



European Union

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Item 4

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 17 March 2015

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

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EU Statement

Human Rights situation that require the Council's attention

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The following countries align themselves with this statement: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Albania and Liechtenstein.

The European Union is highly committed to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide and welcomes this opportunity to discuss human rights situations in various parts of the world that require the Council's attention.

With regard to the situations in the **DPRK, Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, Iraq and Syria** we would like to refer to our interventions in the respective interactive dialogues.

The EU condemns the serious deterioration of the human rights situation in eastern **Ukraine** and **Crimea**. The heavy toll on the civilian population is of grave concern. The ceasefire and implementation of the Minsk Agreements, endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2202 and monitored by the OSCE, are key in putting an end to the abuses and violations. The EU calls on all sides of the conflict to ensure respect for international human rights and humanitarian law and principles, notably by granting safe passage for all those who want to leave the area and for humanitarian workers to deliver aid, and by releasing all hostages and detained persons, related to the conflict in Ukraine. It also supports the work of the OHCHR in documenting violations and ensuring accountability, including in the illegally annexed Crimea. The EU moreover calls for unimpeded access of the OHCHR to the Peninsula.

The EU is deeply concerned by the continuing reports of serious human rights violations and by the continued threats to civil society and political space in **South Sudan**. Justice and accountability remain vital elements in the reconciliation process. The EU calls on the AU Peace and Security Council to urgently consider the report of the AU Commission of Inquiry and follow up on its

findings. The recent abduction of hundreds of young children is an illustration of the complete disregard for human rights by the parties to the conflict and a tragic reminder of how children are the primary victims in conflict situations.

The ongoing internal conflicts within **Sudan** and the continuing serious human rights violations stress the need for a political solution and for credible investigations into all acts of violence and for the government of Sudan to cooperate fully with the Human Rights Council's Independent Expert.

The EU is very concerned about the human rights situation in **Nigeria** and in particular about the appalling abuses committed by Boko Haram which include abductions of women and children, the execution of civilians and fatal attacks on schools. There are credible reports on human rights violations by the Nigerian security forces in responding to Boko Haram which risk alienating communities and creating fertile ground for new recruitments; we call on the authorities to urgently investigate these allegations.

The EU is seriously concerned about terrorist activities and conflict in the region, and the serious consequences they have on civilians and on security forces in **Egypt** and supports Egypt's efforts to combat terrorism, in accordance with human rights law. The EU is also seriously concerned about instances of mass death sentences, severe sentences against demonstrators and activists, protracted pre-trial detentions, in particular of minors, and the referral of civilians to military courts. Due process and freedoms of expression, association and assembly, as enshrined in the Egyptian Constitution, must be safeguarded. The EU also underlines the need for accountability for the alleged abuses perpetrated by security forces since 2011.

The EU remains deeply concerned by the arrest, detention and harassment of peaceful human rights defenders, including lawyers and intellectuals in **China**. We urge the Chinese authorities to release those detained for the peaceful exercise of their freedom of conscience, expression and association, which is recognised under China's international human rights obligations and by its Constitution, including Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti. The EU also remains concerned with the human rights situation in Tibet and Xinjiang and encourages China to address the root causes of unrest, cease the persecution of persons belonging to ethnic or religious minorities for the legitimate exercise of their rights and foster dialogue with and between different ethnic groups.

The EU remains concerned with the ongoing shrinking space for civil society in **Russia**, including the harassment and imprisonment of Human Rights Defenders and opposition leaders. The EU

condemns the climate of suspicion, hatred and intolerance in which crimes such as the murder of Boris Nemtsov can happen. The EU calls on the Russian Federation to ensure a transparent and speedy investigation of this crime. The EU also deplores the closing down of prominent NGOs over the last year as a result of the law "on foreign agents" and the increasing limitations on the freedoms of assembly, media and expression, both online and offline. The EU continues to call on Russian authorities to free people illegally detained in Russia and abducted from outside Russia, such as Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov and Eston Kohver.

We acknowledge the recent releases of prisoners by **Uzbekistan** as positive steps, and encourage further releases. We remain concerned by the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, including restrictions on political activity and on civil society, reports of torture, and the imprisonment of human rights defenders. We encourage Uzbekistan to implement planned reforms and to cooperate with UN Special Procedures. We also acknowledge prisoner releases in **Turkmenistan**, but remain concerned by limitations on freedom of expression and freedom of association, as well as continued reports of torture and the use of incommunicado detention. We encourage Turkmenistan to implement reforms and to address these issues.

The EU is alarmed at the continued detention of political leaders, students and other activists detained since February 2014 in **Venezuela**, as well as the recent arrest of Caracas Mayor Ledezma, and appeals for full respect of the principle of presumption of innocence and due legal process. With legislative elections due in 2015, it is essential that freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly are respected.

Finally, regarding the situation in the **Occupied Palestinian Territory**, the EU remains gravely concerned at the continuing tensions and violence on the ground and calls on all parties to fully cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms. Respect for human rights and international humanitarian law are key factors for peace and stability.