



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

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Statement by

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address the Council in the tenth year of its existence.

We live in difficult times. Three hundred years ago John Locke defined natural rights and the duty of everyone to respect the rights of others. More than 66 years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the normative system of binding international treaties defining human rights ensued, creating a system for their protection. Yet even today, we still witness massive violations of these very basic human rights on a daily basis.

Mainly civilians bear the brunt of today's conflicts. Women, children and elderly are the most affected by conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Ukraine. Apart from the heavy toll conflicts take on civilians, they are also a life threat to regional and international security and stability. The conflict in Ukraine threatens to jeopardize reconciliation and achievements in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Worryingly, territorial aggression - 70 years after the end of the Second World War - is again a living issue the international community must tackle as a matter of urgency. Mr. President, fighting and fuelling of the conflict in Ukraine must stop. Minsk agreements must be honoured by all parties. All allegations of human rights abuses and violations must be duly investigated. All this killing, raping, torture, sexual assault, abduction, kidnapping.

What reflection does this mirror show of our human kind? Shattered lives of ordinary people who have lost everything, their freedom, families, their homes and property. What reparations, remedies, and redress can our nations and international community offer to those victims? How can we ensure that they can return home and start rebuilding their lives? How can we ensure that those responsible for these violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law are brought to justice?

Conditions of lives of minorities and vulnerable groups are a litmus test of humanity of our societies. For minorities, it must never be a question of leaving the states where they live for some hypothetical safe haven. They belong in our societies just as much as the majority. We must strive to create conditions for their full and prosperous lives wherever they live. We may have different views, roots and past. But what must unite us in our coexistence is the duty once defined by John Locke, the duty to respect rights of others. On that we must build our tolerance. On top of that, we need to build among ourselves the acceptance of differences and raise tomorrow's generations in that respect. With the friendly acceptance of the multitude of individuals that create the beauty of the mankind.

However, not everyone shares these objectives. Terrorism is not only a security threat. Above all, it threatens to tear the ties that bind us together in our societies. To win over violent extremism, we must continue our normal lives and not give in to simplistic accusations of any religious or national groups. Fear must never lead us to give up on our freedoms, such as freedom of speech or religion and belief. Each of these freedoms must be protected to the fullest. At the same time it is necessary to accept that my views and beliefs are mine and

not necessarily those of others. There is never a single universal truth to impose on anybody.

Mr. President,

With this session of the Human Rights Council, the Czech Republic has entered its period of observer status in it. Let me assure you of the utmost attention and support we will continue to pay to the work of this highly relevant body whose mandate may seem today more difficult than ever.

We will continue to raise the questions we see as the corner stones of human rights. These include equal and effective participation of citizens in political and public affairs. We believe that the way our societies hear the voice of our marginalized or disadvantaged members shows the real strength of our societies. The way women, ethnic and other minorities access decision making processes in our societies, and what say they get in decision making on budgets or other public policies show how democratic our societies really are.

Equally, we will also continue to raise the issue of protection of human rights defenders – individuals working daily for protection of human rights of their fellow citizens, speaking up and defending the ideal of human rights for everyone every day of the year, risking their freedom and lives. Those cooperating with the UN human rights system still meet reprisals in many parts of the world and we will continue bringing their voices to this hall. We must secure the space for the civil society organizations – their functioning network lies at the heart of every truly democratic society. They may be telling us harsh truths but we must make sure they can operate freely and safely, no matter how critical they are of the governments and their achievements or failures.

Mr. President,

In 2015 this forum will continue to hear most distressing reports of human rights violations and abuses. At the same time the Human Rights Council must remain true to the ideal of human rights and bring hope to those suffering. For its task is to raise the hope that there are remedies to human rights violations and abuses; that those responsible will be held accountable. That the systems protecting human rights improve over time so that more and more people will be able to enjoy “the life in larger freedom” as creators of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights once envisaged.

Mr. President,

I wish Human Rights Council, under your leadership, to face boldly these numerous challenges.

Thank you.