



**Statement by H. E. Mr Karl Erjavec
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Slovenia
High-level segment of the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council
Geneva, 28 February 2017**

Mr President,
Excellences',
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you today.

This year Slovenia celebrates the 25th anniversary of its membership in the UN. After a quarter of a century we remain committed to a rules-based international system with the United Nations at its core. Furthermore, we believe that effective multilateralism is a powerful tool, when used properly, which can contribute substantively to addressing many of the global challenges we are facing today, from terrorist threats to climate change and migration.

Slovenia has been attaching all along great importance to the **UN work in the field of human rights**. For the last decade the Human Rights Council, together with the work of the High Commissioner and his Office, which Slovenia fully supports, has been at the heart of the UN human rights system and of its efforts to promote and protect human rights globally. The Council has made immense progress for the human rights of people around the world, but it can and should do much more. We believe that the Council's crucial responsibility is to respond to the challenges to human rights and dignity worldwide.

We also express our sincere appreciation to the many representatives of the **civil society** whose tireless work reminds us day after day that our successes and failures make a real difference in people's lives. We regret the continued limitations on civil society work in many countries of the world, and deplore in particular the reprisals against individuals on the basis of their engagement with the UN system. We call on all States to foster genuine and inclusive dialogue and call on this Council to adopt concrete measures that will improve the lives of people around the world.

Mr President,

As a **member of the Council**, we continue to pay special attention to the rights of the child, women and older persons, human rights education, the protection of vulnerable groups and the fight against all forms of discrimination. The issues related

to the environment and human rights also merit our heightened attention as does the respect of human rights in business activities.

Despite the positive trend towards abolition of the death penalty worldwide, we remain concerned about the resumption of executions in different parts of the world. In that respect Slovenia, once again, calls upon all countries that have not yet ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to do so.

Mr President,

An important focus of this session will be placed on the **rights of the child**. We are faced on daily basis with the reports on violations of children's rights, some from our vicinity, and some from far away. We would like to draw attention to the challenges presented by the information and communication technologies which, while presenting new opportunities for children to exercise their rights, also entail new ways in which children's rights can be violated. Cyber-bullying is just one such example. Slovenia will continue to support activities to end violence against children in all circumstances.

Alongside the rights of the child, the rights of older persons are also high on our agenda. Population **ageing** will be one of the central sources of social and economic transformations during our lifetime. Its impact is many-fold, and we must adapt to it through a human rights-based approach. We believe that the question of the realization of all human rights for older persons should continue to receive rightful attention in the work of the Council. Slovenia will therefore continue its strong advocacy to that effect.

As to the Council's work at this session, I would like to draw your attention to a **resolution on human rights and environment** that Slovenia will present again together with Costa Rica, Maldives, Morocco and Switzerland. While inter-linkages between enjoyment of human rights and protection of environment have been recognized long ago, these inter-linkages need to be strengthened and relevant policies implemented. This year, the resolution will emphasize the protection of biodiversity as an important pre-requisite for realization of several human rights.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on the **Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities**, we must not forget that millions of people are still persecuted for their religions, beliefs or ethnic identity. The resurgence of movements fuelled by racial, religious, national or ethnic hatred as well as the spread of xenophobia are of particular concern – as also noted by the High Commissioner and his Office. Through a resolution on the rights of persons belonging to minorities, which we will present together with Austria and Senegal, we seek to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority Issues.

Mr. President,

We regret to note that **racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and hate speech** are frequent occurrences in today's world. They are often a result of difficult social

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and economic conditions, a lack of opportunities in various fields, which in the end drive people to the brink of despair and fuel intolerance in our societies. Sadly, such manifestations that mostly target marginalised and vulnerable groups occur daily in every country of the world. To end racism and xenophobia, we must improve people's lives generally, and better educate them in human rights and the value of diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Council has an important **preventive role** in international peace and security. Deteriorating human rights situations and human rights violations should be considered in all seriousness, including as an early warning sign of possible atrocity crimes. In this respect, the Council's early warning capacities should be engaged in the context of the prevention pillar of Responsibility to Protect.

While in certain instances we are witnessing some progress in human rights in the **Middle East**, we are concerned with the overall human rights situation in the region. The continuing dire human rights and humanitarian situation in the **Syrian Arab Republic** urgently calls for ensuring unhindered humanitarian access as well as access for mechanisms of inquiry with a view of ensuring future justice.

Slovenia continues to closely follow developments in **Ukraine** and reiterates its support for rule of law, notably in the light of reports by the OHCHR Monitoring Mission on serious human rights violations linked to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We call for ensuring access to international human rights mechanisms to the Crimean peninsula.

We are concerned about the reports of the serious human rights violations against the **Rohingya population in Myanmar** as well as of the deterioration of the security, human rights and humanitarian situation in Rakhine State

We are also expressing our concern over the human rights situation in **South Sudan, Burundi** and **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

Mr President,

Slovenia is a strong supporter of gender equality. While I look forward to next week's **International Women's Day**, I want to stress that it is unacceptable for women in the 21st century to face restrictions, discrimination and violence in the exercise of their rights. Women and girls must participate as equal partners with men and boys in all spheres of life, and must be empowered to make, autonomously, free and informed choices about their lives, health and bodies. We need to enhance our efforts to make true equality a reality for everyone.

And my final thought. Despite the challenges it faces, this Council has taken important steps towards its ambitious goal of realizing all human rights for all. Slovenia, for its part, remains fully committed to its important work.

Thank you!