

**Item 2 -- Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for
Human Rights March Session of the Human Rights Council
U.S. Statement of Chargé Mark C. Storella
5 March 2009**

Thank you, Mr. President and thank you Madame High Commissioner for your introduction to the OHCHR Annual Report.

The United States appreciates the opportunity to participate in this important dialogue.

The report touches on a number of issues. My government would like to comment on a few of them.

First is the importance of the Office of the High Commissioner itself. The United States has never wavered in its commitment to the independence of the High Commissioner's office, and we will continue to support that independence. We remain fully supportive of the field work that should be a priority focus of the OHCHR's effort.

The vital advisory services and technical assistance – as well as monitoring – that the OHCHR provides through its numerous field presences, regional offices and human rights advisers throughout the world need the support of this body and UN Member States.

Given the importance of this field work, we are therefore concerned by the closure of some offices before their mandates have been accomplished. In this regard, we would be very interested to hear the High Commissioner's vision for expansion of OHCHR's field presence and activities.

We noted the High Commissioner's focus on discrimination as the root cause of many human rights abuses. We agree in many respects, but we also see suppression of the fundamental freedom of expression as equally at the heart of many human rights violations. We note that many in this body continue to promote resolutions on "defamation of religions," a problematic concept that is all too easily invoked by States

to selectively curtail civil dissent, halt criticism of political institutions, prevent genuine dialogue on religious belief and practice and restrict freedom of expression. We remain concerned at attempts to have the Office focus on ways to restrict expression before the international community has fully embraced the full and broad scope of freedom of expression.

As Secretary Clinton said just last week, we must “ advance these timeless values which empower people to speak, think, worship and assemble freely, to lead their work and family lives with dignity, and to know that dreams of a brighter future are within their reach.”

We look forward to continued dialogue with the Office of the High Commissioner as she strives to empower people so that their dreams of a brighter future are within reach.

Thank you, Madame High Commissioner, and thank you, Mr.

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