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Official Records

President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Agenda item 74 (continued)

Promotion and protection of human rights

(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I would like to thank the delegation of Cuba, which, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, facilitated the resolution that led to the convening this meeting.

At this meeting, we are commemorating 70 years of one of the most important contributions of the General Assembly to humankind: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a jewel of multilateralism and proof beyond dispute of the impact of our work on the peoples of the world and on the life of each and every person. That historical document has been the legacy of a generation which, after suffering the tragedies of two world wars, understood that, for everyone: “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”.

I wish to emphasize the role of Eleanor Roosevelt, Hansa Mehta, Minerva Bernardino and so many other visionary women in the creation of a more inclusive and egalitarian Declaration, which has been an inspiration for the struggles of millions of women around the world: indigenous women, Afro-descendant women, women with disabilities and women of diverse backgrounds.

Today, we recall an extraordinary achievement which, despite the passage of time, continues to be the strongest foundation for the promotion and defence of human rights, and we pay tribute to the persons who made such significant contributions to make human dignity the basis of our coexistence in the world.

This is also an opportunity to celebrate 25 years of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which clearly established the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of human rights and which also created the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, currently led by an extraordinary Latin American woman, Michelle Bachelet.

Allow me to make three remarks.

First, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights not only reflects the collective aspiration to establish a world order based on human dignity but has actually transformed the world. It has made it much better. Its 30 articles contain universal ideals and commitments, such as the rights to life, freedom and justice and to education, health, housing, food and work, which have inspired almost every international instrument since

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and enabled the development of the nine core human rights treaties and their optional protocols.

The Declaration has also made an impression on the history of our countries. Its precepts have been gradually included in national legal systems, thus ensuring implementation mechanisms. Today, respect for human rights is an essential element of every system of Government and of the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Indeed, today we could even say that the Sustainable Development Goals are goals that aim to fully guarantee human rights.

Secondly, we must avoid setbacks in the agreements that we have already established and we must avoid the politicization of human rights. In times of crisis and instability, in which the international system that we have worked so hard to build faces so many challenges, we are compelled more than ever before to abide by the principles of the Universal Declaration. If we do not make it a reality, if we allow human rights to be restricted or undermined, humankind could once again face fear, division and, inevitably, conflict — the same spectres that we sought to banish 70 years ago.

Human rights are for everyone. Selective interpretations or those that undermine their validity in accordance with geopolitical or economic interests set the stage for the weakening of those rights and the perception that not all violations or abuses matter or that the fight for justice and freedom is not the same for all peoples.

Thirdly, the fight for human rights is ongoing. It must be a part of our daily efforts. I decided to distribute a special edition of the Universal Declaration so that we always have it at our side during our deliberations. We still have a lot to do. There are still millions of human beings who are not free or equal and have not been liberated from fear and misery. Poverty, hunger and inequality continue to affect all countries and regions. Torture and modern slavery have not yet been eradicated. Racism, discrimination and exclusion are still part of our reality and the rights of women and girls are still being violated systematically.

The Universal Declaration must continue to guide our efforts to build a more peaceful, egalitarian and humane world. Fortunately, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which the General Assembly will endorse tomorrow, is proof that the majority of Member States maintain that commitment. And what better day than

today — 18 December — International Migrants Day, to reaffirm that, regardless of their migration status, migrants cannot be deprived of the fundamental rights that the Universal Declaration grants them.

The international community cannot forget the road that it has travelled to reach the Universal Declaration. One of the sentences in its preamble tells us to bear in mind that “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.”

More than ever, multilateralism needs to go back to its roots, to be nourished by the aspirations and ideals of the men and women who, in overcoming their differences, worked to provide future generations with a legacy of hope — the hope of creating a world in which wars can be averted and the value of life is respected above any other material or geopolitical consideration.

Let us renew our commitment to the Universal Declaration. That is the best tribute that we can pay to it. Let us prove that the ideal of greater justice, equality and freedom is not a utopia, that human beings are capable of coexisting in peace and that the Declaration is as valid today as it was in 1948 when it was proclaimed.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: Seventy years ago, after the Holocaust and the horror of the Second World War, our visionary forebears drafted 30 articles that lay out what they described as the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights marked the first time that countries had ever come together to recognize that all people, everywhere, are born free and equal and share fundamental, inalienable rights. The economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights enshrined in this document belong to everyone.

Wherever we live, whatever our circumstances or place in society, our race, colour, gender or sexual orientation, language, religion, opinion, nationality or economic status, we are all equal in human rights and in dignity. No one ever loses their human rights, no matter what they do or who they are. The clarity and profundity with which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks to the aspirations of people everywhere have made it the world’s most widely translated document. Our challenge remains to translate it into reality for all people everywhere.

The Universal Declaration is much more than a source of inspiration and a statement of principles. Its 30 articles constitute practical measures for advancing peace and inclusive development beyond human rights. Over seven decades, it has enabled women and men in all regions to claim their rights and contest the forces of oppression, exploitation, discrimination and injustice.

In that time, people around the world have gained progressively greater freedoms and equality. Conditions of profound economic misery and exploitation have been improved. Women's rights have advanced, along with the rights of children, victims of racial and religious discrimination, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. And perpetrators of horrific human rights violations have been held to account for their crimes by international tribunals.

Yet, seven decades on, there is still a long way to go. Women, men and children all over the world still endure constraints on — or even total denial of — their human rights. Torture, extrajudicial killings, detention without trial and other egregious human rights violations persist. Untold numbers of women and girls face daily insecurity, violence and discrimination. Today we are seeing a rising tide of authoritarianism, intolerance, xenophobia and racism. It is only by respecting and promoting human rights that we can achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to create sustainable, diverse, inclusive and peaceful societies thriving on a healthy planet.

I understand the importance of human rights from my personal experience. I grew up under a dictatorship and worked in the slums of Lisbon, and later in my career saw the bitter results of human rights abuses as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. As Secretary-General, I wish to highlight that our founding Charter makes human rights part of this Organization's very identity. Human rights are an intrinsic part of all that we do and all that we are.

Human rights inspire. Human rights transform. Human rights drive progress and change the course of history. As the custodians of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the continued commitment of Member States to the rights it enshrines is critical. Let us keep the beacon of this towering document alight so it can continue to guide us all on the path of peace, dignity, security and opportunity for all.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, I would like to consult members, as mentioned in my letter dated 13 December 2018, on inviting Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to address the Assembly.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite the High Commissioner to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the decision just taken, I now call on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to make a statement.

Ms. Bachelet (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): Seventy years ago, when the third session of the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as resolution 217 A (III) (see A/PV.183), the world's States were beginning to emerge from catastrophe. Genocide, on a scale never before experienced by humankind, had inflicted monstrous suffering. Nationalistic and isolationist policies had generated two global wars and an economic depression whose reach and scope harmed millions of people across the planet. The depredations of colonialism had oppressed and exploited entire nations and regions and the use of atomic weapons made it clear that any future global conflict could essentially extinguish life on this planet as we had known it since the dawn of time.

The first impulse to create the Human Rights Declaration came from Latin America. China, Costa Rica, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Lebanon, Liberia, Pakistan and the Philippines insisted on strong commitments against torture, for the rights of women and on justice, dignity and conscience. Together, States from every region drafted the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and agreed that, as the Secretary-General just recalled, they must stand as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" — so that by progressive measures, national and international, Member States would build the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Today, that vow still stands. The recognition that the world's peoples possess those fundamental rights and freedoms cannot be extinguished. The acknowledgment that upholding all people's human rights is the only

possible path to peace and inclusive development is as powerful and valid today as it was 70 years ago and the achievements inspired by the Universal Declaration cannot be denied.

Millions of women and men have come together to demand an end to tyranny and injustice and insist on their rights to justice and freedom from exploitation, discrimination and violence. Today's attacks on the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Universal Declaration are not motivated by its failure. They stem from its success, because human rights stand against exploitation of the many by the few. They require governance and institutions that serve the people, not the narrow interests of powerful individuals.

This Assembly represents the hopes and the interests of all the people of all Member States. Its bedrock is the determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large and small; establish conditions under which justice and respect for international law can be maintained; and promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

The anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an important reminder of why the United Nations and this Assembly came to be and the purpose they must serve today. Its guidance echoes across the 70 years to the many crises that we see building in our era. The Declaration's 30 articles guide us to measures that resolve violence and global destruction, repair social breakdown and mark the path away from conflict towards shared, peaceful solutions. They build, inseparably, on each other.

The rights to participate in decisions, speak freely and seek justice are important in and of themselves and also contribute to the rights to health, life, education and development. Fostering truly inclusive and sustainable economies requires the participation of everyone, an end to discrimination and the right to speak out, make choices and criticize. The provision of governance that serves rather than silences and economic systems rooted in dignity are the responsibility of every leader. They underpin the legitimacy of Government and the sovereignty of States.

I ask members of the Assembly to work towards that vision of peace and justice for all peoples.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her statement and I appreciate her presence at this commemorative event.

I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Gertze (Namibia): I thank the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for their statements this morning and I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this anniversary celebration today. I take the floor on behalf of the Group of African States and would like to thank you, Madam President, for bringing us all together here today to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We consider the Universal Declaration as the most important landmark document on human rights. The African Group upholds the tenets of the Declaration and recognizes the historic effects the Declaration had on many of our countries.

I say that as a reminder that when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on 10 December 1948, only four African countries were States Members of the United Nations and had a seat at the table. At that time, most of us were absent because we were still under the yoke of colonialism. The adoption of the Declaration came as a beacon of hope for us as it set out human rights and fundamental freedoms that should be inherent for every human being. That spoke directly to our plight and the reality of the times.

The first article of this important document sets out that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". For many liberation movements across the continent, that and the following articles added impetus to our struggles for freedom and independence and amplified the case against injustice and colonial subjugation. Therefore, for the African Group, the historical setting of the Declaration's adoption also serves as a reminder of how far we have come as nations in the fight for the full respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have come to embrace the Declaration wholeheartedly and recognize that, by protecting all the rights enshrined therein, we are laying the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world.

We recall the dynamic and inspirational leadership of the Chair of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafting committee, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, who was later referred to by President Harry Truman

as the First Lady of the World, in tribute to her human rights achievements. We salute her for her strong conviction that the Declaration would have the same kind of influence on global society as the Declaration of Independence had on the citizens of her own country.

The African Group takes pride in the progress that we have made in advancing human rights in our various countries. As members of the African Union and our own subregional organizations, many African Group member States have adopted further instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights. Through the African Union, African member States have adopted the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its 2003 Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

Some of the aforementioned documents, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, make direct reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, having expanded the scope of human rights provided for therein. From the Economic Community of West African States to the Economic Community of Central African States and the Southern African Development Community, the African member States have demonstrated their willingness to improve human rights for their people by adopting specific and direct treaties, declarations and guidelines to address specific concerns, such as children's rights, women's rights, the rights of migrants and refugees and many other new and emerging concerns.

A number of institutions have also been set up to facilitate the effective implementation of the instruments mentioned above, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Those institutions have made a tremendous contribution to the advancement of human rights on the continent. If they are resourced sufficiently, their impact will be felt across the continent, especially where it matters most, among those furthest left behind. As we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a common standard of achievement, it is incumbent upon the entire community of nations to guard against the threats posed to human rights,

including xenophobia, racism, trafficking in persons, attacks against migrants and other pressing threats to the well-being of our planet and the citizens of the world, as a mark of its recommitment to the ideals and values of the Declaration.

The African Group remains committed to upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to realize a more peaceful, just and equitable world. For us that is what defines humanity in the true spirit of *ubuntu*, whereby the welfare and well-being of my neighbour translates into the welfare and well-being of us all as a community of nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Mahmaminov (Tajikistan): It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Group of Asia-Pacific States. We extend our appreciation to you, Madam President, for convening this General Assembly plenary meeting today to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, is the guiding document for promoting and protecting human rights for all. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was forged in the aftermath of the Second World War and born out of the universal rejection of violence, whereby, as stated in its preamble:

“recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”.

Throughout much of history, people have acquired rights and responsibilities through their membership in a group, family, religion, class or community, and the Universal Declaration has become the universal embodiment of the rights to life, freedom of expression, liberty, equality, food, shelter and, most importantly, a dignified life. As Governments committed themselves to establishing the United Nations, calls came from across the globe to protect citizens from human rights abuses and violations. Those voices played a critical role in drafting the Charter of the United Nations,

which recognizes the protection of human rights as one of the purposes of the United Nations.

The Universal Declaration embodies economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, based on the premise that different rights can be successfully achieved only in conjunction with one another. That indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights was reconfirmed by the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Both documents demonstrate the common aspirations and collective will of the international community to make the world a better place. They have promoted a common standard of human rights and laid the foundations for a more just and secure world.

Today, while a very comprehensive normative framework of human rights treaties and covenants has evolved together with an elaborate architecture of mechanisms to support that work at the international level, there is growing concern about the multiple challenges posed to the spirit of multilateralism. We must ensure a safe working environment for persons engaged in the promotion and the protection of human rights and also facilitate their legitimate activities. Reprisals and intimidation of any kind, including for cooperating with the United Nations and its mechanisms in the area of human rights, must be effectively addressed.

In that endeavour, we must bear in mind that the rule of law applies equally to all. Abiding by those principles will help maintain the objectivity and neutrality of those engaged in the promotion and the protection of human rights and enable them to constructively engage with all concerned. We should not allow the serious issue of human rights protection to be politicized and challenges at all levels should be addressed in the spirit of cooperation and genuine dialogue.

For the success of our collective and common cause of promoting and protecting human rights, we emphasize that the international human rights system should focus on achieving the desired results from a more inclusive, participatory and positive approach of dialogue and capacity-building. The values ingrained in the Universal Declaration and Vienna Declaration will continue to enlighten our path as we strive to achieve a fair human rights system.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action are two pillars of global human rights today. Those two documents codify the important messages and

understanding of the past and provide a framework for us to respond to emerging challenges. Most importantly, those two projects enshrine our commitment to find global solutions to common challenges that hinder the progress of humankind. We should aspire to the realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and continue to work towards achieving a better world free of violence for us and future generations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Ms. Plepytė (Lithuania): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Group of Eastern European States.

As we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reminisce and reflect. As a result of the enormous suffering of people in the Second World War and their struggle for peace, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 and marked the first step in the long journey ahead to bring humankind together in response to the atrocities of the greatest tragedy in its history and to build a new world, with human rights at its heart. Armed with the joint commitment to the principles set out in that fundamental document, we, the international community, helped lift up the dignity of many and prevented inestimable human suffering.

The Universal Declaration has become a cornerstone of international human rights law upon which many States have since built a solid and robust human rights architecture. That remarkable instrument spells out in merely 30 articles the rights and duties that we owe one another by virtue of our humanity and provides us with a set of measures to end extreme poverty and create opportunities for every human being. It also gives us the courage of our convictions, in that everyone can make a difference so that all may live the promise of the Universal Declaration — a life of dignity and respect.

With the end of the Cold War, a revived international consciousness and cultural confluence inspired yet another momentous step forward through the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Its fundamental description of human rights as “universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated” cut through the division of civil and political rights from rights that are cultural, economic and social. The first words of the preamble of the Vienna Declaration manifested

a great hopefulness for a new era, with inter-reliant States engaging in a shared approach to the causes of human suffering “[c]onsidering that the promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community.”

As we reflect upon the seven decades that have passed, we realize that the promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and those of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action have yet to be fulfilled. Yet, the very fact that they have stood this striking test of time is a testament to the enduring universality of their perennial ideals of equality, justice and human dignity.

This anniversary is an opportune moment to evaluate the overall societal impact that human rights have had throughout the years. Yet the meaning of these documents for the people and their everyday lives is what counts most. That is why we must promote understanding of how the Universal Declaration and the Vienna Declaration continuously empower us and inspire our deeper reflection on the ways in which we can stand up for human rights and the rule of law in addressing existing challenges.

This anniversary is a stark reminder that while reflecting on achievements as a source for hope and optimism, we cannot take human rights for granted. We are acutely aware of the current struggles of people for the full enjoyment of their human rights taking place across the globe today. Human rights violations and suppressions can and must be addressed, violence prevented and peace sustained.

This anniversary is a chance for the world to celebrate the gift of the Universal Declaration and the Vienna Declaration and to reaffirm the enduring human rights principles and standards they have helped establish. It is also time to stand up for what the Universal Declaration and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action truly represent. We need to secure our achievements and the advances made and use this occasion to mobilize as the international community to continue to defend human rights with fierce commitment. We need to reaffirm the fundamental significance of human rights for our lives and those of future generations, finding our strength in the moral language of the Universal Declaration.

Perhaps the most far-reaching re-reading of these momentous documents today concerns its emphasis on the duties that we hold towards each other, as opposed

to the rights we claim against each other. That is why we hope that the documents adopted with a particular era’s problems in mind will not only preserve their universal authority as future points of reference for international human rights law but also endure as the most comprehensive statements of inalienable human rights. We have a long way to go.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia): I have the honour to deliver these remarks on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) at this plenary meeting to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

After the devastation of war, the historic adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 marked the first time that countries in the world had come together to recognize that every human being, everywhere, shares fundamental and inalienable rights. In a similar way, the adoption of the Vienna Declaration on 25 June 1993 reaffirmed the commitment of all States to fulfil their obligations to promote the universal respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, highlighting that international cooperation on this matter is essential for the full achievement of the purposes of our United Nations.

The Universal Declaration has allowed people all over the world to demand their rights and fight against all forms of oppression, exploitation, discrimination and injustice. It provides us with the basis for ensuring equal rights for everyone, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” and the pursuit of peace, security and sustainable development for all humanity. In that regard, we would also like to recognize the importance of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that are indispensable for the dignity and personal development of all.

There is no doubt that we have come a long way, but we still have much more to achieve in the field of human rights and there is much more to do to overcome the current challenges in the world when universal

values are being eroded. We must face those challenges together by strengthening the multilateral system on the basis of mutual understanding, dialogue, transparency and confidence-building, promoting international cooperation and respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

In commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean would like to reaffirm that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and that all human rights must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. We emphasize the need for the promotion and protection of all human rights to be guided by the principles of impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization in the spirit of constructive international dialogue, solidarity and cooperation.

To that end, we would like to assure the full cooperation and commitment of every State member of GRULAC with the United Nations system in achieving the effective enjoyment of all human rights for everyone around the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

As we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, we should take a moment to reflect, for those two documents are as relevant today as they were on the days they were signed. Since the signing of the Universal Declaration 70 years ago, the world has undeniably moved in a promising direction. More and more people see their human rights codified into national laws and protected by functioning justice systems. That, in turn, has led to more freedom, equality and prosperity. The Universal Declaration has played an instrumental role in the progress made. It has repeatedly served as a source of inspiration for national constitutions, as well as for other international and regional human rights conventions, including forming

the foundation for 18 treaties and optional protocols advancing human rights globally.

But we, the peoples of the United Nations, have also failed many of our fellow human beings — many who would doubt if they really were born free and equal in dignity and rights and many who continuously face violations or abuses of their human rights, often at the hands of the very Governments whose responsibility it is to protect and promote such rights. Although we have failed them, we should learn the lessons of our failure and do better. Three of those lessons stand out and deserve specific attention.

First, we must recognize the crucial role of civil society, including through a free press, in holding Governments accountable with regard to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. Human rights defenders worldwide deserve our unwavering support, especially when they become the target of repression.

Secondly, we have learned the importance of strong international human rights institutions. They are needed to further intergovernmental dialogue, mutual understanding and the improvement of normative frameworks and, where such institutions are not delivering as expected, we should all strive to improve and strengthen them.

Lastly, we need to do a better job of preventing conflicts and mass atrocities and preventing inequality and poverty. Respect for human rights in itself will serve as a preventive tool to avoid such injustice, while, conversely, human rights violations and abuses can and should be used as the proverbial canary in a coal mine — as a warning before situations spiral out of control that should lead to early action.

We can only truly learn those lessons through the inclusion of all, without discrimination on any grounds. In that connection, I would like to briefly pay tribute to all the women who have made crucial contributions to gender equality and human rights achievements over the past 70 years, starting with Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the drafting committee of the Universal Declaration; Hansa Mehta, who, highlighting the need for gender equality, ensured the use of the term human beings instead of men in article 1 of the Declaration; Marie-Hélène Lefauchaux, who managed to include the notion of non-discrimination based on sex in article 2; all the way to brave women today such as Malala Yousafzai and Nadia Murad, both winners of the

Nobel Peace Prize. Women represent half of the world population and they should be equally represented.

In conclusion, let us renew our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Let us look back with pride on our achievements and with humility on our failures. In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt,

“we face the future fortified with lessons we have learned from the past. It is today that we must create the world of the future.”

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bahamas, who will speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

Ms. Carey (Bahamas): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at this General Assembly plenary meeting on the momentous occasion of the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, in accordance with resolution 72/169.

Seventy years ago, on 10 December 1948, the States Members of the United Nations ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The intent of its drafters — those brave eight men and one woman — was to create a document that would elaborate the fundamental rights and freedoms of all during a time when the dignity of humankind was threatened. Being the first formalized document to outline human rights for all, the Declaration was envisioned to be a blueprint to promote universal rights for all people. Today, the Declaration is revered as one of the most fundamental documents within the sphere of international human rights.

On 25 June 1993, the world reaffirmed the importance of the universality of human rights with the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which further forged the linkages between peace, security, human rights and development. All human rights remain universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Our countries remain resolute in the defence of the universal values and inalienable rights due to every human being.

The key contributions and advocacy of women in the drive to create the Universal Declaration were substantial and led to the significant advancement

worldwide of women’s rights and empowerment. As we note with appreciation, Madam President, your presidency is historic, as you are only the fourth woman to have served as President of the General Assembly.

On 10 December, the world celebrated Human Rights Day, which served as an opportunity to reflect on the progress made toward the universalization of fundamental rights and freedoms. Such occasions are truly beneficial as they encourage us to reassess the broad spectrum of human rights situations and to reaffirm our commitment to removing barriers that may infringe on the full and equal enjoyment of human rights.

A historic milestone was reached a few months ago, when, for the first time since the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006, an English-speaking small island developing State from the Caribbean region was elected to become a member. The membership of the Bahamas on the Human Rights Council will allow the deliberation among its members of the unique experiences and perspectives of CARICOM, such as those relating to the environment, climate change, decent work, migration, inequality, gender and youth.

Our region is pleased with that achievement and looks forward to more opportunities to participate on the international stage in this vital area of international discourse. At this juncture, CARICOM expresses its sincere appreciation to the donor countries of 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. The programme designed by the Trust Fund is invaluable in enriching understanding on substantive agenda items and procedures of the Human Rights Council.

The drafters of the Universal Declaration succeeded in the attempt to craft a document that would provide hope and dignity, a document in which the universal human rights for every man, woman and child would be enshrined. Since then, a number of instruments to protect and promote human rights have been crafted to ensure the full enjoyment of those rights by all. Instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women underscore the importance of universality, equality, participation and the rule of law, which firmly buttress development.

The world has worked tirelessly to ensure that rights for all becomes a reality. We have accomplished many goals, but as with any worthwhile effort, the journey continues. While the Universal Declaration speaks to universal human rights, the world still faces ongoing challenges and the Caribbean region has particular concerns in that regard. Climate change is a particular challenge for small island developing States (SIDS) with regard to our realizing all fundamental human rights and freedoms. The special vulnerabilities of SIDS to the negative implications of climate change threaten certain rights, such as the right to water, food and housing and, as a result, impede our progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

In that vein, we support measures to enhance bilateral, regional and international cooperation aimed at addressing the adverse impact of consecutive and compounded global crises, such as financial and economic crises, food crises, climate change and natural disasters, on the full enjoyment of human rights.

In addition, we recall the need for a holistic approach to addressing human rights matters, whereby we remain mindful of the nexus between peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.

I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this important session and would like to assure Member States of CARICOM's full commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms with the aim of ensuring a better world for all through peace, fairness, justice, equality and dignity.

Mr. Kickert (Austria): On 10 December 1948, after the horrors of the Second World War, the world community came together to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

Against the backdrop of the end of the Cold War, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights continued the path embarked upon in 1948 and broke new ground in the international protection of human rights by agreeing on the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which clearly laid out that:

“[d]emocracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing”.

It also led to the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was a true milestone in the institutional protection of human rights.

The year 2018 provides us with not only a chance to commemorate the adoption of those two landmark documents, but also the opportunity to engage in an honest and open reflection on what we have achieved and where more needs to be done. Despite the achievements of the past 70 years, we still witness that the inherent dignity and inalienable human rights of all human beings are often not guaranteed. We witness a backtracking on established human rights commitments across the globe. Increasingly, the need to address human rights challenges seems confronted with mistrust and hostility. In many countries, civil society organizations and human rights defenders, to whom we will pay special tribute later today, are faced with pressure, restrictions, reprisals or even worse.

In that context Austria, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, organized a conference for human rights experts from all world regions in Vienna on 22 and 23 May to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, entitled “Vienna + 25: Building Trust — Making Human Rights a Reality for All”. At the conference, stakeholders from civil society, academia and international organizations discussed how global trends such as urbanization, digitalization, demographic changes and climate change would shape the human rights agenda of the next decade. Only if human rights are effectively protected when we address those new challenges can they play their role as a stabilizing factor for the effective rule of law, to combat social exclusion, as an important driver for sustainable security and as a guarantor and creator of justice and equality in a spirit of solidarity.

The outcome of that fruitful exchange is reflected in action-oriented recommendations on the two key themes of the conference — human rights and security and the promotion of equality in our societies. The outcome document, which was circulated on 27 September and is contained as an annex in document A/73/399, comprises the main elements of the discussions. I encourage everyone to thoroughly reflect on those suggestions from the field and to include civil society in our task of tackling future challenges.

Let us not forget our common conclusion from the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action:

“Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Governments.”

In that spirit, Austria looks forward to cooperating with all Member States in our upcoming three-year term as a member of the Human Rights Council in following up on those recommendations and becoming one step closer to making human rights a reality for all.

Mr. Lukyantsev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today’s General Assembly meeting is dedicated to a truly historic event. Seventy years ago, States adopted a document that shaped the entire modern system for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Nazism had just gone down to historic defeat, along with the human-hating ideology of national socialism, whose founding principle was the superiority of one race over all the rest. It is therefore no surprise that even today the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sounds like a kind of political manifesto and manual, providing a set of principles and guidelines that members of the international community should follow in developing responses and solutions to today’s human rights challenges. That is why it is rightly considered the standard to which States should aspire.

In the ensuing years the Declaration’s provisions were enshrined in States’ Constitutions and national legislation, as well as in international treaties both multilateral and regional. Although the Declaration itself does not have the force of a binding international treaty, it has been universally acknowledged by States whose level of development, political systems and cultural traditions differ substantially. The fact that the Declaration does not prescribe one-sided approaches but rather highlights the importance of diversity and of considering regional specificities and countries’ different national, cultural, religious and historic traditions has played a major part in this.

The successful implementation of the standards enshrined in the Declaration is largely dependent on the steps that we take. Today it is more important than ever for States to renounce short-term political interests and focus their efforts on strengthening dialogue and cooperation and involving all stakeholders in the

collective process of formulating and taking decisions. As it was 70 years ago, the United Nations should be the main driver of that process. At the same time, realizing the goals of the Declaration in our lives depends primarily on States.

Since the Declaration was adopted, significant progress has been made in overcoming discord and disagreement in the area of human rights. Nevertheless, there continue to be serious obstacles to its implementation. New challenges and threats constantly arise and hinder its implementation. In that regard, the joint efforts of the international community in combating transnational problems such as racism, extremism, discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia are particularly important. All of these phenomena are primarily focused on denying the main idea of the Declaration, under which “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written and adopted immediately after the Second World War. To a large extent, it was humankind’s response to the suffering caused by that tragedy and its desire to ensure that what had led to it would not happen again — the doctrine of Nazism, which divided humankind into higher and lesser races, some better than others. Many of the States Members of the United Nations that adopted the Declaration suffered the terrible consequences of such doctrines in practice themselves. It is therefore very worrying to see the cynical and increasingly regular and systematic attempts today to whitewash Nazism and distort history.

Although the concept of human rights is a process that is continually evolving and improving, the Declaration is still relevant today. Moreover, its potential as a platform for dialogue is still underestimated. We believe firmly that it can be a powerful instrument for reducing mistrust, combating intolerance, building bridges between civilizations and overcoming the dangerous prejudices, enmity and hatred that have led to social upheaval and wars for hundreds of years.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today within the framework of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly 73 years after the founding of both the League of Arab States and the United Nations in 1945 as two pioneering organizations in the area of multilateral

work to maintain international peace and security and to preserve human dignity.

Based on that shared responsibility, since its establishment the League of Arab States has always worked to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations and follow its declarations and resolutions, first and foremost the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has served as the cornerstone of regional and national human rights systems.

Within the Arab human rights system, the Permanent Arab Committee for Human Rights, established in September 1968 as the first permanent committee of the region under the auspices of the Arab League, working to promote human rights throughout the Arab region, was in line with that important international instrument. Regional efforts have continued at both the structural and the legislative level, whereby a number of steps have been taken, the most important of which are the following.

First, the revised Arab Charter on Human Rights was adopted at the March 2004 Arab League summit as a reference document for the region to incorporate human rights within the basic national interests of Arab States.

Second, the Arab Human Rights Committee was established in 2009 in accordance with the Arab Charter on Human Rights, after the latter's entry into force on 16 March 2008, to consider reports of the States members of the Arab League on measures taken to promote the rights and freedoms set out in the Arab Charter.

Third, the date of the Arab Charter's entry into force, 16 March, was adopted as Arab Human Rights Day, which is celebrated annually by the League of Arab States at the ministerial level. It provides an opportunity to carry out discussions on human rights and adopt the necessary recommendations to develop Arab human rights.

Fourth, the 2009-2014 Arab Plan for Human Rights Education was adopted at the Arab League summit with the goal of including human rights in the curricula of the education system at various levels.

Fifth, the 2010-2015 Arab plan to foster the culture of human rights was adopted at the Arab League summit to strengthen a culture of human rights in the Arab world and to ensure the enjoyment thereof by all individuals, groups and sectors of society.

Sixth, the Legislative, Legal and Human Rights Committee was established as part of the Arab Parliament to enable Arab parliamentarians to participate in and contribute to policymaking and implementation of the relevant policies in their respective countries.

Seventh, a human rights conference bringing together the leaders responsible for guaranteeing those rights was launched under the auspices of the Arab Permanent Committee on Human Rights, which was the result of cooperation between the Arab League and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Strengthening human rights is an integral part of the existing cooperation framework shared by the League of Arab States and the United Nations, as well as many other regional organizations, such as the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the African Union and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, among others. The Arab League's cooperation with the United Nations is evident through its holding since 2014 of a biennial regional high-level meeting on the protection of human rights jointly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

As we celebrate the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the content of those two documents undoubtedly constitutes noble purposes to protect the right to life and to lay the foundations for achieving freedom, justice and peace throughout the world. In that regard, we stress the importance of establishing peace and finding radical and sustained solutions to the crises all over the world, especially the crisis in the Middle East. In particular, we underscore the right of the Palestinian people to pursue their struggle to enjoy their rights free from occupation, as well as resolving all other problems in the Arab region, so that the people can exercise their rights guaranteed by the relevant international and regional covenants and conventions, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Arab League will continue its involvement in and maximum support for the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to ensure that the hopes and aspirations of our peoples to enjoy a better life are met.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.