



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of the Czech Republic

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Statement by

**H. E. Mr. Lubomír Zaorálek**

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
of the Czech Republic

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having assumed the office of the foreign minister I have also taken over the valuable heritage of the long-lasting consistent Czech policy of promotion and protection of human rights. Yet, like any other heritage, it generates both feelings of gratification and, to the same or even higher extent, a sense of strong responsibility for advancement of its substance.

The Czech Republic has a deep tradition of human rights in its history starting from the humanists of Jan Hus or Jan Amos Komenský going to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of the independent Czechoslovakia. The most recent experience comes from our peaceful return to democracy in 1989. Subsequently we have strived for and succeeded in establishing intense relations with countries and their societies through the advancement of human rights. The Czech Republic remains active in its support to all human rights in both political and social context with the aim to preserve the dignity and worth of the human being.

Recent developments in Ukraine have clearly demonstrated that people are ready to stand up and die for their rights. I am deeply concerned about the violent crackdown on protesters on Maidan Square in Kyiv and in other parts of Ukraine which left dozens of people dead and hundreds injured. The killings and other alleged human rights violations should be impartially investigated as a matter of urgency and the perpetrators brought to justice. I am also gravely concerned about the way Russia interfered in the fragile transition process in Ukraine, a process triggered by spontaneously expressed aspirations of millions of Ukrainian people. Not only is the Russian military intervention a breach of international law and the UN Charter, it could spiral into human rights and humanitarian catastrophe. We fully support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and call for a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Ukraine in accordance with the principles of international law.

Mr. President,

It is my deep conviction that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Such a human rights approach is increasingly more valid in today's globalized world where activities and decisions of any single country affect others. Naturally the Czech Republic is also well conscious of eventual international implications of its domestic policy decisions on human rights.

The process of globalization has also seen increased expectations for responsible behavior regarding human rights of non-state actors such as business enterprises. While the primary responsibility for human rights clearly rests with the state, the transnational corporations must play their part and carefully consider impacts of its activities on society. This particularly relates to situations, where weak rule of law and lack of good governance prevail. It is the governments' role to make, by setting clear operation rules, corporations respect human rights. In this regard, the UN Framework for Business and Human Rights provides an important guidance and we welcome its widespread uptake by all stakeholders.

Often, the very first victims of human rights violations and abuses are vulnerable groups such as ethnic, sexual and religious minorities, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons or, in some contexts, children and women. They face various and multiple forms of discrimination and prejudices. Their plight is further aggravated by armed conflict and natural disasters and cyclical or protracted humanitarian situations are a devastating reality for many of them. Not only are they deprived of civil and political rights, their enjoyment of social, economic and cultural rights is severely limited too.

Both in peace and in conflict or disaster situations, persons belonging to vulnerable groups have to cope with limitations and challenges in accessing basic public services – education, health care services or labor opportunities. Above all, their voice and grievances are not heard since their participation in public life and decision-making processes are hampered. It is my belief that this Council, the world's principal human rights body and the international community at large, should give more prominence to human rights challenges vulnerable groups face. My own government attaches great importance to this issue through legislative measures and through increased emphasis on their effective implementation.

*Vis-a-vis* alarming living conditions of many individuals around the world we have to focus on both the urgent needs of the individuals as well as the structural insufficiencies and failures virtually preventing the enjoyment of human rights. To my mind the needed adequate reaction must consist in a well-balanced combination of humanitarian, development and transition assistance. These forms of international cooperation and solidarity are complementary to each other and only thus the effectiveness and sustainability of progressing towards the realization of human rights for all can be assured.

In today's globalized world the necessity of international cooperation is even more pressing than ever before. Close cooperation, an expression of solidarity and responsibility, should always be the prior aim of our efforts, with ultimate goal of creating a friendly international environment, a friendly global village.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being aware of our domestic challenges in the field of human rights, I stand ready to discuss any human rights issue and show that the Czech Republic is an open-minded country ready to learn from its own gaps and mistakes.

My ambition is to learn together from each other from our mistakes in the framework of international discussion. I am firmly convinced that this is the only way to forward.

Thank you.