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Chair: Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia)
later: Ms. Węgrzynowska (Vice-Chair) (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 68: Promotion and protection of human rights (*continued*) (A/71/40; A/C.3/71/4)

(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (*continued*) (A/71/56, A/71/254,

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(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (*continued*) (A/71/308, A/71/361, A/71/374, A/71/379-S/2016/788, A/71/394, A/71/402, A/71/418, A/71/439, A/71/540-S/2016/839 and A/71/554; A/C.3/71/5)

1. **Ms. Adamson** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union, as a community based on respect for and defence of human rights, remained deeply committed to the central role of the United Nations in the protection and promotion of human rights.

2. The European Union was appalled by the deteriorating situation in Syria. The Syrian regime had the primary responsibility for the protection of the Syrian population; the European Union strongly condemned the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks by the regime and its allies against civilian populations, humanitarian and health care personnel and civil and humanitarian infrastructure. It also decried the confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). All persons responsible for breaches of international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law, some of which might constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, must be brought to justice. The European Union and its member States would be exploring

avenues for concerted action, including through the General Assembly.

3. Together with Japan and other Member States, the European Union would once again table a draft resolution on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which continued to gravely and systematically violate the human rights of its people, while refusing to engage more constructively with the international community in a dialogue on human rights.

4. The European Union was extremely concerned about the repeated atrocities in South Sudan and about the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and it called on all sides involved in the conflict in Yemen to end the ongoing human rights violations and abuses immediately. In Egypt, the threat of terrorism must be tackled with full respect for international human rights standards, and those responsible for violating human rights and fundamental freedoms must be held accountable. In Burundi, a robust inquiry and accountability framework should be put in place immediately to address arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence and other human rights violations. In that connection, the Government of Burundi should reconsider its decisions to suspend cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

5. The European Union was following with concern the recent violent repression of protests in Ethiopia and called on the Ethiopian Government to exercise maximum restraint and engage in meaningful dialogue with all parties. It would continue to engage with African partners and the United Nations to foster respect for human rights in Libya, the Central African Republic, Sudan and Eritrea. Regarding Eritrea, it noted the recommendations contained in Human Rights Council resolution 32/24 on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, including the request that the General Assembly should submit the report of the commission of inquiry to the Security Council for consideration and appropriate action.

6. China should honour its human rights obligations and its commitment to uphold the rule of law, in particular by allowing human rights defenders and lawyers to pursue their activities, releasing all

individuals detained for exercising their freedom of expression and ensuring a safe and enabling environment for civil society, including foreign non-governmental organizations. Similarly, the Russian Federation should cease its campaign to restrict civil society and end the harassment of human rights defenders, independent journalists and opponents both in its own territory and in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula.

7. The European Union strongly condemned the atrocities, mass killings, sexual violence and other human rights abuses perpetrated against civilians by ISIL and other terrorist groups and paid tribute to the defenders of the rights of the Yazidi community and their fight for the victims of sexual enslavement by ISIL. It reaffirmed that religious belief could not justify resort to terrorism and violence and encouraged religious leaders to do all in their power to prevent the hijacking of any religion to justify terrorism and human rights abuses.

8. The European Union remained concerned about restrictions on public freedoms and the many detentions, arbitrary arrests and executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It called on all Member States to abolish the death penalty. Welcoming the initial steps of the newly elected Government of Myanmar to improve respect for human rights and advance the peace process, the European Union encouraged it to follow up with bold actions to find sustainable solutions and provide adequate protection to religious and ethnic minorities, including the elimination of statelessness.

9. The European Union welcomed the new mandate of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights to address reprisals against human rights defenders and undertook to protect defenders through political and logistical support. It called on all Member States to sign and ratify the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It underlined the importance of upholding the human rights of all, including asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and all displaced persons. To address the underlying causes of migration, better respect for human rights and the effective rule of law must be promoted in countries of origin through the various means available, such as political and human rights dialogues and development cooperation.

10. **Ms. Mendelson** (United States of America) said that the assault on Aleppo by the Syrian regime, aided by the Russian Federation, had killed hundreds of people; certain atrocities could only be described as crimes against humanity. The siege of East Aleppo was mirrored on a smaller scale in communities across the country, and the regime continued to imprison tens of thousands of Syrians, subjecting many to torture. The United States reiterated its call for an immediate end to the war and accountability for all human rights violations.

11. Her Government called on the Islamic Republic of Iran to end the widespread use of arbitrary detention, death sentences for minors, excessive sentences and harsh imprisonment, and on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to close political prison camps and cease its many other egregious human rights violations. It was deeply troubled by the ever-widening crackdown on civil society and independent political opposition, and restrictions on religious freedom, in the Russian Federation; it was also deeply concerned about threats and attacks against opponents of the occupation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and members of minority groups, and called upon the occupation authorities to allow full access to international human rights monitors. Regarding Yemen, it urged all parties to abide by the terms of the cessation of hostilities, to allow for unfettered humanitarian access and to re-commit to talks under United Nations auspices to find a political solution.

12. In Egypt, human rights organizations faced narrowing political space, and many people, including peaceful activists and opposition members, had been arrested, detained or disappeared. Bahrain had dissolved the Al Wefaq political party, revoked the citizenship of Sheikh Issa Qassim and continued to detain political activists. Saudi Arabia restricted the exercise of the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and religion and inadequately protected the rights of women and minorities.

13. The United States remained concerned by reports of violence and human rights abuses in Burundi; it deplored the decision of the Government of Burundi to expel the United Nations human rights investigators and called on it to cooperate with the commission of inquiry. It was also concerned about serious violations

and abuses committed in South Sudan and the escalating ethnic dimension of threats, targeted attacks and violence and called on the Government to enable unobstructed deployment of the Regional Protection Force, allow immediate humanitarian access and implement genuine political reforms.

14. Her Government condemned the use of lethal force and arrest of peaceful protestors by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and urged it to commit to a peaceful democratic transition of power and hold presidential elections in 2017. Regarding Ethiopia, it was troubled by the heavy-handed response to protests and the declaration of a state of emergency with far-reaching restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. It was concerned about the reported torture and death of opposition figures in custody in the Gambia and the poor human rights situation in Eritrea, as well as violent crackdowns and shrinking civil society space in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, the Republic of the Congo and Swaziland.

15. The United States was concerned about the continued narrowing of civil society space in China and called on that Government to cease the systematic detention of lawyers and other rights defenders and release all political prisoners. It again urged Thailand to lift restrictions on civil liberties, particularly the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, and called on Cambodia to end its actions against civil society and the political opposition and to promote transparent judicial processes. It was concerned about reported extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and, while welcoming the new democratically elected leadership in Myanmar, it was troubled by the recent violence in the Rakhine and Kachin states.

16. Her Government called on Cuba to cease the arbitrary detention and violent harassment of peaceful activists; on Venezuela to engage in an inclusive political dialogue, free all political prisoners and hold a fair and timely recall election; on Turkey to try the persons responsible for the coup attempt through fair and independent judicial processes; and on Azerbaijan to implement its recent constitutional referendum and free all opposition members, human rights activists and advocates of religious freedom.

17. In Belarus, the September 2016 parliamentary elections had fallen short of international obligations,

and despite releases of political prisoners in 2015, there had been little systematic improvement in human rights. In Kazakhstan, the new law on payments could burden civil society and curtail freedom of expression.

18. **Mr. Ruiz Blanco** (Colombia) said that his country was nearing a final peace agreement in the 50-year armed conflict that, when reached, would usher in a new era for human rights in Colombia. The agreement would respect the rights of victims and enable greater investment in education, health and housing, especially for the most vulnerable people. Already, his Government had made reparation to almost 600,000 people, and Colombian courts had handed down more than 1,000 sentences for human rights violations. Amnesty for serious crimes of international concern would not be granted under any circumstances. Colombia thanked the international community for its valuable contribution to the peace process and hoped to count on its help in meeting the challenges of peacebuilding and development.

19. **Ms. Shlychkova** (Russian Federation) said that the agendas of international human rights bodies and organizations were increasingly being politicized and used to promote the self-serving interests of individual States and groups. That inequitable geographical balance usually reflected political expediency, rather than the real situation on the ground. The deteriorating human rights records of States purporting to be mature democracies were far more troubling than the understandable problems faced by countries transitioning towards democracy. Indeed, human rights bodies and mechanisms should focus on the recurrent problems with which the United States had been grappling for decades, including arbitrary and indefinite detention, abduction of foreign nationals in violation of international law, impunity for the use of torture, indiscriminate use of drones, racial profiling, police brutality and the use of solitary confinement.

20. Ukraine continued to struggle to apply the rule of law, and had not yet investigated the tragedies in Odessa and Mariupol, the crimes committed at the Maidan, the killing of journalists and numerous cases of torture. The European Union was faring little better. There was persistent mass statelessness in the Baltic States. Even in wealthy countries such as Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Norway, mounting ethnic and religious intolerance,

anti-migrant and xenophobic political rhetoric and discrimination against ethnic minorities and migrants had been observed by human rights defenders.

21. The international community was failing to deal with the alarming increase in contemporary forms of racism and neo-Nazism. The United States authorities were hushing up the swelling numbers of radical and neo-Nazi groups in that country, which between 2014 and 2016 had surged from 784 to 892. The Russian Federation condemned, in particular, the permissive stance maintained for many years by the European Union in relation to the Baltic countries, which permitted the holding of gatherings and marches of Waffen SS members and young neo-Nazis, the defacement and vandalism of monuments to anti-fascists and Holocaust victims, and also to the celebration of festivals of Nazi music in Poland under the auspices of the Blood and Honour pro-fascist organization.

22. Governmental intervention in the private life of citizens remained a problematic issue. Non-governmental human rights organizations in the United Kingdom and Germany had uncovered practices by security agencies and government bodies whereby data had been collected on citizens who were not suspected in connection with any crimes. In Sweden and Belgium, the powers of law enforcement agencies to tap conversations and monitor electronic communications had been expanded.

23. Child protection issues, including child trafficking, child labour, sexual violence, child pornography, domestic violence, adoption abuses, and restrictions on access to education, social protection and health care, were also a cause of grave concern. In the Netherlands, Norway and Finland, human rights bodies had drawn attention to cases of children who had been separated from families without justification on the basis of one-sided case reviews. In Norway, host families had forced Muslim children to attend church and eat pork, in violation of their freedom of religion. Lithuania was experiencing high levels of child delinquency and violence in families and specialized institutions, with a 30 per cent rise in cases of violence against children, one fifth of which involved sexual abuse. The 80 per cent rise in child sexual abuse crimes in the United Kingdom over the previous three years was even more shocking. Attacks on the freedom of speech, persecution for non-conformist views and the

closure of media outlets had become common occurrences not only in Ukraine and the Baltic States, but also in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Lastly, particular attention needed to be paid to the issue of equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

24. **Mr. Almabruk** (Libya) said that the considerable progress that had been achieved by the international community in the area of human rights was being undermined in many countries by armed conflict, the spread of extremism and terrorism, significant refugee and migrant flows, entrenched poverty and the impact of natural disasters. Indeed, many States lacked the capacity to address the multiple challenges they faced, and a collaborative, multinational response and firm political will were needed for the global community to succeed in its efforts to foster prosperity and promote non-discrimination and human dignity worldwide. Failure in that endeavour was, moreover, likely to exacerbate hatred and extremism and further undermine human rights, and could pose a significant threat to long-term international peace and security.

25. Despite the significant challenges faced by his country in its transition to democracy, his Government was determined to comply with all international human rights instruments to which it was a party. To that end, it had, inter alia, adopted a law criminalizing torture, forced disappearances and discrimination, and had established several national human rights monitoring bodies, including the National Council for Civil Liberties and Human Rights, and a committee to address the needs of victims of sexual violence. Furthermore, the Libyan Political Agreement of Skhirat, signed in December 2015, had underscored Libya's determination to uphold the principles of international humanitarian law and end impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations. Libya also believed that women could play a key role in efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts and find peaceful solutions to the challenges faced by the country, and was therefore striving to ensure that they participated effectively in Libya's decision-making mechanisms.

26. His delegation acknowledged that chronic instability and a lack of security in Libya had, on occasion, given rise to human rights violations. He urged the Human Rights Council to continue to provide technical and institutional support to his country,

including in coordination with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, with a view to strengthening Libya's efforts to uphold human rights and promote justice. In that connection, he underscored that Libya lacked the capacity to deal effectively with and uphold the rights of the large numbers of irregular migrants transiting its territory en route to Europe. His Government was, nonetheless, striving to combat the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking, and was working with the International Organization for Migration to facilitate the voluntary return of irregular migrants to their countries of origin. Libya was also working closely with the European Union to combat illegal migration and save lives in the Mediterranean. It was, however, increasingly clear that focusing solely on the security aspects of irregular migration was unlikely to stem migration flows. Instead comprehensive development strategies were needed to combat poverty and reduce unemployment in migrants' countries of origin.

27. Lastly, he voiced his delegation's concerns regarding ongoing attempts to enshrine controversial concepts — which violated the religious, cultural, social and legislative norms of certain Member States — in draft resolutions and other United Nations documents. His delegation rejected all such attempts, which undermined consensus and the Organization's work, and trusted that its concerns would be taken into account in all draft resolutions submitted to the Committee in the future.

28. **Ms. Yotdamnoen** (Thailand) said that Thailand had made steady progress in mainstreaming international human rights standards into its laws and policies. In recent years it had passed and strengthened laws in many areas, including gender equality, trafficking in persons, access to justice, protection of vulnerable people and child pornography. It was implementing a national human rights plan, and had established a Justice Fund that paid legal expenses for the poor and vulnerable.

29. Thailand had accepted 187 of the 249 recommendations from the second cycle of the universal periodic review and had already started the implementation process. It would continue to reflect on the remaining recommendations. It had acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and withdrawn of its

reservation to article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

30. Her Government advocated the strengthening of regional and international cooperation on human rights through constructive engagement and dialogue and recognized the need to cultivate an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. It noted that technical cooperation and capacity-building on human rights were critical for developing countries.

31. **Mr. Rafee** (United Arab Emirates) said that the competent authorities in his country were constantly striving to draw up domestic legislation and policies to promote the human rights of all members of society. His Government had also enacted policies and laws to create a society of responsible citizens and believed that, to achieve that objective, every effort must be made to strengthen national institutions and safeguard the nation State from extremism and sectarianism. It had therefore developed strategies to empower young people to reject violence and extremism and had established a number of bodies and forums to that end, including the Hedayah centre, the Muslim Council of Elders and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies. It had also established the world's first Ministry of Tolerance to spearhead efforts to counter extremism, discrimination and intolerance and promote dialogue, pluralism and the acceptance of others.

32. Rather than viewing development solely in economic terms, States should seek to promote development that was truly people-centred, inter alia by strengthening tolerance, mutual respect, equality and gender parity in their societies. The United Arab Emirates strongly believed that women should play a leading role in the country's development and in preparing young people for the future, and had therefore accorded particular attention to women's empowerment. Women held 27 per cent of seats in Parliament, and the United Arab Emirates was an active member of the Executive Board of UN-Women, which had recently opened a liaison office in Abu Dhabi to strengthen its presence in the Middle East region. The United Arab Emirates was also making every effort to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, had adopted a national strategy to combating human trafficking, and had

amended the country's legislation to enhance protections for trafficking victims and for migrant and domestic workers. Furthermore, in accordance with a parliamentary decision adopted in 2012, all companies and federal institutions were required to include women on their governing boards.

33. His country had adopted a law on the rights of children in 2016, which prohibited all forms of exploitation of and violence against children, and mandated harsh penalties for any violations of their rights. The United Arab Emirates was a major contributor to educational projects targeting millions of children in low-income countries and it was particularly keen to promote girls' education. In that regard, his country warmly welcomed the adoption by the Human Rights Council in July 2016 of resolution [32/20](#) on realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl. His country was also striving to empower and uphold the rights of persons with disabilities and promote their integration into society, and had, *inter alia*, taken action to promote the equitable access of persons with disabilities to education and employment opportunities.

34. In closing he underscored that the United Arab Emirates was the world's second largest donor of official development assistance in proportion to its gross national income. His country would continue to work with the international community to uphold the human rights of all peoples of the world and foster global prosperity.

35. **Mr. Sobral Duarte** (Brazil) said that the promotion and protection of human rights was enshrined in the Brazilian Constitution and reflected in its accession to the main international human rights treaties. A human rights perspective underpinned all aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; yet in many countries, social vulnerability was exploited by narratives of fear and entrenchment, and people the world over continued to experience discrimination based on faith, race, social and economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity. Prolonged conflicts had killed thousands of civilians, and record numbers had been forcibly displaced; the rights of all displaced persons must be protected, in accordance with international human rights law, regardless of migratory status.

36. Brazil was concerned about the negative impact of surveillance and interception of digital communications, including extraterritorial and mass surveillance, on the exercise of the right to privacy, and emphasized the need to promote and protect the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality. His Government was sponsoring draft resolutions on the right to privacy in the digital age and on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. It deeply appreciated the support shown by Member States in electing it to the Human Rights Council for the period 2017-2019.

37. **Mr. Aboulatta** (Egypt) said that, despite the adoption of numerous international human rights instruments, much work remained to be done to translate that global framework into tangible improvements in the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in many parts of the world. Indeed, violence, extremism and terrorism were on the rise, and millions continued to live in extreme poverty, in conflict zones or under foreign occupation. Meanwhile, millions of refugees who had been forced to flee their homelands were encountering hatred and discrimination or perishing on their desperate journeys to find shelter abroad.

38. Certain States that claimed to be staunch defenders of human rights and fundamental freedoms were seeking to promote their narrow political interests by using those rights and freedoms as a pretext for interference in other States' internal affairs. Meanwhile, law enforcement authorities in the United States of America, for example, were responsible for the unlawful killing of migrants and African Americans. The United States imprisoned a higher proportion of its population than any other country and racial discrimination was ubiquitous in that country's criminal justice system. Egypt was also deeply concerned that the European Union was adopting measures that contravened international refugee law to prevent the entry of refugees into Europe. Indeed, in many European countries, xenophobia and Islamophobia were on the rise, discriminatory measures were being enacted against minorities, and extreme right-wing parties were making gains at the ballot box.

39. His delegation believed that implementation of the international human rights agenda must take place on the basis of an intergovernmental dialogue and in

accordance with the principles of impartiality, universality, non-politicization and non-selectivity. Human rights must never be used in a selective manner with a view to interfering in Member States' domestic affairs. It was, moreover, important to adopt a comprehensive approach to human rights issues that addressed civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development. It was also vital that all United Nations agencies concerned with human rights respected their mandates and did not try to circumvent them through loose interpretations with a view to undertaking new activities or controversial initiatives.

40. **Ms. Stener** (Norway) said that the record numbers of displaced persons were clear evidence of the failure of States to protect and promote the human rights of their citizens. Conflicts and crises could never be an excuse for ignoring human rights violations of for repression. The international community needed to step up its efforts to promote and defend human rights; to that end, it must consolidate and implement human rights norms and safeguards and strengthen international human rights institutions such as OHCHR, including by ensuring that they had adequate human and financial resources.

41. Violent extremists posed a direct threat to human rights and should be held accountable for all violations and crimes; however, States' efforts to address violent extremism must be in line with their obligations under international law. They should recognize the value of freedom of expression, not simply as a universal right and a prerequisite for democracy and good governance, but also as the best defence against repression, violence and conflict. Norway urged all States to join forces to protect human rights defenders, whose situation was difficult and in some places worsening.

42. The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, co-convened by Norway, Chile, Indonesia, Malawi and the United Nations Children's Fund, had submitted a report to the Secretary-General indicating the priority areas for getting all children into school within one generation, and Norway hoped that Member States would follow up on its recommendations. An opponent of the death penalty under all circumstances, it had hosted the sixth World Congress against the Death Penalty in June 2016, bringing together both abolitionist and

retentionist States; it urged all States to take a stand against the death penalty in the Committee.

43. Member States must work to improve the ability of the Human Rights Council to promote and protect human rights. Norway acknowledged the crucial role of civil society in the work of the Council and believed that other United Nations bodies, including the Committee, would also benefit from greater transparency, openness and inclusiveness.

44. **Mr. Landry** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the fundamental right to life should be protected at all stages, from conception to natural death. Unfortunately, the right to life of the unborn, migrants, victims of armed conflicts, the poor, older persons and those facing the death penalty continued to be ignored or minimized. His delegation especially welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context ([A/71/310](#)), which recognized the obligation of States to address systematic deprivations of the right to life tied to poverty, grossly inadequate housing and homelessness. It also welcomed the growing consensus on abolishing the death penalty.

45. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion went beyond mere tolerance and was not limited to the private sphere. Unfortunately, people continued to be persecuted, imprisoned and killed for their religious beliefs. In some countries, the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities had risen to a level that constituted a serious violation of international human rights law. Religious communities themselves sometimes engaged in persecution, on the basis of intolerant interpretations of religious beliefs. In certain cases, when used to define national identity, religions facilitated discrimination and stigmatization in education, health care and family law with a view to limiting the freedom of other religious groups. All States had an obligation to protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.

46. **Ms. Nguyen** Phuong Nga (Viet Nam) said that the promotion and protection of human rights was a core purpose of the United Nations and essential to achieve its goal of promoting social progress. All human rights, including the right to development, were universal, indivisible and interrelated and must be treated equally, and the sovereign rights and historical,

social, cultural and development circumstances of States must be respected, in order to enhance mutual understanding, trust, dialogue and cooperation.

47. Viet Nam did its utmost to preserve peace and stability, promote sustainable development and safeguard human rights. It placed people at the centre of development and had mainstreamed the International Covenants and other instruments to which it was a party. It had also presented two national reports under the universal periodic review and had undertaken to implement all accepted recommendations. However, Viet Nam still faced challenges, including the impact of climate change, which were hindering the realization of the right to food, health, education and adequate housing; her Government would appreciate assistance in addressing those challenges.

48. **Mr. Teo** (Singapore) said that there could be no “one size fits all” approach to human rights, as each country faced unique circumstances and challenges. Member States shared common human rights objectives, but each country should implement the policies and practices best suited to its needs, in line with international obligations. That approach did not preclude striving together to achieve shared goals, such as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

49. His Government implemented laws and policies in full compliance with its international human rights obligations and sought to build a fair and inclusive society. Thanks to its deliberate choices and policies, Singapore’s communities lived together in peace and harmony, even though the country was densely populated and racially and religiously diverse. At times his Government had had to intervene for the common good and take steps that were unpopular with a section of the community.

50. Singapore took a firm line with racial and religious extremists; it did not allow anyone to exploit freedom of expression to denigrate other religions or ethnic groups and emphasized the responsibilities that accompanied that right. Because of rising religiosity and greater exposure to extremist ideologies and social media, Governments needed more than ever to engage the different groups and balance their competing interests. His country’s pragmatic approach to human

rights had been successful in advancing development and furthering the rights of its people.

51. **Ms. Al-Temimi** (Qatar) said that human rights were at the core of her country’s policies on education, the environment, health, children, older persons and women’s empowerment, and that, as a result of its efforts in those areas, Qatar ranked first in the Arab world on the human development index of the United Nations Development Programme and thirty-second in the world. Her country was determined to address the challenges impeding its efforts to promote human rights, and would continue to engage in an open and transparent manner with the United Nations special rapporteurs on human rights issues.

52. Qatar had been elected to the Human Rights Council for three consecutive terms of office, and was proud to host the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region. Furthermore, in January 2016, Qatar had hosted a regional conference on the role of OHCHR in promoting and protecting human rights in the Arab region. Qatar had also launched numerous initiatives to help States emerging from conflict to rebuild their societies, and focused, in particular, on promoting the right to education in emergency situations. Those initiatives included the Educate a Child initiative and the Qatar Upholding Education for Syrians Trust (QUEST).

53. Qatar was gravely concerned about ongoing actions by Israeli forces in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including restrictions on the movement of civilians, house demolitions, the confiscation of Palestinian land and restrictions on Palestinians’ freedom of worship and access to religious sites. Israel’s use of overwhelming military force against unarmed Palestinians constituted a clear violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Qatar called on the international community to intervene to protect Palestinians and ensure respect for their fundamental rights. The international community must, moreover, compel Israel to desist from its illegal practices and ensure that all perpetrators of human rights violations were prosecuted.

54. Qatar was also deeply concerned about the gross human rights violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime against Syria’s civilian population. That

regime's crimes included the indiscriminate bombing of homes, schools, hospitals and essential civilian infrastructure and the arrest, torture and murder of thousands of civilians. It was imperative that the international community shouldered its moral and legal responsibility to stop bloodshed and atrocities taking place in Syria.

55. Her Government remained committed to working closely with the international community to protect and promote human rights in Qatar, the wider region and beyond. Her delegation called on Member States to redouble and coordinate their efforts to uphold human rights, foster peace and promote justice worldwide.

56. **Mr. Grant** (Canada) said that at no time in human history had there been greater global awareness of, and the architecture to support, universally accepted human rights; yet human rights violations and abuses by States and non-State actors continued to occur, and attempts to circumvent international human rights obligations by claiming exceptional or unique circumstances were eroding confidence in human rights institutions and structures. The climate of impunity for human rights violations was a major impediment to sustainable development, peace and security. Canada was troubled by efforts to silence the voices of civil society and human rights defenders both around the world and within the United Nations, as well as by the global trend of declining respect for difference and lack of appreciation of the positive effects of diversity, which had a direct impact on respect for human rights. It had embraced pluralism and inclusion and knew from experience that diversity, inclusion and civic engagement were a source of economic, social and cultural strength.

57. His Government was committed to tackling its national human rights challenges and had taken concrete actions on refugee resettlement and integration, gender equality and human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples. Its resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees over the past few months spoke to its commitment to promote positive change at home and abroad. It would continue to work through the Committee to promote and protect human rights and to address the increasing restrictions being placed on civil society, both online and offline.

58. **Mr. Al-Hussaini** (Iraq) said that, in line with its obligations under international human rights

instruments, his country's democratic Government had adopted legislation to strengthen fundamental rights and freedoms, promote and protect the rights of women, children and minorities and bolster the role and independence of the judiciary. The rights of Iraqis were enshrined in his country's Constitution, and Iraq had acceded to eight of the nine core international human rights instruments.

59. Iraq was making every effort to encourage all sects and communities within Iraqi society to participate fully in public life. His Government had also enacted policies to promote gender parity, and Iraqi women already held prominent positions in politics, business, the diplomatic corps, academia and the judiciary. To strengthen the rights of children, Iraq had signed two of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had established the Child Welfare Authority to monitor implementation of the Convention. Iraq had also enacted legislation to safeguard the cultural identities and rights of its ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and the Constitution enshrined the rights of all Iraqis to freedom of belief and worship. His Government had implemented policies to promote tolerance, mutual understanding and solidarity among its various ethnic and religious communities, and Iraqi law prohibited all forms of incitement to religious and ethnic discrimination or persecution. Furthermore, to strengthen media freedom and the right to freedom of opinion and expression, it had granted broadcasting licences to more than 80 television channels and allowed numerous international broadcasters to operate in complete freedom within the country.

60. Although his Government was conducting wide-scale military operations to liberate a number of Iraqi cities that had fallen to the terrorist group ISIL, it was determined to uphold its duties under international humanitarian law, and was taking all possible steps to safeguard civilians in the theatre of operations.

61. In closing, he thanked all Member States that had supported Iraq's successful candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council for the term 2017-2019. As a member of the Council, Iraq would exert every possible effort to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

62. **Mr. Menelaou** (Cyprus) said that his country was fully committed to the inclusive protection of human

rights and the establishment of unconditional accountability for all human rights abuses. It had sponsored Human Rights Council resolution 33/20 on cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage and called for a robust Security Council resolution that would apply universal limitations on the trade and transfer of artefacts originating from conflict zones. The recent International Criminal Court judgment in *Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi*, in which the defendant had been found guilty of the war crime of attacking religious and historic buildings in Mali, set a precedent for prosecuting attacks on religious sites as war crimes, whether or not the sites were historically significant.

63. Cyprus expressed concern about recent developments in Turkey; while condemning the attempted coup and expressing its support for the country's legitimate institutions, it underlined the need to respect democracy and human rights and fundamental freedoms in full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

64. Since 1974, the Cypriot people had collectively been denied the basic right to peaceful existence. Turkish occupation troops still remained, and 200,000 Greek Cypriots remained internally displaced. By colonizing the occupied areas, Turkey was illegally attempting to change the demographic nature of the island. Enclaved persons experienced daily violations of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including censorship of textbooks, arbitrary dismissal of teachers, vandalism of churches and cemeteries, intimidation of worshippers and arbitrary denial of requests to conduct religious services. More than two thirds of the remains of 2,001 missing persons were still unidentified, and time was of the essence, given the advanced age of the relatives and witnesses; Turkey should therefore provide unrestricted access to all areas immediately and disclose evidence of the deliberate removal of remains. Any comprehensive, just and sustainable solution to the Cyprus problem would require respect for the human rights of all Cypriots, regardless of ethnic origin or religion.

65. **Mr. Thant Sin** (Myanmar) said that each country had the right to choose its own economic and social path. The work of the international community in the promotion and protection of human rights should be carried out through constructive dialogue, with

objectivity, impartiality and respect for national sovereignty; his country had been reaching out to the international community to share best practices in the area of human rights. His Government was amending or repealing outdated laws in order to put an end to conflicts, discrimination, inequalities and injustices. Furthermore, it hoped to become a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the very near future; was in the final stages of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and was taking steps to ratify or accede to the remaining human rights treaties.

66. Myanmar consistently cooperated with human rights mechanisms, and OHCHR was assisting its efforts to promote human rights. To implement the 166 accepted recommendations from the second cycle of the universal periodic review, it was forming a working group which would consult with civil society throughout the process. Given its achievements and full commitment to all human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, Myanmar should be removed from the agendas of the Committee and of the Human Rights Council.

67. **Mr. Pouleas** (Greece) said that, to promote human rights effectively, Member States must work together to develop a strong multilateral human rights system based on building bridges and encouraging constructive cooperation to produce tangible results on the ground. Greece had extended a standing invitation to all international human rights mechanisms and complied with its reporting obligations. It had recently submitted its candidature for Human Rights Council membership for 2019-2021 and had adopted a national action plan on human rights.

68. To offset the negative impact of the economic crisis, his Government had adopted measures to provide relief first and foremost to the most vulnerable segments of society. In response to the migrant/refugee crisis, it would continue to coordinate efforts with all relevant stakeholders, emphasizing burden sharing, addressing root causes and, above all, saving lives. Given the vital importance of education, it was implementing an action plan on the education of migrant and refugee children. Greece protected freedom of expression, online and offline, as a

prerequisite for ensuring peace, democracy and good governance, and was addressing the issue of the safety of journalists and media workers in both the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

69. Forty-two years after the military invasion and illegal occupation of more than one third of the territory of Cyprus, despite the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Cyprus were still being violated. Turkey continued to prevent almost 200,000 internally displaced Greek Cypriots from returning to their ancestral homes, and its massive, illegal sale of Greek Cypriot property exacerbated the problem. It also denied the enclaved Greek Cypriots full protection of their human rights, including their property rights. Greece attached particular importance to the issue of missing persons, some of whom were Greek nationals, and was gravely concerned at the widespread looting and destruction of the Christian and Hellenic cultural heritage in the occupied area. It supported efforts to achieve a comprehensive, viable and just settlement of the Cyprus issue in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principles and values of the European Union. Recent developments had only reinforced its long-standing position that full withdrawal of the Turkish occupation forces and elimination of the system of guarantees were fundamental conditions for the resolution of the issue.

70. **Ms. Gebrekidan** (Eritrea) said that international cooperation on human rights should give equal emphasis to the two International Covenants. International cooperation and solidarity would be enhanced if all countries implemented universally recognized human rights. Discussions of human rights could not be meaningful without addressing poverty, instability, occupation and unjustified sanctions.

71. Eritrea remained committed to strengthening its growing partnership with OHCHR. In May 2016, it had signed an agreement with the United Nations to strengthen its national capacity to implement its universal periodic review commitments.

72. Her delegation believed that human rights concerns should be addressed through genuine dialogue and constructive engagement rather than country-specific mandates, which were politicized,

confrontational and counterproductive. It was concerned about growing double standards both in the region and globally. The same States that were criticizing its human rights record had given a country in the region a green light to commit grave human rights violations, kill peaceful protesters and impose martial law.

73. **Ms. Mainali** (Nepal) said that human rights were the central pillar of democracy, governance and sustainable development. Nepal was a party to 24 human rights treaties, and its 2015 Constitution guaranteed fundamental political, social, cultural and economic rights while prohibiting discrimination in the application of laws. It was implementing its fourth national plan of action on human rights, comprehensive national policies and action plans on human rights treaties and an action plan on Security Council resolutions [1325 \(2000\)](#) and [1820 \(2008\)](#) with a view to ensuring the meaningful participation of women in the post-conflict peace and development process. It had a zero-tolerance policy on violence against women and was working to strengthen the capacity of all national human rights institutions, some of which had been elevated to constitutional status. To address issues related to human rights violations during the conflict period, it had established a commission on investigation of disappeared persons and a truth and reconciliation commission. It also recognized the positive role of the media, civil society and human rights defenders.

74. Nepal had submitted its second report under the universal periodic review in November 2015 and would make every effort to fulfil its subsequent commitments to harmonize its legal infrastructure. The fourteenth Nepalese development plan focused on eliminating poverty and hunger with an emphasis on vulnerable groups. Her Government was working to mainstream the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In view of its contributions and long commitment in the area of human rights, as well as the need for fair representation, Nepal hoped that the Member States would support its candidature for the Human Rights Council.

75. Migrant workers were among the most vulnerable groups. Discrimination, intolerance and denial of basic services undermined their human rights abroad. Serious and concerted efforts should be made to

protect their rights, including through the full implementation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

76. **Mr. Saito** (Japan) said that his country was determined to play an even more active role in protecting and promoting all human rights. Despite the damning 2014 report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/HRC/25/63), there was no sign of improvement; Japan and the European Union had therefore decided once again to sponsor a draft resolution on that issue. His delegation welcomed the appointment of the new Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and hoped that, with the help of the independent experts, he would be able to recommend mechanisms of accountability for human rights violations in that country. One of the most serious human rights violations, the abduction of foreign nationals, should be addressed as soon as possible, given the advanced age of the abductees and their family members.

77. Japan was deeply concerned about the deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation in Syria and strongly condemned the repeated attacks on hospitals and medical facilities in Aleppo; it called on the international community to take immediate action to reinstate the cessation of hostilities. It appealed to all parties to the conflict to fully observe international human rights and humanitarian law and to guarantee unlimited humanitarian access. The political process should be resumed with a view to a long-term solution.

78. The international community should pay close attention to the situation in Yemen and demand full accountability for all human rights violations. Japan continued to support the efforts of the United Nations and others to mediate the conflict and achieve peace and stability in that country.

79. **Ms. Byaje** (Rwanda) said that mass migration and displacements, natural disasters, epidemics, unrest and conflicts were becoming commonplace, while people continued to suffer in abject poverty. That state of affairs could only lead, in most cases, to gross human rights violations and called for a drastic shift in the global approach to human rights. The 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development should be implemented strategically to redress that situation.

80. For a country that had experienced the worst human rights violations during the genocide against the Tutsi, the promotion and protection of the human rights and socioeconomic well-being of all were a paramount concern. Her Government was strongly committed to the rule of law, human rights, transparency, participation, inclusion and democratic governance, as attested by its Vision 2020 policy and its strategy for economic development and poverty reduction.

81. Freedom of association and assembly were guaranteed under the Constitution. There had been an explosion in the number of local radio stations, newspapers and news websites, and a network of journalists organized community debates on local radio and television. Contrary to the United States allegation, Rwanda had a vibrant civil society that was fully engaged in public programmes and projects, participated in policy debates and put forward alternative strategies. Her Government had embarked on a programme to strengthen civil society institutionally, technically and financially so as to enable it to contribute actively to ensuring responsive and accountable governance.

82. **Ms. Izanova** (Kazakhstan) said that systematic reform had ingrained the promotion and protection of human rights in the political culture of her country. Her Government was actively engaged with the human rights treaty bodies; in June 2016 it had presented its second national report under the universal periodic review, and it had already started work on implementing the recommendations. Its national human rights action plan incorporated the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression. As part of that action plan, it had established the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society, which had a permanent working group on interaction with non-governmental organizations, and it had set up more than 200 public councils within governmental bodies to promote cooperation with civil society.

83. In the current context of rising religious intolerance and violence, Kazakhstan attached great importance to interfaith and inter-ethnic harmony. Every three years, it hosted the Congress of Leaders of

World and Traditional Religions, which provided an important platform for dialogue and cooperation.

84. **Mr. Joshi** (India) said that special procedures mandate holders were an important part of the United Nations human rights machinery for strengthening constructive engagement with Member States. To be effective, they needed to maintain independence and impartiality and adhere to their mandates and code of conduct. They should aim to promote genuine dialogue and should make constructive, mandate-specific recommendations relevant to the national context which were not ideologically driven or confrontational. Nearly half of the mandate holders continued to be from one region, despite the requirement of equitable geographic representation and appropriate representation of different legal systems. Furthermore, it was disturbing that the Human Rights Council increasingly relied on voluntary contributions and earmarked funding to support the special procedures system, as earmarking often unduly elevated some mandates and could have an adverse effect on their perceived independence. To strengthen the trust and confidence of Member States in the special procedures system, all mandate holders should receive equitable financial and professional support through a transparent process, and steps should be taken to address potential conflicts of interest and ensure full disclosure of funding sources and uses.

85. The increasing tendency to use human rights as political tools and engage in selective naming and shaming and intrusive monitoring were undermining the credibility of the human rights system. The United Nations should focus on promoting genuine dialogue and strengthening national capacities without attaching external conditionalities or ideological prescriptions.

86. The right to development underpinned all other human rights. India welcomed the appointment of the new Special Rapporteur on the right to development, whose mandate would complement the efforts of the Working Group on the Right to Development and help to strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development from the perspective of the right to development.

87. Special procedures mandate-holders had an obligation to strengthen national and international accountability for eliminating poverty in a time-bound manner. They should also assist Member States in eliminating any direct or indirect support for terrorists

or their proxies; the international community could no longer afford to take half measures against terrorism, which had emerged as the fundamental challenge to the full enjoyment of all human rights. Lastly, they should work to promote policy coherence among Member States in relation to globalization, since developing countries disproportionately bore the costs of globalization without receiving an equitable share of the benefits.

88. **Mr. Ghaebi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the situation of indigenous people and other human rights abuses in Canada continued to give rise to serious concern. Canadian promises to end domestic human rights violations remained mere words. Systematic racism and abusive treatment of indigenous people translated to poor health, education and employment conditions. People of colour suffered frequent abuses, including excessive use of force and sexual assault by police officers while in custody. According to the national statistical agency, aboriginal women were many times more likely than other women to be murdered or experience violent abuse. Other groups, including Muslims, Asian and African communities, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities and women, were also subject to discrimination and human rights violations.

89. Human rights violations by the United States of America, both inside and outside the country, remained rampant, and included involuntary disappearances and torture, incarceration in secret detention centres and prisons, targeted killings, drone strikes and other covert operations. As a consequence of its political, trade and financial policies, including the imposition of unilateral coercive sanctions, millions of people around the world were being denied their right to development, and millions felt the devastating impact of its unfair and inflexible immigration policies. At the domestic level, its criminal justice system was rife with systematic injustice, including racial and religious profiling and the disproportionate incarceration of minorities, particularly Muslims, African Americans and Hispanic Americans.

90. In many European countries, anti-immigrant sentiments, xenophobia and Islamophobia continued unabated. Other areas of concern included extensive use of detention for migrants and asylum seekers, lack of safeguards in asylum appeals procedures and lack of

support for rejected asylum seekers who could not be returned to their countries of origin. Thousands of migrant children remained at grave risk of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, compounding their trauma, and some States had instituted restrictive border-crossing measures, discouraged migrants and asylum seekers from staying in their territories and criminalized the provision of aid to irregular migrants.

91. **Ms. Bird** (Australia) said that if elected to the Human Rights Council, Australia would continue to demonstrate its strong commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, both at home and abroad. Her country was concerned about the growing number of acts of violence and human rights violations based on a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. While such matters were sensitive issues for many people, there was a shared recognition that no one should face stigmatization, discrimination, violence or abuse on any ground. Member States should be guided by the principles of universality and non-discrimination in that regard and in relation to other vulnerable groups, including women and children, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and ethnic and religious minorities. Vulnerability was particularly heightened during times of crisis. It was necessary to work with a broad range of partners to address international human rights violations and enhance the promotion and protection of human rights. Active engagement by civil society and national human rights institutions strengthened the work of the United Nations.

92. Australia would soon be hosting visits from five special rapporteurs and welcomed civil society engagement in those visits. It had sponsored Human Rights Council resolution [33/15](#) on national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights, and had supported the application of the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights at the recent session of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations.

93. Australia reaffirmed its commitment to promoting the rights established in International Covenants. It remained convinced of the effectiveness of the universal periodic review process, and would continue to support the Human Rights Up Front initiative.

94. **Mr. Bouassila** (Algeria) said that the right to development was a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of all universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. For people deprived of their basic rights to food, health and education, civil and political rights were meaningless. Algeria encouraged the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development and the members of the high-level task force on the implementation of the right to development to intensify their efforts to complete the 2008-2010 road map established by the Human Rights Council and to make the right to development central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It welcomed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the right to development. The promotion and protection of human rights should take into account national specificities and should include measures to ensure greater social justice, eradicate extreme poverty and reduce inequalities within and between countries. The right to development implied the full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, including their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their national wealth and resources.

95. As a founding member of the Human Rights Council, Algeria continued to play an active role in global efforts to promote human rights. It submitted its reports to the human rights treaty bodies regularly and cooperated fully with the special procedures mandate holders. Its revised Constitution, adopted in February 2016, emphasized the rule of law, guaranteed freedom of assembly and association, provided for the representation of women in elected office and reformed the electoral system and the management of local communities.

96. *Ms. Węgrzynowska (Poland), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

97. **Ms. Otto** (Palau) said that progress towards universal health coverage was slower for mental health services than for physical health. Yet, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in four persons worldwide would be affected by a mental health condition in their lifetime. Furthermore, mental health conditions were becoming more prevalent as a direct result of conflict, violence, natural disasters, climate change and resulting displacement. Although WHO had produced two intervention guides to help

non-specialized health and community workers deliver mental health and psychosocial support services, and other expert organizations had developed similar tools, up to 85 per cent of persons needing such services in low and middle income countries did not receive them, and even in high income countries, less than half received services. In too many countries, mental health and psychosocial services represented a tiny fraction of the health budget, and all too often the limited allocations supported institutional rather than community-based care. Even where services were available, people were sometimes reluctant to use them because of deeply entrenched stigma and institutionalized discrimination against people seeking help. She challenged the Member States to ensure that by 2030, at a minimum, 85 per cent of the people needing services received them, and to commit to meeting the highest standards of evidence- and community-based services.

98. **Ms. Elhassan** (Sudan) said that her Government had ratified all the regional and international instruments pertaining to human rights, including the International Covenants. To ensure its full compliance with those instruments, Sudan had, *inter alia*, established an independent human rights commission that operated in accordance with the Paris Principles. Furthermore, to promote the rights of children, Sudan had established a National Council for Child Welfare, and pursuant to the Child Act of 2010, had put in place an integrated system of juvenile and restorative justice. Cases involving minors were heard by specialized courts and training was provided to judges and other relevant personnel on the application of the Child Act.

99. Domestically, the Armed Forces Act, the Police Act and the National Security Act prohibited the recruitment of children under the age of 18. Sudan has also established child protection units in the armed forces, a child and family protection unit in the police force and a specialized unit to combat violence against women and girls. It had enacted a law on persons with disabilities and established a National Council on Persons with Disabilities. Her country had also passed a law prohibiting trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

100. Sudan was cooperating fully with United Nations human rights mechanisms. In that connection, the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral

coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights had visited Sudan in November 2015; in his report, submitted to the Human Rights Council in September 2016, he had underscored that the unilateral economic sanctions imposed on Sudan had seriously hindered the country's development, including in the health, education, agricultural, industrial and banking sectors, worsened Sudan's external debt burden, and seriously undermined the country's capacity to uphold fundamental human rights, including the right to development.

101. Human rights concerns must be addressed by the Human Rights Council in a constructive manner and in a spirit of objectivity, non-selectivity and respect for Member States' national sovereignty and cultural norms. Sudan rejected the use of human rights as a means to exert political pressure on developing countries, the application of double standards in the field of human rights, and the adoption of unilateral coercive measures against certain States. Her country also rejected all efforts to compel States to accept new rights or human rights concepts that had not been agreed upon by the international community; Sudan would accede only to international instruments that promoted human rights principles that enjoyed the consensus of the international community. Her delegation underscored, moreover, that the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council was the most appropriate forum in which to address States' human rights concerns.

102. In closing, her delegation called for the adoption of a comprehensive approach to human rights issues that took into account the effects of climate change and promoted development, debt forgiveness and the lifting of trade restrictions and unilateral sanctions, so that all countries could meet their obligations in the area of human rights and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

103. **Mr. Wickramarachchige** (Sri Lanka) said that, after nearly three decades of conflict, Sri Lanka had restored peace in 2009, and was striving to promote democracy, development and reconciliation. As part of the transitional justice process, the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms was consulting international experts and working to obtain training and capacity-building for the relevant mechanisms, and a task force consisting entirely of

civil society representatives was seeking public input. At the legislative level, Parliament had recently passed a bill establishing an independent office on missing persons. For its part, the Government was developing the national human rights action plan for 2017-2021 and drafting a new constitution that would ensure equal rights, justice and dignity for persons of all ethnic, religious and language groups.

104. In 2016, Sri Lanka had received visits from the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteurs on the independence of judges and lawyers, the question of torture, the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence and minority issues, and it remained keen to engage and consult with all of them.

105. **Mr. Tumbare** (Zimbabwe) said that his country's new Constitution guaranteed all human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. To promote the economic rights of Zimbabweans, his Government was implementing land reform, an economic empowerment policy and a five-year economic plan. However, its efforts were being hampered by economic sanctions, both declared and undeclared, imposed by some Western countries; those sanctions must be lifted immediately and unconditionally.

106. The promotion and protection of human rights was the sovereign responsibility of States, and assistance should be provided only at the request of the State. Every country had the right to determine its own human rights policy. Human rights should not be exploited to interfere in the internal affairs of States or vilify them for political purposes. No country had the moral authority to condemn others' human rights challenges. Human rights should be promoted through constructive dialogue and genuine cooperation based on the principles of respect for State sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, non-selectivity and impartiality.

107. Zimbabwe was deeply concerned at the continuing expansion of human rights without the consensus of Member States, including attempts to twist the language of human rights instruments and reinterpret them to promote new classes of rights which had no international legal standing. It

condemned the increasing tendency of United Nations human rights mechanisms to fall under the influence of international human rights movements which were supported by well-funded pressure groups whose interests were at complete variance with most people, particularly in developing countries. Zimbabwe rejected such developments, which undermined the legitimacy of human rights mechanisms and amounted to a new form of imperialism, and called for the respect of cultural differences. It reiterated its conviction that all human rights, including the right to development, were indivisible, interrelated, equal and interdependent and urged the Committee to devote greater attention to economic, cultural and social rights.

108. **Mr. Ri Song Chol** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that human rights entailed the right to sovereignty and independence for all nations. However, human rights issues were currently being openly misused as political leverage in international relations to infringe upon State sovereignty and to interfere in internal affairs. The ongoing, vicious smear campaign conducted against his country by United States-led hostile forces posed a grave threat to the social system and people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In July 2016, in an act of supreme hostility, the United States Government had released a special list of individual sanction targets on the basis of falsified and fabricated human rights concerns about his country. The United States and its vassal forces were also seeking to violate the right to existence and other human rights of his country's overseas workers, as part of unilateral economic sanctions to isolate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

109. Even though the United States did not ensure even the minimum right to existence for countless migrants, it was desperate to fabricate false human rights violations against overseas workers from his country, who worked in conformity with the labour laws of the countries concerned and under valid contracts. Such interference deprived workers of their legitimate right to work and their economic freedom; they should consequently receive apologies and compensation for being insulted.

110. The international community must consider what the United States was pursuing through its lengthy and persistent campaign against the Democratic People's

Republic of Korea and whether such efforts were in conformity with the intrinsic mission of human rights protection as well as the Charter of the United Nations. His delegation would not attend any discussion that dealt selectively with the non-existent human rights issues in his country and would take strong measures to oppose the human rights racket staged by hostile forces.

111. As a result of the aggressively interventionist actions perpetrated by the United States and its vassal forces under the guise of human rights and democracy, the Middle East had been plunged into chaos, State collapse, ethnic conflict and war, and thousands of civilians had fallen victim to the war on terror. Meanwhile, extreme racial discrimination, torture and other appalling human rights violations were taking place in the United States, Japan continued to avoid making official apologies and providing compensation to the victims of its past crimes against humanity, and the Republic of Korea had abducted a group of women from his country. The United Nations should include such issues on its official agenda and urgently work towards solutions.

112. All citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea enjoyed their rights to the full. In response to the recent natural disaster in the northern part of the country, his Government had taken measures to mobilize and channel all its human, material and technical resources into rehabilitation efforts so that the flood victims could resettle as soon as possible, thereby demonstrating clear its deep respect and love for the people. His country would continue to strengthen and develop its national human rights protection and promotion system. His delegation categorically rejected the politicization of human rights, selectivity and double standards in the international arena, and would promote genuine cooperation and dialogue in the field of human rights.

113. **Ms. Ilić** (Serbia) said that her country had addressed the migrant and refugee challenge humanely and responsibly, in accordance with international standards. Serbia was fully committed to cooperating with United Nations mechanisms in the field of human rights, as evidenced by its sponsorship of Human Rights Council resolution [33/20](#).

114. During the previous two months, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally

Displaced Persons and the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights had visited Serbia. In March 2016, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context had presented her report on her visit to Serbia, including Kosovo and Metohija, in June 2015. Serbia expected to submit its third report under the universal periodic review before the end of 2017. It would likewise submit its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2017 and its report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in March 2017.

115. Her delegation drew attention to the human rights situation in the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija; unfortunately, there had been no progress in the protection of the rights of ethnic communities, in particular Serbs, in the province. Basic human rights such as security, freedom of movement, use of language and script, the right to education, the right to property and the exercise of cultural and religious rights continued to be violated. Serbs in the Kosovo and Metohija provinces frequently suffered from incidents of arson, plundering, physical attack, intimidation and obstruction. As a result, the 200,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija could not return to their homes and property, in accordance with Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#). Although her country had engaged in a good-faith dialogue with Kosovo, such dialogue required mutual engagement and goodwill, which unfortunately had not been the case, especially recently.

116. Xenophobia, ethnic and religious intolerance and racism were on the rise and posed a threat in Europe, especially in south-eastern Europe, and particularly with regard to minorities. Her country expressed concern at the increasingly frequent incidents targeting the Serbian minority in Croatia and consequently drew attention to the Opinion of the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Croatia. It hoped that Croatia would consider the serious criticisms contained therein with regard to the protection of minority rights and implement its recommendations in good faith.

117. Although the advance of human rights faced obstacles in every country, Serbia, as a multi-ethnic

and multi-faith State, would continue to promote the status of its minorities, combat discrimination and strengthen human rights for all its citizens in accordance with its strategic and legislative framework within the process of accession to the European Union.

118. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his country's strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights stemmed from its Constitution, which embodied the principles and provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Bangladesh was moreover a signatory to both the International Covenants and a party to all major human rights instruments. It had established legal and institutional frameworks to promote economic, social and cultural rights, in addition to civil and political rights. His country's independent judiciary, independent human rights commission, free media and vibrant civil society all contributed to monitoring and supporting his Government in the realization of human rights.

119. Like many least developed countries, Bangladesh faced challenges regarding human rights, in particular poverty, which was at the root of many human rights violations, impeded economic development and prevented people from achieving their economic, social and cultural rights. Poverty eradication was therefore a priority for his Government and was targeted through such means as a social safety net, microfinance, education and special programmes for women's empowerment.

120. Bangladesh urged all Member States to work in a spirit of collaboration and compassion for the effective implementation of the inalienable right to development. His delegation's position on human rights issues was based on the principles of universality, non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity; it therefore did not support country-specific resolutions, as they did not contribute in any way to the improvement of human rights situations in developing countries, and failed to take into account their development status, national situation, religious background, culture and specific challenges. True commitment to the promotion of human rights should be achieved through dialogue, consultation and cooperation, including through the universal periodic review.

121. His delegation expressed grave concern at the continued escalation of human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. As the repeated appeal

of the international community to end human rights violations against the Palestinian people remained unheeded by the perpetrators, a collective voice should be raised to compel the occupying Power to stop such flagrant violations.

122. **Mr. Yaremenko** (Ukraine) said that as a result of Russian aggression, 29 citizens of his country were political prisoners of the Russian Federation, 107 citizens were being held as hostages and over 600 citizens were considered missing in Donbas. Ukrainian citizens facing political prosecution on fictitious charges had been arrested, sometimes kidnapped, and interrogated by officers of the Russian Federal Security Service and Ministry of the Interior and subjected to brutal violence, psychological pressure and torture. Prosecutions against Ukrainian citizens had obvious political overtones and used unacceptable methods, including illegal imprisonment and, recently, the forcible detention of a Crimean Tatar leader in a psychiatric hospital.

123. His delegation expressed grave concern regarding the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, in particular the State propaganda of hatred and enmity, blatant violations of freedom of expression, and new counterterrorism legislation that unjustifiably expanded surveillance while undermining human rights. Human Rights Watch, Reporters without Borders and the International Federation of Journalists had reported on the oppressive climate for journalists and independent critics and the murder of journalists and media personnel. On 27 February 2015, Boris Nemtsov, a leading Russian political opposition figure, had been assassinated in front of the Kremlin; despite the identification of seven suspects, four of whom were active or former members of law enforcement and security agencies, many questions remained unanswered. The international community must continue to apply political and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation to cease its totalitarian practice of suppressing human rights.

124. **Ms. Nescher** (Liechtenstein), also speaking on behalf of Australia, Iceland, New Zealand and Switzerland, said that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had confirmed the link between development and human rights. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals had a clear human rights focus and many targets were directly linked to

State commitments stemming from human rights instruments.

125. One of the most contentious concepts was the right to development. However, the 2030 Agenda shared many elements with the Declaration on the Right to Development: both texts recognized the centrality of people to development, sought to create enabling environments in which every individual's human rights and fundamental freedoms were fully realized, acknowledged that peace was essential for development, and reaffirmed each State's responsibility to ensure equal opportunities based on non-discrimination. Discussions in recent years had sometimes obscured the true meaning of the right to development: the inalienable right of every individual to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms could be fully realized. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda provided a new opportunity to explore the relationship between the protection and promotion of human rights for all and the achievement of sustainable development, including the right to development.

The meeting rose at 1.00 p.m.