



Outcomes of the 44th session of the Human Rights Council from an EU perspective

Geneva, 17 July 2020

From 30 June to 17 July 2020, the 44th UN Human Rights Council session (HRC44) gathered in Geneva, addressing a wide range of thematic and country specific human rights issues and situations. *"Building back better means that human rights need to be at the centre of our battle against the pandemic,"* underlined Ambassador Walter Stevens, Head of the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva. *"At a time of growing challenges to fundamental rights, the EU will continue to stand firm on the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide."*

At this session, the EU presented a resolution on the situation of human rights in **Belarus** to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for one more year due to the continuing human rights violations in the country. *"In the run-up to the Presidential elections of 9 August, we are alarmed by the current crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus. The harassment, persecution and non-registration of leading opposition candidates is not acceptable"* emphasised Ambassador Stevens. Belarus also continues to apply the death penalty, to which we reaffirmed our strong and unequivocal opposition in all circumstances.

We lent our strong support to the resolution on the human rights situation in **Eritrea**, which included a technical roll over of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, as there is no evidence that the country has made tangible progress on its human rights obligations. In an Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur, we called on Eritrea to fully cooperate with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur as well as UN human rights mechanisms and expressed our concern about the human rights situation, including the indefinite National Service.

The EU reiterated its profound concern over the human rights situation in **Venezuela** as well as the worsening of the political crisis and the further shrinking of the democratic and political space in the country. We also strongly advocated for accountability for the atrocities committed in the **Syrian** conflict and welcome the resolution focusing on arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. The EU reiterated its call on China to uphold its national and international obligations and to respect human rights. It raised the deteriorating human rights situation, including in Xinjiang, and concerns about [the new national security law imposed](#) on Hong Kong.

At this session, we rallied around the issue of **gender equality** and supported three resolutions on women's and girls' rights. While women have proven to be a driving force in the global COVID-19 response as healthcare and social workers, confinement measures have laid bare structural discrimination against women and girls and an intolerable rise in sexual and gender-based violence. *"Gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and their full enjoyment of human rights are key to rebuild more equal, inclusive and resilient societies for all,"* urged Ambassador Stevens.

We strongly supported a resolution on **Freedom of Expression**, with a timely focus on access to Information. The freedom to seek, receive and impart information is in fact essential in combatting the current global health-and economic crisis. In this context, the increasing restrictions on freedom of expression online and offline around the world is a worrying trend. This resolution contributes to reaffirm that while disinformation should be resolutely countered with transparent, timely and fact-

based information, public health and the fight against disinformation should not be used as a pretext to unduly limit the enjoyment of this right. Freedom of opinion and expression and public health go hand in glove.

The EU also continued to advocate for genuine progress on the **Business and Human Rights** agenda through the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We therefore supported the adoption by consensus of a resolution on this issue and welcomed the merger of the two related resolutions, which renewed the two mandates, into one concise text.

Finally, we supported the anniversary resolutions on 15 years of **Responsibility to Protect** and **75th anniversary of the UN**: *"In these unprecedented times, the EU will continue to rally behind a strong UN that delivers for all, we will continue to champion effective multilateralism, and we will use all available tools to fulfil our commitments to human rights."*

All EU statements and interventions at the Human Rights Council are published on the [EU Delegation's website](#). Updates were timely posted on the EU Delegation's Twitter account [@EU_UNGeneva](#).