states of the United Nations have now been reviewed. The reviews have demonstrated the value and potential value of this instrument as a unique tool in the promotion and protection of

human rights through monitoring and dialogue. I welcome active involvement in the process of NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions as foreseen.

One of the more important challenges to the instrument is the overwhelming interest to participate in the dialogues. This must be addressed. So must the question of making the recommendations more operational and securing thorough follow up to the recommendations.

Mr. President,

The UPR clearly underlines the pivotal role for independent international monitoring in holding states responsible for the implementation of human rights. All states must cooperate fully and in good faith with the international monitoring mechanisms.

I encourage all states to issue a standing invitation to all Special Procedures established by the Human Rights Council and to honor such invitations in practice. The criticism such visits may result in should be seen as part of a constructive dialogue leading to an improvement of the human rights situation in all countries.

Mr. President,

I am also pleased to welcome the extension during the course of the last year of mandates of Special Procedures. This includes the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Torture.

I also welcome the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression.

We need to strengthen – not weaken – the Special Procedures and their mandates in the service of promotion and protection of human rights. I therefore regret the adoption last March of an amendment to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression that risks shifting focus from the protection of freedom of expression to restrictions in the freedom of expression. This undermines our ambition of making the Council the central – and credible – human rights platform.

I find it difficult to defend the Human Rights Council against the criticism expressed against it. We too are critical and share some of those concerns. To our frustration, we find ourselves spending time on defending what has already been achieved, rather than moving the human rights agenda forward.

Mr. President,

Next month the Durban review conference against racism takes place here in Geneva. The conference shall review the progress made in the fight against racism on the basis of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Durban conference in 2001. Racism shows its ugly face in all parts of the world and must be addressed also through international cooperation. The review conference should and must be an important event to this end.

Denmark is committed to making the conference a success, and has from the outset been actively engaged in the negotiations of a draft outcome document.

However, the preparations of the conference so far give rise to serious concerns, and a consensus based on the draft outcome document after the first reading seems unlikely. Attempts are being made to divert the focus of the conference away from the real problems of racism.

Denmark is committed to working for the promotion and protection of human rights. We cannot accept that the conference is being diverted from combating racism and racial discrimination to restricting freedom of expression or any other human right or fundamental freedom.

The stakes are high. If we lose focus, we risk that the consensus in Durban in 2001 will unravel to the detriment of our common endeavor to fight racism. It is a high price to be paid by those men, women, and children for whom racial discrimination is reality and who rely on us to further the international work to end their suffering. They are the focus of the Durban Review Conference. Let us keep that focus.

Mr. President,

Expectations to the new High Commissioner appointed last year are high from states and people alike - also when it comes to fighting racism and racial discrimination. Let me pledge Denmark's continued support for the work and independence of the High Commissioner and her Office. Rest assured that Denmark will continue to be among those states that will rebuff attempts to dispute the independence of or impose micromanagement on her office.

Mr. President,

Denmark sees it as a key foreign policy ambition to improve the human rights protection of all human beings. Implementation of existing commitments and obligations are at the core of our ambition.

My Government will today - as part of our commitment to the Universal Declaration - launch a strategy for Denmark's international human rights work.

The strategy will be the key policy instrument carrying forward the Government's targeted, consistent and high-principled human rights policy. We will do so in conjunction with a new strategy to foster democracy and human rights in developing countries.

We commit ourselves - as part of the strategy - to counter attacks on the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as attempts to undermine these rights. And where human rights violations occur, we stand ready to consider how the situation is best and most efficiently addressed with dialogue and cooperation as our preferred tools.

Among our priorities will be human rights defenders, freedom of expression, rule of law, gender equality, Corporate Social Responsibility, torture and the death penalty, freedom of religion and belief, respect for human rights in the fight against terrorism, indigenous peoples, and children.

We will continue our long standing commitment to the international fight against torture. We shall table a draft resolution at this session focused on the role and responsibility of medical and health personnel. We count on your support for the resolution.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by renewing my call from last year for dialogue, cooperation and cultural understanding. Dialogue is at the core of any democratic process. Without dialogue there would be no democracy. Dialogue is also the prime confidence building measure among states.

Denmark firmly believes in and supports dialogue initiatives at all levels as a means to overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions and polarization.

States may not always agree and consensus may not always be achievable. The votes and explanation of votes in the Human Rights Council clearly testify to this effect. But as members of the United Nations, we have a duty to work for compromise, but the compromises must not undermine human rights and fundamental freedoms and their universality. I sincerely hope that this session will yield constructive results to the benefit of all people.

Thank you.