

**ADDRESS BY H.E. LÜTFİ ELVAN
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT, 31ST SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
(Geneva, 29 February 2016)**

-Check against delivery-

Honorable President, Mr. High Commissioner, Excellencies,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to address this august body.

As we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Council this year, I would like to reflect upon the historic responsibility that we bear in upholding the human rights and to draw attention to global and regional challenges. This backbone session of the Human Rights Council convenes amid global challenges of unprecedented nature. The protracted conflict in Syria entering its sixth year, horrendous atrocities committed by DAESH, ongoing threats of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia as well as the tragedy of migrants and refugees are all hurting the conscience of humanity.

While facing acute humanitarian challenges in a critical geography, Turkey continues its comprehensive reform process on human rights launched over a decade ago. Fully determined to further enhancing democracy, we have initiated an intensive legislative work with six priority sectors. Enhancement of democracy and reform in justice system are at the top of our reform agenda. Some important bills have already been referred to the Parliament, such as the Law on Data Protection and the Law on Turkish Human Rights and Equality Institution. This institution will have a public legal personality, administrative and financial autonomy, and private budget.

Mr. President,

Syria has become a broken country and the conflict in Syria continues to pose a threat to the entire region's peace and stability. Continuing escalation of violence has cost so far over 400 thousand people's lives, led to the displacement of half the population and left more than 4.5 million Syrians seeking for shelter in neighboring countries.

As is well known, Turkey has pursued a principled policy on Syria from the outset. We are all unified in our belief that the political settlement is the only way for a viable solution. A genuine political transformation based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué must remain the key priority.

In this context, we acknowledge the recent work undertaken by the ISSG Task Forces. Whether this critical exercise will produce tangible and sustainable results, remains yet to be seen. We should also ensure the end of impunity and full accountability for the widespread gross violations of human rights perpetrated during the conflict, which severely marked the conscience of mankind.

Turkey itself is doing its utmost to shoulder a large part of the humanitarian catastrophe. According to the UNHCR, Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees in the world. The total number of Syrians living in Turkey already exceeded 2.7 million. The number of Syrian babies born in Turkey has reached almost 152 thousand. Turkey has so far

spent 10 billion US Dollars for the needs of the Syrians, whereas the total contributions from the international community so far have been limited to only 455 million USD. It is our expectation from international community to act in line with the principles of burden sharing and solidarity.

Mr. President,

Ukraine today is facing a humanitarian crisis. We appreciate the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the work done by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

Turkey remains deeply concerned by the extent of human rights violations in southeastern Ukraine and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, targeting minority groups, including Crimean Tatars.

We call upon the Office of the High Commissioner to prepare a separate report on the situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

Mr. President,

The current situation in the Palestinian occupied territories is unacceptable. Israel continues to expand its illegal settlements.

We are deeply concerned with Israel's violations towards Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Its status and sanctity should be protected.

Mr. President,

Today, the whole world is facing the scourge of terrorism and the brutal terrorist organizations such as DAESH, Al-Kaide, PKK and Boko Haram continue to threaten the order and the well-being of our societies. Terrorism is a shared and complex threat that requires joint, as well as mutually reinforcing action on the part of the international community. Turkey has always supported the UN activities as the main platform for promoting a united stance against this scourge. While countering terrorism, the balance between fundamental freedoms and security needs are maintained.

Violent extremism in all forms is another growing source of concern on a global scale. The human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism should remain on the agenda of the Council and of the United Nations in general.

Racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia continue to challenge our efforts to ensure the universal enjoyment of human rights. With the rising trends of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, they constitute serious threats towards global peace and social harmony. We condemn all kinds of incitement to hatred and religious discrimination against Muslims, Jews and people of other faiths.

Let me also mention one of the most disheartening issues of our times, the tragedy faced by migrants and refugees all over the world. We fully support the call to action by various instances regarding the migrant/refugee crises. However, it is obvious that taking solely "security measures" is not the right approach to address the challenge.

These reflections and debates are important as we prepare for the World Humanitarian Summit that we will host together with the UN Secretary General on May 23-24 in Istanbul. We look forward to welcoming you in Istanbul on the occasion of this historic event.

Thank you.