



European Union

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

25th Session

(3 – 28 March 2014)

Item 4

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 18 March 2014

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

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EU Statement

General Debate

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Human Rights situations that require the Council's attention

Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner,

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

The following countries align themselves with this declaration: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia[†], Montenegro[†], Iceland[‡], Albania[†] and Liechtenstein[§].

The European Union condemns the grave, persistent human rights violations and abuses in Syria, and the DPRK. In Iran, positive signals by the Government have yet to translate into real improvements for human rights protection. The EU also continues to be concerned about the human rights situation in Myanmar/Burma, while acknowledging the progress made so far. We welcome that the Council is seized of these issues and will discuss them in separate dialogues.

The EU strongly condemns the unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation in clear breach of the international law, and the holding of an illegal referendum in Crimea on joining the Russian Federation on 16 March, in clear breach of the Ukrainian Constitution and international law. The EU does not recognise the illegal and illegitimate “referendum” and its outcome and calls on the Russian Federation to take steps to de-escalate the crisis, immediately withdraw its forces back to their pre-crisis numbers and garrisons in line with its international commitments, begin direct discussions with the government of Ukraine and avail itself of all relevant international mechanisms to find a peaceful and negotiated solution, in full respect of

[†] The Candidate countries former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia as well as potential candidate countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

[‡] Candidate Country Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

[§] Liechtenstein and Norway are members of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.

its bilateral and multilateral commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this respect, the EU regrets that the UNSC was not able to adopt a resolution, owing to a veto by the Russian Federation.

All citizens in all parts of Ukraine shall be protected against intimidation and human rights violations. Cases of beatings, arrests and kidnappings of journalists and civil activists in Crimea, including by the so-called "self-defense forces" must stop immediately. We welcome Ukraine's resolve in investigating human rights violations which, we believe, shall be carried out in line with international standards and in cooperation with the Council of Europe. Efforts should continue to reach out to all Ukrainian regions and population groups and to ensure full protection of persons belonging to national minorities, drawing on the expertise of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. We are concerned that the OSCE and the UN officials have been denied access to Crimea. We call on the Russia Federation to enable immediate access for international monitors in Crimea.

Today, we would like to particularly highlight the following situations of concern.

First, the European Union is deeply concerned about the lack of accountability for serious human rights violations and abuses in a number of countries.

We are appalled by the grave and massive nature of atrocities committed since December last year in South Sudan and which have not yet been addressed. We welcome further investigations by the UN into the role of different actors in instigating and committing the gross violations documented in ongoing reports. We stress the need for the commission of inquiry established by the African Union to urgently start credible investigation into all alleged crimes and to cooperate with the United Nations and other relevant actors. The EU is confident in an adequate response by the HRC.

We also regret that almost five years after the end of conflict and despite numerous calls, the Government of Sri Lanka has failed to ensure credible investigations into the allegations of violations and abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law committed on both sides in the civil war, while human rights violations still continue in the country without credible investigation or prosecution. We support the High Commissioner's call to establish an international inquiry mechanism.

We continue to call on Eritrea to honour its international human rights obligations and to unconditionally release all persons detained in Eritrea for having peacefully expressed their views, including the Eritrean-European citizen Dawit Isaak. We urge Eritrea to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur.

We are also deeply concerned by the ongoing internal conflicts within Sudan and the continuing reports of serious human rights violations. We stress the need for a political solution to these conflicts and for credible investigations into all acts of violence.

We are also concerned by the ongoing human rights violations in the Central African Republic, and commend the country's continuous and full cooperation with the United Nations.

Secondly, the EU wishes to draw the Council's attention to a current disturbing phenomenon taking place worldwide in the form of growing efforts to restrict, punish and deter human rights defenders and civil society organizations from operating freely, online and offline.

The EU remains concerned about legislative restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, as well as harassment of NGOs, the media, opposition, and protestors, human rights defenders, minorities and LGBT community in Russia. This was notably exemplified by the recent detention of several "Bolotnaya" protesters and disproportionate sentencing to three years in prison of environmental activist Evgeny Vitishko, for a misdemeanor offence he allegedly committed in 2011.

The EU is deeply saddened and shocked by the passing, last week, of Ms. Cao Shunli, Chinese human rights activist detained for several months for supporting the participation of independent civil society in the UPR of China. We pay tribute to Ms. Cao Shunli and remind that her case is just one in a multitude of trials, convictions, detentions and house arrests of human rights defenders in China, and harassment of their relatives. Nobel peace prize winner, Liu Xiabo, and Xu Zhiyong, member of the New Citizens Movement are detained for peacefully advocating social justice, others like Ilham Tohti for peacefully promoting the human rights of minorities. We are also concerned by the health conditions of some relatives of prominent human rights defenders, such as Liu Xia and Chen Kegui. The EU considers those to be severe human rights violations contrary to the pledges and duties of a Human Rights Council's member.

We also remain deeply concerned about the systemic nature of the human rights violations in Belarus. In that respect, the continuing detention of political prisoners, including an internationally recognized human rights defender Ales Bialiatski, arrested for his courageous support to victims of repression in Belarus, is a symbol of the continuous harassment of the civil society. The EU calls once again on Belarus to work with the Special Rapporteur to address this and other HR concerns in a satisfactory manner.

We continue to have concerns about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, including over the restrictions faced by civil society organizations, the lack of space for political opposition, absence of independent media the persistent reports of failings in the criminal justice and penal systems. We emphasize the need for both countries to implement the recommendations from the recent UPRs as necessary steps towards compliance with international human rights standards. The EU is also worried about the continuing unrest in Venezuela and the use of violence by all sides, which has resulted in loss of life and injuries. We are concerned about the detention of several demonstrators, including students and political figures. Freedom of expression and the right to peaceful demonstrations must be protected. The EU encourages all parties to pursue peaceful dialogue and calls upon Venezuelan authorities to reach out to all segments of society.

The EU reiterates its utmost appreciation for all those who put their lives at risk to defend others, and calls on all these States to release all prisoners of conscience, to review restrictive legislative and administrative measures, to respect the rights to freedom of association, assembly, expression and opinion, online as well as offline, and to safeguard an enabling environment for NGOs', human rights defenders' and civil society's work and participation.

Finally, the EU attaches great importance to the work of Special Procedures to address specific country situations. The EU continues to follow the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with close attention and will address these issues in more detail in the EU statement under Item 2. In this context, the EU reiterates its longstanding position on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and expresses its expectation that the future Special rapporteur will take into consideration the responsibilities of all duty bearers.

Thank you.

