



# General Assembly

Sixty-eighth session

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Official Records

*President:* Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.*

## Agenda item 69

### Promotion and protection of human rights

#### Commemorative meeting to mark the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General.

**The Deputy Secretary-General:** I am very glad to see such a big room and such a great attendance.

Before I deliver my formal remarks I want to tell you a story. I was once giving some speeches and lectures on human rights in my home country, Sweden, and a woman who saw me on television sent me a brochure that she had kept in her library for many years — in fact, since 1950. It was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948. She had attended a seminar in New York and had bought that little brochure at the great cost of 25 cents. And she said that there had been such a nice lady chairing the meeting and that she had gone up afterwards to ask for her autograph. She said that I had spoken so well about human rights that she wanted to give the brochure to me. So she sent it to me and when I opened it, right here on page 3, it says, “With good wishes, Eleanor

Roosevelt”. Quite a thing, is it not? I keep it in a very special little box inside my bank safe.

I tell that story only to say that people in the world expect us to live up to our human rights obligations. They know what good and right are, and they have their little brochures in the library, but they also have in their hearts the great conviction that we have to live up to the belief that everyone is of equal value and the principles and purposes and values for which this Organization stands.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to take part in this ceremony. The Secretary-General had planned to be here, but he is now on his way back from Johannesburg after participating in the memorial for Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest human rights champions of all time. And the Secretary-General conveys his best wishes to everyone and sends his congratulations to today’s winners of the United Nations Human Rights prize.

I want to add my voice to his and to pay tribute to the activists, lawyers and human rights defenders who are here today or who are with us in spirit in different parts of the world. Each in his or her own way is bringing to life the freedom and protection that are every person’s birthright. Human rights defenders are challenging Governments to uphold their obligations, strengthen the rule of law, empower women and girls, and stake out new ground for our global human rights effort by focusing on neglected problems and marginalized people. They richly deserve today’s recognition at the United Nations.

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Human rights are a core part of this Organization's identity and mission. They are one of the three pillars on which the United Nations is built, namely, peace and security, development, and human rights; all three closely connected and interdependent. In the Charter of the United Nations, it says that we the peoples reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person. All our work stems from that essential premise. The United Nations has committed itself to promote and encourage respect for human rights for all, without distinction. When our work falls short of our commitments to the dignity and worth of the human person, we are all diminished, and we distance ourselves from the Charter.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly 65 years ago today, there has been tremendous progress. We now have a broad corpus of human rights laws and standards, a wide range of mechanisms for monitoring adherence, and a growing presence of experts on the ground across the world.

This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1993 Vienna Programme of Action, with its bold vision of human rights — economic, social, political and civil — and of course, crucially, the creation of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, which was the realization of so many people's long-held dreams. In 2006, the new Human Rights Council was established. Awareness of human rights has never been higher. At the same time, we must admit, as is all too painfully clear, that countless people across the world still do not enjoy their human rights.

Poverty, inequality and economic crises continue to keep people hungry, homeless and jobless. Repression and misrule have kept people from participating in decisions that affect their lives. Terrorism, extremism and waves of brutality have created fear and vicious cycles of hatred and violence.

In armed conflicts, we continue to see large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. It is States Members of the United Nations, in the first instance, that have the responsibility to protect human rights and prevent violations at the national level. It is States that should take appropriate action when the failure of other States to meet their commitments leads to large-scale violations and atrocities. We must all do more, not the least through universal periodic reviews

to ensure that States uphold their responsibilities. That also means that we must ensure that individuals who cooperate with the United Nations enjoy freedom from intimidation or harassment. The peoples of the world must enjoy their inherent freedom to engage with this Organization, which was established for them.

The Secretary-General and I are convinced that peoples' freedom and ability to freely communicate with us are vital for the Organization's strength and relevance. We have a collective responsibility to uphold and protect that freedom and ability. The United Nations system, for its part, is committed to doing better. We have begun to implement human rights up front through action plans to ensure that we respond preventively to the risks of large-scale human rights violations.

As a first step, the Secretary-General recently wrote to all United Nations staff renewing the commitment of the United Nations system to identifying emerging risks and supporting national authorities to take essential early action when human rights violations take place. We also commit ourselves to bringing violations to the attention of the United Nations organs and regional organizations that are appropriate when national authorities are unable or unwilling to respond.

Human rights are our best early warning signal of calamities and crises to come. When we analyse conflicts over the past 50 years, we see that they very often, even in the majority of cases, start with human rights violations. Why should we then not act more energetically at that stage rather than wait for the entire house to be on fire. In that respect, our thoughts today turn in particular to the victims of atrocities unfolding in the Central African Republic. Our rather dramatic appeal, the Assembly will recall, for collective assistance to a State in danger of collapse must continue to sound loud on this day, the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Looking ahead, we must also do our best to ensure that the rights perspective is taken into account as Member States consider their post-2015 development agenda. We have the formula: There can be no peace without development, there can be no development without peace, and neither peace nor development without respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The rule of law and human rights are outcomes as well as enablers of development. Through close attention to governance institutions and the rule of law, we can take great strides towards lasting peace

and sustainable development. The walk on the road of respect for human rights should be our way of life, enabled by human rights learning and human rights education.

As mentioned earlier in my statement, Nelson Mandela's life personified all that has been said. "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion", he stated. If hatred is learned, so love can be taught, because love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Those words of wisdom recall Nelson Mandela's memory to all of us.

In conclusion, let me say that our success in this endeavour, central to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, can be made possible through the commitment of Member States, through the work of civil society and human rights defenders and by continuing to strengthen the United Nations system. We are in this together, and we can succeed together only if we are united in the pursuit of a life of dignity for all.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement.

Mr. John Ashe, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, has gone to Pretoria on the pressing mission of which the Assembly is aware, but he is with us in spirit, because he empowered me to deliver a statement on his behalf, which I will now do with a sense of responsibility and pleasure.

"On this day, 65 years ago, our General Assembly adopted one of the most important documents in world history, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Let us take a moment to remember that a mere three years after the founding of the United Nations, the countries of the world came together to reaffirm their faith in universal human rights as a main pillar of the Organization and of human civilization as a whole.

"In 1948, that inspirational and aspirational document became a road map for the then fledging United Nations, affirming that basic rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent to all human beings — inalienable and equally applicable to everyone at all times. The Universal Declaration transformed into reality the bold and audacious premise that all people, regardless of circumstances, are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

"The far-reaching consequences of such a document cannot be underestimated. It has been described by the *Guinness Book of Records* as 'the world's most translated document'. As of today, it has been translated into 416 languages and dialects. It transcends borders, has stood the test of time and remains a shining testament to the hope, vision and courage of those who worked tirelessly in its drafting and subsequent adoption. More importantly, it continues to guide the hopes and dreams of millions living across the globe.

"The formation of the Universal Declaration marks a proud moment for humankind and is an indicator of our highest and noblest aspirations. More than six decades later, we can celebrate the extent to which it has influenced, and continues to influence international and national laws, norms and standards. That document laid the foundation for a body of international human rights law, which defines our shared human experience and continues to evolve and expand today. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, we have seen the development of a comprehensive and legally binding system for the promotion and protection of human rights through international human rights covenants.

"This system and other international and regional human rights instruments, institutions and mechanisms all operate under the core principles of universality, interdependence, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, as first set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But let us not forget that the real power of such a document is in its implementation, and we should take note that when the Declaration is tarnished or when its principles are not upheld and implemented, we who make up this assembly of nations are all diminished.

"Persistent violations of the principles of the Declaration are rampant. All too often, we, as representatives of the people, have failed to uphold and adhere to the laws, norms and standards to which we have ascribed. We are still challenged in our efforts to address and implement effectively the basic tenets of the Declaration. Around the world, we see that poor, vulnerable, marginalized populations and minorities are continually discriminated against on the basis of their race, gender, language, religion and socioeconomic status.

“Sixty-five years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, far too many people lack the right to a standard of living that is adequate for health and well-being. Too many suffer from persecution and are denied equal access to the law and to recognition before the law. Too many women and children are still victims of human trafficking and contemporary forms of slavery and are denied their basic rights to liberty, security and dignity. Those and other violations occur far too often, and we in the assembly of nations have an obligation — a duty, really — to respond and take action. We cannot stand by idly or look away when we see oppression and discrimination. That is the essence of what it means to be part of one larger human family. We cannot shy away in the face of injustice. Instead, we need to persevere and overcome.

“In 1993, delegations gathered in Vienna for the World Conference on Human Rights, and they adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action by consensus. It marked a collective decision to renew and strengthen the international community’s commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. One of the concrete recommendations of the Conference was to establish the mandate of a High Commissioner for Human Rights, and thereby strengthen and harmonize the human rights monitoring capacity of the United Nations.

“As we celebrate this year’s theme, ‘20 years: working for your rights’, I would like to congratulate and extend my appreciation to Ms. Navanethem Pillay and to previous High Commissioners and their respective offices for their dedication and commitment in responding to human rights challenges across the globe, ensuring that human rights are mainstreamed and mutually reinforced in all United Nations programmes, and developing partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including United Nations entities, Governments and civil society.

“I also commend the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for providing a forum for the voices of victims and survivors of human rights abuses and violations throughout the world. Despite the challenge of persistent budgetary and human resources

constraints, the Office continues to work in a reliable and effective manner.

“In the 65 years since the signing of the Declaration, the world has seen many champions of human rights, some of whom have passed on and others of whom are still with us. By their example, those icons have lived the principles of the Declaration and sought to ensure the freedoms and dignity of the world’s people.

“In that spirit, let us acknowledge the legacy and work of the late President Nelson Mandela, affectionately known as Madiba. His life was dedicated to the advancement of human rights, dignity and freedom and, while we mourn his loss, we cannot fail to learn by his example. In 1988, Nelson Mandela, along with his former wife, Winnie Mandela, were recipients of the very human rights prize being awarded today.

“Mandela taught us that there can be no true development unless all people have access to equal human rights, democracy, dignity and freedom. Today, we salute all those who have worked and sacrificed themselves for those ideals.

“We are gathered to honour the virtue of courage, for at the heels of every human rights violation is a human rights defender working tirelessly for justice, dignity and decency. The winners of the 2013 United Nations prize in the field of human rights have all made outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and the right to development in their respective countries. They have helped identify where action is needed. They ensure that the voices of victims of human rights violations are heard, and they fight against impunity.

“The efforts of those individuals and institutions not only have a direct impact on the situations at hand, but indirectly they serve as voices of social conscience. They inspire us and set an example and they put violators of human rights on notice that their abuses will not be tolerated or ignored.

“We applaud this year’s winners — their personal courage and their collective contributions to better our human family. It is my distinct privilege to honour their dedication to human rights

and fundamental freedoms for all, and, in doing so, to thank them for their service to humanity.”

In accordance with General Assembly decision 68/522 of 9 December 2013, I now give the floor to the President of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Remigiusz Achilles Henczel.

**Mr. Henczel** (Poland), President of the Human Rights Council: At the outset, on behalf of the United Nations Human Rights Council, I would like to pay tribute to a remarkable man and a champion of the human rights cause — Nelson Mandela, who passed away some days ago. His life was a true testimony to what can be achieved with sheer strength of character, determination and absolute belief in and personal commitment to one’s fellow human beings and one’s nation — in his case, South Africa. Nelson Mandela devoted almost all of his life to bringing a message of freedom, democracy, equality, racial harmony and human dignity to the entire world. Let us be inspired by his towering achievements, summed up in one of his many famous quotes:

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

It is an honour for me, as President of the Human Rights Council, to take part in the celebrations of Human Rights Day marking the sixty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Coinciding, as it does, with the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, this year’s commemoration has a special significance. Those two crucial human rights documents constitute a milestone in the continuing struggle for the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and should guide our efforts to further advance the cause of human rights in the world. A long road, not without enormous difficulties and obstacles, has been travelled since the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration. We should spare no effort in ensuring that the Declaration and all of the international human rights law inspired by it do not remain dead letters.

The achievements that have been realized so far in the field of human rights would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of all those brave human

rights activists, mostly unknown, who have dared to raise their voices to denounce abuses and injustices and who have worked in their communities to ensure respect for human rights. That is why, when we look at the future, one of our priorities should be to preserve a safe space for the effective participation of civil society at both the national and the international levels, including when cooperating with human rights mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council.

Today the Assembly is recognizing the importance of the many individuals and organizations working around the world every day to assure the promotion and protection of our rights. In that regard, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the laureates of the 2013 United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights who are here with us today. As has already been mentioned, Nelson Mandela himself was a laureate in 1988.

We live in a fast-changing world that is still facing a complex, multifaceted crisis. That has had a serious impact on human rights everywhere without exception, affecting the daily life of millions of people, especially the most vulnerable. If the international community wishes to seek credible sustainable solutions to those problems, it must put human beings at the centre. Indeed, events in recent years have shown us that we will never be able to enjoy real development and security without a similar enjoyment of human rights.

I would like to conclude by once again quoting the wise words of Nelson Mandela: “[A]fter climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.” So let us climb them together.

**The Acting President:** I thank the President of the Human Rights Council for his statement.

In accordance with General Assembly decision 68/522 of 9 December 2013, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, was to speak at this commemorative meeting, but, owing to her participation in the memorial service for His Excellency Mr. Nelson Mandela, she is unable to be here with us today.

In the light of Ms. Pillay’s absence, I should now like to consult members with a view to giving the floor to Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Ivan Šimonović,

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, to make a statement at this meeting?

*It was so decided.*

**The Acting President:** In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Mr. Šimonović.

**Mr. Šimonović** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights): Ms. Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, was very much looking forward to this special meeting of the General Assembly, and had, of course, intended to be here with us today. However, she had to be with Mandela one last time. In 1988, Mandela himself was awarded the same Human Rights Prize that we are awarding today, exactly 25 years ago.

Anniversaries invite us to reflect on what we have achieved but also on where we have failed and what we have yet to accomplish. This year, we have much to reflect on. Twenty years ago, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was adopted, building on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to set out a bold vision of how to promote and protect human rights. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is also 20 years old this year, and faces renewed and expanded demands, as human rights become ever more central to the way the entire United Nations system operates.

There can be little doubt that, overall, the United Nations human rights system is a great deal stronger than it was in 1993. There are more human rights treaties and protocols ratified by a growing number of States, and there are more special-procedures mandates. The Human Rights Council is gathering strength and reputation, with the universal periodic review well into its second cycle. The system of international justice has expanded and, of course, civil society is stronger and more effective. But if we look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written when the horrors of two world wars were fresh in memory but also when the determination to create a better world for all was stronger than ever before, we can see that that aspiration remains an unfulfilled promise for far too many people all over the world.

Present-day crises, including massive human rights violations and displacements during conflicts, continue to challenge the international community and its commitment to uphold human rights. Women continue to suffer discrimination and violence, and migrants continue to be treated as second-class citizens, with authorities seeming to ignore the fact that they have

the same fundamental rights as anyone else. There was hope in the decade following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that xenophobia and racism could be, and indeed were being, defeated, but today there is a clear lack of leadership in tackling xenophobic and racist forms of propaganda and other forms of discrimination that lead to the denial of the basic economic, social and cultural rights of minority communities and even to violence against them.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains as relevant now as it was on the day it was adopted, but its authors could scarcely have imagined today's world, nor could those of us present at the 1993 Vienna Conference. Climate change and proliferating global and regional terrorist movements are among the complex challenges that have emerged. Technology is transforming our lives, with the lines between the public and private spheres increasingly blurred. The task of protecting human rights in a digital age is one that we must address with urgency.

Events of recent years, including the unexpected upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa and the global financial crisis, have shown that economic growth without adequate measures to promote inclusive and participatory development is not sustainable. The interdependence of human rights, development, and peace and security — the three fundamental pillars of the United Nations — is now unmistakably evident. An increasingly global economy means that not just States but also businesses and other segments of civil society need to assume their human rights obligations and responsibilities to protect human rights and promote development.

The winners of the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2013 embody many of the human rights challenges we face: defending the right of girls and women to education, fighting for the right to gender equality, campaigning for the rights of persons with disabilities, ending modern-day slavery, and guaranteeing respect for human rights through the interpretation and enforcement of States' obligations under international law.

I have highlighted the way in which United Nations human rights-specific institutions are stronger now than they were in 1993. But they are not enough by themselves. If we want to see real change in the lives of millions worldwide, the rest of the United Nations — individual Member States, the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as United Nations agencies, funds

and programmes — needs to join the common cause of improving human rights for everyone, everywhere, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Vice-President of the General Assembly has made clear how important human rights and the rule of law are to promoting consensus and encouraging concrete action within the global community on the post-2015 development goals.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General for their efforts on the “Rights up front” action plan, which places human rights considerations at the forefront of reacting to and dealing with emerging crises. The message is clear — never again will the human rights indicators of forthcoming crises go unregistered and unreported; never again will we refrain from reporting to Member States, including to the Security Council, what they need to know, rather than what they want to know. Such commitments make our celebration of Human Rights Day very special. But let us be aware that we will be judged not by what we say, but by what we do in practice.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights for his statement.

The Assembly will now begin the ceremony for the award of the United Nations Prizes in the Field of Human Rights for 2013. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2217A (XXI) of 19 December 1966, six prizes are to be awarded this year to individuals and one organization that have made outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Allow me to make a brief presentation of the winners.

Mr. Biram Dah Abeid is the son of freed slaves and is engaged in an advocacy campaign to eradicate slavery. In 2008, he founded the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement, a non-governmental organization. His organization seeks to draw attention to that issue and to help take specific cases before courts of law.

Ms. Hiljmnijeta Apuk has been an activist for the rights of the disabled for over 30 years, both domestically as well as internationally. She is the founding director of the non-governmental organization Little People of Kosovo and acts as the coordinator of an awareness campaign for the employment possibilities of persons with disabilities in Kosovo. In addition to working

for many years on the rights of persons with muscular dystrophy and of those with disproportionately restricted growth up to the height of 4.1 feet, she is also an artist, working to promote the authentic culture of persons with disabilities through her art work. Additionally, Ms. Apuk was a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

Ms. Liisa Kauppinen has been a voice for the human rights of deaf people since 1970. She was effective in securing the inclusion of references to signed languages, deaf culture, the deaf community and the identity of deaf people within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. Ms. Kauppinen has been heavily involved in spreading and developing a Nordic bilingual deaf education model all over the world, which has helped to ensure that deaf children have improved access to education.

Ms. Khadija Ryadi has been at the forefront of several human rights causes, including full equality between men and women, self-determination and freedom of expression regardless of sexual orientation. Ms. Ryadi has been a human rights activist since 1983, when she joined the Moroccan Association for Human Rights. She is also a former president of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights.

Ms. Malala Yousafzai is a symbol for young women’s rights the world over. Ms. Malala was initially a vocal and well-known advocate for education and women’s rights, speaking out on the crucial right of girls to education, women’s empowerment and the links between the two. After surviving an October 2012 assassination attempt in retaliation for her actions and advocacy, Malala has demonstrated her courage and commitment by continuing to speak out on behalf of the rights of girls and women.

The Mexican Supreme Court of Justice provides legal protections for the constitutional rights of Mexican citizens and residents. The national Supreme Court has accomplished considerable progress in promoting human rights through its interpretations and enforcement of Mexico’s Constitution and its obligations under international law.

I will now present the awards, and I kindly request delegations to reserve their applause until the last award has been presented.

I now call to the podium the first recipient, Mr. Biram Dah Abeid, to receive the award.

*Mr. Biram Dah Abeid was escorted to the podium.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the second recipient, Ms. Hiljmnijeta Apuk, to receive the award.

*Ms. Hiljmnijeta Apuk was escorted to the podium.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the third recipient, Ms. Liisa Kauppinen, to receive the award.

*Ms. Liisa Kauppinen was escorted to the podium.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the fourth recipient, Ms. Khadija Ryadi, to receive the award.

*Ms. Khadija Ryadi was escorted to the podium.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the fifth recipient, the representative of Ms. Malala Yousafzai, who is unable to participate today, to receive the award.

*The representative of Ms. Malala Yousafzai was escorted to the podium.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Ms. Yousafzai in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the sixth recipient, Chief Justice Mr. Juan N. Silva Mez, to receive the award on behalf of the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice.

*Mr. Juan N. Silva Mez was escorted to the podium.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice in recognition of its outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As I said before presenting the awards, after all of the prizes have been awarded, there will be a final applause to thank the winners once more.

I now give the floor to the representatives of regional groups, who will make statements in connection with today's celebration.

**Mr. Tangara (Gambia):** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 54 members of the Group of African States.

Today, as we commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this important meeting gives us an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the Universal Declaration for humankind. The African Group would like to reaffirm its strong commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. Africa's commitment is shown through the achievements of the African Union in the field of human rights, such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights adopted in 1981, the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, the creation of the African Court on Human and People's Rights, the adoption of the protocol to the African Charter in 1998, and the African Peer Review Mechanism, which reviews the progress of African States in the protection and promotion of human rights.

The achievements that have emanated from the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are undeniable. The Declaration affirmed the universal values that are shared by all and established the basic standards in the fields of human rights with regard to many regional and international instruments.

The African Group reaffirms its conviction that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and reiterates the need for the international community to treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. The African Group is convinced that the values enshrined in the Declaration call for moral, legal and political action to promote the realization of freedom, equality and dignity for all human beings. The African Group would like to emphasize that tolerance



and respect for cultural diversity are important and serve to facilitate the enjoyment of all human rights by all.

The African Group opposes all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or beliefs. It condemns all acts of violence that perpetrators may claim, albeit falsely, to do in the name of religion, and reaffirms that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.

Overall, interreligious dialogue and a culture of peace should be promoted in such a way as to foster unity for all peoples and mankind, with due respect for all cultures and religions. The Group is, however, concerned by the growing trend to create new rights, concepts and categories and standards that are not recognized in international human rights instruments or universally agreed by Member States of the United Nations. Therefore, the Group urges full respect for national sovereignty and cultural values, and for the ability of all societies to make choices in a democratic way as to what is acceptable to them. The African Group reaffirms that the enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights is essential for the full achievement of the purposes of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that context, progress in the field of human rights should be sought through cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect. The exploitation of human rights as an instrument for political purposes should be prohibited.

Despite all the progress made, there are still too many men and women deprived of their fundamental rights. Many phenomena, such as neocolonialism, poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, hunger, discrimination, racism and religious intolerance, continue to prevail. All of those issues should be addressed in order to ensure dignity and justice for all. The fate of peoples under foreign occupation, colonialism or alien domination should not be forgotten. Their right to self-determination and the exercise of that right remains valid and essential.

The African Group also expresses its full adherence to the principles of sovereignty, national integrity and non-interference. The African Group attaches great importance to the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and advocates that economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights should be treated equally.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development is a cornerstone initiative towards that purpose, as it aims to promote and protect the social and economic rights of African people. In that connection, the right to development needs to be recognized as an essential and integral part of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to development is an inalienable human right from which all countries and individuals should benefit.

In that connection, the African Group stresses the urgency of addressing extreme poverty around the world. It is the belief of the African Group that the international community cannot continue to speak highly of our success in promoting human dignity while millions of our fellow human beings are still struggling in extreme poverty. The international community cannot continue to talk about our success in advancing social progress and better standards of life and larger freedom when millions of people around the world are still struggling daily in search of basic needs, such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation, shelter and basic health, and others. It is therefore very important that the international community do all it can to advance the right to development as a process towards the effective fulfilment of human potential. More attention should be paid to economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to life, the right to food, the right to safe drinking water and basic sanitation and the right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. International cooperation should be promoted in that regard.

The developed countries should, to that end, do more to honour their commitments in terms of providing development assistance, technology transfer, debt reduction and market access, so as to create favourable conditions for the effective promotion of the universal realization of the right to development. Furthermore, the African Group recommends the integration of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development to serve as a top priority in the post-2015 development agenda.

The African Group would like to express once again the importance of the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up. Moreover, the Group is alarmed by the increase in acts of racial discrimination, including the challenges faced by migrant women, men and children. Political measures for exclusion have become tools for political leaders and parties. Measures should be taken to ensure safe

and legal migration in order to avoid tragedies such as the latest boat tragedy off Lampedusa off the coast of Sicily. Governments should refrain from devising new methods of exclusion.

The African Group attaches great importance to the Human Rights Council and the added value it brings. We also attach great importance to the universal periodic review and underline the central role that the mechanism should play in enhancing constructive dialogue and cooperation between Member States and in bringing about the realization of all human rights for all. It has demonstrated its added value by the commitment of all States to the review and the acceptance of many of the recommendations formulated during that exercise.

Human rights education makes an essential contribution to the prevention of human rights abuses over the long term. It represents an important investment in the endeavour to achieve a just society, in which the human rights of all persons are valued and respected. Human rights education promotes values and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community. In that context, the African Group wishes to express its support for all initiatives aimed at ensuring human rights education and learning, and looks forward to contributing in the elaboration of the Plan of Action of the third phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education developed by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In addition, the capacity-building of developing countries in the human rights area — to be carried out at their own request — should receive particular attention.

I would like to conclude my statement by reaffirming the commitment of the African Group to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which remains the common standard of achievement for all peoples. We will continue to support the efforts of the international community in the promotion and protection of all human rights around the world.

**Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic): As Chair of the Asia-Pacific Group of States for December 2013, I sincerely regret to inform the Assembly that the Chair will not be able to deliver a statement on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group at this historic event because no consensus exists in our Group to deliver such a joint statement.

**Mr. Logar** (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States. It is events like today's that enable us to take stock of recent key developments in human rights, and, most importantly, let us look ahead at what can be achieved in the future.

Remembering the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, which encompassed an unprecedented level of participation on the part of the international human rights community, we can acknowledge the tangible and very practical results that were included in its historic Declaration and Programme of Action. I wish to highlight three elements in particular.

First, let me stress the reaffirmation of the universality of human rights — the idea of all human rights for all. Every individual is entitled to the full enjoyment of his or her rights without discrimination. States are obliged to promote universal respect for and observance and protection of human rights.

Secondly, I wish to stress that all human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights indeed envisaged. Given the serious erosion of economic and social rights following the severe global financial meltdown and the ensuing socioeconomic turmoil, we salute the unifying principle of human rights today more than ever.

Thirdly, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action also transformed the former Centre for Human Rights into the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Twenty years later, the evolution of that Office has been significant, given that every day it works to promote and protect human rights around the world. For example, some very important new normative frameworks have been established to better protect and promote human rights, in particular those of women, children and indigenous peoples. On behalf of my Group, let me also acknowledge the role of the treaty bodies in promoting and protecting human rights.

Last but not least, let me congratulate all of the winners of the 2013 United Nations Human Rights Prize. We thank them for their work and tireless efforts in promoting and protecting human rights all over the world.

**Mr. Goddard** (Barbados): On behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, I would like to again extend congratulations to the six recipients of the 2013 United Nations Human Rights Prizes.

This year's celebration of Human Rights Day is marked by a confluence of three watershed moments in the history of human rights: the sixty-fifth anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and of the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It also coincides with the awarding of the prestigious United Nations Human Rights Prize, which happens every five years.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted and adopted in 1948, was a landmark document, inspired by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, by which the peoples of the United Nations reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of the human persons, and in the equal rights of men and women.

The undergirding principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms inspired the Declaration and established it as a common standard of achievement for the peoples of all nations. The Declaration is as relevant today as it was when proclaimed 65 years ago. The recognition, observance, protection and promotion of human rights is as much of a priority now as at any other point in human history.

In the years since the General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration, much has been achieved. Human rights have become central to the discourse on peace, security and development at all levels. The international human rights system has expanded to encompass a wide network of instruments at the regional and international levels, which build on the foundation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Groups in need of particular protection, including women, children, persons with disabilities and migrant workers, are now the focus of particular human rights instruments. Bodies to monitor and evaluate the fulfilment of the human rights commitments assumed by States have been established, and the treaty body system is recognized as one of the greatest successes of the United Nations.

The United Nations Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review, guided by the principles of

impartiality, universality and constructive dialogue, contribute to the promotion, protection and the enjoyment of human rights. All too often the obligations of States are not translated into the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the ground. Economic and social rights, such as the right to enjoy just and favourable conditions of employment and an adequate standard of living, are often sidelined in the quest for economic advancement and growth. Injustices continue to be perpetrated, too often as a routine affair. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the first casualties of war and armed conflict. To paraphrase the words of the Declaration, continuing disregard and contempt for human rights result in barbarous acts that outrage the conscience of mankind.

I wish to highlight two recent initiatives of States members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) at the sixty-eighth session.

Member States inaugurated a much-needed debate on upholding the right to privacy in the digital age. Respect for the human right to privacy is pivotal in any democratic society, in which the full protection of individual liberties, including the right to privacy, is paramount.

In addition, for the first time, a draft resolution on the right to the truth has been submitted to the Third Committee of the General Assembly (A/C.3/68/L.43/Rev.1). The right to the truth and the preservation of memory play a decisive role in the prevention and repetition of injustice. Our societies strive to advance policies aimed at preserving their historical memory and affirming their democratic values. Apart from joining the consensus on the draft resolution on the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (A/C.3/68/L.44), we firmly extended our support to the draft resolution on the right to the truth.

Speaking of our region, GRULAC wishes to draw attention to the situation in Haiti. We are deeply concerned by the negative impact of the cholera epidemic in that country. We believe that the international community has an important role to play in supporting the efforts of the Haitian Government to realize the right of the Haitian people to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health. We also note the initiative of the Secretary-General in that regard.

GRULAC reiterates its commitment to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related

intolerance in all circumstances, including sports. We encourage all Member States to promote sport as a means to combat all forms of discrimination.

The hour has come for the proclamation by the United Nations of the International Decade for People of African Descent, an essential step towards the goal of heightening awareness of prejudice, intolerance and racism. GRULAC reaffirms its unwavering support for the proclamation of the International Decade by the end of this year.

Finally, we applaud the achievements of the recipients of this year's United Nations Human Rights prize. We are inspired by their passion, commitment, and work to promote and protect human rights.

It is a source of particular pride for GRULAC that one of this year's laureates, the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice, is an institution from the region. This is the first time that the prize has been awarded to a national or subregional court. The Supreme Court has made considerable progress in promoting human rights through its interpretations and enforcement of Mexico's Constitution and its obligations under international law. It has set important human rights standards not only for Mexico, but for the entire Latin American region.

Among its many achievements, the Supreme Court established the principles of interpretation and control by the judiciary, and the compatibility of judicial decisions, both at the federal and local level, with international human rights treaties to which Mexico is a party. The decision in that regard confirmed the obligation of all Mexican authorities to abide by the established international principles of human rights. The Supreme Court has also undertaken an active programme on gender equality and has a long-standing relationship with UN-Women. It has prioritized the protection of the rights of women, particularly in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, and combating discrimination.

The annual celebration of Human Rights Day brings our focus to the work needed to achieve the vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We join other members of the United Nations in reaffirming and renewing our commitment to the full realization of all human rights.

**Mr. Grima** (Malta): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Western European and other States Group in commemoration of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Determined to respond to the horrors and atrocities of the Second World War 65 years ago, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a landmark document representing the highest aspirations of humankind. Sixty-five years after its adoption, that document still forms the basis for both international human rights law and the work of the United Nations in advancing the cause of peace, security and prosperity for all, without discrimination.

The freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration helped spread awareness of the rights and fundamental freedoms that individuals possess. The Declaration has inspired the adoption of many legal instruments promoting equality, and freedom and upholding dignity for all humankind.

That eloquent text reflects the common aspirations of all humankind for human rights and fundamental freedoms, for which all Governments should be held accountable. Let us reaffirm that each and every State, regardless of circumstances, must fulfil its primary responsibility to respect and protect the rights of all individuals, without distinctions of any kind. Let us continue to promote the work of non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders, who have played a critical role in assessing violations and protection gaps.

Let us also work towards supporting international mechanisms, such as the human rights treaty bodies, the international and regional tribunals and courts and the International Criminal Court, all of which seek to provide effective tools to ensure adequate redress and respect for human rights. Members of the Western European and other States Group fully support international human rights law, and strongly promote States' full ratification and implementation of those conventions to which they are parties.

Over the past decades, the Declaration has demonstrated a great ability to unite the world's people. As we commemorate Human Rights Day, we must turn our attention to those deprived of their rights, to those who have had their rights neglected and to those whose Governments fail to uphold their citizens' fundamental freedoms, and to those Governments that do not recognize their citizens' human rights. All of us must redouble our efforts to uphold all fundamental human rights equally for all people, as well as to ensure that the implementation of all human rights obligations, freely entered into by all Governments, results in the fulfilment of the goals and aspirations of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights: that all individuals in our societies be able to pursue their life enjoying their fundamental human rights equally as members of humankind.

In the words of a beacon of freedom, the late Nelson Mandela, "To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity".

**The Acting President:** I now declare closed the commemorative meeting devoted to the observance of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 69.

*The meeting rose at 5 p.m.*