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Chair: Mr. Tafrov..... (Bulgaria)

Contents

Agenda item 69: Promotion and protection of human rights (*continued*)

- (b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (*continued*)
- (c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (*continued*)
- (a) Implementation of human rights instruments (*continued*)
- (d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 69: Promotion and protection of human rights (A/68/487) (continued)

(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (continued) (A/68/56, A/68/176, A/68/177, A/68/185, A/68/207, A/68/208, A/68/209, A/68/210, A/68/210/Add.1, A/68/211, A/68/224, A/68/225, A/68/256, A/68/261, A/68/262, A/68/268, A/68/277, A/68/279, A/68/283, A/68/284, A/68/285, A/68/287, A/68/288, A/68/289, A/68/290, A/68/292, A/68/293, A/68/294, A/68/296, A/68/297, A/68/298, A/68/299, A/68/301, A/68/304, A/68/323, A/68/345, A/68/362, A/68/382, A/68/382/Corr.1, A/68/389, A/68/390 and A/68/496; A/67/931)

(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (continued) (A/68/276, A/68/319, A/68/331, A/68/376, A/68/377, A/68/392, A/68/397 and A/68/503; A/C.3/68/3 and A/C.3/68/4)

1. **Mr. Feltman** (Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs), referring to reports submitted under agenda item 69 (b), introduced the Secretary-General's report on strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization (A/68/301). Although the purpose of United Nations assistance to Member States was to enable them to conduct peaceful, credible and genuine elections, it could neither replace national electoral authorities nor take decisions on behalf of national political leaders. Among other things, the report focused on improved delivery, which required system-wide coherence and consistency. For that reason, the role of different actors had been better delineated, resulting in greater accountability on the part of United Nations actors. However, more than a dozen United Nations bodies still played or claimed a role in electoral assistance.

2. Regarding the promotion of gender equality in elections, the report noted that despite a steady increase in the share of women in parliaments worldwide, the global rate of elected women remained low at around 20 per cent and their participation in

politics still fell far short of expectations. Where the United Nations had facilitated elections, however, women's representation had been higher, but much remained to be done. Fully mainstreaming a gender perspective into all activities was an established practice of all United Nations electoral assistance. He also recalled Member States' obligations in connection with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

3. Turning to sustainability, he expressed the Secretary-General's concern that international assistance might result in the introduction of technologies and systems that receiving countries could not afford to maintain in the current economic climate and in the longer term. Moreover, the new voting systems did not always enhance voter confidence. In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, elections were political events whose results must represent the will of the people and whose outcomes rested with national political leaders and candidates. The United Nations would continue to do all that it could to ensure that elections were held in an atmosphere of trust, offering electoral assistance in full respect for the sovereignty of States and national institutions. Sustainable peace and development depended not only on credible elections but also on good governance and full respect for human rights, open media and a robust civil society.

4. **Mr. Šimonović** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights), introducing reports of the Secretary-General submitted under agenda item 69 (b), said that the report on the promotion and protection of human rights, including ways and means to promote the human rights of migrants (A/68/292) analysed the components of a human rights-based approach to migration in the post-2015 development agenda. The report on the follow-up to the International Year of Human Rights Learning (A/68/207) outlined human rights education, training and learning activities facilitated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) from July 2011 to June 2013. It highlighted activities such as the World Programme for Human Rights Education and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training.

5. The report on the right to development (A/68/185) contained a brief overview of the activities of the human rights mechanisms relating to the promotion and realization of that right and provided information on efforts to mainstream the right to development in the global partnership for development.

The report on human rights and unilateral coercive measures (A/68/211) contained responses from 10 Member States to a request for information on the effects of such measures on their populations. Some States had expressed support for the creation of a monitoring mechanism. National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights were covered in another report (A/68/208), which contained information on activities to establish and strengthen such institutions. The report on globalization and its impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights (A/68/177) highlighted the complexity of the phenomenon.

6. The report on human rights in the administration of justice (A/68/261), providing an analysis of the applicable international legal and institutional framework for the protection of all persons deprived of their liberty, had been submitted to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-fourth session. The report on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief was the subject of a report (A/68/546) compiled and summarized States' responses and provided an update of United Nations activities in the field.

7. He also introduced the reports on the universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing nature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (A/68/224); the promotion of equitable geographical distribution in the membership of the human rights treaty bodies (A/68/323); strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation and the importance of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity (A/68/209); the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (A/68/390); human rights and cultural diversity (A/68/277); the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region (A/68/287); effective promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (A/68/304); and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (A/68/298).

8. Lastly, he introduced two reports under agenda item 69 (c). The report on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/68/392) updated the United Nations' engagement

with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and referred to the establishment by the Human Rights Council of a commission of inquiry to investigate the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the country. That report addressed, among other things, asylum, family reunions, non-refoulement and humanitarian aid. The report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/68/377) expressed great concern at the significant increase in reported executions, including in public, and mentioned the new Islamic Penal Code signed in June 2013. Noting the positive economic and social achievements and welcoming that country's appearance before the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in May 2013, the report called on the Government to fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and facilitate his access to the country.

9. **Mr. Albably** (Yemen) expressed his Government's appreciation of the work of the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region and its Director. Since the Centre's foundation in 2011, Yemeni nationals had attended a number of workshops and seminars that it had organized in the Arab region, including those aimed at diplomats and journalists. He called on the United Nations, OHCHR and donor countries to provide the Centre with the necessary financial resources to allow it to undertake the greatest number of activities for disseminating the values and principles of human rights in the region. He thanked Qatar for hosting the Centre and providing all the necessary facilities for its functioning.

10. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) said that the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa was a good example of how the United Nations could provide technical assistance for the promotion of human rights, a priority in the subregion. While the countries of the subregion were grateful for the creation of the Centre and the activities that it had carried out, she expressed her delegation's concern that there should be greater synergy between the centre and its Director and the Governments of the subregion's States, whose needs must be taken fully into account. She was also concerned that, despite the projected increase in the Centre's activities, the budgetary provisions for the coming years had been cut. Cameroon hoped that those cuts would be reversed

in the future. In view of the Human Rights Council's decision to make media professionals and journalists the focus group of the third phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, she called on the Centre to pursue its cooperation with members of that group.

11. **Ms. Al-Tamimi** (Qatar) said that her delegation appreciated the report on the activities of the Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region since its establishment three years earlier. The Centre played an important role in promoting human rights, in particular social, economic and cultural rights, focusing on the regional priorities, which included fighting discrimination and impunity while upholding the rule of law. It had, however, been hampered by a lack of sufficient human and financial resources to meet growing needs in a large number of countries, above all in the light of developments in the region. She asked how the Centre could be effective as a result, how it could better meet its budgetary demands and where investment could best be made to ensure the Centre's effectiveness.

12. **Mr. Sahib** (Iraq) said that the report on protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (A/68/298) referred to the increase in the number of executions in his country. His delegation noted that since 2003 Iraq had faced growing violence and multiple terrorist attacks, targeting public buildings of all kinds, resulting in thousands of civilian deaths, injuries and disabilities. It was the responsibility of the Government to compensate the victims and bring the perpetrators to justice, respecting human rights, judicial guarantees, fair trials and due process. However, the Government must protect its population from daily attacks and believed that the sanction of capital punishment was the best way to curb violence and fight terrorism.

13. **Mr. Jahromi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that since the free, fair, transparent and democratic presidential elections held in June 2013 his country had entered a new stage of democracy and wished to build on that momentum to adopt a new constructive approach based on cooperation and dialogue with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights nationally and internationally. His Government took a long-term approach to safeguarding all human rights in compliance with all its obligations under international law and with due respect for the principles and values enshrined in the Constitution. Biased approaches to

human rights based on double standards eroded the credibility of the United Nations human rights mechanisms and States' ability genuinely to promote and protect human rights at the national level.

14. Turning to the Secretary-General's report (A/68/377), he said that the General Assembly resolution mandating the Secretary-General to submit a report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran was itself the outcome of an unfair, selective and biased decision. Country-specific resolutions undermined the credibility of the United Nations and highlighted the undemocratic international order. His Government had rejected the previous four reports while showing utmost willingness to cooperate at every level with the United Nations and provide information on the human rights situation in the country. The report had qualified the very high turnout in the June presidential elections as a positive sign of the dynamism of civil and political life in his country. However, it made no mention of its important achievements since the elections or the severe challenges facing the Iranian Government and people.

15. Above all, the report was vague and ambiguous when referring to the unilaterally imposed economic sanctions, which had a negative effect on ordinary citizens and violated international standards, including provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. The report did not condemn the illegitimate sanctions, which violated the human rights of the Iranian people and caused considerable suffering, nor did it specify that the United States and the European Union had imposed them. His Government would cooperate fully with the United Nations human rights mechanisms provided that they acted in an impartial, professional manner.

16. **Mr. Šimonović** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights), speaking in response to the questions and comments by delegates, said that securing the financial resources for the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region was a challenge because its activities covered 25 countries. Those countries should cooperate with the Centre to address the situation. The cut in resources for the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa was only temporary. His planned visit to Iraq in January 2014 would be an opportunity to address the important issue of respect for human rights while

countering terrorism. As for the report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said that it did not reflect some positive developments since the elections, such as the release of a significant number of prisoners, owing to the report's August 2013 cut-off date.

(a) Implementation of human rights instruments

(continued) (A/68/40 (Vol. I), A/68/40 (Vol. II), A/68/44, A/68/48, A/68/280, A/68/281, A/68/282, A/68/295 and A/68/334)

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action *(continued)* (A/68/36; A/C.3/68/2)

Continuation and conclusion of general discussion

17. **Ms. Byaje** (Rwanda) said that her country had ratified nearly all regional and international legal instruments related to the promotion and protection of human rights. Furthermore, it submitted regular reports on their implementation to the United Nations treaty bodies, as well as to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and other African mechanisms. It had been the first African nation to subject itself to the evaluation of the African Peer Review Mechanism in 2005. Her country's Government task force on treaty body reporting, established in 2007, ensured cooperation with civil society and United Nations agencies.

18. The domestic implementation of ratified instruments had resulted in outstanding progress in the promotion of human rights in Rwanda. In the education sector, primary school enrolment had increased to 96.5 per cent for those aged between 7 and 12. In 2010, the literacy rate had stood at 84 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 and 70 per cent of those aged 15 and above. Progress had also been made in access to health services, the promotion of women's rights and social protection. Rwanda had abolished the death penalty, regarding the decision as necessary in a country rebuilding itself from genocide. The conditions in detention facilities had been significantly improved, thanks to the rehabilitation and construction of prisons in accordance with international standards.

19. An independent governance board had been established in 2008 to regulate and guarantee the rights of political parties, faith-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Legislation on access to information had been promulgated,

obliging public officials to provide the media with appropriate information and allowing the media to self-regulate. The number of newspapers, radio stations and mobile telephones in the country had increased significantly. She concluded by stating that the promotion of human rights began with the eradication of poverty, to which her Government was committed. During the past three years, a million Rwandans had been removed from poverty, and her country was determined to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

20. **Ms. Hosking** (South Africa) said that her delegation subscribed fully to the proper contextualization of General Assembly resolution 60/251, establishing the Human Rights Council, namely that human rights violations anywhere in the world should be addressed in a context that would not lead to politicization, double standards or selective targeting. The effective implementation of human rights instruments was primarily the responsibility of States, which were obliged under human rights treaty law to submit periodic reports to the United Nations treaty monitoring system. States were also obliged to protect people from human rights violations and punish the perpetrators of such violations to ensure non-recurrence and prevent impunity.

21. Some human rights instruments were moribund and obsolete, including the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Contemporary violations of the relevant rights were such that the instruments no longer provided for them. She therefore called upon the United Nations human rights system to engage constantly in processes that would ensure the elaboration of new instruments responding to present-day violations. Moreover, the monitoring bodies must have sufficient resources to carry out their mandates effectively. The process of treaty body reform must be continued to its logical end and not be undermined, while account should be taken of the provisions of the relevant treaties. Her delegation urged the United Nations human rights system to respect the letter and spirit of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, while placing the two core human rights covenants on a par.

22. **Ms. Solórzano-Arriagada** (Nicaragua) said that her Government was determined to eradicate poverty

as part of its commitment to economic and social rights and had established programmes to meet the principal needs of its people, upholding the fundamental right to life. It had implemented a national human development plan, since without fighting the scourge of poverty it was impossible to speak of rights, citizenship or development. The ethical dimension of that plan lay in ensuring respect for the human person in the area of the moral order and the common good. She stressed the importance of citizenship participation in decision-making and other processes.

23. Nicaragua had established a mechanism to promote human rights and had developed specific institutions to comply with international human rights instruments, with an emphasis on assisting those most vulnerable. The institutions defended human rights in general and certain interests in particular, such as those of children and adolescents, women, indigenous peoples and ethnic communities, disabled persons, persons deprived of their liberty, sexual diversity, the family, HIV/AIDS and the Atlantic coastal region of the country. Her Government had also put in place a programme providing legal advice to those who could not afford such services.

24. **Mr. Vokouma** (Burkina Faso) said that his country had adopted a raft of measures to strengthen the legislative, regulatory and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. They included anti-torture legislation, measures aimed at improving the living conditions of detainees, the creation of a national commission for human rights and the establishment of an interministerial committee on human rights and international humanitarian law. A national council for the survival, protection and development of children had been set up to determine the priority action areas and ensure that national action plans were financed and supported. Awareness-raising activities had been undertaken to eradicate torture, forced and/or early marriage and female genital mutilation and make detention centres more humane.

25. Human rights were a priority for his country, which had adhered to most of the international instruments and had undergone two universal periodic reviews, in 2008 and 2013. In order to improve coordination of the follow-up of the recommendations, a multisectoral committee had been set up in 2011. Burkina Faso was practically up to date in terms of submitting its national reports to the various United Nations treaty bodies. His Government was convinced

that the establishment of the rule of law guaranteeing all citizens the same economic, political, cultural and social rights was the key to sustainable and inclusive development. Burkina Faso was investing with all national stakeholders in the integration and coordination of actions through a specific ministry for human rights issues.

26. **Ms. Homanovska** (Ukraine) said that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action outlined the main priorities for strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions and for protecting vulnerable groups such as minorities and indigenous peoples. They significantly influenced the situation of human rights around the world but, despite the progress made, her Government regretted to note that human rights violations persisted worldwide. It strongly believed that preventing violations was important for the promotion and protection of human rights. Ukraine hoped that the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution [24/16](#) on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights, which it had sponsored, would improve understanding of the role of prevention.

27. Strongly committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, Ukraine was a party to the main international human rights instruments and was ratifying the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. It was also making every effort to bring national legislation into line with relevant international standards, in keeping with the priority that the President had placed on Ukraine's European integration. Her country cooperated with the treaty bodies and supported the mandate of the Human Rights Council, whose mechanisms were extremely important tools for the protection of human rights.

28. Business enterprises, in particular transnational corporations, had a responsibility to respect the human rights of communities that might be adversely affected by their activities. The endorsement of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which Ukraine welcomed, had helped to clarify the scope of corporate responsibility in interaction with States' duty to protect human rights. Work had been initiated on a national corporate social responsibility strategy, with the involvement of civil society. Ukraine supported Council of Europe activities in the field, in particular the decision of the Steering Committee for Human Rights to establish a drafting group to

implement the United Nations Guiding Principles in Europe. The Guiding Principles were a starting point for future developments, resulting in a more proactive approach to their implementation.

29. **Mr. Sarki** (Nigeria) said that his delegation was concerned that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance continued to threaten the rights of millions of people around the world. States should act upon their commitments with regard to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the most comprehensive framework for addressing those issues. Nigeria was greatly concerned at the growing cases of dumping toxic waste in developing countries, in particular in West Africa, which was a grave violation of the rights to health and life. He called on the exporters of such waste to end the practice and on the international community to support developing countries in their fight against the dumping of hazardous waste.

30. Migrants and their families were subjected to discrimination, xenophobia, marginalization, stigmatization, socioeconomic exclusion and denial of access to education and health care. The advocacy undertaken by OHCHR and the International Organization for Migration for the inclusion of the human rights of migrants in the post-2015 development agenda was commendable. However, more than two decades after the adoption of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, fewer than 50 States had signed, ratified or acceded to it. Noting with grave concern that some developed countries, which were largely migrant-receiving, had not signed the Convention, he encouraged them to do so.

31. Clarifying some issues pertaining to the enjoyment of human rights and the freedom of expression in Nigeria, he said that contrary to some perceptions, there was no violence or discrimination based on people's lifestyles or inclinations. His country respected the decision of countries that had legalized same-sex marriage and would not put pressure on them to change their laws. However, he asked them to respect Nigeria's right to make laws in consonance with its beliefs and customs, reflecting the will of the nation's vast majority, and in the national interest.

32. **Mr. Cassidy** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, as a human rights-based organization,

ILO had established a system of international labour standards covering a wide range of employment issues. Through its unique tripartite structure, comprising representatives of Governments, employers and workers, ILO had adopted the largest number of binding instruments in the United Nations system, including 189 Conventions. Eight of those, addressing the issues of child labour, forced labour, non-discrimination and freedom of association, had been designated as fundamental by the international community. Human rights were the foundation of decent work, which had been recognized as a human right in itself in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many other international instruments. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations reviewed more than 2,000 government reports every year and its annual report was examined by the Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference.

33. Some of the provisions of other international human rights treaties had been modelled on those of ILO Conventions. Decent work had recently become a central issue in national consultations and other activities related to the post-2015 development agenda. The engagement of the private sector was of particular relevance to ILO, and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights referred to the responsibility of enterprises to respect internationally recognized human rights. ILO believed that the world of work was a unique entry point for addressing wider social and economic issues. Employment could not be separated from concerns about promoting inclusive economic growth to reduce inequalities and poverty.

General discussion

34. **Mr. Haniff** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the work of the international community in the promotion and protection of human rights should take into account principles of respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. ASEAN had established its Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights in October 2009. Welcoming ongoing efforts to fulfil its commitments to the promotion and protection of human rights, he said that ASEAN was implementing the 2013 priority programmes and activities of the

Intergovernmental Commission as well as the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration adopted in November 2012. Since the entry into force of the ASEAN Charter, the bloc had been emphasizing the need for a human rights document tailored to the norms and values of its member States.

35. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration emulated the essence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several international human rights instruments, yet it was uniquely Asian. However, it was not useful to compare the ASEAN Declaration with the Universal Declaration or with other regional human rights mechanisms. Instead, it should be seen as complementing existing human rights instruments, with value-added features that took Asian norms and values into consideration. Ultimately, what was important was that the regional declaration would lead to improved livelihoods for people in the region.

36. He highlighted the progress of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, established in April 2010. ASEAN was studying ways of contributing to the promotion of women's economic rights, in particular to land and property. In cooperation with UN Women, the ASEAN secretariat had conducted an intensive learning workshop on women's human rights for the regional and national secretariats to ASEAN human rights bodies, in Bali, Indonesia, in March 2013. Training had been held in Jakarta in February, to enhance knowledge of gender mainstreaming in support of the One Billion Rising global campaign to end violence against women. He reaffirmed the bloc's commitment to intensifying efforts to realize the ASEAN Community by 2015, which was crucial to ensuring the effective promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

37. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that the composition of present-day societies was the result of past and current migratory flows, in particular in the Caribbean region. Migration and its implications should, therefore, be systematically addressed by all States, irrespective of whether they were origin, transit or destination countries. He underlined the importance of migrants retaining their links with their countries of origin and called for the cultivation of skills among migrant communities to foster development in origin countries.

38. CELAC was concerned that the contributions of migrants to the economic and social development of host countries were not sufficiently taken into consideration. It was also concerned about violations of the human rights of migrants, as well as the deterioration of working and employment conditions of migrant workers and their families around the world. He highlighted the increasing reversal of migration flows between Latin America and the Caribbean and developed countries and the complexity of migratory flows within geographical regions, which required a better understanding of migration patterns. CELAC regretted the adoption of laws and regulations that criminalized migration and called on States to refrain from putting measures in place that discriminated against and stigmatized migrants and their families. In particular, the Community urged all countries to guarantee the protection of the most vulnerable migrants.

39. CELAC recognized the important work of the International Organization for Migration and the efforts of Member States at the Global Forum on Migration and Development but remained concerned at the increasing exploitation of migrants and the targeting of migrants by transnational organized crime networks. Effective policies and strategies were needed to bring about more tolerant and integrated societies. CELAC was committed to preventing and combating trafficking in persons, including the exploitation of migrants, and urged all States to establish and strengthen coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination. He encouraged countries of origin to implement national policies to discourage unsafe migration.

40. Welcoming the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, CELAC was confident that it would provide guidelines for United Nations work in that field. Coherence, cooperation and dialogue among all stakeholders were crucial to maximize the potential benefits of migration and overcome the challenges. He encouraged States to sign or ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and called for due consideration to be given to international migration in drawing up the post-2015 development agenda.

41. **Mr. Bart** (Saint Kitts and Nevis), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that, despite many achievements in the field of human

rights, in particular civil and political rights, the world was still plagued by ethnic hatred and genocide. Many people were still deprived of food, shelter, access to health care, education and employment, and poverty continued to violate human dignity. As the Special Rapporteur on the right to education had stated, education was the best investment that a country could make. Sustainable development could not be advanced without respect for and promotion of human rights, in particular the right to education. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, the international community had affirmed that full access to quality education was essential to sustainable development. However, progress towards the education-related MDGs remained limited and the right to education must be given the utmost importance in the post-2015 development agenda.

42. Realizing the right to adequate food, within the broader context of the right to an adequate standard of living, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, was crucial for the eradication of poverty and hunger and the attainment of sustainable development. Since an international enabling environment must complement national efforts to guarantee the right to food, international cooperation was vital. The twelfth Caribbean Week of Agriculture, held in Georgetown in October 2013, had reinforced the significance of agriculture for regional development and had highlighted the contribution of women.

43. CARICOM members would remain actively engaged in the intergovernmental process on strengthening the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system, despite the economic and climatic challenges facing the region. There was a long history in the Caribbean of celebrating identity and diversity through culture. The eleventh Caribbean Festival of Arts, or CARIFESTA, a celebration of art and culture, held in Suriname in August 2013, had emphasized the conviction that long-term development could not take place without culture, which was equally important in the region's efforts to promote respect for human rights.

44. **Ms. Calcinari Van der Velde** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and associating herself with CELAC in the context of migrants' rights, women's empowerment, the

promotion and protection of the rights of the child and social development, emphasized that human rights were universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. They contributed to the promotion of sustainable peace and development, in line with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. MERCOSUR had created specific mechanisms to promote effective regional coordination. Its member States were concerned about the impact of the global economic and financial crisis on the universal enjoyment of human rights. The crisis should never be used as an excuse for States to disregard or neglect human rights. She called on developed countries to honour their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to development.

45. MERCOSUR was united in the fight against all forms of discrimination and intolerance and was concerned at the violation of human rights for reasons, *inter alia*, of race, sexual orientation, age, disability and gender identity. Everyone had a right to freedom of belief and religion, and all forms of hate speech must be combated. Despite progress in the promotion and protection of the rights of people of African descent, important challenges remained, and MERCOSUR called on the General Assembly to proclaim the International Decade for People of African Descent, to educate the public against prejudice and intolerance.

46. MERCOSUR members and associated States condemned and emphatically rejected the interception of communications and spying actions constituting a violation of human rights, in general, and of the rights to privacy and information, in particular. The prevention of crime must be carried out in accordance with the rule of law and in strict observance of international law. The international community must reaffirm its commitment to the promotion and protection of civil and political freedoms, without putting individuals at risk and violating international law. Enterprises and transnational corporations were fully responsible for respecting human rights, national legislation and ethical principles in the countries in which they operated.

47. MERCOSUR members and associated States were making every effort to ensure the greatest degree of social inclusion in their policies, while continuing to implement policies and programmes that protected children, adolescents, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and persons of African

descent. She highlighted the MERCOSUR Specialized Women's Conference, which had been raised to the ministerial level. MERCOSUR had also conducted a study into the ratification status of States parties to the principal universal and regional human rights instruments.

48. MERCOSUR members and associated States had made important progress towards the realization of the MDGs, placing emphasis on the eradication of poverty. They reiterated their support for the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which would contribute significantly to ending impunity and protecting human rights, and urged States to sign and ratify it. MERCOSUR recognized the important contributions by civil society to the promotion and protection of human rights, which complemented national efforts. A strengthened Human Rights Council, representing the membership of the United Nations, was fundamental for the guarantee of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

49. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Iceland, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and the stabilization and association process country Albania, said that, since the Committee's debate on the agenda item in 2012, there had been some cautious but positive developments. However, there had been attacks on freedom, insidious new laws and a wanton disrespect for human life, with freedom of expression curtailed and journalists reporting on human rights violations under ever-increasing pressure. Human rights required unending vigilance and those on the front line, including human rights defenders, deserved the unwavering support of Member States. Mentioning Malala Yousafzai, who had campaigned for the right to education since the age of 11, he said that challenges must be tackled head on.

50. While welcoming recent positive moves in the Islamic Republic of Iran, he called on its Government to honour its international human rights obligation and cooperate with the Special Rapporteur. The European Union strongly condemned human rights violations in the Sudan, including the excessive use of force by the Government during the September protests against subsidy cuts, which had resulted in significant loss of life. The situation in Jonglei state, South Sudan, was of grave concern, and the Government should hold those accused of committing human rights abuses to account.

In the light of the grave, widespread and systematic human rights abuses in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, documented at length in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteur, the European Union had presented a new resolution on the situation in the country. It would also present a text on freedom of religion and belief in the hope of again reaching consensual agreement on the subject.

51. Despite the reduction in the use of the death penalty in China, the European Union would welcome more transparency regarding the number of cases and the Supreme Court's review process. It called on China to respect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, release political detainees and ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The European Union was concerned at restrictive legislation in the Russian Federation affecting the work of civil society and human rights defenders and at the increasing stigmatization of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. It urged a return to civilian government in Egypt and called for swift justice for the victims of recent violent events in the country and a full and impartial investigation.

52. The European Union continued to monitor the situation in Bahrain, where more needed to be done to rebuild trust and begin genuine national reconciliation. He called on the authorities of the Central African Republic to bring to account those responsible for summary and extrajudicial executions, sexual violence, torture and the recruitment of child soldiers. Encouraged by development in Myanmar, the European Union called for legal and judicial reform, the release of political prisoners and reconciliation with ethnic and religious minorities.

53. The situation in Eritrea, where journalists and opposition politicians had been detained without trial since 2001, was cause for deep concern. The European Union noted the exceptional work of the Special Rapporteur in that context. Harassment of civil society and regime critics continued unabated in Belarus, and the European Union called for the immediate release of all remaining political prisoners, while regretting the continuous use of the death penalty. He expressed the European Union's concern at reports of reprisals against human rights defenders who had engaged with the High Commissioner during her visit to Sri Lanka and encouraged the Government to cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

54. He urged all parties in Mali to respect their commitments under international human rights law, noting that in the wider Sahel region weak governance and its impact on State institutions had dramatically diminished the capacity of States to protect human rights. Pervasive human rights violations continued to affect civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the European Union urged the Government to prevent them. The latest crisis in the country had demonstrated the need for a reinvigorated approach by the international community in tackling the local, national and regional roots of conflicts.

55. The European Union remained extremely concerned by the deteriorating situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and called for an end to all violence and suffering, through a political solution meeting legitimate aspirations in the framework of the Geneva communiqué. It called on both sides to allow for local ceasefires to facilitate humanitarian work and to respect obligations under international humanitarian law. Lastly, it was incumbent on the international community, despite few reasons for hope, to ensure that human rights were the foundation of its policies. The European Union would continue in its unwavering support for democracy and human rights, drawing courage and inspiration from stories of heroism and resilience.

56. **Mr. Hajnoczi** (Austria), speaking also on behalf of Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland, said that civil society played a crucial role in holding States accountable and advancing human rights at the regional and international levels. Yet its representatives often faced numerous legal and practical restrictions and were deprived of their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association. Civil society actors were intimidated and harassed for cooperating with the United Nations, and reprisals against human rights defenders were on the rise. The four countries therefore welcomed the work by OHCHR to promote space for civil society and the recent adoption of Human Rights Council resolution [24/24](#), which dealt with the question of intimidation and reprisals.

57. Despite the intergovernmental nature of the United Nations, civil society representatives must be able to share their experiences, insights and recommendations in its public meetings, in particular its high-level meetings and conferences. He reiterated the four countries' concern and disappointment at

efforts to restrict the participation of civil society representatives, in particular that of NGOs lacking consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, in high-level meetings. The non-objection procedure allowed for the exclusion of legitimate stakeholders for political motivations without accountability. Selection processes for NGO participation must be transparent, and the NGOs concerned should be told who objected to their participation and for what reasons. Member States were responsible for enabling the meaningful and unhindered participation of civil society in United Nations work and ultimately could only benefit from its contributions.

58. **Mr. Pande** (India) said that international cooperation was essential to create a supporting environment for realizing the right to development, which should be mainstreamed in the policies and activities of development actors at the national, regional and international levels. His Government placed great importance on the adoption of a post-2015 development agenda with the central and overarching goal of eradicating poverty through an intergovernmental negotiation process under United Nations auspices and in consonance with the outcomes and principles of the Rio+20 Conference. In India, the Right to Information Act 2005 had empowered ordinary citizens by providing access to information on Government actions, which had led to more transparent and accountable governance.

59. Terrorism remained a grave threat to security and stability everywhere, and terrorists violated the most fundamental human right of their victims, the right to life, while attacking democracy, human dignity, human rights and development. The international community must renew its commitment at the United Nations to concerted, cohesive and continuing global action that ensured zero-tolerance of terrorism, while removing the moral and legal ambiguities that allowed terrorism to gain legitimacy. The human rights debate must not be misused to undermine global efforts to combat terrorism. Thanks to its democratic, pluralistic and secular polity, India had successfully ensured effective guarantees for the promotion and protection of human rights, which could best be pursued through dialogue and cooperation.

60. **Mr. Kozak** (United States of America), noting that the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic had continued to

document violations of human rights in that country, said that those responsible must be held accountable. He acknowledged the welcome gestures made by the new Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but warned that they must be followed by practical measures, such as the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners, along with actions to bring those guilty of acts of torture to account and to protect the country's minorities. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea still had political prison camps and practised forced labour, public executions and torture while denying basic freedoms, and he called on the Government to facilitate the work of the relevant commission of inquiry.

61. The Sudan should end gross violations of human rights in Darfur and the targeting of civilians in various parts of the country. Its Government must protect its people and respect their human rights. Belarus should immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and grant access to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. China should allow freedom of information, refrain from harassing political activists and their families, and stop persecuting minorities such as Tibetans and Uighurs. The Cuban Government was guilty of repressing civil society to prevent peaceful assembly and free expression. He called on the Cuban authorities to release Alan Gross, who had been imprisoned for Internet-related activities, and to conduct an independent investigation into the deaths of pro-democracy leaders Oswaldo Payá and Harold Cepero.

62. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela repressed the independent media and prevented its citizens from seeking redress for human rights abuses. Poor prison conditions prevailed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, along with ongoing violations of many human rights. Both countries refused to allow visits by United Nations special procedures mandate holders and had criminalized consensual same-sex activity. The United States was concerned at continuing attacks on civilians in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Eritrea had not accounted for disappeared persons on its territory, and repression had led to large numbers of migrants fleeing the country. He urged the Government to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur.

63. His Government wanted Egypt to make progress to electing an inclusive democratic Government with a constitution that protected universal rights. There should be an independent investigation into allegations of the excessive use of force by security forces earlier in the year and into attacks on Coptic Christians and their churches. Lastly, he lauded efforts by the Government of Myanmar to ensure respect for human rights, but warned that much remained to be done in the realization of a democratic society. The United States offered its support to the Government of Myanmar in its new endeavours.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.