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Human Rights Council 28th Session

Item 2 – High Commissioner’s Annual Report



United Nations
Human Rights

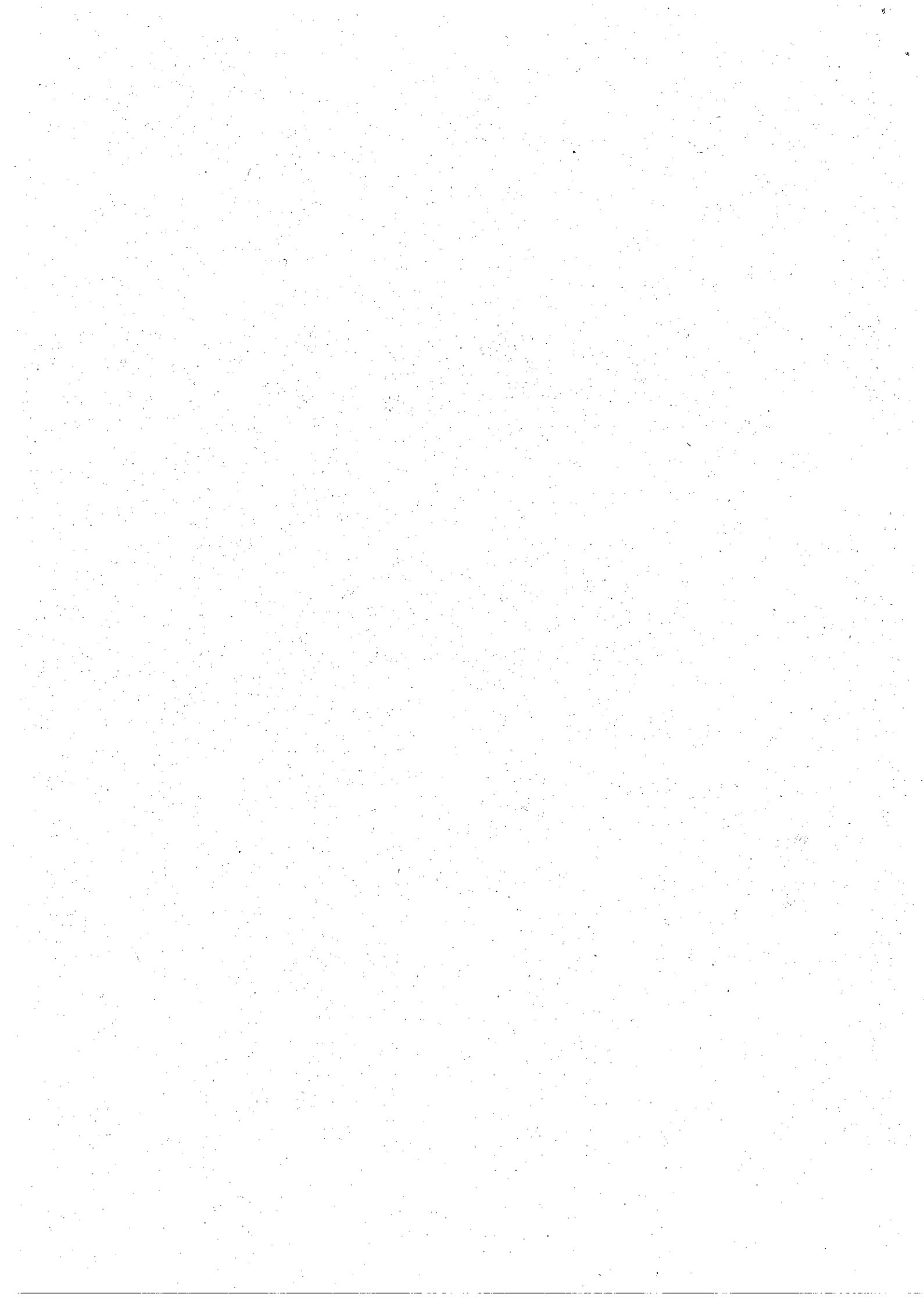
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Opening Statement by

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United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Geneva, 5 March 2014



Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Colleagues and Friends,

It is an honour to present to you the work of my Office over the course of 2014. The Annual Report that has been made available gives an overview of OHCHR's efforts to translate human rights norms into reality for people across the globe.

I come to you at what may prove to be a turning-point in our young and troubled century. There is real danger that in their reaction to extremist violence, opinion-leaders and decision-makers will lose their grasp of the deeper principles that underpin the system for global security which States built 70 years ago to ward off the horror of war.

The fight against terror is a struggle to *uphold* the values of democracy and human rights – not undermine them. My Office strongly supports efforts by States around the world to prevent and combat terrorism, and to ensure that the perpetrators of terrorism, as well as their financiers and suppliers of arms, are brought to justice. But counter-terrorist operations that are non-specific, disproportionate, brutal and inadequately supervised violate the very norms that we seek to defend. They also risk handing the terrorists a propaganda tool – thus making our societies neither free nor safe.

The Takfiri movement, root causes of extremism, counter-terror operations

The so-called ISIL movement gloatingly broadcasts its acts of horror in *Syria*, *Iraq*, and recently *Libya*, in a deliberately public theatre of cruelty. I am appalled by the massive suffering this group provokes: from the murders, torture, rape and sale of children that were highlighted a few weeks ago by the Committee for the Rights of the Child; to mass beheadings; burning people alive in cages; seemingly genocidal attacks on ethnic and religious groups; the obliteration of due process; torture; deprivation of income and every kind of service and resource; recruitment of children; the destruction of elements of the cultural heritage of humanity; and, not least, particularly vicious and comprehensive attacks on the rights of women and girls.

In *Nigeria*, bloodbaths by the Boko Haram group have included the use of young girls as remote-controlled bombs, in explosions that tear apart their bodies as well as those of many others. Like ISIL, Boko Haram abducts, rapes and enslaves women and girls, recruits children, loots resources, and metes out arbitrary and lethal punishments. The group has forced an estimated one million people to flee. Increasingly intense fighting across the Cameroon, Chad and Niger borders has led to deployment of neighbouring forces, and the African Union has formed a Regional Multi National Joint Task Force, or MNJTF. OHCHR has deployed staff to Cameroon to provide reliable information on the human rights situation in the Far North region. They will also contribute to the UN's response, including support to the operationalization of the MNJTF, notably by mainstreaming respect for human rights, humanitarian and refugee law in the planning process.

I am bound to note that over the past year, observers have reported that the counter-insurgency effort has been marked by significant human rights violations by Nigeria's Security Forces and affiliated militia. They include arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and summary executions. The Special Rapporteurs on Summary Execution and Torture have noted allegations that following a March 2014 attack by Boko Haram on the Giwa military barracks, Nigerian Armed Forces allegedly executed over 600 Boko Haram suspects. If true, this would constitute a war crime. Despite the difficult situations that they face, it is essential that all counter-insurgency forces across the world uphold the rule of law, in accordance with international human rights obligations. This is not only an absolutely vital principle; it is an effective strategy. Communities which believe that their Government seeks to protect them are far more likely to cooperate with the authorities, and far less likely to incline towards rebel groups.

In *Libya*, the lawless actions of a multitude of heavily armed groups have generated an increasingly alarming crisis. My Office and UNSMIL report arbitrary killings, as well as attacks on protected civilian sites, abductions, torture and other forms of severe ill-treatment. Human rights defenders, journalists and some minority groups have been threatened and attacked. The turmoil in Libya is profoundly disturbing, and has evident cross-border impact. My Office will be presenting a detailed report to the Council during this session.

I am also increasingly concerned about the human rights impact of the crisis in *Yemen*. My Office in Yemen reports that violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have been committed by all parties, in complete impunity. They include killing civilians; attacks on and use of schools and hospitals; recruitment of children; arbitrary detention; and torture. Given the country's chronic under-development, including one of the world's highest rates of malnutrition, the crisis in Yemen will have profound repercussions for civilians. In addition, the volatile situation is generating regional – and even global – consequences, most evidently in terms of migration.

The decades-long conflict in *Somalia* grinds on. Insecurity remains a challenge and my Office has been informed of numerous human rights abuses, including arbitrary executions, attacks on journalists and targeted killings of political figures. Military campaigns continue to cause civilian deaths, destruction and displacement, and I urge all parties to the conflict to conduct their military operations in line with international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Excellencies,

To be truly effective, any response to extremist violence must be targeted, proportionate, and legal. Military campaigns, financial sanctions and attempts to staunch the inflow of weapons – such as the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty – may be part of the solution. But other actions are needed to stem the root causes that feed into these conflicts. We must acknowledge that large numbers of people do not join such extremist movements *en masse* because they have been suddenly and inexplicably hypnotised. Extremism – however repugnant – is nurtured by ideology, and by alienation fed by years of tyranny, corruption, repression, discrimination, deprivation and neglect of the legitimate rights of communities.

Thus the vengeful actions of the *Syrian* Government – whose campaign of violent repression against what were originally peaceful protestors began four long years ago – have now morphed into wave upon wave of pitiless assaults by all sides. The Security Council, deadlocked by vetoes or threats of vetoes, has been powerless to step in and alter this landscape of destruction and bloodshed. The Syrian conflict has killed well in excess of 200,000 people, and continues to kill more every day. It has involved the torture and ill-treatment of countless others; forced millions to flee; and deprived even more of the basic conditions for a decent life, including the rights to education, food, healthcare and housing.

Events in Syria have also had acute and dangerous impact on neighbouring countries. And this destruction is a major factor behind the rise of the *takfiri* mind-set.

In *Iraq*, dictatorship, sanctions, occupation and sectarian politics have now generated great violence and widespread contempt for human life. However, the new Government shows welcome signs of breaking with that pattern.

Many of the recruits that flock to ISIL from well over 50 countries are drawn, I believe, by messages of persecution and pity: filled with ill-defined rage at what they perceive as unfair treatment in their own context, they may genuinely feel they are signing up to protect the abused. One need not look far to find this propaganda – "*come to Syria and give your life real meaning by offering it up in the service of suffering orphans.*"

The fact that the vast majority of ISIL's victims are fellow Muslims receives far less publicity. A real campaign of ideas to discredit ISIL will need to mobilise such facts. It should also seek to infuse fresh courage into the overwhelming majority of peaceful and tolerant Muslims around the world, to encourage them to take a stand and voice the essential nature of their faith. But above all, the struggle to combat extremist violence must tackle the visions of injustice that fuel it, as well as the experiences of humiliation, inequality and discrimination that may drive – though they do not excuse – the urge to destroy.

Following the recent terror attacks in Paris, I was impressed by the French Prime Minister's admission that, quote, "many ills gnaw at our society", including, as he said, "a geographic, social, ethnic apartheid...(and) daily discriminations." To undermine the forces of extremism in the long term, we need that kind of clarity of vision – to be followed up by hard and detailed work to redress these violations of human rights.

Terrorist attacks cannot destroy the values on which our societies are grounded – but laws and policies can. Measures that build what has been termed the "national security state" – such as arbitrary or prolonged detention; torture and ill-treatment; massive surveillance that contravenes the right to privacy; unfair trials; discriminatory policing; and the abusive use of legislation to curb legitimate rights to peaceful protest and to freedom of expression – are human rights violations. They generate legitimate resentment, harm social cohesion, and undermine the essential values of the international community.

In the *United States*, the Feinstein report on torture in the context of counter-terrorism operations is courageous and commendable, but profoundly disturbing. For a country that believes so strongly in human rights to have swiftly abandoned their fundamentals at a time of crisis is as astonishing as it is deplorable. And yet few other countries have had the courage to likewise publicly investigate and publicly admit to rights abuses resulting from counter-terror operations – and many should.

Under international law, the Feinstein recommendations must be followed through with real accountability. There is no prescription for torture, and torture cannot be amnestied. It should also lead to examination of the institutional and political causes that led the US to violate the absolute prohibition on torture, and measures to ensure this can never recur.

As the Feinstein report clearly demonstrates, the neglect of due process, use of torture and collective punishments that were permitted by US officials in the post-9/11 context did not make the world – or the US – any safer. On the contrary, they increased the threat of terrorism, by feeding into the grievances on which it thrives. The orange jumpsuits of Guantanamo are a recruitment tool for ISIL and other groups. As former President George W Bush has conceded, Guantanamo became, I quote, “a propaganda tool for our enemies.”

Public freedoms and freedom of expression

Excellencies,

Terrorist attacks, particularly on the media, may have a chilling effect on freedom of expression; they are planned precisely to cause such fear. But the major obstacle to freedom of expression is the restrictions placed on it by Governments.

I am disturbed by a continuing trend of harsh restrictions on public freedoms by States across all regions. I refer to military crackdowns on demonstrations; harsh sentencing of human rights defenders, journalists and dissidents in politically motivated trials; brutal punishments for simple tweets; censorship; oppressive and illegitimate regulations of civil society movements; the use of new technologies to stifle human rights in the virtual space; and new security laws that are unjustly broad, endangering civil liberties and human rights.

And yet the great pillar of every resilient and participative society is freedom of expression. Freedom to formulate the ideas of equality led to the overthrow of colonialism, and has powered every movement against discrimination and injustice. To immunize against dictatorship or totalitarianism, to undo discrimination, to drive justice and accountability, we need freedom of expression – full and free and far-reaching. There is no good governance without free speech.

When powerful leaders feel threatened by a tweet, a blog, or a high-school student's speech, this speaks of profound underlying weakness. And when writers are abducted, jailed, whipped, or put to death; when journalists are assaulted, subjected to sexual violence, tortured and killed; when peaceful protestors are gunned down by thugs; when human rights lawyers, human rights defenders and land activists are

arrested and jailed on spurious charges of sedition; when newspapers are attacked or shut down – such cases attack and undermine the foundations of stable governance.

Mr. President,

I am appalled by the rising tide of attacks around the world that target people on account of their religious beliefs, including in their places of worship. We continue to observe horrific acts of racial and religious hatred, including in many countries in *Western Europe* and *North America*, as well as evidence of unfair policing, daily insults and exclusion, and barriers to opportunity. It should be obvious that Islamophobia; anti-Semitism; and attacks that single out Christians or other groups because of their beliefs are identical manifestations of the same poisonous intolerance.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, the oldest of our core human rights treaties. These five decades have seen great successes and numerous tragedies. Based on the Convention, the tireless efforts of Committee members over the years, and the strong voices of civil society, many States have strong legal protections in place against racial discrimination. This protection cannot be allowed to give way in the face of political pressure to fan the flames of hatred.

As the Convention clearly states, speech can be an incitement to action — in some cases, very violent and hateful action. My Office has been instrumental in a series of important efforts to foster more effective implementation of the Convention's prohibition on advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. I urge States to refer to the Rabat Plan of Action regarding prohibited forms of speech, and to implement Resolution 16/18 in order to combat intolerance, stigmatization, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief.

Countries of concern in the context of a shrinking democratic space

Mr. President,

It is also vital that national legislation give sufficient space, encouragement and protection to human rights defenders, the media, alternative political ideas and civil society groups. Civil society movements, with human rights at the core of their missions, not only do profoundly empowering work: they also expose difficulties that should be addressed, in every healthy society.

I am encouraged to note that in *Tunisia*, we are seeing steady progress on a number of key fronts. We have witnessed fair elections and peaceful transitions in power. Differences are mostly being resolved through negotiations rather than through the resort to violence, and important steps are being taken to enhance human rights protections and entrench the rule of law. The country is also embarking on a vital process to come to terms with the legacy of past abuses and corruption. More needs to be done to nurture the people's confidence that there will be no slipping back to the old ways. My office in Tunis is working closely with all sectors and

stakeholders to help ensure that mechanisms are in place to prevent and protect against human rights violations, and to ensure past victims will obtain justice.

I am also optimistic that 2015 will be a decisive year for the future of peace in *Colombia*. After five decades of a devastating civil war, we trust that the peace dialogue between the government and the FARC will succeed. An unprecedented 60 victims have given testimony at the negotiating table in Havana, and I welcome this inclusion of their needs and perspectives in this process.

However, in *Egypt* there has been a surge in arrests for “protesting without a legal permit”, and trials of dozens of political and human rights activists. Judges have on several occasions sentenced over 100 people at a time to death or life imprisonment, in processes that may violate the right to fair trial and due process. Egypt clearly faces the threat of violent extremism, particularly in the Sinai where dozens of Egyptian soldiers and civilians have been killed. But restriction of people's right to freedom of expression and association is deeply worrisome, and it is likely to prove counter-productive. I urge the Government to recognize that the way forward, to ensure peace, stability and prosperity for all Egyptians, is through a genuine dialogue with all national stakeholders. Participation in peaceful protest, or criticism of the Government, should not be grounds for detention or prosecution. I am glad to say that we hope to make progress on these points, since in close consultation with the Government of Egypt, OHCHR has developed a programme of training, capacity building and practical assistance.

In *Thailand*, which was once a force for democracy in the ASEAN context, the military authorities continue to silence opposition under martial law. More than 1,000 people have been summoned or detained since the May 2014 coup, and many of them brought before military courts. The legal prohibition on criticism of the monarchy has been increasingly deployed. At a time when a new constitution is being drafted, freedom of expression is needed to ensure genuine debate.

In The *Russian Federation*, killings of opposition leaders and human rights defenders by unknown assailants are a source of grave concern. Against a pattern of increasing challenges facing civil society, I urge the Government to ensure that non-governmental organizations, human rights defenders, and the media have the space and protection they need to be able to carry out their important functions, in line with international human rights standards. There are also worrying developments - especially human rights violations affecting Crimean Tatars - in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, whose status is prescribed by UN General Assembly resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

I remain very concerned at the deteriorating human rights situation in *Venezuela*, particularly the government's harsh responses to criticism and to peaceful expressions of dissent. The use of lethal force against demonstrators is deeply disturbing. We have also received repeated reports of intimidation and public smear campaigns, including by high-ranking government officials, of human rights defenders. I am particularly concerned at the continued detention of opposition leaders and demonstrators, often for prolonged periods.

In *Myanmar*, after recent years of reform, there are signs of a return to the suppression of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. A rising tide of extreme nationalist and religious invective is also prompting regressive measures against women and minorities, such as the Rohingya. Conflict between armed groups and the military in the north and northeast of the country has had significant negative impact on the civilian population.

In *Turkey*, recent amendments related to the security laws could, if adopted, have detrimental effect on human rights and freedoms. I urge the Government to take into consideration the views of civil society; to bring the laws regulating use of force by law enforcement officers in line with international standards; and to ensure that freedom of expression online and offline is legally protected. I also encourage the authorities to finalize the important initiative to establish an independent oversight body for allegations of human rights violations by police.

Concerns persist regarding the human rights situation in *Saudi Arabia*, including with regard to the situation of human rights defenders, application of the death penalty, and use of corporal punishment. A group of this Council's independent experts has called on Saudi Arabia to bring its judicial system in compliance with international standards, and I second that call – noting also that there is ample evidence to show that the death penalty has no impact whatsoever in reducing crime.

I also sharply regret renewed use of the death penalty in *Indonesia*, *Jordan* and *Pakistan* – countries that had previously observed a moratorium – and by the continued high rates of judicial executions in *China*, *Iran*, *Iraq* and the *United States*.

In both the *Democratic Republic of the Congo* and *Burundi*, I am disturbed by restrictions on the media, freedoms of association and assembly, and on the democratic space in the context of forthcoming elections. In recent months, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC has reported that political opponents and civil society activists have been targeted by security and defence forces, and several demonstrations have been violently repressed, including by use of lethal force in several parts of the country, with impunity. The recent armed incursion into the north west of Burundi, resulting in a large loss of life, is also of great concern as the country prepares itself for national elections.

I am especially pained to report that forthcoming elections in Tanzania, Burundi and possibly elsewhere have generated acute fear for the physical security of people with *albinism*. The trade in their body parts for the purposes of rituals that purport to bring good fortune is simply shocking, and all Governments concerned must take strong action to protect the people at risk.

The overall human rights situation in the *Occupied Palestinian Territory* will be the subject of a separate and full discussion during this Council session. Here I will highlight only issues regarding freedom of expression and other public freedoms, which have deteriorated significantly during the reporting period. Use of force by Israeli Security Forces during demonstrations in East Jerusalem, and also by Palestinian security forces in the West Bank, resulted in significant civilian casualties. Members of political opposition groups have also been frequently arrested and detained by Palestinian security forces in the West Bank and Gaza, raising concerns

that this is aimed at stifling opposition. The authorities in Gaza have cracked down on political and social activists, and freedom of expression. OHCHR has continued to document cases of arbitrary arrests and detention of journalists and human rights defenders for participating in public events.

In *Hungary*, recent actions against civil society organizations, including those working on human rights issues, are the latest in a disturbing series of curbs on public freedoms. We have also observed restrictive media laws and challenges to the independence of the judiciary. I urge the Government to ensure that the critical voices of civil society organizations – such as those working on the rights of minorities – are encouraged.

A recent wave of assaults on opposition figures and NGO activists in *Armenia* is also very worrisome. In *Azerbaijan*, the work of civil society and human rights activists is impeded in many ways, with legislation precluding NGOs from receiving domestic grants, let alone foreign, for their legitimate activities.

In *China*, the rapid pace of development and on-going reforms have given rise to an increasingly vibrant society. But tolerance for freedom of expression remains arbitrary, and human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and other activists frequently face sanctions, despite the positive contribution they can make to transparency and accountability in the country.

In *Viet Nam*, independent writers, bloggers and human rights activists have faced harassment by the police and authorities; arrest; detention in harsh conditions; and criminal convictions -- in some cases with severe sentences, under vaguely defined crimes such as “disseminating materials deemed to oppose the government”, or “promoting reactionary ideas”. The Government restricts independent media, and closely controls publications, radio and TV stations, as well as restricting access to the Internet.

In *Bangladesh*, the appalling attack on a freethinking blogger and his wife last week is the latest shock in an escalating atmosphere of political violence. At least 80 people have been killed, including several children, in arson attacks and clashes between political parties and security forces. Civil society and freedom of speech is also under attack, not only by extremists but also due to heavy-handed official responses. I join the Secretary-General in appealing to all political leaders to de-escalate the violence, find paths of political dialogue and ensure respect for human rights.

Other country situations of concern

In *Ukraine*, any further escalation of violence may prove catastrophic for the human rights of 5.2 million people who live in the eastern conflict zone. This crisis is deeply alarming for all those who had assumed that Europe had become the one continent where war would no longer occur. With its rapid and extensive deployment, and the painstaking monitoring manifest in its 9 public reports to date, the work of OHCHR's Ukraine Monitoring Mission has been exemplary, and we strongly hope that all parties will abide by the current cease-fire and all the provisions of the Minsk Agreements. In its second year of operations, our mission will also work on capacity

building and technical cooperation, in addition to monitoring. It will also work with UNCHR regarding protection concerns, as part of the UN humanitarian emergency response.

In *South Sudan*, the risk of outright ethnic war is ever-present. Because of the conflict, and massive associated displacement, famine now stalks the land. UNICEF reports at least 229,000 children suffering from severe, acute malnutrition, a condition likely to cause permanent damage – if, indeed, they live. Countless violations of human rights have been recorded, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and sexual violence, and people have clearly been targeted purely because of their ethnicity. There has also been a marked failure by both Government and opposition forces to protect civilians and to hold perpetrators accountable. The UN continues to protect over 100 000 civilians in its Protection of Civilian sites. A final peace agreement was scheduled to be signed this week, but recent signs have not been hopeful. Last month, Assistant Secretary-General Ivan Simonovic, visited the country and reiterated a strong message of accountability to political and military leaders.

Fighting and violence in the *Central African Republic* continues to generate great suffering, particularly among minorities and those displaced. With the assistance of the international community, the transitional authorities should pursue efforts to overcome sectarian and ethnic divisions. Ensuring accountability for gross human rights violations remains a key priority, and it will be critical to provide adequate funding for the establishment and operations of the Special Criminal Court to deal with serious violations of international law.

The situation is also dire in *Sudan*, in Darfur. The plight of civilian populations is especially troubling, with over 400,000 people displaced in 2014 alone. Human rights violations are extensive, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, sexual violence and targeted attacks against civilians by all parties to the conflict. Regarding the reports of a mass rape in the town of Thabit, I am deeply concerned that the Government has refused to grant UNAMID access, to conduct a full-scale human rights investigation.

Mexico is a stark example of the way unchecked criminal violence can threaten hard-won democratic gains. I have repeatedly expressed my concern over generalised violence in parts of Central America and in Mexico, and alleged links between organised crime, security forces and local and central authorities. The disappearance of 43 students in Iguala is far from an isolated case, but it challenges the authorities to take decisive action to end impunity and prevent such crimes in the future.

This session will be an opportunity to reflect on the follow up to the Council's efforts with respect to human rights in the *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. The Commission of Inquiry report that was presented to the Council one year ago has galvanised international attention and action, including a briefing of the Security Council on this issue in December. There is now unprecedented determination among Member States to demand improvements, and accountability for those responsible. At the same time, we welcome the early signs of responsiveness from the DPRK to engage more fully with the international human rights system. I am pleased to report

that the field based structure envisioned by the Human Rights Council in its last resolution will shortly be opened in Seoul, and will provide a new hub for information-gathering, documentation, technical assistance and outreach on this issue.

At this session, Member States were also due to consider my report on the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 25/1 on accountability and reconciliation in *Sri Lanka*, including the findings of the comprehensive investigation mandated by the Council. After serious reflection, and acting upon the suggestion of the investigation's group of experts, I recommended that the presentation of this report be deferred until the 30th session of the Human Rights Council in September. This was based on my assessment of the changing context in Sri Lanka, the broad signals of cooperation I have received from the Government, and the possibility that new information will become available for the report.

The Government has agreed to invite the Special Rapporteur on Truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence, and the Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances, as well as myself, to visit Sri Lanka before the September session. During this period, OHCHR staff also plan to engage on the ground with all stakeholders to advance transitional justice issues. This is a singular opportunity for the Government to lay the foundations in justice for lasting peace and reconciliation. I urge the authorities to consult deeply with the people, particularly victims, in order to design mechanisms that will work and not repeat the failures of the past.

International partnership

Mr. President,

On many vital issues, only cooperation can establish real solutions, and 2015 will be a particularly crucial year for international partnership. As the Secretary-General has said, "We are the first generation that can end poverty. We are also the last generation that can slow global warming before it is too late."

To solve poverty, it is vital that we acknowledge its causes, which centre on discrimination and power. People are poor because they are deprived of opportunities and resources; because they are subject to the whims of the powerful; because public resources are confiscated by corruption and poor governance; and because their voices are suppressed and denied.

Economic and social rights build strong societies. They are not an optional luxury for times of peace; they are rights in the full meaning of the word, and a tool for building peace and powering true development. Societies that are participatory can benefit from the skills of all – including girls, women, and minorities and castes that previously suffered discrimination. And when adequate services are provided, such as decent health, education and housing, there is massive economic benefit to all, and a dividend in stable peace.

Conversely, when international human rights obligations to respect, protect and fulfil these rights are deferred or breached, the entire economy, and society, is weakened.

The *Ebola* epidemic underscores an essential truth that is often overlooked, which is that human rights are extremely practical tools for preventing and combating major disease-related crises. If the right to adequate health had been honoured, and health policies conceived with the involvement of – and accountable to – local communities, it would likely have been easier to contain the outbreak. The result would have been fewer deaths, fewer orphans, and less damage across every kind of economic and social terrain.

After Ebola, surely we all must acknowledge that the provision of adequate services for all is not only necessary and just – it is far cheaper than solving the disasters that are generated by deprivation. The world simply cannot afford development that ignores fundamental rights such as the right to health. We also need to learn long-term lessons, putting people and their rights at the centre of policies regarding food, housing, health, education and all other policies.

The Secretary-General's synthesis report on the *Sustainable Development Goals* emphasises the importance of human rights, participation and inclusion, both as tools to drive sustainable development, and as benchmarks for its success. The report specifically emphasises that access to information, and freedom of expression, assembly, and association, are vital to development. Over the course of 2014, OHCHR continued to step up its work to assist in strengthening the Sustainable Development Goals with forceful human rights principles, including equality, access to decent services, inclusion, and a strengthened global partnership. There has been tremendous progress in development across a range of topics, and we have real hope for further important advances with the new agenda.

The spectre of comprehensive and permanent *climate change* is not only an assault on our common ecosystem: it violates our human rights. Unchecked, climate change could undercut the rights to health, to food, to water and sanitation, to adequate housing, and – for the people of small island States and coastal communities – even the right to self-determination. And it will only be solved if States adopt real and cooperative solutions. I am pleased to note that tomorrow, the Council will have the opportunity to hear directly from the President of Kiribati and the Prime Minister of Tuvalu on this critical issue.

Migration is another issue that cries out for more thoughtful and coordinated action between States. The notion of ghost ships drifting on auto-pilot towards the coasts of Europe in the hopes that coast-guards will rescue the people on board – and the hideous sight of men and women tearing their flesh on barbed-wire fences in a desperate, and sometimes lethal, attempt to clamber into *Western Europe* and find a better, more peaceful life: such scenes are simply intolerable.

And they are not restricted to Europe. In the *Americas*, hundreds of thousands of people are forced to flee the uncontrolled violence of criminal gangs, and may then be preyed upon by criminal gangs during their attempted journey. And in the Indian Ocean, irregular migrants and asylum seekers attempting to reach *Australia* by boat

are being intercepted and diverted to detention and resettlement in countries that are far less equipped to receive them. It is truly urgent that we seek far more thoughtful, and better-coordinated, responses to migration: responses that are humane, fully acknowledge the human rights of every individual involved at all points of origin, transit and destination.

It is my hope that the *International Decade for People of African Descent* will inspire all of us to grasp the deep harm that is done by discrimination. I have personally been inspired by many thinkers of African descent, and the racism, xenophobia, and deprivation that so many continue to endure, in every region, is an appalling affront to the human rights we stand for.

I want also to highlight the pressing need for women to participate in all discussions of strategic responses to extremist violence, to discrimination, and to deprivation of all kinds. Part of our response to the brutalities of extremist groups must be a repeal of discriminatory legislation, and implementation of inclusive and non-discriminatory policies. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action*, and we can seize this opportunity to go beyond lip-service to gender equality – genuinely challenging, and dismantling, the power structures and dynamics which perpetuate discrimination against women.

Mr. President,

It is the people who sustain government, create prosperity, heal and educate others and pay for governmental and other services with their labour. It is their struggles that have created and sustain States. Governments exist to serve the people – not the other way round.

Governments that protect human rights, combat discrimination and deprivation, and which are accountable to their people are more prosperous and more secure than those which stifle rights, hamper opportunities, and repress freedoms. When people's rights are respected – when they are accorded dignity, have opportunities to express their skills and are given a fair share of resources – they form resilient societies. When they are wronged, their rights betrayed, there is a constant threat of turmoil. Respect for the human rights of the people is not destabilizing; but driving legitimate opposition underground is.

Reorganisation of OHCHR

I would like to turn now, for a few moments, to our new initiative on change management, which I spoke of on Monday. This initiative is based on the outcomes of the functional review. It will make us more effective in protecting and promoting human rights, and in discharging our mandates as called for by relevant organs and sub-organs of the UN. It will also generate savings, which we will be able to re-invest in core activities; and it will increase possibilities for mobility or career advancement for our staff. My staff has been briefed on this initiative, and the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General have been informed and are both supportive.

The functional review was a comprehensive exercise led by independent experts. It took into account a long series of internal discussions and external

reviews, extensive consultations and analysis involving a large number of staff. And it identified a pressing need for organizational change.

Over the last few years, especially, the demand placed on our field presences has grown considerably. The 2014 crises in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Ukraine, among others – as well as the conduct of new human rights investigations or fact-finding missions in previous or on-going crises – have given new weight to the challenges before us. OHCHR also faces sharply increasing requests from countries for technical assistance. All of this means that OHCHR needs to devolve greater resources from the headquarters to the field – building on the decision taken ten years ago to emphasize field-work.

Likewise, human rights are being given increasing attention by the UN leadership and members: this is reflected in the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative, the post 2015 development agenda, and increasing engagement by OHCHR with the Security Council and others. It requires a commensurate strengthening of our New York office.

Building on the functional review, I have decided to reshape OHCHR's structure. We will shift some resources closer to the countries that we aim to assist and the people whose rights we are mandated to protect. We will also strengthen our presence in New York. And we will maintain a critical mass in Geneva, to continue to service the needs of the Council and other mechanisms.

Subject to the agreement of the intended host countries, we will create seven new regional hubs, located in cities where the UN presence is already strong, or where regional organizations, including human rights organizations, are headquartered. Our stronger New York presence will reflect our increasing involvement in discussions on peace and security, the right to development and rule of law.

At OHCHR Headquarters in Geneva, we will flatten the organisational structure, streamline reporting lines and delegate authority to the lowest possible level. I intend to foster a culture of innovation, to support creative and innovative responses to the immensely complex human rights issues we face. I plan to establish three 'technical' divisions in Geneva, instead of the previous four: the new Mechanisms Engagement Division; the Integrated Country Engagement Division; and the Research, Policy, Methodologies and Special Procedures Division.

We are preparing a detailed implementation plan which will take into account the steps I can undertake under my authority, and the steps which will require approval from the General Assembly. At the end of March, I will review the implementation plan with senior staff, to discuss any further adjustments needed. We will consider how best to review our component of the UN Strategic Framework, recognizing that this is a rearrangement of resources rather than a strategic change in policy or programmatic terms.

Implementing this change process will demonstrate our ability to adapt to increasing expectations and responsibilities. It will also show the continued relevance of human rights mechanisms and our country-level engagement. And finally, it will

allow us to become better able to deliver effectively and efficiently on our mandate. I am certain that with your support – the support of the Member States – we will be successful.

Mr. President,

It is my strong belief that human rights are the only viable way to build safe and harmonious societies. As we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Charter, I trust you will agree that the continued strength and independence of OHCHR, and our work to assist States to promote human rights, is vital to the interest of the people of our world.

Thank you.