



European Union

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Item 4

Statement by

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to the United Nations Office in Geneva**

on behalf of the European Union

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EU Statement
General Debate
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Mr. President,

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

The Candidate Countries Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro*¹ and Iceland**², the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. President,

We meet at a time of historic change. Across North Africa, the Middle East and beyond, people are standing up for that core human aspiration: to be able to shape their own lives, politically and economically and to live in freedom and with dignity. The EU welcomes the democratic reforms already underway in several countries. The people of North Africa and the Middle East themselves are leading the process. The role of the international Community, including the United Nations and the European Union, is to support them in the realization of their aspirations.

...Countries in transition

The EU wholeheartedly supports the **Tunisian** people's aspirations for a democratic transition in the country and underlines the crucial role of the Tunisian civil society and human rights defenders. The EU supports Tunisia's plan for reform and its commitment to sign up to international conventions on human rights, and calls on all parties to engage into an inclusive dialogue to agree on the way forward, and to adopt a credible calendar for reforms that will guarantee a successful transition outcome. The EU calls on the implementation of the recommendations of the OHCHR assessment mission.

Similarly, the EU fully supports the aspirations of the **Egyptian** people for a civilian and democratic government based on the rule of law. The EU encourages the transitional leadership to pursue its efforts to amend the constitution and fix a credible timetable for the necessary reforms, including for the holding of democratic parliamentary and presidential elections, the lifting of emergency rules, the freeing of all political prisoners and the proper investigation of committed human rights violations. The EU welcomes the invitation by Egypt to the OHCHR to deploy a mission. The EU hopes that this visit can take place in the coming days to allow Egypt and the High Commissioner to debrief the HRC before the end of the session.

The EU welcomes the liberation in **Syria** of Mr Haytham el-Maleh and calls on Syrian authorities to release all prisoners of conscience and to respect freedom of speech, in accordance with its international commitments.

The EU follows closely the very important developments in the region. The EU notes that specific events and the government's response differ in each country, but condemns all acts of violence against peaceful demonstrators. Human rights violations have to be swiftly investigated in accordance with international standards. Perpetrators need to be held accountable and victims need to receive an effective remedy. All

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

² **Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

human rights and fundamental freedoms of people and their aspirations in terms of political, civil, social, cultural and economic rights should be fully respected and comprehensive national dialogues be put in place rapidly to address these aspirations.

The EU strongly condemns the ongoing repression in Libya and deplores violence against – and death of – civilians. It calls on the Libyan regime to put an immediate end to this violence and bloodshed and to respond properly to the legitimate call of the Libyan people for the establishment of a democratic state, respectful of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU commends the swift actions taken by the Human Rights Council, the UNGA and the UNSC, including the referral to the ICC as an important step to fight impunity. It hopes fact-finding missions of the UN and the EU will be able to thoroughly assess urgent humanitarian needs in order to protect civilians who bear the brunt of the conflict. The HRC will need to remain seized of developments in Libya as a matter of priority.

In the aftermath of the November 2010 elections, the EU expresses its strong preoccupation about the worsening security, humanitarian and human rights situation in **Côte d'Ivoire**, with the killing of peaceful demonstrators and the increasing violence against civilians. The EU reiterates its full support for the action of the United Nations and the efforts of the African Union and ECOWAS, and underlines the importance for UNOCI to implement its protection mandate.

Regarding **Belarus**, the EU deeply regrets that the Presidential elections of 19 December failed to meet Belarus' OSCE commitments for democratic elections. The EU reiterates its demands for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. It calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end the persecution of democratic forces, independent media, representatives of civil society, students and all those exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, including the leaders of the opposition parties.

The EU is extremely concerned by the deteriorating human rights situation in **Iran**, particularly the dramatic increase in executions this year, carried out without respect for international safeguards. The EU deplores the systematic repression of **Iranian** citizens, including women, students, professors, lawyers, journalists, bloggers, artists, human rights defenders and members of the opposition who in many cases face harassment and imprisonment for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The EU calls for the immediate release of political prisoners, and expresses its concerns about the treatment of Mr Moussavi and Mr Karoubi, whose current condition – under house arrest or otherwise imprisoned – remains unclear. It urges the Iranian authorities to grant them the freedom of movement to which they have a right. The EU also urges the Iranian authorities to fully facilitate the scheduled visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The EU fully supports together with countries of other regions the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on Iran and calls on the authorities to honour their standing invitation to all existing Special Procedures.

The EU welcomes the timely, peaceful and credible conduct of the Southern **Sudan** Referendum as a crucial step in implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, but recalls the urgent need to come to an agreement on the future status of Abyei in order to stop the ongoing violence, as well as the obligation to protect all citizens. The EU welcomes the current visit in Southern Sudan of the UN Independent Expert. The EU remains deeply concerned about the continued violence in Darfur. The attacks by both government and rebel forces on civilian populations must stop, and the Sudanese government must carry out its commitments to disarm militias or improve accountability for past and ongoing human rights violations. An effective ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access remain essential to alleviate the suffering of the people of Darfur and to lay the ground for the implementation of the peace process. The EU recalls the obligation of the Government of Sudan to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Court.

The Union remains preoccupied by the situation in **Zimbabwe** and the increasing evidence of what appears to be politically motivated intimidation and violence, including against serving government Ministers, Members of Parliament and of Constitutional bodies. The Union recalls the importance of a peaceful process towards credible and democratic elections, with the full support and engagement of SADC countries. The Union deplores the arrest of Zimbabwean activists at a lecture on the protests in North Africa and the fact that they have been charged with treason and could face the death penalty.

The EU regrets that the elections in **Burma/Myanmar** were not in compliance with international standards for democratic and transparent elections. While taking note of recent developments since the elections, the EU urges the government to embark on a genuine and inclusive process of national reconciliation that requires a dialogue with all components of the opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi and with ethnic minorities, and to release immediately all prisoners of conscience, to end ongoing grave human rights violations and to ensure accountability for past and current violations.

The EU acknowledges as a positive step the ongoing release of political prisoners by the Cuban Government. However, the EU is concerned about the human rights situation in **Cuba**, including the lack of respect for the freedom of expression and information, and for the freedom of assembly.

...Strengthening co-operation with the UN Human Rights System

Mr President,

The quick response from the UN to the situation in Libya is proof that multilateral institutions matter and can live up to their mandate. All States, including States running for elections in this body, have a key responsibility to co-operate with the UN system, including the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The issuing of standing invitations to special procedures and subsequent cooperation in good faith are full part of such responsibility.

The ongoing review of the Human Rights Council represents a major opportunity to strengthen the international system for the promotion and protection of human rights. We do regret that we are about to miss this unique chance to enhance the ability of this Council to address human rights situations wherever they occur.

The European Union urges the authorities of the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** to co-operate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur for the DPRK. The EU invites DPRK political leaders to take steps to ensure the respect for human rights, in particular by stopping the ongoing large-scale and systematic violations of fundamental freedoms of its citizens and through allowing greater openness to the outside world and allocating more resources to the basic needs of the population, such as food, education and health.

The EU welcomes the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to **China** in December 2010. It urges China to extend an invitation to the nine other UN special procedures who have so requested. The EU welcomes the recent reduction in China of the number of crimes carrying the death penalty and hopes that China will take further steps towards its complete abolition. However, the EU is concerned by increased violations of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly as well as by the increasing use of extra-legal measures to harass and restrict the activities of lawyers and human rights defenders, and is also concerned at frequent reports of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners. The rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, notably in Tibet and Xinjiang, need to be fully respected in accordance with the Chinese Constitution and international standards. The EU encourages China to accelerate its efforts to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The EU took note of the call of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and of the Human Rights Council on the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** to prepare an implementation plan with timelines for delivery of the outstanding recommendations for the improvement of the human rights situation in the country. With national elections due this year, it is of great importance that the situation of human rights in the DRC continues to be reviewed by the HRC, addressing in particular the continued reports of high number of rapes. The EU fully supports the call of thematic rapporteurs on the Council to establish a specific mandate on the situation of human rights in the DRC. The EU welcomes the reports of the seven UN Experts and of the High Commissioner, which will be discussed under item 10. The EU underlines the importance of the upcoming visit of the OHCHR with regard to the follow up of the mapping exercise.

There is also the pending request of 6 Special Procedures to visit **Sri Lanka**, notably the repeated request by the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances. The EU has always supported efforts to achieve long-term peace, underpinned by a reconciliation process involving all the people of Sri Lanka, addressing outstanding grievances of all of Sri Lanka's communities. This includes addressing the issue of

accountability for alleged violations of international humanitarian law by both sides in the military conflict. As part of this process, further progress in the implementation of constitutional rights for all, as well as the final repeal of the Emergency Regulations, the application of the Preventions of Terrorism Act only where absolutely necessary and full respect of the right to freedom of expression would be important steps. The EU also urges the Government of Sri Lanka to co-operate fully with the work of the UN panel of experts.

...Freedom of Religion or Belief

Finally, Mr President,

The EU expresses its profound concerns about the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination, as epitomized by recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities. Regrettably, no part of the world is exempt from the scourge of religious intolerance. We are shocked by the recent murders of Minister Bhatti and Governor Taseer in **Pakistan**, two prominent defenders of the principles of equality and human rights, enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan. The EU urges the Pakistani authorities to do their utmost to ensure the safety of those in the Government and civil society who have spoken out on these matters, and to bring to justice those responsible for these crimes.

Religious communities and their places of worship have been violently attacked in **Egypt**, and **Iraq**. Sectarian tensions and violence in **Nigeria** and **Malaysia** have resulted in victims among Christian and Muslim communities; in **Indonesia** among Christians and Ahmadiyyas. The Baha'is and other religious minorities in **Iran** suffer from severe harassment and restrictions. The EU underlines the vital importance of governments' involvement in the peaceful resolution of interreligious issues and in the fight against religious intolerance. Freedom of religion or belief is intrinsically linked to freedom of opinion and expression as well as to other human rights and fundamental freedoms, which all contribute to the building of pluralist and democratic societies.

The EU opposes the death penalty in all cases and in all circumstances and is particularly disturbed that changing religion is illegal in several countries and carries the death penalty. We urge these countries to comply with international standards and to abolish any restriction on the right to change one's religion.

The EU holds a strong commitment to freedom of religion or belief, and will continue to engage with partner countries and offer its cooperation to promote religious tolerance and promote human rights.