



General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

23rd plenary meeting
Friday, 1 November 2019, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Muhammad-Bande (Nigeria)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 65

Report of the Human Rights Council

Report of the Human Rights Council (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1)

The President: In connection with this item, I would like to recall that the General Assembly decided at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 20 September 2019, to consider agenda item 65 in plenary meeting and in the Third Committee, pursuant to resolution 65/281 of 17 June 2011.

It is my pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council, to the General Assembly. I commend Ambassador Seck's efforts to improve the working methods of the Human Rights Council in its mandate to encourage the effective coordination and mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system. The presentation today of the report of the Human Rights Council (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1) to its parent body, the General Assembly, will pave the way for interactive dialogue when the report is discussed in the Third Committee.

Seven decades ago, the States Members of the United Nations agreed to a set of inalienable rights, which ensure the dignity of everyone, everywhere. The Human Rights Council works to realize that shared vision for a better world as a fundamental element of the human rights system.

Moreover, resolutions relating to the administration of justice and the integrity of the judicial system have strengthened democracy and the rule of law around the world. Let us not forget: a more just world is a safer world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a milestone document that sets standards for all peoples and all nations. We can ensure peace and development only if human rights are upheld.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is built on a foundation of human rights. Since the adoption of the Agenda (resolution 70/1), the Council has mandated the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to convene intersessional dialogues on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That is a very effective way to draw the attention of us all to the interconnections between rights and the Goals.

I encourage Member States to view the Sustainable Development Goals through a human rights lens. Let us consider, for example, one of my key priorities for the seventy-fourth session: education. Sustainable Development Goal 4 is linked to articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Despite being anchored in those texts, we still have much to do in order to reach the targets of SDG 4 on quality education and lifelong learning. Education also involves equipping people with the skills to navigate a rapidly developing world that is changing technologically.

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As such, I was pleased to see Human Rights Council resolution 41/11, on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights, spearheaded by the Republic of Korea and Denmark, which seeks to safeguard the rights of those we serve in the context of new technologies.

In order to achieve all 17 Goals, we must ensure that all stakeholders are included throughout our work so that no one is left behind. To that end, I have made inclusion a priority for the session. We will not have a United Nations that excludes. Women must take their rightful place at the centre of all our work.

It is also most encouraging to note in the report Human Rights Council resolution 41/14, on equal pay, at the instigation of Iceland. The rights of women, everywhere, must be upheld. After all, this is 2019. We have come a long way.

Moreover, the rights of everyone at risk of being left behind must be safeguarded. That applies to all who have been systematically excluded, including those who are displaced, people with disabilities and indigenous persons.

On 20 November, we will commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the rights of the child. The notion that children are people, too, serves as a reminder to us all that the rights of children everywhere must be upheld so that children do not just survive but also thrive. I trust that I can count on Member States to ensure inclusion in every aspect of their work here in the General Assembly.

The Human Rights Council has taken great strides to ensure inclusion through the establishment of the voluntary technical assistance trust fund to support the participation of least developed countries and small island developing States in its work. I commend those who have supported the trust fund, as well as Member States for their foresight in adopting Human Rights Council resolution 42/32.

Indeed, the report of the Human Rights Council aligns not only with the aforementioned priorities of education and inclusion but with all the priorities I have set for the seventy-fourth session, including peace and security through conflict prevention, poverty eradication and zero hunger, and climate action. It has long been understood that most of the violent conflicts that we are battling against today had their origins in violations of, or disregard for, human rights. It is

incumbent upon us as Member States and as individuals to uphold equal dignity and human rights for everyone, everywhere. There is no alternative to protecting the rights of the people we serve. I am confident that by striving together, we will succeed in delivering for all.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 65/281, I now give the floor to His Excellency Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council.

Mr. Seck (Senegal), President, Human Rights Council (*spoke in French*): I am here today to present the report of the Human Rights Council (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1) in my capacity as President of the Council pursuant to resolutions 60/251 and 65/281.

The Council has remained faithful to the mandate entrusted to it by the Assembly throughout this year, particularly in terms of promoting universal respect for and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner. Today I will give Member States an overview of the topics and situations in different countries that have been the subject of discussions and deliberations of the Council.

The Human Rights Council met this year in three regular sessions, providing the opportunity for it to address a wide range of matters that require its attention and action. This year's deliberations of the Council are summarized in the report before the Assembly, which contains the activities as well as the resolutions, decisions and statements of the President adopted at the three ordinary sessions.

During the year, the Council focused its attention on new situations and topics that were not on its agenda. The Council therefore considered the human rights situation in countries such as Nicaragua, the Philippines and Venezuela. It decided to create a new fact-finding mission to report back to it in September 2020. The Council also addressed the issue of discrimination against women and girls in the areas of sport, equal pay and the right to development, with the establishment of a new subsidiary expert mechanism with regard to the latter.

The Council continued to focus on technical assistance and capacity-building, particularly with regard to Cambodia, Georgia, Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Sudan, Ukraine, Venezuela and Yemen.

The importance of technical assistance and capacity-building is highlighted by the Council's annual discussions to promote the sharing of experience and good practices and technical cooperation in the promotion and protection of human rights. The theme of this year's round table was technical cooperation and capacity-building in the field of the human rights of older persons, and provided an opportunity for the Council to identify key gaps in the protection of the rights of older persons, as well as possible measures to address them through technical cooperation and capacity-building.

Some Council resolutions contain specific recommendations for the General Assembly. In addition to the resolutions that I have already mentioned, resolution 40/17, on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, recommends that the General Assembly submit all reports submitted by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to the Security Council for appropriate action.

With regard to resolution 41/14, on equal pay, it recommends that the General Assembly declare an international equal pay day to celebrate the efforts of all stakeholders to achieve that goal and to urge further action for the goal of equal pay for work of equal value for all.

In its resolution 42/2, on the human rights situation in Yemen, in response to the comprehensive written report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts, the Council recommends that the General Assembly transmit the report to all relevant United Nations bodies.

With regard to resolution 42/3, on the situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, the Council recommends that the General Assembly transmit the reports to all relevant United Nations bodies, and requests the Chair of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar to present the reports to the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session.

In its resolution 42/26, on the situation of human rights in Burundi, the Council recommends that the General Assembly submit the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi to the relevant United Nations bodies for their consideration and appropriate action, taking into account the relevant conclusions and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry.

Lastly, in its resolution 42/29, entitled "From rhetoric to reality: a global call for concrete action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance", the Council, in reference to the Forum on People of African Descent, urged the General Assembly to define the modalities of the Forum at its seventy-fourth session.

Given the issues and challenges facing the world today, it is becoming imperative to improve the effective implementation of human rights standards, once international human rights treaties have been ratified and political commitments made at States' highest levels, through international human rights mechanisms in general and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in particular. With the establishment of the mechanism of the Universal Periodic Review, the States Members of the United Nations have a unique forum for sharing best practices and cooperating on the promotion of human rights while ensuring respect for the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity.

All 193 Member States have been reviewed twice under the UPR, and the third four-and-a-half-year review cycle began on 1 May 2017. The continuing universal and high-level participation in the UPR reflects the political will of Member States and their determination to pursue this dialogue on human rights between peers on an equal footing and in a more cooperative context, with a strong focus on the implementation and follow-up of accepted recommendations. We should also emphasize the link between the UPR and technical assistance and capacity-building.

The Council's high-level segment, which takes place once a year during the February-March session, provides an opportunity for a number of dignitaries to present their human rights policies. This year, we welcomed 95 such speakers to the high-level segment, including Secretary-General António Guterres.

I want to stress that effective participation in the work of the Human Rights Council remains a priority for all States, whether or not they are members of the Council. In that regard, I particularly commend the efforts of the least developed countries and small island developing States for their active participation in the Council, which reinforces the respect for the principle of universality that characterizes the United Nations. The trust fund to support the participation of least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Council enabled 33 delegates

from 32 such countries to participate in the work of the Council this year, including 11 small island developing States without permanent representation in Geneva. I encourage more States to contribute to the fund so that the Council can continue to facilitate those States' essential contribution. In accordance with resolution 34/40, and building on the positive outcomes of its first workshop for the Caribbean region, on 20 November in Nadi, Fiji, the trust fund will hold a second regional workshop, for the Pacific region, in which I will participate. A declaration to strengthen the participation of Pacific developing countries in the Council will be adopted at the workshop.

In 2011 the Council decided to establish a task force to improve access for persons with disabilities to its work, resources and documents, in keeping with international standards on accessibility for persons with disabilities. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the task force is continuing to take initiatives to improve access to the Council for persons with disabilities, as is also emphasized in the recent report of the Joint Inspection Unit on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2018/6). For example, thanks to the task force's advocacy, the Council was able to hold eight fully accessible meetings in 2019 with sign-language interpretation and closed captioning, compared to only a single meeting in 2011. In addition, the Council is implementing its full accessibility policy whereby only documents in accessible format, including statements by States and other participants in its work, can be downloaded from the Council's extranet. The task force's efforts predate and are fully in line with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy launched by the Secretary-General earlier this year, and represent a concrete contribution by the Council to achieving the goal of ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities, protecting them from discrimination and realizing their human rights.

In discussing the Council's work and successes, I would be remiss if I did not stress the essential contribution of civil society and intergovernmental organizations. Civil society plays a crucial role in ensuring that the Council's deliberations remain relevant and close to the realities on the ground. Both sectors have a key role to play in monitoring and capacity-building efforts in their countries of origin. It is therefore essential to maintain a space for the active participation and contribution of civil society in the Council, which

makes the Council unique among other United Nations intergovernmental bodies. Following the allegations of reprisals and intimidation that were brought to my attention in the past year, I have unfortunately had to reiterate on several occasions that acts of reprisal or intimidation against those who cooperate with United Nations human rights mechanisms are unacceptable and must stop.

Before concluding, I would like to address the issue of the forthcoming review of the Council by the General Assembly. In resolution 65/281, the Assembly indicated that it would review the status of the Council, as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, at an appropriate moment and at a time no sooner than 10 and no later than 15 years after the adoption of the resolution. The General Assembly has set itself the goal of completing its review of the Council's status between June 2021 and June 2026. In my view, only close collaboration between the Human Rights Council and the Assembly can yield the outcome that the General Assembly sought through its adoption of resolution 65/281. I would like to point out that during the 2011 review, the Assembly and the Council worked closely on the status issue. In fact, the President of the Council at the time appointed a focal point for Geneva-New York relations. The two processes in Geneva and New York were conducted in an atmosphere of great harmony and mutual respect. It would therefore be desirable for the Assembly and the United Nations human rights protection system to benefit from the same coordination and cooperation in the next review.

The President: I thank the President of the Human Rights Council for his report.

I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Gonzato (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, and the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to warmly thank Ambassador Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council (HRC), for presenting the Council's annual report to the General Assembly (A/74/53) and for his able stewardship of the work of the Council in 2019.

Two weeks ago, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights opened her statement to the Third Committee by pointing out that

“[u]ndeniably, we are facing rising challenges to multilateralism and to many fundamental international human rights treaties, laws and values. We are witnessing an increase in xenophobia, hate speech, pushbacks on women’s equality and the rights of minorities, as well as restrictions on the civic space and widening inequalities in income, wealth, access to resources and access to justice.”

The High Commissioner’s point is emphasized by the fact that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. We should never forget that.

During the reporting cycle, the HRC adopted 88 resolutions, 42 Universal Periodic Review decisions and two presidential statements. Those numbers reflect the importance that countries from all regions of the world attribute to its work. The HRC plays an important role in contributing to facing the challenges mentioned by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. During its high-level segment, the Council held a mainstreaming panel on human rights in the light of multilateralism, highlighting the role that human rights have in strengthening multilateralism.

The HRC has an agenda item dedicated to the fight against racism, and an African Group-led resolution on the issue (resolution 42/29) was adopted without a vote for the first time in many years. Differences remain, but an effort was made by all sides to find a compromise. Many statements this year were related to the fight against incitement to hatred. The EU led another resolution on freedom of religion or belief (resolution 40/10), extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for a period of three years. In collaboration with the Government of Denmark, the EU also organized a stocktaking meeting in Geneva on the Istanbul Process, and the Government of the Netherlands is hosting the seventh meeting of that process in just over two weeks’ time. That is an important opportunity to collectively address intolerance, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief. It will also keep the Rabat Plan of Action high on the international agenda.

In terms of fighting the pushback on gender equality, we welcome the work done by the HRC, with the adoption of several strong resolutions that address

the full enjoyment of human rights and gender equality for women and girls, from combating violence against women and girls to fighting child, early and forced marriage, combating discrimination against women and striving for equal pay. In terms of fighting for the rights of persons belonging to different vulnerable groups, we would like to mention the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and the resolutions on indigenous peoples and on the human rights of migrants. The HRC has integrated various dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in its work, thereby contributing to fighting the widening inequalities in income, wealth and access to resources.

Real progress has been achieved this year in relation to civil-society participation — a key priority for the EU. In March, the European Union was proud to support the Norwegian-led resolution (resolution 40/11) on recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development. More recently, at the September session, the Human Rights Council emphatically endorsed a resolution on reprisals (resolution 42/28) — an initiative that was strongly supported by the States members of the EU. Acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who have cooperated, are cooperating or seek to cooperate with United Nations human rights mechanisms simply cannot be tolerated. It is timely that that resolution invited the General Assembly to remain seized of developments on that issue. Both in Geneva and in New York, we must ensure that we are vocal in condemning those acts, and in that regard, the EU commends the leadership that the President of the Human Rights Council has shown in using his good offices to highlight the important work being undertaken by the Bureau of the Human Rights Council on those issues.

The EU is fully committed to better preventing human rights abuses by businesses and improving access to remedy for victims inside the EU and beyond. In the EU, existing legislation enables the victims of corporate human rights abuses to find adequate access to remedy. The EU is committed to building on a solid body of legislation and policies and underlines that the added value of any possible legally binding instrument should be in enhancing the protection of and respect for human rights, as well as to ensure a level playing field for companies globally. Any such instrument needs to

be fit for purpose and able to be effectively implemented and enforced. It is also important for it to enjoy strong cross-regional support from both developing and developed countries. The EU will continue to work with all States and stakeholders to make genuine progress on the business and human rights agenda.

In line with our long-standing and principled opposition to capital punishment, the EU supported, during the forty-second session of the Human Rights Council, a resolution focusing on the protection and promotion of human rights in the context of the death penalty (resolution 42/24). That resolution reaffirms that States parties to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are barred from reintroducing the death penalty and condemns its resumption in all cases. While abolition should be the ultimate goal, the resolution emphasizes that in instances of the death penalty still being applied — which in itself would be regrettable — it must be strictly limited to the most serious crimes, in conformity with international human rights law. In the context of human rights and terrorism, the European Union supports the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council (resolution 42/18) but would have hoped to see a stronger emphasis on the importance of States respecting international law, including the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all human beings, when adopting and applying counter-terrorism measures. The EU also remains concerned about the integrity of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. Protecting the mandate will remain a central priority for the EU.

On 17 October, the General Assembly elected 14 new members to the Human Rights Council (see A/74/PV.17). We welcome in particular the more diverse membership of the HRC and encourage countries that have never been members to consider submitting their candidatures. Serving as a member of the Council entails important responsibilities. Resolution 60/251 provides that members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and shall fully cooperate with the Council. While we congratulate the new members, we also remind them to give due importance to the human rights situations in their own countries and to fully cooperate with the Council's mechanisms in the promotion and protection of the human rights of all, without discrimination of any kind.

No State has a perfect human rights record, but we particularly expect from the newly elected members

that they engage in the work of the Human Rights Council with a view to improving their own human rights situation and to addressing all human rights concerns that come before the Council on their merits. In that regard, we remind Venezuela, Libya, the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia and the Philippines of their particular obligations of cooperation as members of the Council. We also strongly encourage all States and other stakeholders to cooperate with the special procedures as a means of enhancing the protection and promotion of human rights. We take this opportunity to call on all States that have not done so to extend a standing invitation to all special procedures.

Accountability for human rights violations and abuses lies at the core of the HRC's work in Myanmar, Burundi, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Venezuela. On Myanmar, the EU welcomes the work of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, which shone light on the grave human rights violations in the country. The EU is also pleased that the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, which was established by the Human Rights Council last year and welcomed by the General Assembly (resolution 73/264), was declared operational as of 30 August by the Secretary-General and has started its important work. We call on the Government of Myanmar to grant access to the Mechanism, cooperate with it and ensure that full accountability for violations and abuses of human rights can be achieved. The EU is pleased that it has continued its close and constructive cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and again presented a joint resolution (resolution 42/3) during the forty-second session of the HRC.

The European Union welcomes the extension of the mandate and the work of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, as the human rights situation in the country remains extremely serious. For the third consecutive year, the Commission has documented crimes against humanity and serious human rights violations and abuses. In accordance with the principles of early warning and prevention, the Commission has also identified several risk factors in the current environment. The situation needs to be followed with the greatest vigilance. The EU regrets that the Government of Burundi failed to cooperate with the Commission and condemns the threats against and intimidation of its members. We encourage the Burundian authorities to resume cooperation with the Commission and all

relevant human rights mechanisms, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The EU welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. This year we have tried a cooperative approach with Belarus to get the country concerned on board and commit to cooperation. While we negotiated constructively and in good faith, the Government unfortunately decided against the cooperative approach, and we therefore once again had to present the draft resolution requesting the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, which is particularly important in the light of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

We expressed profound concern over the situation in Yemen. The Human Rights Council was offered ample and compelling evidence by the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties to the conflict. Such violations and abuses, which persist despite the relative decrease in the fighting since a few weeks ago, need to be properly documented and investigated. The EU therefore supported HRC resolution 39/16, which renewed the mandate of the Group of Experts and calls on all States to fully cooperate with it.

The EU remains gravely concerned by the human rights situation in Syria. We welcome the announcement made by the Secretary-General on an agreement to form a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led constitutional committee. The EU praises the Special Envoy for facilitating the agreement in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). We have offered our full support for the establishment of a genuine political process, which must be accompanied by meaningful progress on the ground. The EU calls on all parties to support that process and refrain from actions that risk undermining it, return urgently to the previously agreed ceasefire and protect civilians. The EU will keep the human rights situation in Syria under continued scrutiny, including in the HRC. We therefore underscore our continued support for the important work carried out by the commission of inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We also note the important

role that the International Criminal Court could play in that regard and the authority of the Security Council to refer such situations to the Court.

The report of the High Commissioner confirmed the seriousness of the human rights violations and abuses in Venezuela, which are taking place with impunity. The EU calls on the competent Venezuelan bodies to fully implement the totality of its recommendations and to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner, the Human Rights Council and its Mechanisms, including the recently established fact-finding mission.

We welcome the continued support that has been rendered to Georgia and Ukraine. The EU remains deeply concerned about the ongoing human rights violations and abuses committed against persons living in areas of eastern Ukraine not controlled by the Government of Ukraine and in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. The work of the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine and the High Commissioner's regular updates to the HRC are a very important platform through which we can receive impartial information and updates directly from the ground and to keep the issue high on the HRC's agenda. We stress that all international human rights observers and monitoring mechanisms should be granted full, free and unrestricted access to the entire sovereign territory of Ukraine. We also welcome the High Commissioner's regular oral and written updates on Georgia under item 10 and urge those exercising effective control to grant unimpeded access for the Office of the High Commissioner and other international human rights mechanisms to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region and South Ossetia.

In the Sudan, the European Union welcomes the extension of the mandate of the independent expert and the Sudanese Government's commitment to establishing a fully mandated Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights country office in Khartoum and field offices in Darfur, Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan and eastern Sudan. Those two mechanisms will support the Sudan in addressing its human rights situation and therefore help it make progress towards becoming a more stable, democratic and prosperous country. The EU is committed to continuing to work with all stakeholders with the objective of supporting the Sudan in making that progress firmly in mind.

Through joint statements, the human rights situations in Saudi Arabia and Cameroon have been addressed by the HRC. During the past year the Human Rights Council has also demonstrated its commitment to providing technical assistance and capacity-building to promote human rights to the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Cambodia.

We welcome the adoption of HRC resolution 40/2, initiated by a group of countries in the region requesting that the Office of the High Commissioner monitor the human rights situation in Nicaragua. We trust that the HRC will continue to closely monitor situations where technical assistance and capacity-building can make a difference and take action where necessary. The European Union calls for unfettered access by international human rights monitoring mechanisms to be granted to all territories.

We also welcome the extensions of the country-specific mandates of the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Eritrea and of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

To be able to deliver, the HRC must continue to work on its own efficiency, always looking at its impact on the ground. We hope that the efforts by the current President will build on his predecessors' work, and we wish him success. HRC members and observers are now more aware of the need to better use the Council's toolbox. For the European Union, it is crucial to further improve synergies between the HRC and the Third Committee while at the same time ensuring that the mandate, the independence and the work of the HRC is respected. Moreover, we welcome the consistency between the work of the HRC, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee, with a view to ensuring that the activities mandated by the Human Rights Council are appropriately funded and can be duly implemented.

The Human Rights Council, including its system of special procedures, the establishment of accountability mechanisms, the Universal Periodic Review and all other mechanisms of the HRC, has contributed positively to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Through the delivery of technical assistance and capacity-building mandates, it has also helped countries faced with human rights crises

to build human rights protection policies and to fulfil their international obligations.

For the HRC to increase its preventive role, the broader use of the HRC's mechanisms should apply, including by transferring reports and other materials to the Security Council when relevant. During the current year, the HRC has invited the General Assembly to do so in the cases of Syria, Myanmar, Burundi and Yemen.

In conclusion, the European Union will continue to do its part in engaging with the mechanisms of the HRC and all stakeholders working to promote and protect human rights, including by presenting resolutions on the rights of the child, together with the Latin America and Caribbean Group, and on the freedom of religion or belief, as well as on various country situations.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Cuban delegation welcomes Mr. Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council, and we congratulate him on the discharge of his duties in his position.

As selectivity, double standards and political manipulation of the human rights issue had already led to the disappearance of the now defunct Commission on Human Rights, we note with concern that those negative practices are once again gaining ground in the work of the Council, which is not conducive to the spirit of dialogue and cooperation that should prevail in this body and contributes only to confrontation.

We can make progress in the promotion and protection of all human rights for all only based on the principles of universality, objectivity and non-discrimination — hence the importance of the Universal Periodic Review, which is the only universal mechanism in existence for the comprehensive analysis of human rights situations in all countries on an equal footing. The principles of universality, objectivity and non-discrimination must be fully respected in the Council's special procedures and by the human rights treaty bodies. We are sorry to note that in some cases that is not happening, because while we continue to hear heavy criticism of various countries of the South, complicit silence persists in the face of clear human rights violations in some highly developed countries. We therefore want to remind the Assembly that special-procedures mandate holders must observe the code of conduct adopted during the Council's institution-building process.

We share the view that the Human Rights Council can and must work better. At the same time, we understand that any processes for improving its efficiency and working methods should be developed in full conformity with its institutional-building package. The Council is and must remain a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, and is therefore subordinate to it. However, that does not mean that initiatives submitted to the Third Committee or the Council should be limited, or that submission to one of those bodies as well as the General Assembly constitutes duplication. We do not agree with efforts to seek greater ties between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council. Human rights issues should not be securitized, as it were, based on the argument that the Human Rights Council's preventive work should be implemented.

The Human Rights Council still has much to do, not only with regard to the necessary strengthening of its work, but also with regard to the recognition of rights such as the right to peace, development and international solidarity. The Council has the potential to contribute a great deal towards fostering a truly democratic and equitable international order. Yet as long as the current international economic and political order, which is unjust by nature, persists, it is not human rights but selfish and hegemonic interests that will prevail. And as long as unilateral coercive measures continue to be imposed on countries of the South, the full realization of the human rights of millions of people all over the world will remain a utopian endeavour. The economic, commercial and financial embargo that the United States has imposed on Cuba for nearly six decades is a clear example of those kinds of measures and their impact on human rights. That criminal and genocidal policy is a massive, flagrant and systematic violation of the human rights of all of the people of Cuba and the main obstacle to our development.

Cuba will continue to advance the promotion and protection of all human rights for all people in spite of that embargo, which is getting worse and worse and is clearly intended to strangle our people and make them surrender. That will never happen. We will continue to defend the right of peoples to self-determination, peace and development. We will continue advocating for the promotion and protection not only of economic, social and cultural rights, but also civil and political rights, which are just as important. In that regard, the Assembly can continue to count on Cuba's resolute support.

Mr. Rybakov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Human Rights Council (HRC) is an important body in the international architecture of human rights institutions. In accordance with its mandate, its job is to address real issues of human rights that have a serious impact on the quality of people's lives and to help to strengthen States' capacities in that area. Today, as the outcomes of the HRC's Universal Periodic Review have shown, all States need to intensify their efforts to implement their national human rights policies. The Universal Periodic Review mechanism is the Human Rights Council's most valuable attribute. Through it the Council is obliged to carry out the non-selective monitoring of human rights situations in every country in the world, without exception. Unfortunately, the HRC continues to go beyond the framework of the Universal Periodic Review, engaging in public political squabbles that damage its credibility. Ironically, the Council, which in theory is there to fight repression, is itself becoming a repressive body.

The HRC continues to adopt decisions and resolutions motivated by the narrow political interests of individual countries. Today we are once again compelled to point out that there is no other institution within the United Nations whose reputation is as controversial as the Council's. We must also emphasize the lack of progress in the work of the Human Rights Council over the past year. It has not been able to cope with its ingrained problems of politicization and double standards, a lack of objectivity in its assessments of human rights situations, especially in developing countries, the overburdening of its discussions with country-specific issues and increased confrontation among States.

This is very worrying. The Human Rights Council was originally conceived as a body that would be guided in its work by the principles of universality, objectivity and non-discrimination. It was created not to enable individual countries to channel criticism to suit themselves but to seek collective solutions. A trend has become firmly established whereby country-specific situations are considered across the entire Human Rights Council agenda, and it is getting worse with every session. The Council's rubber-stamped country-specific initiatives are based on subjective points of view and assessments of individual States or groups of States. They run counter to the Sustainable Development Goals. There is not a word in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development about legalizing

methods of political pressure, sanctions or the threat of sanctions. The authors of such initiatives are mistaken if they think that such decisions can produce positive changes in human rights situations on the ground. On the contrary, we are witnessing a natural decline in States' interest in discussing country-specific mandates for which there was and is no basis.

I would like to say a few words on a separate issue in response to the part of the statement of the observer of the European Union (EU) about the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. I want to reiterate once again that Belarus has never recognized and never will recognize that mandate. Its use as a tool for exerting direct political pressure in the context of the upcoming elections, as was stated, is a blatant confirmation of how these issues are politicized by individual States or groups of States, as I mentioned. It should be understood that we will conduct the upcoming elections, both presidential and parliamentary, in the interests of the people of Belarus, not of the EU or anyone else, and in full compliance with our national legislation. We would not advise anyone to try to blackmail or intimidate us. Of course, the EU may continue to attempt to give its valuable — or valueless — advice, but we would recommend that they deal with their own problems first, including in the area of human rights.

Considering the critical financial situation at the United Nations and the Organization's painstaking and sometimes ludicrous efforts to save money, it will most likely be we the States who will have to think about and discuss the issue of the reduced resources allocated to the implementation of Human Rights Council decisions, and especially with regard to country-specific mandates. We once again suggest conducting a review of the agendas of the Third Committee and the Human Rights Council in order to eliminate duplicative resolutions and also move resolutions to a biennial or even triennial basis, which would enable us to increase the effectiveness of the work of the Human Rights Council and preserve the human and financial resources that we all probably need. That must be done as part of the process of strengthening the Human Rights Council and not in an attempt to give it additional judicial functions. The capacities and potential of the Council should be directed towards peace.

Belarus calls for developing essential cooperative mechanisms and discussion platforms in the Council for exchanging best policies and practices in the

various areas of human rights, including in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Belarus will continue to participate actively in improving the working methods of the Human Rights Council and in ensuring that our voice is heard.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council, for presenting the Council's report (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1) and for his leadership of the Council, particularly given the increasing challenges facing the world today, which are affecting the human rights situation on the social, economic, cultural and civil fronts.

The State of Qatar is committed to participating actively in the efforts of the Human Rights Council to improve standards and address cases of human rights violations by responding immediately, particularly when it comes to ensuring accountability for such violations and ending impunity. The State of Qatar is committed to enhancing and protecting human rights at the national, regional and international levels. At the regional level, the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region, which is hosted by Qatar, has had a number of achievements this year, providing activities for young people and extending its services to States all over the region, including by providing capacity-building programmes for freedom of expression and countering hate speech and discrimination, as well as fighting violence and extremism.

At the national level, I would like to highlight the progress we have made in strengthening social justice and enhancing the provision of decent work, efforts that were recently welcomed by the International Labour Organization (ILO). They include legislative and executive measures to strengthen and protect rights for migrant workers, including ending the *kafala* or labour sponsorship system in Qatar. The ILO's recognition confirms that our Government has succeeded in implementing the conventions it has ratified. Qatar is now a leading State in the areas of improving pay, strengthening labour inspection systems, ensuring professional health and safety standards, improving employment procedures and enhancing ways to prevent, prosecute and protect people in disputes. We have enacted legislation to create a fund providing aid and security to migrant workers and established an institutional framework to ensure the protection

and strengthening of human rights, and to exchange experiences and foster cooperation with other States and United Nations human rights mechanisms by adopting an open-door policy for special-procedures mandate-holders and cooperation with them.

Despite the harmful effects of the unjust blockade that has been imposed on Qatar since June 2007, we have persisted in our efforts to protect and enhance human rights, including for our citizens and residents, and we have maintained a good ranking in the Human Development Index at the regional and international levels. We have continued to participate actively in humanitarian and development cooperation and in efforts to achieve peace and security at the international level.

The Council's report reflects the deplorable situation of flagrant violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory and mentions the international consensus that they must be allowed to enjoy their inalienable rights, which are guaranteed by international law and international human rights law

With regard to Syria, the report cites the wide range of violations of human rights and international human rights law that have been systematically perpetrated in the country for the eighth consecutive year, helping to prolong the crisis. The prosecution of those responsible for such crimes should be a major factor in preventing and putting an end to impunity for them, and the only way to achieve that prevention is through a political settlement in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

In conclusion, we will continue our efforts to protect human rights in order to achieve justice, peace and security for all peoples.

Ms. Feldman (Australia): Australia thanks the President of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for his presentation of the Council's report (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1).

At the end of our second year as a member of the Human Rights Council, Australia would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to it as a leading component of the multilateral human rights system. We commend the President's leadership and ongoing concerted efforts to strengthen the Council and improve its efficiency. Australia strongly supports these efforts and will continue to engage constructively

to support outcomes that strengthen the Council's core mandate, which is to promote and protect human rights and to prevent and address human rights violations.

It is important that we continue to support the ability of civil society and small States, some of which may not have a permanent presence in Geneva, to engage in the work of the Council. Australia is proud to continue working to amplify the voices of Pacific countries at the HRC. This year, at its fortieth session, we led the development of a joint statement on behalf of 15 Pacific nations on human rights in the fishing industry, including modern slavery and trafficking in persons. At the forty-first session, we are continuing that work, developing a joint statement with 16 Pacific nations on the importance of youth employment and education.

There is still a pressing need for stronger processes to ensure that HRC members uphold the highest human rights standards. To that end, and to promote transparency, Australia supports efforts to strengthen civil-society engagement and participation in HRC processes. Australia remains committed to strengthening the Council through cooperation, transparency and objectivity, a point that we made in our incoming member's pledge in 2018. This year Australia's initiative of an incoming member's pledge was taken up by members elected to the Council for the 2019-2021 term. We were pleased to see Fiji deliver a 2019 incoming member's pledge affirming its commitment to constructive engagement with the Council.

Together, United Nations Member States must find a way to balance the need to improve the efficiency of the Human Rights Council with the need to ensure that the Human Rights Council is adequately resourced to carry out its important mandate. As we strive to improve the Council's efficiency, we must also work together to improve its effectiveness. A strong multilateral human rights system is the keystone to promoting and protecting universally applicable human rights.

Mr. Almajroub (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Despite the gross human rights violations being committed in many parts of the world, great efforts are still being made to promote and protect those rights. The international community is still urging States to promote and respect human rights, as reflected in the inclusion of human rights at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, to varying degrees

according to the nature of each Goal. That reflects the importance of enshrining the principles and values of human rights today, more than ever, due to the horrific situations that many people are going through.

My delegation stresses that the State of Kuwait is keen to meet its obligations under international instruments to which it is a party and to submit regular reports to the concerned human rights committees and mechanisms of the United Nations on time. In that context, we submitted our third regular report on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and our third through sixth comprehensive regular reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in November 2018. We also presented our first report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September of this year to the relevant committees. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights welcomed our presentation.

The State of Kuwait is preparing to discuss its third comprehensive national report, in line with the Universal Periodic Review, at the Human Rights Council at the beginning of 2020.

The State of Kuwait believes in the importance of cooperating with Human Rights Council mechanisms, such as the Special Rapporteurs with special mandates, and of having interactive dialogues with them in order to benefit from their expertise and make progress in the field of human rights. The recent scheduled visit of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, in late 2018, attests to our ongoing cooperation. We are also coordinating dates for visits from the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, as well as the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

We carefully monitor human rights issues around the world, especially in the Middle East. We recognize that the gross human rights violations in the region necessitate a serious stance on the part of the international community. We share the concern of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights over the continued Israeli violations of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. This is a breach of international law and international humanitarian law and defies the relevant Security Council resolutions.

There are no deterrents to the occupying Power that has been perpetrating that tyranny, spurred by the silence of the international community. We once again underscore the right of the Palestinian people to live in dignity, and we support their path to an independent and free State that provides a good livelihood for our brotherly Palestinian people.

We would also like to express our grave concern and sadness about the continuous suffering of the Rohingya minority. It is high time for them to live in dignity and security, and to return to their country peacefully and securely. We affirm our principled and consistent position on the need to maintain and respect human rights and its inclusiveness and universality. Our Constitution reflects that belief in articles providing for the enjoyment of economic, social, political, civil and religious rights to all citizens without discrimination, such as the right to education, ownership, opinion, work and religious practices. In addition, many of its provisions are aligned with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the relevant international instruments on maintaining and realizing human rights.

In conclusion, we commend the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michele Bachelet, and her Office for their great efforts to promote and consolidate the principles of human rights and for their noble endeavours to maintain and safeguard human rights. In that vein, we reiterate that the State of Kuwait will continue supporting the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We recognize the volume of the work it undertakes and the challenges it faces in ensuring the enjoyment of fundamental rights by all, in line with States' obligations under international human rights law.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein thanks the President of the Human Rights Council for presenting a comprehensive and informative account of its work. As the central permanent human rights organ of the United Nations, the Human Rights Council is today a well-established voice and an authority on the entire spectrum of human rights questions, not only for the General Assembly, but also for the broader public. Liechtenstein supports the work of the Council, its evolving body of special procedures and its strong civil society dimension, as well as the Universal Periodic Review, whose integrity and universality are important achievements that must be preserved.

While this debate is an important annual opportunity for the General Assembly to engage with the Human Rights Council on its substantive work, it also provides a good platform to evaluate the Council's institutional set-up in the framework of the United Nations. The most recent review of the Human Rights Council brought useful clarification of its relationship with the General Assembly, including its Third and Fifth Committees, but the General Assembly has a standing responsibility to provide conditions conducive for the Human Rights Council to implement its mandate. An area where there is clear room for improvement is the Council's mandate to promote the effective coordination and mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system. That calls for stronger and more consistent links between Geneva and New York, and for more robust cooperation between the Human Rights Council and other main bodies of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council.

The work of the Human Rights Council and its many special procedure mandate-holders is, in many instances, obviously relevant to the discussions in the Security Council, yet consistently disregarded by it. In doing so, the Security Council deprives itself of the best available factual basis for decision-making and promotes an extensively narrow concept of security that the international community has long overcome. It also prevents the Human Rights Council from fully living up to the important role we have collectively given it. Liechtenstein will continue to consider the broader institutional set-up of the Human Rights Council in the United Nations system — a question of status as the General Assembly engages in further review of the Human Rights Council.

The General Assembly has just elected new members to the Human Rights Council. The importance we have collectively given to the quality of its membership is clearly reflected in the provisions of resolution 60/251 and is also a lesson learned from its predecessor body, the defunct United Nations Commission on Human Rights. That Council members shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights represents a commitment by the membership of the Assembly, in particular at the time of election. Some measures have helped increase the fairness and transparency of those elections, and we are grateful for the continued commitment of civil-society actors in organizing hearings and exchanges with candidates. At the same time, it is obvious that

these measures are insufficient and that States too often consider their own commitment in this respect as dispensable. This continues to be a serious liability for the Human Rights Council, in both its work and functioning and in its outside perception. Liechtenstein will therefore continue to support additional measures to ensure the full implementation of the relevant provisions of resolution 60/251, including as part of discussions on the Council's status.

The work of the Human Rights Council is essential in particular in cases of human rights emergencies and grave violations. The Council is indeed often the only United Nations body to address such situations with the necessary urgency.

On Myanmar, we have received well-documented reports from the Council's special procedures on consistent patterns of the most serious human rights violations and abuses, including extrajudicial killings, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as other serious violations of international humanitarian law. The independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar speaks of genocidal intent against the Rohingya population. It is obvious that these allegations need to be fully addressed by a competent independent criminal-justice body. Liechtenstein welcomes the independent investigative mechanism for Myanmar as a facilitating measure in that regard. The creation of the mechanism by an overwhelming majority of the Council's membership reflects a strong wish for accountability.

However, Liechtenstein regrets that the Council failed to provide the appropriate political backing during its most recent session to support accountability efforts, including the important steps taken by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the context of forced deportation. Today the ICC provides the most concrete path to justice for the Rohingya people, albeit not for all the grave crimes they have suffered. It is shameful that the Security Council continues to ignore calls from States, from the United Nations system and from the victims themselves for a full-fledged referral to the ICC and has in fact not even discussed the matter. At the same time, it is perfectly clear that no lasting solution can take place in the absence of accountability, especially not the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the many displaced persons.

Liechtenstein condemns the ongoing reprisals, both online and offline, against individuals who cooperate

with the United Nations. Such reprisals are unacceptable and must be fully investigated. Constructive interaction by civil society with the United Nations system, in particular with the special-procedure mandate-holders, is essential for the effective human rights work of our Organization. We welcome the fact that the Human Rights Council has recognized the important contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights and that it renewed the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The promotion and protection of human rights is a precondition for peace and security and lies at the very core of sustainable development. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we have at our disposal the most ambitious and comprehensive implementation programme for the right to development ever devised. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fully reflect a human rights-based approach, which has been one of the most important paradigm shifts in the United Nations. This puts the Human Rights Council front and centre in our efforts to achieve sustainable development, including in the area of climate change.

Yet at a time when progress towards achieving the SDGs should be our main focus, we are concerned that conceptual differences on the development paradigm might cause a distraction that we can hardly afford. The right to development, as set out in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, is a fundamental human right, with the human person as its central subject and its active participant and beneficiary. Liechtenstein considers the Declaration to be the primary normative guidance as we try to find a common understanding of the meaning of leaving no one behind. Interpretations that hold that the right to development does not primarily address the individual person are obviously deviating from that understanding. The Human Rights Council can make a valuable contribution to that discussion, in addition to furthering the implementation of the specific human rights enshrined in the SDGs.

Mr. Hassani Nejad Pirkouhi (Islamic Republic of Iran): The Islamic Republic of Iran takes note of the report of the Human Rights Council (HRC), as contained in documents A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1. We thank His Excellency Mr. Coly Seck for his statement and for his role as the President of the Council.

My delegation recognizes the importance of strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council within the framework of the institution-building texts attached to the HRC resolutions 5/1 and 16/21. The importance of the institution-building package should also be highlighted on the issue of the rationalization of the HRC's work and resolutions. Meanwhile, the follow-up measures by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) needs to be conducted in a balanced, fair and equal manner. Within that framework, my delegation underscores the importance of maintaining the current structure of the HRC agenda, in particular its standing agenda item 7. It should also be recalled that General Assembly resolution 65/281 decided only to consider the issue of the status of the Council no sooner than 2021 and no later than 2026. Therefore, discussions on the status of the Council and on improving the working methods of the Council should not be mixed.

My delegation stresses the importance of further cooperation and interaction between the HRC, the Third Committee and the General Assembly with a view to improving delivery and enhancing the promotion and protection of human rights in a cooperative and dialogue-based manner. However, we are of the view that calls to engage the Human Rights Council and the OHCHR with the Security Council constitute an open invitation for an even further politicization of human rights. Bearing in mind the highly politicized nature of the work of the Security Council and its exclusive structure, any engagement of the OHCHR, special-procedure mandate-holders or the HRC with the Security Council runs the risk of harming even further the cause of human rights and its securitization for the sake of political interests.

At a time when waves of racism, assaults on multilateralism, nationalist populism, extreme supremacist ideologies and bigotry show no sign of retreat, Iran emphasizes the fact that the potential of the High Commissioner and her Office are yet to be utilized in full as a medium for dialogue and cooperation.

On the work of the Council, it is unfortunate that politicization and manipulation have increased mistrust and eroded the effectiveness of the Council and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism. The initial idea behind the UPR mechanism was to ensure universality, objectivity, non-selectivity and impartiality in the work of the Council. Regrettably, a few countries still prefer to revert to the dysfunctional

practice of submitting country-specific resolutions, which only serves to increase confrontation in the Council. The report of the Human Rights Council contains a reference to a resolution against my country (resolution 40/18), the product of a pernicious approach on the part of a few unscrupulous Governments, which is an illustration of one such case and exposes the shortcomings of the Council. The resolution merely reflects the inconsistency and narrow political interests of its sponsors and has nothing to do with the meaningful promotion and protection of human rights. The Islamic Republic of Iran therefore dissociates itself from that part of the Human Rights Council's report. In the meantime, we reiterate our position whereby we do not recognize or cooperate with mandates of the Council when they extend beyond the internationally recognized arena of human rights.

Ms. Tesfamariam (Eritrea): Eritrea welcomes this opportunity to interact with the President of the Human Rights Council and takes note of his report (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1).

The establishment of the Council after the failure of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was a reaffirmation and recognition of the universality and indivisibility of human rights and presented a renewed opportunity to effectively promote human rights globally on an equal footing. Sadly, we continue to see a repetition of the Commission's failed practices. We see constant instances of the Council dictating how States should prioritize rights and establishing ineffective benchmarks for meeting those rights. We see a disproportionate focus on some rights rather than others and the use of an arm-twisting approach to support country-specific mandates for some countries while ignoring violations by others. This approach to addressing human rights undermines the Council's ability to effectively promote human rights. It is biased and designed to vilify and pressure countries, usually for independent political reasons, and it lacks any real intention of promoting human rights.

The success of the Human Rights Council will be measured by its ability to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights in a fair and equal manner, as well as its ability to assist States, which bear the primary responsibility in implementing human rights obligations. The Council can be effective in promoting human rights only if it can constructively engage States on their identified priorities and challenges, based on their specific national situations.

Its success will be measured by its ability to promote the universal respect and protection of all human rights in a fair and equal manner and to assist the States that bear the primary responsibility for meeting human rights obligations. The Council can only be effective in promoting human rights if it can constructively engage States on their identified priorities and challenges based on their specific national situations.

My delegation continues to stress the importance of constructive international dialogue and cooperation. In that regard, we reiterate our firm belief in the centrality of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for fulfilling States' human rights obligations and improving situations on the ground. In June Eritrea presented its third-cycle UPR report on the implementation of 80 of 92, or 85 per cent, of its agreed priority areas and shared challenges in its remaining areas. During the same cycle, Eritrea supported 131 recommendations. The accepted recommendations are broad in scope and content, covering the full range of rights enshrined in the two most important international covenants, namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

As stated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, official human rights mandates continue to grow in number and scope, but the regular budget resources are not keeping up with them. Eritrea supports an increase in regular budget allocations, as well as voluntary support from Member States' contributions. We also support the strengthening of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review to provide support for countries, especially least developed countries, in their implementation of human rights commitments. While recognizing budgetary challenges and their impact on the work of the Human Rights Council, we also note with concern the expansion of mandates whose contribution to human rights on the ground remains questionable. The Council ought to ensure the implementation of its existing agendas rather than expanding its work unproductively.

Eritrea rejects the selective manner in which human rights continue to be addressed in the Human Rights Council. Eritrea opposes country-specific and all politically motivated mandates, which continue to be counterproductive and a waste of resources. Eritrea sees its membership in the Human Rights Council as an opportunity to contribute to the Council's success.

In its first year of membership it has worked to ensure the Council's effectiveness by engaging with all members proactively and constructively on all issues, despite some members' divergent views. If the Council is to effect changes in the human rights situation of countries it ought to take a constructive approach of genuine dialogue with States and cooperate on a range of areas identified by States according to their national priorities and realities.

Mr. Lukyantsev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In 2006, when the General Assembly adopted its historic resolution 60/251, establishing the Human Rights Council, the entire international community had great hopes for that decision. The times were changing. Instead of the biased United Nations Human Rights Commission, which by then had totally discredited itself, we were establishing a body that would function on a basis of objectivity, impartiality and constructive dialogue. More than 10 years have passed since that historic moment. The time has come to give some thought to what the Human Rights Council has become. Has it lived up to our expectations? Has it been able to rectify the mistakes of its predecessor, the Commission? Will its work help improve the human rights situation and strengthen individual countries' ability to protect human rights nationally?

Unfortunately, the answer to all of those questions is no. In the hands of unethical political forces, the Council is increasingly becoming a mechanism for putting political and economic pressure on sovereign States, and its work is rapidly losing independence and impartiality. For all practical purposes it has ceased to fulfil its function as the intergovernmental platform of the United Nations for the discussion of the entire spectrum of human rights issues. The Council is openly using a number of States and alliances to achieve narrow political and economic goals. The practice has begun of adopting country-specific resolutions, in the pursuit not of the noble purpose of protecting human rights but of interfering in the internal affairs of individual countries in order to effect regime change in undesirable Governments. Some Council member States also use thematic resolutions to solve their economic and political problems.

The untargeted use of the Council's capabilities is unfortunately becoming a regular practice. The agenda of meetings is full of topics that now have a very distant connection to human rights. The Council inevitably gets involved in questions of the

standardization and regulation of trade and economic relations, medical issues, the arms trade and the fight against organized crime and narcotics when certain groups of States cannot get the results they want through other specialized United Nations platforms. We believe that this kind of manipulation by the Council is irresponsible and extremely dangerous. The adoption of politicized decisions damages the process of developing united approaches to concrete issues and situations. It also harms the reputation of the Council itself and undermines confidence in it. The only way out of this situation is a return to strict observance of the Council's mandate, as set forth in resolution 60/251.

One of the reasons for the Human Rights Council's lack of real influence on human rights situations in specific countries is the fragmented nature of the work of the United Nations as a whole in the area of human rights. Some groups of countries are neither ready nor willing to recognize the existence of institutional and programmatic links between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee. In practice, that obstinacy in dismissing the nexus linking the Council and the Third Committee's work with that of OHCHR is leading to a deterioration in the situation of the rights of ordinary people, as the decisions and resolutions of the Human Rights Council providing Governments with technical assistance or advice are not backed up with technical, human or financial resources. Yet OHCHR has all those resources at its disposal. The importance of coordinating its work with that of the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee is obvious. It is only through dialogue that we can arrive at appropriate and effective solutions, including by developing and supporting United Nations projects and programmes in the area of human rights, and specifically Programme 20.

The Russian Federation was an active participant in the negotiation processes on resolution 60/251, developing the documents for the Council's institution-building process, on the Council's resolutions 5/1 and 5/2, and the 2011 operational review procedure of the functioning of the Council. Our country has been a member of the Council several times, and we have always been committed to strengthening the principle of cooperation in its work. In the current circumstances, Russia cannot stand idly by as the Human Rights Council reverts to its discredited predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights. We want to restore the Council's

positive momentum and constructive potential, as set out in resolution 60/251 and Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 5/2, and bring back the trust and hope that the international community invested in the establishment of the Council. Those are the tasks and goals that the Russian Federation has set for itself in presenting its candidacy for election to the Council for the period from 2021 to 2023.

In conclusion, we want to once again affirm our country's commitment to constructive and equal cooperation across the entire spectrum of issues on the international human rights agenda, to which there is no alternative and which is the only way to comprehensively strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights.

Mr. Nasir (Maldives): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Coly Seck of Senegal, President of the Human Rights Council in its thirteenth cycle, and his Bureau for steering its work this year. I would also like to express my appreciation to Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and her Office, for their perseverance in the promotion and protection of human rights.

Since its establishment in 2006, the Human Rights Council has made significant progress in putting the human rights perspective at the centre of the United Nations system. It has not only established itself as a forum for hearing the voices of victims of human rights violations and witnesses to them, but also as a body that is ideally positioned to respond to human rights violations and emergencies. Through commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and country-specific resolutions, it has drawn the attention of the world to a number of situations in which people have been subjected to gross human rights violations and has prompted international action in support of the protection of the human rights of millions. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is in its third cycle, is one of the Human Rights Council's progressive achievements. The UPR process embodies the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity.

In 2008 the first democratically elected Government in the Maldives succeeded in securing a seat in the Human Rights Council with its democratic and human rights credentials. The Maldives successfully served two consecutive terms in the Council, beginning in 2010. Unfortunately, however, in 2012 the democratic journey that had begun in 2008 was cut short, and the

country went into a downward spiral of regression with regard to many of the democratic gains that we had achieved. Since his election in 2018, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has taken swift measures to restore the human rights of the Maldivian people, which suffered from considerable neglect during the previous regime, when many fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and assembly, as well as the peaceful conduct of political activities, were significantly curtailed. One of the first actions of the current Parliament was to repeal a draconian defamation law that imposed severe restrictions on the freedom of expression and the media. Among other things, the new Government has also submitted revisions to a law on political parties in order to remove restrictions on political participation.

President Solih's Government also plans to institute a transitional justice programme to seek justice for those who were unfairly tried and punished by the previous Government. In addition, it has established a commission for the investigation of murders and enforced disappearances, with the requisite powers to investigate such heinous crimes and bring those responsible to justice. The Government has also announced a zero-tolerance policy on corruption and has taken steps to strengthen institutional mechanisms to rid our society of corruption, which had become endemic in the past few years. As President Solih said in his address to the General Assembly in September,

“[T]he Maldives represents a remarkable story. It is a story of second chances, people power and how we as a nation managed to reverse a downward spiral towards autocratic rule”. (A/74/PV.3, p. 27)

However, across the globe, there are many who are not as fortunate as our people. The human rights and humanitarian crisis in the State of Palestine continues to deteriorate. That crisis is the result of Israel's illegal and prolonged occupation, which has deprived generations of Palestinians of their most fundamental rights, including the right to life. This year the people of Gaza faced a deadly start to Ramadan marred by funerals, destruction and heartbreaking anguish.

There are also millions of Syrians who are besieged, displaced and deprived of their basic right to life and liberty. My delegation condemns not only the gross human rights abuses in Syria, but also the failure of the international community to stop the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Syrian people for

almost eight years. As we speak, a new wave of violence is unfolding in Syria.

The fate of the Rohingya community in Myanmar is another human rights and humanitarian crisis that is deeply concerning to the Maldives and the wider world generally. We are concerned about the thousands of Rohingya refugees who are living with extreme restrictions on their freedom of movement, whether related to their livelihoods, health care or education. The Maldives adds its voice to the calls of the international community and urges the Government of Myanmar to remove all restrictions on freedom of movement and grant unhindered access to all United Nations and humanitarian aid officials and journalists, as well as to cease all atrocities and hostilities directed at the Rohingya people. The Maldives also urges the Government of Myanmar to facilitate and expedite the safe, voluntary and dignified return of all displaced Rohingya people to their homes to live in peace and dignity.

While the Maldives shares its concerns with the rest of the world with regard to the many human rights violations that are occurring in a number of areas, we are keen to see improvements within the United Nations human rights mechanisms in order to enhance their timely response to such crises. In that regard, we believe there is significant room for improvement in the work of the Human Rights Council, which would enjoy a greater level of support and cooperation from the broader United Nations membership if it was seen to be more inclusive in its working methods. The Council's current working methods place many delegations from small island developing States at a disadvantage. Inadequate time is often provided for informal consultations on most draft resolutions. The input of non-member States in informal negotiations is often overlooked, owing in part to the disproportionate weight given to the views of member States of the Council. The Maldives therefore reiterates its call for specific and practical measures to improve the Council's working methods.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to this generation of the human race and poses a serious risk to the fundamental right to life. The Maldives introduced the idea of examining the human rights dimensions of climate change and led the Council's efforts that resulted in the establishment of a mandate on human rights and the environment. The Maldives is proud of the contributions that we have made to the Council's work and the outcomes that we have facilitated over

the years. The Maldives has also had the privilege to lead, with the support of core groups, resolutions and Parliaments as promoters of human rights, on issues concerning the independence of the judiciary, children, early and forced marriage and freedom of assembly and association, as well as on establishing and supporting the voluntary technical assistance trust fund to support the participation of least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Transitional Justice.

The Maldives remains committed to strengthening the Council as well as its working methods and ability to work with Governments of Member States in promoting and responding to human rights situations around the world. Human rights remain a key pillar of our Government's development policy, and we are honoured to assure our partners that in the service of humankind our Government will continue to promote and protect the rights of all, both at home and abroad.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks the President of the Human Rights Council for his statement this morning and commends him on his hard work.

Over the three sessions of the past year, the Human Rights Council once again demonstrated its central role in promoting, protecting and implementing human rights, as well as in combating human rights violations worldwide. The role of the Council has enabled it to respond to current situations and renew key mandates. Switzerland reiterates the importance of cooperation with all the mechanisms and instruments of the Human Rights Council, including its commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions. In particular, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council play a vital role in the implementation of the Council's mandate. They are also one of the main sources of information on human rights situations worldwide. Switzerland strongly supports their work and calls on all countries to cooperate fully with them. We are convinced that that would enable the special procedures to make an even greater contribution to the early-warning and prevention efforts of the United Nations.

Switzerland fully supports the reforms initiated by the Secretary-General, as well as their emphasis on prevention. Strengthening the capacities of the United Nations in terms of prevention, especially with regard to early warning and early action, remains a priority for

Switzerland. In that regard, we are convinced that human rights has a crucial role to play in conflict prevention. That is why Switzerland remains committed to placing human rights at the heart of peace and security issues. That includes increasing and systematizing the exchange of information between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council. Furthermore, Switzerland supports the efforts to strengthen the Human Rights Council, in particular by increasing its efficiency and visibility within the United Nations system.

Treaty bodies are another key component of the United Nations human rights pillar. In the run-up to the 2020 review of the treaty body system, Switzerland reiterates its full support for resolution 68/268 and the improvements it brought about in terms of strengthening the effective functioning of that system. Switzerland reiterates the importance of ensuring that the human rights pillar receives the resources it requires from the ordinary budget in order to finance all the mandates entrusted to it by the Member States. To that end, we will continue to pursue our efforts in the Fifth Committee, and we call on all States to work towards securing adequate funding for the United Nations human rights pillar. In addition, we consider it essential to ensure the inclusive participation of civil society in the work of the United Nations, including non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders. In that regard, Switzerland remains concerned about the reprisals that have been taken against persons who cooperate with human rights bodies and mechanisms, including treaty bodies. We call on all States to ensure that civil-society representatives are able to freely carry out their activities, including their participation in the work of international mechanisms, without being subject to reprisals. In that regard, it is essential that we ensure the harmonized implementation of the San José Guidelines.

I would like to raise a final point that is of particular importance to Switzerland. The rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly are vital to well-functioning democracies and to peace and sustainable development. Unfortunately, the ability of civil society, in particular human rights defenders and journalists, to work freely and in total security is continuing to decrease throughout the world. Hostility and violence are now part of their everyday reality. Attacks and threats, which are often perpetrated online, have a particularly significant impact on women human rights defenders and journalists. Switzerland

therefore reminds all States of their obligation to respect, protect and implement these fundamental rights, and also reiterates the responsibility of the private sector to respect these rights, including in cyberspace.

Mr. Kakanur (India): We thank the President of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for his report (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1) and for his briefing on the activities of the Council. I would also like to convey our deep appreciation for the smooth and effective manner in which he has conducted the deliberations of the Council.

Since it was established 13 years ago, the Human Rights Council has sought to overcome the problems faced by its predecessor, the Human Rights Commission, and, despite the challenges, has been able to immensely contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights globally. India, in its engagement with the discourse on human rights at the Council, has always favoured an inclusive and constructive approach based on dialogue, consultation and cooperation. As a member of the Council, India has always made efforts to ensure that the Council functions in an objective, non-selective, non-politicized, inclusive and transparent manner. The unique and inclusive mechanism of the Universal Periodic Review has bolstered the credibility and effectiveness of the Council. We need to retain its universality and further improve its efficiency by rationalizing recommendations and by refraining from using it to impose specific thematic issues that may not have acquired universal acceptance.

It is our firm belief that human rights issues cannot be approached in isolation, which would ignore the complex and intricate relationship between human rights, development, democracy and international cooperation. We will work towards addressing constraints on national capacities to implement human rights obligations, instances of politicization of human rights and perceived intrusiveness beyond mandated activities, as these remain areas of concern. Our efforts will be to find practical measures to protect and promote economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

We believe that a more balanced geographical representation in all United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms is necessary to promote objectivity and effectiveness. This approach would bring in diversity, grass-roots knowledge and experience and empathy, which, in turn, would

contribute to constructive engagement with Member States and all other stakeholders. While we appreciate the commitment of the High Commissioner towards increasing the diversity of the staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, enhanced efforts are encouraged to achieve the broadest possible geographical diversity.

Terrorism has emerged as one of the worst forms of human rights violations. Despite terrorism being acknowledged as one of the foremost global challenges, any meaningful collective response to address this menace remain elusive. We appreciate the role of the Human Rights Council in advocating a balanced approach and considering the impact of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights, while espousing international cooperation to combat the terrorist menace.

We will continue to seek the cooperation of all States to prevent any support from reaching terrorist groups, deny terrorists safe havens and extradite the perpetrators of terrorist acts or supporters. We also request that States take all measures to address propaganda advocating hatred or the misuse of the Internet and all other social media for spreading violent extremist ideologies fuelling terror, thereby gravely threatening the human rights and human dignity of millions.

Skyrocketing prices of life saving medicine, vaccines and health-care costs that push hundreds of millions into poverty every year constitute a barrier to the realization of human rights. We appreciate the significant contribution made by the Human Rights Council in recognizing access to medicine as a fundamental component of realizing the right to the highest attainable standard of health. We also need to place the human rights dimensions of access to medicine and vaccines at the centre of our efforts to ensure the full realization of the health-related goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We appreciate the Council's recent endeavours in this regard.

As an ancient civilization of immense diversity and the world's largest democracy, India has abiding faith in the spirit of multilateralism for the effective realization of human rights. India's active engagement with the global human rights agenda dates back to the early days of the Commission on Human Rights and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights conventions.

India's approach to human rights continues to evolve as more rights become justiciable and go through the process of progressive interpretation of laws by the judiciary. Human rights considerations are deeply ingrained in the inclusive development efforts in India that have lifted millions out of poverty. Women's leadership and political participation, especially at the grass-roots level, has played a pivotal role in this context. Our approach to the realization of human rights globally is inspired by our own experience of being a pluralistic and vibrant democracy. As a member of the Human Rights Council, we remain committed to bringing a pluralistic, moderate and balanced perspective to helping to build bridges across multiple divides in the discourse on and practice of human rights.

Ms. Wessel (Norway): Sustainable development for all depends on the realization of human rights. A central ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is creating a world of universal respect for equality and non-discrimination and leaving no one behind. Our common task now is to turn that message into reality.

However, looking at the world today, as outlined in the most recent Human Rights Council report before us (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1), we are still far from reaching our ambitions. Discrimination of marginalized groups continues. People are left behind on a large scale, with many of them taking to the streets to communicate their discontent, to which we would reiterate that all States must refrain from responding violently to peaceful protest. If we want to achieve sustainable peace and development, we must leave no one behind.

We are deeply concerned by the continually shrinking space for civil society in many countries and at the United Nations. It is vital for States to recommit to the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and to recognize the crucial role played by human rights defenders in building sustainable, prosperous and democratic societies. The most recent resolutions in the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council on human rights defenders were adopted by consensus, which demonstrates a global recognition of their role. But, unfortunately, there remains a vast gap between what countries have agreed to and the reality experienced by human rights defenders in many parts of the world.

Through Norway's facilitation, the General Assembly has adopted far-reaching resolutions on that subject, and we intend to do so again this year. We have recently presented this session's draft resolution in the Third Committee for the consideration of Member States. The draft resolution stresses the need to step up the implementation of the Declaration, including by providing a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders and strengthening their protection. We again look forward to building consensus around this important issue.

In 2019, the Human Rights Council addressed serious human rights violations, adopting strong resolutions and renewing important mandates. We are pleased to see that the Human Rights Council is delivering, but we also recognize the need to make the Council even more efficient in order to truly fulfil its mandate. We also welcome that the High Commissioner is a strong and clear defender of human rights. But there remains a clear need to financially strengthen the United Nations human rights pillar as a whole. Norway encourages all countries to contribute to this end.

Before concluding, we again welcome this opportunity to consider the report of the Human Rights Council in the plenary session of the General Assembly and to hear the views of others on the Council's overall work and performance. We have a collective commitment to strengthening the United Nations human rights machinery; its institutional basis must not be undermined.

To conclude, I want to thank the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Seck, for his professional leadership and for travelling to New York to present the report. This is a positive practice — one that furthers our goals of harmonizing the work on human rights in New York and Geneva.

Mr. Giordano (United States of America): As we reflect on the recent work of the Human Rights Council, we must all acknowledge that the body continues to fall far short of its potential laid out by the General Assembly in 2006.

Underpinning the problems affecting the Council is a broken membership selection process that permits such human rights abusers as the Maduro regime to gain representation at the expense of those who would support human rights. As Ambassador Craft said, that one of the world's worst human rights abusers would be granted a seat on a body that is supposed to defend

human rights is utterly appalling. The Council will never achieve legitimacy as long as States responsible for human rights violations and abuses are given a platform to criticize the human rights situations of other States, all the while perverting the Council's own mechanisms to avoid responsibility for their own violations and abuses.

Further undercutting the Council's credibility is its continued refusal to treat all States equally, as demonstrated by its continued discriminatory treatment of Israel under Item 7 on its agenda. Moreover, we have grave concerns about reprisals against human rights defenders appearing before the Human Rights Council and other United Nations forums in Geneva, including Chinese efforts to silence voices of dissent in its Universal Periodic Review.

We continue to hope that changes in procedure and focus can enable the Council to meaningfully promote, in the words of resolution 60/251, universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and would like to make additional comments in its national capacity. We would like to thank the President of the Human Rights Council for his briefing on the Council's report (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1).

At the end of 2018, Slovenia concluded its second term in the Human Rights Council. Under the 2018 Slovenian presidency, the Council managed to achieve consensus in adopting a set of efficiency measures that were also aimed at strengthening effectiveness.

As the Republic of Slovenia was built on respect for human rights, it therefore strives for the further development, promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms by drawing on its own experience, as well as past and future challenges. Slovenia pursues the principles of the universality, interdependence, indivisibility and inalienability of human rights, while also respecting the principle of the inherent dignity of every human being. We advocate the principle of equality regardless of gender, race, national origin, language, age or any other personal circumstance.

Slovenia is obliged to fully meet all its international commitments on human rights and engages in dialogue

with its partners in the international community to encourage them to also fully respect theirs. Yet we need to remain prudent; we are living in times when human rights are under constant threat. While we should be discussing human rights in relation to a new and changing global context — dealing with threats to human rights or such frontier issues as demographic changes and environmental degradation, including climate change — we are barely managing to hold the fort.

In that regard, we regret the many challenges posed to existing international human rights treaties and values. Furthermore, we are deeply disturbed by the shrinking space for civil society, which is facing an increasing number of obstacles in securing a place at the table. This should not be the case; we gather as a Council and in this Hall to represent our nations and to make sure human rights law is implemented and progressively developed. Civil society should form an integral part of our discussions. We are concerned by the alarming trend of growing numbers and methods of reprisals against individuals and organizations cooperating with the United Nations in the area of human rights. We underline the primary responsibility of States to abstain from, prevent, address and investigate such acts. Given the trends, we believe that these issues should also be discussed by the General Assembly.

The Human Rights Council is the principal body in the United Nations system for dealing with all human rights issues. Slovenia has been actively engaged in the Council's work as an observer and member since 2006, and we have announced our candidacy for Council membership for the period 2026 to 2028.

Throughout its existence, the Council has proved that it has the capacity and the will to cooperate and deliver and has brought about many good stories. In this regard, we support the universal nature of the membership of the Human Rights Council, which in our view contributes to the Council's importance as a global forum for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore welcome the candidacy and election of the small island developing States to the Council. We underline that members should uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council.

Over the past year, the work of the Council has brought about many positive developments. We have adopted by consensus a resolution on environmental

human rights defenders, resolutions dealing with issues of discrimination and violence against women and a resolution on the death penalty, and we have extended numerous important mandates, including the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

We continue to underline the importance of the Council's preventive work, which has the further potential to contribute to the early detection and warning of mass human rights violations. In this regard, we welcome the organization of two intersessional seminars on the Council's preventive mandate and look forward to the report on this topic.

Slovenia has been a staunch supporter of the various mechanisms of the Council. We strongly defend the universality of the Universal Periodic Review process and participate in all State reviews. In the next session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, Slovenia will undergo its third review. We are grateful to civil society actors for their cooperation in the preparation of our report and are looking forward to the exchange with States during the dialogue. We are also a strong supporter of the work of other mechanisms, including the Council's special procedures. We value the work done by the mandate holders in their reports, visits, consultations and communications.

In its 13 years of existence, the Council has established itself as a leading forum in which concerns and views about human rights issues and situations can be voiced in a constructive manner. During our 2018 presidency of the Human Rights Council, our priority was to make the Council an even stronger, more efficient and more effective body. We were pleased that under our leadership the Council managed to reach a consensus on a set of measures aimed at improving its efficiency and effectiveness. It is important for all these measures to be implemented, including those on the use of modern technology, which represent an important step towards improving the work of the Council and required the full engagement of all delegations. Nevertheless, it has also been a good exercise in building trust and dialogue. We therefore welcome and support the efforts of the current President, Ambassador Coly Seck, and his Bureau to continue the process of further strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the Human Rights Council.

Mrs. Niang (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I am extremely pleased to be taking part in the General Assembly discussions on this agenda item dedicated to considering the report of the Human Rights Council (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1). On behalf of the Senegalese delegation, I would like to warmly congratulate Ambassador Coly Seck for the skill and vigour with which he discharges his responsibilities as President of the Human Rights Council. I extend our congratulations to the entire team that assists him in this task.

My delegation is pleased to note the quality of the report under consideration, which provides us with ample information not only on the notable progress made, but also on the dimension of the challenges ahead in terms of the promotion and protection of human rights.

As we engage in this reflection together, we welcome the important normative and institutional work that has been carried out in the defence of fundamental rights and freedoms. But we should make no mistake — these gains are fragile and need to be constantly maintained and strengthened in the face of growing threats and contemporary challenges. Moreover, the report of the Human Rights Council gives us sufficient insight into the ongoing need to act on the various factors that have been proven to impact the effective exercise and enjoyment of human rights. Indeed, it goes without saying that poverty, food shortages, conflict, health crises, environmental issues and climate change and terrorism, *inter alia*, are also forces that destabilize the progress achieved in the exercise of civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights, thereby threatening international development and peace and security.

The promotion and protection of human rights will remain a challenge as long as the right to development continues to be an unresolved issue. In this regard, while reiterating Senegal's support for the intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development established for this purpose, I would like to invite Member States to strengthen their efforts to implement this right. Therefore, it is important to make every effort to ensure the effective exercise of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights by emphasizing their universal, interdependent, indivisible and inalienable nature. This prompts the debate on the improvement of mechanisms for the promotion of human rights to contribute to the now urgent need to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In

this regard, I would like to highlight the Universal Periodic Review, which is currently in its third cycle and has already registered two reports for each of the 193 Member States. This mechanism and its links to technical assistance and capacity-building deserve our full attention.

The spirit of the Senegalese presidency of the Human Rights Council in 2019 should be welcomed as a time for reflection and decision-making for a world where human dignity is at the heart of our priority concerns. The most eloquent illustration of this approach was the Human Rights Council retreat held in Dakar on 21 and 22 October to examine such important issues as the links between human rights and climate change, mass migration, growing inequalities and corporate social responsibilities, as well as the digital age.

It is evident that the promotion and protection of human rights cannot be dissociated from the other two pillars underlying the action of the community of nations we form, namely, peace and security, on the one hand, and development, on the other. The Assembly may rest assured that, at a time when the destiny of our peoples is more interdependent than ever before, Senegal will remain committed to the sole viable option: to respect human rights, realize sustainable development and achieve lasting peace.

Mr. Valtýsson (Iceland): Iceland thanks the President of the Human Rights Council for his briefing on the Council's report (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1), which invites us to reflect upon the functioning and work of the Council.

Iceland is a strong supporter of multilateral cooperation and the United Nations. We believe that the Human Rights Council is one of the most important forums, providing a platform for important conversations on human rights, respect for fundamental freedoms, diversity and difference — discussions that affect everyone, everywhere. It has therefore been our pleasure and our privilege to serve on the Human Rights Council for the very first time. Our work on the Council has been based on established priorities that include, specifically, gender equality and women's rights, the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, and the rights of the child.

Reflecting on the Human Rights Council's work over the past year, we have passed some important resolutions, including on the human rights situations in Yemen, Myanmar, Iran, Venezuela and the Philippines.

Furthermore, important resolutions relating to the issue of violence against women and environmental human rights defenders were adopted. Moreover, we were particularly pleased to see the strong support of member States of the Council for extending the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

We were also pleased to see the Council approve a resolution put forward by Iceland, along with seven other countries of the Equal Pay International Coalition, on the principle of equal pay for equal work — a priority for us in line with our focus on gender equality. The resolution is aimed at tackling the root causes and other factors influencing equal pay, as well as the gender pay gap, in line with Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8, especially target 8.5, which calls for equal pay for work of equal value by 2030. I am happy to note that the General Assembly, in its Third Committee session, will consider a follow-up resolution, namely, to identify 18 September each year as International Equal Pay Day.

It is important to keep in mind the strengths of the Human Rights Council. Our focus should be on what works well but, at the same time, find mutual ground on how we can further improve and strengthen the work of the Council. All changes should add value to the Council's work and be in line with its current mandate.

The Human Rights Council has been addressing some of the key questions currently facing all of us. It has been functioning, as it should, as the primary arena for debating and advancing human rights at the national and international level. However, we need to remain vigilant. These are treacherous times for human rights, and we can see an effort to negate some of the important progress made both in New York and in Geneva. We are particularly worried that previous milestones with regard to women's rights and reproductive freedom are under threat in far too many places. Iceland is committed to continue defending women's rights.

We believe that human rights express the fundamental purpose of the United Nations. Advancing the dignity and equality of all human beings and leaving no one behind must be our goal today and in future. Only by those means can we attain peace, security and sustainable development for all societies and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I take this opportunity to thank the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Seck, for his professional and transparent leadership over the past year. It has been a pleasure for Iceland to work with the President and serve on the Bureau as Vice-President of the Council. Member States can count on Iceland's support for and commitment to the work of the Human Rights Council.

Mrs. González López (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My country would like to acknowledge the work done by the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Coly Seck of Senegal, in 2019.

My delegation would like to make the following comments on the report of the Human Rights Council on its fortieth and forty-first sessions (A/75/53).

First, El Salvador welcomes the diversity of issues considered during the Council's sessions. The initiatives put forward by member States accurately reflect the central role of the Human Rights Council in guaranteeing an open, transparent and inclusive debate between States and other stakeholders in the continual promotion of and respect for the inalienable rights of all people, at all times and in all places.

El Salvador calls on Member States to look at this thematic diversity with a view to organizing the work of the Council and the General Assembly in a more efficient and effective manner, in order to prevent overlap and ensure complementarity.

El Salvador would also like to highlight in the report resolution 41/13, entitled "Youth and human rights", which was put forward by El Salvador and a group of countries and which was sponsored by 70 States. The resolution's goal is to support the development of the human rights of young people as a cross-cutting issue on the United Nations agenda.

The resolution expresses special concern about violence against young women, which hinders their social development, the achievement of genuine gender equality and the full enjoyment of their rights. It highlights the United Nations Youth Strategy entitled "Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People", put forward by the Secretary-General.

My country would also like to emphasize that we co-sponsored approximately 20 resolutions during the sessions covered by the report, which concern priority issues for my country, including the rights of the child, migration, the elimination of violence and

discrimination against women and girls, democracy and the rule of law, and protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, inter alia.

We would also highlight the joint statement on migrant children and adolescents submitted by El Salvador during the forty-second session of the Council, which was endorsed supported by 25 countries. The statement focuses on the principles of family unity and the best interests of children, which must be observed at all times and in all circumstances in countries of origin, transit and destination.

El Salvador commends all countries on the adoption of their Universal Periodic Review reports. My country will give an oral presentation on its review on 4 November, during the thirty-fourth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review.

To conclude, El Salvador would like to put on record its firm commitment to the work of the Human Rights Council and reaffirms its support for the adoption of its report as a whole by the General Assembly.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): Bangladesh welcomes the President of the Human Rights Council to New York in connection with the presentation of his report to the General Assembly.

Bangladesh considers the Human Rights Council as an apex custodian body in the United Nations human rights mechanism. As a current member, Bangladesh remains actively engaged with the Council and provides support from within. We take due note of its work during the reporting period.

Last year the international community observed the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and renewed its collective commitment to upholding and reflecting on the Declaration. As the principal mechanism for the implementation of the Declaration and in view of the onerous burden of promoting and protecting human rights, we recognize the need to strengthen the Council's sustained efforts to address issues of emerging concern. Efforts should also be made to bring coherence to the work of the Council in Geneva and ensure its facilitation here in New York. To that end, we urge all States members of the General Assembly to give due regard to the work and language agreed by the Human Rights Council.

We thank the States members of the Human Rights Council for the adoption of its strong resolution

42/3, on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, on 26 September. We have always maintained that the possibility of repatriating the Rohingya to their place of origin in Myanmar can be realized only in an environment that restores their safety, security, dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms. We see the Human Rights Council's engagement as an effort to safeguard the interests of the Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar from the systematic human rights violations to which they have been subjected so far. The outright rejection of the Council's overtures to Myanmar can be construed by those affected as a continued denial by the State concerned of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Bangladesh deeply values the work of the various Special Rapporteurs and related mandate-holders and mechanisms in upholding human rights, and it will continue to work closely with them. In the past year we have been fully cooperating with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar and the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar to enable them to fulfil their respective mandates as the Rohingya humanitarian crisis crossed into its third year. We laud them for the good work they have been doing despite non-cooperation from Myanmar. In the interests of objectivity, it is critical that Member States engage with the mandate-holders and not with the individuals embodying the mandate at any given time. That would go a long way towards ensuring accountability for the atrocities unleashed. Accountability is not only a matter of moral obligation for the international community but also a critical enabler for a resolution of the Rohingya crisis.

Bangladesh deeply regrets that the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, who is coming to the end of her term, is still being denied access to Myanmar. Nor was the fact-finding mission allowed access to report on the situation on the ground. That is really unfortunate.

Since the General Assembly created a new mandate for the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar, Bangladesh is similarly cooperating with her Office. We are encouraged to see that she has managed to obtain limited access in Myanmar and look forward to more firm, engaging and collaborative efforts on her part to implement her mandate.

Bangladesh remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights and continues

to strive to realize it at the national level. Our strong national institutions and astute political leadership are providing full support for ensuring human rights. Our independent judiciary and independent National Human Rights Commission remain alert to address any human rights issue. The Parliament, as and when required, reviews and updates national acts and laws in order to bring them in line with international human rights law and obligations. We are also regularly fulfilling our reporting obligations to the various United Nations human rights mechanisms.

Under the guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, we will remain engaged with the international community to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide.

Ms. Agladze (Georgia): The protection and promotion of human rights is at the heart of our work, and the Human Rights Council is uniquely positioned to address the key challenges facing the world in this respect. We must strive to make the best possible use of the Council while at the same time vigorously seeking to further strengthen its effectiveness.

Let me express our appreciation to President Coly Seck for his report today and for all his efforts aimed at increasing the efficiency of the work of the Council at both the substantial and technical levels. In this regard we welcome the adoption last December of the statement of the President of the Human Rights Council on enhancing the efficiency of the Human Rights Council as well as the three-year programme of work of the Council.

Georgia enjoys fruitful cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and fully supports the independence and integrity of the mandate of the Office. Another key mechanism of the United Nations human rights machinery remains the Universal Periodic Review, which is a valuable tool in enabling States to better assess and implement the policies needed to improve and advance human rights. Georgia's midterm voluntary report on the implementation of the second cycle recommendations was submitted in March 2019.

Taking into account the fact that more than 50 per cent of the recommendations by human rights mechanisms require parliamentary action, we believe that increased parliamentary engagement with human rights will contribute to enhancing the focus on the implementation of the cycles of the Universal

Periodic Review and to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, I would like to welcome the draft principles on parliaments and human rights presented in the OHCHR report contained in document A/HRC/38/25. We are determined to further promote parliamentary engagement with human rights at the national and international levels.

We also welcome the wider engagement of the non-governmental sector and independent national human rights institutions. While attaching particular importance to the implementation of treaty obligations and human rights recommendations coming from the United Nations human rights system, Georgia has established a national institution mandated to track and coordinate national follow-up and implementation of the aforementioned obligations and recommendations.

I would also like to reiterate our full support for the special procedures, which are another efficient tool for addressing specific situations. Georgia has extended a standing invitation to all special-procedures mandate holders and has already hosted several visits, including the visit in April 2019 of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

The work of the Human Rights Council cannot be efficient without the voice of civil society being heard. We therefore reiterate the importance of the active participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Council and its mechanisms. We greatly value the vital role of human rights defenders and regret that they continue to be the subject of reprisals. There is an urgent need for all States to take the measures needed to prevent intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and take appropriate action to provide remedies for all acts of intimidation and retaliation. We also believe that the effective work of the Council highly depends on the universal participation of all States Members of the United Nations, and we are proud to be contributing to support the participation of least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council.

Georgia supports the strengthening of the Council's delivery of technical assistance and capacity-building under Item 10 of its agenda, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the Member States concerned. During the reporting period, the Council adopted various significant thematic and country-specific resolutions. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing

human rights violations and abuses committed against persons living in the Ukrainian areas of Donbas, as well as in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which have been illegally annexed and occupied by the Russian Federation, and support the further engagement of the Council to this end.

Let me underline Human Rights Council resolution 40/28, entitled “Cooperation with Georgia”, adopted at the fortieth session of the Council, which calls for giving immediate access to the OHCHR and other international and regional human rights mechanisms to the occupied regions of Georgia. However, despite the repeated efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, access has not been granted. This is happening against the backdrop of a trend towards increased human rights violations, including freedom of movement, the right to native language, kidnapping, killings and illegal detentions. Given that the Russian Federation is in effective control of the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, it is responsible for closing these regions off to international monitors. We believe that the Council’s strong leadership and engagement in this matter will prevent the situation on the ground from further deteriorating.

Lastly, let me recall that Georgia has decided to submit its candidature to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term and once again reiterates its readiness to join the international community in strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights across the world.

Mr. Yaremenko (Ukraine): One of the main responsibilities of the Human Rights Council is to react in a timely and appropriate manner to human rights situations that require its urgent attention. We are pleased to acknowledge that, during the reporting period, the Council has demonstrated its ability to adequately respond to gross violations of human rights and send out resounding messages to the international community by establishing or renewing country mandates, including through the use of fact-finding expert bodies. The transformation of the Sudan into a democratic nation can serve as an exemplary case of the success of the Council’s attention to the country situation multiplied by technical assistance.

Ukraine continues to pay special attention to the issue of technical assistance. We appreciate the contribution of the Human Rights Council and its special procedures in addressing the current human

rights situation in Ukraine, including in occupied Crimea. The relevant resolutions on cooperation and assistance to Ukraine in the area of human rights, adopted since the beginning of the Russian aggression in 2014, and interactive dialogues on Ukraine at every session of the Council and during its intersessional period, are important tools that provide the international community with objective information about the actual human rights situation in Ukraine. The Government of Ukraine will continue to take further measures to ensure the proper protection of the rights and freedoms of all persons living in the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Ukraine was among the countries that enthusiastically supported the establishment of the Human Rights Council. It was a Council member during the first two consecutive terms that followed the establishment of the Council and is now working hard during its third term. We will also present our candidature for the 2021-2023 term and hope that the Member States will support us as an active member of the Human Rights Council.

During the reporting period, my country initiated two resolutions — resolution 41/25, entitled “Cooperation with and assistance to Ukraine in the field of human rights”, which was adopted, with 44 sponsors, and resolution 42/6, entitled “The role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights”, adopted by consensus, with 66 sponsors. While the Council has held many debates and adopted a number of decisions on the topic, prevention has not acquired the role it deserves in the Council’s toolbox, which is unfortunate. Looking back at recent history, we can clearly see that human rights violations are often the major precursor to threats to peace, aggression and wars.

We need a Council that can prevent future human tragedies. The recent Human Rights Council elections demonstrated that adherence to high standards in human rights protection or fulfilling voluntary obligations and commitments is unfortunately not always considered as key requirements. Such an attitude can only weaken the Human Rights Council, making it indulgent towards human rights abusers.

Such indulgence leads to continued impunity for grave breaches of human rights and international law. My fellow citizens in Crimea and Donbas have experienced the entire spectrum of such breaches. The comprehensive and timely report by the Secretary-

General, entitled “Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine” (A/74/276), which was recently issued pursuant to resolution 73/263, is a valuable account of numerous violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law committed by the occupying Power in the Ukrainian peninsula.

It is also important that the report and its recommendations not be challenged, but respected and duly implemented by its opponents. Ukraine needs a Human Rights Council that can become a genuine, uncompromising platform for defending human rights, including of those who suffer under Russian occupation in Crimea and Donbas and who have become political hostages deprived of their freedom by the Kremlin regime.

As a responsible member of the international community, Ukraine will do its utmost to strengthen the Human Rights Council. In this regard, we are looking forward to an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the measures outlined in the statement of the President of the Council on 3 December 2018. In accordance with resolution 65/281, the General Assembly has a mandate to consider the status of the Human Rights Council between 2021 and 2026. Intensive consultations on that issue should be conducted in different formats with different stakeholders.

We welcome the initiatives of Council Presidents Vojislav Šuc in 2018 and Coly Seck in 2019 to organize retreats in Ljubljana and Dakar, respectively, which provided an opportunity to discuss, in an informal and constructive format, substantive issues that represent important challenges facing the international community and which are likely to underpin the work of the Council in coming years. In our view, the results of these retreats could be quite instrumental in our further deliberations.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome Ambassador Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council at its thirteenth cycle, and thank him for briefing the General Assembly on the report of the Council (A/74/53 and A/74/53/Add.1).

For the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the promotion and protection of human rights constitutes, in addition to being a political and ethical commitment of the highest order, a constitutional mandate based on the guiding principles of universality, inalienability,

indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness. Human rights must be addressed in a fair, equitable, and objective way, with respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, impartiality, non-politicization and non-selectivity. Such an approach must be constructive, taking into account the political, historical, social, religious and cultural particularities of each country.

The public policy framework in Venezuela has focused on citizen participation, visibility and care for the most vulnerable people, as well as the eradication of poverty, with a cross-cutting human rights perspective. Despite being the victim of foreign aggression, Venezuela was elected as a member of the Human Rights Council, which proves the international community’s rejection of the sustained campaign to discredit and destabilize our country in which multiple forms of interventionism, unprecedented unilateral coercive measures and the threat of armed intervention have been used to seriously undermine the full enjoyment of human rights. Accordingly, Venezuela reaffirms its tradition and responsibility to continue contributing constructively to the work of the Council for the next three years and thanks States for their support and confidence.

We insist on condemning the instrumentalization of the issue of human rights and human mobility in order to advance policies of regime change in different parts of the world, which is a criminal policy promoted by the United States Government and its European allies, which claim a moral authority that no one has bestowed upon them and whose results have shown that they have only brought suffering, destruction and the plundering of natural resources. Human rights can no longer be exploited by humanitarian hawks to impose their skewed vision of the reality of peoples.

The challenges that Venezuela faces today must be considered in the light of the illegal and criminal imposition of devastating unilateral coercive measures against the country, which undermine the human rights of the entire population. Unilateral coercive measures are the modern weapon of destruction employed by the United States to destroy societies with the same efficacy as traditional bombing campaigns, but without the media attention they entail. The results on the ground are equivalent to crimes against humanity, although their intellectual authors are not the military, but bureaucrats and bankers. We call once again for an end to the application of these criminal measures

against all peoples suffering from it and for the return to our country of the assets and savings stolen from the Republic by the United States, Latin America and Europe in form of businesses, property, gold and cash.

Despite the enormous pressures on the Venezuelan State, it is working tirelessly to fulfil its obligations to society and therefore is continuing to urge national actors to join the national dialogue for peace and against interference and in favour of the lifting of the economic and financial blockade against the country. We invite all countries that use the issue of human rights to make internal political gains to instead commit to shouldering their own responsibilities and face up to the grave transgressions to the human rights of their peoples in terms, inter alia, of social exclusion, repression of demonstrations, corruption and transnational crime.

Finally, we wish to reaffirm Venezuela's readiness and willingness to work constructively and transparently with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and in all

forums established by the universal system to promote and protect human rights, as demonstrated in the two cycles of the Universal Periodic Review, the mechanism par excellence for addressing this issue on the basis of cooperation and dialogue, as well as through human rights treaty bodies and all international bodies showing a willingness to work without hidden political motives and in favour of the population as a whole, particularly the most vulnerable.

That is what Venezuela committed to when it was elected as a member of the Human Rights Council for the 2020-2022 term. We will work towards building a world of peace that is free from violence and armed conflict, where we can live together in the diversity of our cultures, nationalities, languages, beliefs and political differences. We reaffirm that it is only through dialogue and transparent and respectful cooperation on an equal footing that sustained progress in human rights will be achieved.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.