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Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner

Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Tomáš HUSÁK

Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to

the United Nations Office in Geneva

on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 5 March 2009

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**United Nations Human Rights Council
10th session
(Geneva, 2 -28 March, 2009)**

Interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic
on behalf of the European Union**

Geneva, 5 March 2009

Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner,

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

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

Please note the whole statement as distributed; I will present only its main parts.

Thank you for your statement presented earlier today, and for the report describing in very clear and concrete terms the efforts of your office in fulfilling its mandate.

We welcome the continuous dialogue between your Office and the Council, a dialogue based on transparency and cooperation. We highly regard the very open manner in which both you, Madam High Commissioner, and your predecessor often going beyond any obligations, inform us in great detail of the goals of the Office and means by which you plan to achieve these results.

We reaffirm our full support of the independence, integrity and impartiality of your Office in compliance with your mandate outlined in resolution 48/141. We see no added value in further discussing relationship of the Council with the Office, as this is well defined in the resolution establishing your mandate and the one creating the Human Rights Council.

Furthermore, we are aware of the need to curb the number of requests of the Council to the OHCHR, which has grown considerably during the existence of the Council.

¹ * Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Of the many State supporting activities of the OHCHR, I would like to particularly express our appreciation for the important work undertaken by the Office for the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. The documentation prepared by the Office represents an indispensable background to the process and the compilation of UN information, serves as an element of an objective and independent, comprehensive yet concise overview of developments and challenges of each State under review. We observe important synergies between the UPR, treaty bodies, special procedures and field offices as well as further requests by states for technical assistance, and we hope all these will materialize in concrete improvements of human rights situation on the ground.

The UPR once more demonstrated to us all the immense importance of the work of civil society organizations and their submissions, which have substantively enriched dialogues on human rights in states under review. In this relation, the EU would like to support further action of the OHCHR to promote civil society's role in this regard as well as in the work of the UN human rights system as a whole.

In the work of the Office as well as of the Council we would like to see continued focus on concrete results. We fully agree with your comment on thematic panels and special sessions, that any working arrangements and topics chosen should consider how they will become integrated into the Council's work and their practical added value. For the Council to fulfil its mandate and to withstand public scrutiny, it is of utmost importance that it reacts in a timely and effective manner to situations of serious violations of human rights. We are open to different modalities under which the Council would substantively deal with those situations and to different outcomes, again while considering the effects of such meetings and outcomes on the ground.

Moving to one specific part of the UN human rights system that makes considerable difference on the ground, as well as within the work of the Council, we would like to acknowledge the system of Special Procedures, who act as the 'eyes and ears' of the Council, and moreover as a torch shining a light upon serious situations and themes that otherwise would not be systematically observed and considered. We recognize their potential to function also as an early warning mechanism and would like to underline the importance of your continued support to them.

We are grateful for the information provided in your report on developments in strategic thematic areas. We reiterate our commitment to mainstreaming human rights in the work of the UN as well as on a national level. We reaffirm the universality, indivisibility and mutual interdependence of all human rights, the latter being further highlighted through the current financial crisis. We are committed to combating discrimination and inequality while paying special attention to the most vulnerable groups. We welcome continued emphasis on the fight against impunity, especially for serious violations of human rights of civilians in armed conflicts and for violence against women. We also commend your strong support to the December 2008 GA joint statement on behalf of 66 States on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity and we further recommend the continued promotion of equal rights for all human beings in the work of the OHCHR.

We welcome information on your country visits and on situations to which you pay special attention, in this relation we echo your concerns about protection of civilians in Sri Lanka and that civilians must be protected by all sides to the conflict and those responsible for serious violations of human rights must be punished. Similarly we would like to highlight our concern over dire human rights and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. We would like to ask how the international community could better assist your Office in your efforts to promote protection of human rights of the population in both of these countries.

We would very much have liked to see a strengthened presence of the OHCHR in Sri Lanka. We hope that you under present circumstances will be able to establish a proper presence in Zimbabwe and realize the added value an Independent Expert would give your ongoing work in the DRC.

We continue to fully support the strengthened country engagement of the OHCHR - reaching now 51 field presences that mainstream human rights, provide human rights analysis, and support the efforts of national governments. This presence in the field places human rights at the centre of efforts of country teams and peacekeeping operations. We congratulate those who have recently signed or renewed their memorandums of understanding. We note that such strengthening also has to take into account that sufficient resources are allocated to the Secretariat and Treaty Bodies in Geneva.

As was mentioned earlier, timely reaction to serious violations of human rights is of utmost importance, in this view we highlight the important work of the rapid response unit.

We welcome the contribution of the High Commissioner to the Durban Review Conference, look forward to study it in detail and appreciate the awareness raising activities preceding it, namely the very useful webpage launched in this connection. The EU considers your active participation as Secretary-General of the Durban Review Conference absolutely vital in order to guarantee a successful outcome of the conference as well as its clear focus on racism and racial discrimination.

In accordance with our long-term commitment to cooperation with international human rights mechanisms, we greatly value the expert support of treaty bodies which provide analysis and recommendations in order to improve the understanding and the implementation of the respective international human rights treaties.

We welcome the increased emphasis of treaty bodies on the follow-up of their recommendations and we highlight the importance of the support the OHCHR provides them. We welcome the new Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities that just concluded its first session and note the slow beginning of the preventive work of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture which would deserve considerable strengthening.

Madam High Commissioner,

To conclude let me reiterate our high expectations of the work of your Office and our gratitude for the purposefulness and openness that have over the years become trademarks of the OHCHR.

Thank you.
