



**Statement by H.E. Dr. Anwar Mohammed Gargash
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of the UAE
to the High Level Segment of the 25th session of the
United Nations Human Rights Council**

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Excellencies, Madame High Commissioner, Mr. President

I am pleased on behalf of the United Arab Emirates to extend to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Human Rights Council. I am confident that you will successfully lead the Council this year in carrying out its important mandate.

I am also grateful to your predecessor Ambassador Henczel for his work and express my sincerest appreciation for the efforts made to promote and protect human rights by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Her Excellency Mrs. Navi Pillay.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak about the efforts that the UAE is making to promote human rights at home and abroad, about the severe challenges to human rights we are facing in our region, and about how we might strengthen the Human Rights Council's capacity to address these pressing issues.

Mr President,

The UAE is deeply committed to promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In a region in which we see the damaging impact of youth unemployment, a painful rise in sectarian conflict and the risk of a regression in women's rights, the UAE stands as a beacon of hope, opportunity and tolerance.

The UAE has a prosperous society and a diverse economy with strong human development. We have invested in people and promoted economic freedoms. All citizens and residents have access to education and healthcare, and the UAE ranks 41st in the world on the UN's Human Development Index. In the UN's new Happiness Index we rank 14th globally and first in the Arab world.

We have a tolerant, multicultural society in which people of more than 200 different nationalities live harmoniously together, freely worshiping in their churches, temples or mosques, and shielded by a common legal system. We resolutely reject forces of religious intolerance.

We see the empowerment of women as fundamental for our development as a modern, progressive society. Women participate meaningfully in every facet of civic, economic and political life in the UAE, and work in the judiciary, police, military, diplomatic corps, and the private sector. Women hold 66% of government jobs and comprise 70% of university graduates, which is the highest rate in the world. The UN ranks the UAE highest in the Arab world on gender equality and 40th globally.

We have an extensive strategy for safeguarding the rights of workers. The UAE's status as an attractive place of work for people from around the world has made it a major recipient of foreign labour, which is of course of benefit to both them and us. We have ratified nine major ILO conventions related to the rights of workers, and we have adopted numerous laws to protect workers' rights, including in the areas of recruitment, pay, housing and health.

Due to the large number of foreign workers in the UAE, this continues to be a major focus for legislative and executive improvements. We have stepped up the enforcement of labour protections: by the end of 2012, 215,000 companies were paying about 3.2 million workers through a recently-introduced Wage Protection System, and in 2012 the Ministry of Labour conducted 162,413 inspection visits to worksites. In addition, we will soon be enacting a new law to enhance protections for domestic workers. But we acknowledge that more needs to be done. We consider this area to be an evolving challenge that I assure you, we will continue to address.

Mr President, all of this progress is easy to take for granted; but let me assure you that we in the UAE do not. We know that it has only come about because of a combination of visionary leadership, collective commitment, and a determination to stay on course.

And despite this exceptional progress, the UAE is not satisfied with the status quo. We know that promoting human rights is an ongoing challenge that requires that we continue to review our legislation and strengthen enforcement mechanisms, to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Mr. President,

The UAE is also committed to supporting the promotion of human rights around the world, and there can be no doubt that we face a large number of grave challenges in that regard.

We recognize the centrality of economic development and poverty alleviation to the realization of people's human rights. That is why we continue to deliver large amounts of foreign assistance every year. In 2012 we disbursed a total of \$1.59 billion. Using the OECD DAC's methodology, our aid was equal to 0.33 per cent of GNI. This is why we strongly support the work of the UN General Assembly to define a "post-2015 agenda" and ensure we continue to share a collective vision for promoting human development.

We are passionate advocates of the women's empowerment agenda internationally, not least because we have seen how important it has been to our own experience. This is why last year we joined the Executive Board of UN Women. In addition, the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs is a sponsor of the important UK-led initiative to prevent sexual violence in conflict situations.

The UAE is also a leading player in the global campaign against human trafficking. We became a member of the Bali Process last April and signed numerous agreements with workers' home countries to work together to prevent human trafficking. This is a challenging area, but we have made significant progress. In 2012 there were 47 human trafficking-related cases, leading to the arrest of 149 alleged traffickers and convictions in 32 cases, involving 91 traffickers. In January 2013, the UAE Cabinet passed enhanced legal protections for victims, including important provisions such as security protection to witnesses and lawyers, as well as psychotherapy to victims. In addition, the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking recently decided to establish a fund to support victims.

Mr President,

It will not surprise you to hear that the UAE is profoundly concerned about current challenges to human rights across the Middle East and North Africa region. There is no doubt that people across the region face grave threats that should rightly be a focus of concern for the United Nations.

In this context, the UAE reaffirms its support for the ongoing democratic process in the Arab Republic of Egypt which has the support of the majority of the Egyptian people who is currently facing a wave of acts of terrorism, violence and extremism and we call upon the international community to give its support to this brotherly country.

The tragic circumstances of the Syrian people profoundly saddens us. We must send a clear, united message about this humanitarian crisis. There is mounting evidence of deliberate and widespread use of starvation as a weapon of war by the Syrian regime, as well as evidence of systematic torture and murder of detainees. UN Security Council resolution 2139 is a welcome step but now we must see action on the ground. We are grateful to Undersecretary-General Valerie Amos for her tireless efforts in this

regard. Still, the situation in Syria has grown so horrifying that even relief is not enough. We must ensure now and in the post conflict phase that there is no impunity for crimes that have been committed, so that the terrors of this war, including mass starvation and the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure will not be repeated.

The UAE also strongly supports current efforts to facilitate a two-state solution between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The Palestinian people have suffered for too long and Israel must recognize its responsibility to make the compromises necessary to achieve peace. That includes an immediate end to Israel's construction of illegal settlements, which pose the single greatest threat to the current peace efforts. It also means an end to universally condemned practices such as the demolition of homes, illegal seizure of assets, and arbitrary detentions.

Beyond these two specific human rights tragedies, **the region as a whole is facing a number of common threats that pose serious challenges to human rights:**

- the manipulation of our religion in order to achieve extremist political goals that are antithetical to Islam, a religion which is conducive to modernisation, tolerance and women's empowerment;
- sectarianism, which is fuelling violence and is a self-serving, politically driven phenomenon that we have a responsibility to oppose;
- and violent extremism, a disease that has scarred our region.

And Mr President, we are profoundly concerned at the impact this is having on the rights of women in the region. There is no doubt that some in our region have tended to place too many limits on the role of women and have not benefited as much as the UAE has from women's broad and deep contribution to our society. But the growing pockets of extremism

across the region are threatening to make this problem much worse. Let me assure you that the UAE will vigorously challenge this trend.

In our determination to oppose these pan-regional threats, the UAE's leadership is committed to maintaining its vision of a society that is firmly rooted in Arab Muslim values, which values tolerance and diversity, gives people from all backgrounds the opportunity to achieve their aspirations, and empowers women to participate fully in social, economic and political life.

Mr President,

The UAE believes that international cooperation, especially through the United Nations, is an important cornerstone of efforts to promote human rights. We are proud to be a member of the Human Rights Council and see it as a vital mechanism for enabling cooperation between states on these issues.

Last year, the UAE underwent its second Universal Periodic Review. We appreciate the opportunity the UPR provides to engage in a constructive dialogue with the international community and generate ideas for further improvement. We see the UPR as the central, most legitimate mechanism for international dialogue about a country's human rights situation. The UAE's UPR report was adopted in June and we have now begun the work of following-up on the one hundred recommendations that we accepted and the additional seven that we partially accepted.

In December of last year, we also presented our first periodic report to the Arab Human Rights Committee, in accordance with the Arab Charter of Human Rights, and we are playing a leading role in establishing and promoting efficient human rights mechanisms in the framework of the League of Arab States.

In 2013 the UAE established a new informal dialogue on human rights with the EU. This is designed to promote open and constructive dialogue about these issues, in the spirit of mutual respect, so as to enhance understanding of our respective human rights challenges and achievements and to support one another's continued progress in this regard.

We were also pleased to host a visit by the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons last April, who recognized the progress achieved by our national campaign. Earlier this year, we welcomed the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and look forward to studying her report when it is complete, as part of our on-going efforts to strengthen our judicial system.

Mr President,

It is because of our commitment to the success of the UN's human rights mechanisms that we are conscious of the need to work hard to reinforce their effectiveness.

The UAE is committed to cooperating with Special Procedures, which are designed to assist countries to promote human rights, within a context of mutual respect. We strongly welcome mandate holders as we sincerely seek to benefit from their expertise and constructive advice. We stress the importance to their effectiveness and credibility of them verifying the accuracy of the information that they use. We believe that it is extremely important to enshrine the highest standards of competence, professionalism and intellectual expertise in the selection of the mandate holders.

The UAE also encourages the Human Rights Council to prioritize its work, avoid repetition and duplication, and focus on new initiatives with greater added value, in order to maximize its impact and facilitate follow up to its decisions.

This also requires that we provide adequate financial resources for carrying out its important work. That is why the UAE decided to donate 1.5 million dollars to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2013. And I can announce today that we will soon enter into an agreement with the UN to finance 11.5 million dollars' worth of restoration to Hall 17 of the UN buildings here in Geneva.

Mr President,

As we look around the world today, there is no doubt we live in challenging times. Promoting human rights in this context is not easy. Nor are there any simple answers and we have to rise above using this important issue for political purposes that do not serve the high and noble objectives of the human rights principles.

To conclude, let me assure you Mr. President, that **the UAE is committed to ongoing improvements in human rights at home and to working in partnership with other countries, and through the United Nations, to help improve the lives of people everywhere.**

