Organizational Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 9 December 2022

**Speech by H. E. Ambassador Václav Bálek upon being elected as President of the UN Human Rights Council for the year 2023**

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

This is a great honour for me and my country the Czech Republic. I am deeply grateful to the Council’s Members for electing me the President of the UN Human Rights Council for the year 2023 and entrusting me with this responsibility.

First and the foremost, let me please use this opportunity to thank the outgoing president H.E. Ambassador Federico Villegas and the Bureau for their work throughout this year and especially for their efforts to bring the Council back to where it was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Under your leadership, Federico, the Council has done enormous work fulfilling its mandate in 2022. It will be a real honour to continue in these efforts.

As a President, I promise to do my best to meet the expectations. I am taking up the HRC Presidency with the deepest respect for the Human Rights Council. This Council, our Council, must be a safe space for everyone to respect, protect and promote human rights offline as well as online. We will work on this together with the Bureau, Member and Observer States, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office, Special Procedures and Council’s Mechanisms and civil society. We will do so impartially and inclusively. Czech colours are white, red and blue. For the Presidency, I will strictly stick to the UN blue.

Speaking about the Czech colours and my country, let me add, that the Czech Republic, historically located between different spheres of interests, relies on the international rules-based order with human rights at its core. Our story is a human rights story after all. Over the past 100 years, we became an independent Czechoslovak state after breaking free from an empire, then we were hit by two regimes seeking full control of our people and yet we managed to begin a new chapter as a free democratic country during the Velvet revolution in 1989. I was a university student during the Velvet revolution and actively involved in our strive for democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights. This makes this moment really special for me, personally.

Speaking of historical milestones, the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action are upon us. In cooperation with the Bureau and the OHCHR I will seek your views on how to best address these milestones next year. Let’s be creative and let’s work on the basis of consensus. The great things about this Council is that we are all equal in our responsibilities, standing and opportunities to influence our work.

There is no doubt that 2023 will bring many new challenges and quite a few will also persist from this year. I am ready to pay due attention to all of them and with the help of the Bureau and the Presidency team address every issue ahead of us. Nevertheless, if I were to name now just three topics to which I attach utmost importance when it comes to the work of the Council, I would mention the following: *Prevention, Participation and Progress in Efficiency*. Let me explain what I mean by these “three Ps”:

With “*Prevention”* I have in mind support to the Council’s preventive mandate, as defined in the operative paragraph 5(f) of the UNGA resolution 60/251. This provision gives the Council the mandate to contribute, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies. In my role as a President of the Council, I will be ready to support all actions and initiatives aiming to fulfil this mandate. Also by swiftly responding to requests to address urgent human rights situations by the Council, supporting mandate holders in providing technical assistance and capacity building and generally promoting constructive dialogue and cooperation among all states and other actors to minimize human rights violations around the world. In my view, the Council has a good practice of informal meetings with various partners such as the UN High Commissioner for human rights, representatives of the UNGA or Special Procedures Coordination Committee that should continue.

My second priority is *“Participation”, meaning* the involvement of all relevant actors in the work of the Council. I am committed to promoting the Council’s inclusive nature and supporting participation of small states and least developed countries that face difficulties due to capacity reasons. Participation also means ensuring a safe space for civil society in the Council. Furthermore, I will support the need to speak the language of people outside of our Geneva “bubble” and bring the Council closer to them, using both traditional and social media. I will also encourage participation of women and girls, UN youth delegates and persons belonging to vulnerable groups. In order to promote the widest possible engagement in the Council’s activities, I am glad to confirm that the Czech Presidency intends to hold an informal retreat in 2023 as an opportunity for an open and frank exchange of views.

*“Progress in efficiency” is my third priority*. The Council’s agenda has been growing substantially over the years, placing increasing demands on capacities of delegations, Secretariat as well as of other actors. It must be a priority for every Presidency to help the Council to work more efficiently. The efficiency process is traditionally driven by the Presidency and so this is the natural third priority. Throughout the year, I intend to organize - with the assistance of the Bureau and co-facilitators - a series of consultations on optimising the Council's work programme, rationalization of initiatives, use of digital tools and other efficiency measures. It goes without saying that this process can only be successful if it is done in an inclusive manner and its outcomes are based on consensus. I will rely on your constructive approach and support throughout the process.

As I put emphasis on efficiency, I should lead by example. Therefore, let me stop here. My last point is that this Council can be only as good as we allow it to be. This is our common responsibility. Let’s work on this together. My door will be always open.

Once again, I thank you.