

Mannréttindaráð Sameinuðu þjóðanna
Ræða Guðlaugs Þórs Þórðarsonar utanríkisráðherra
Genf, 27. febrúar 2017

Mr. President,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Eleanor Roosevelt, who after years of ruinous world wars, actively fought for the first Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, once pondered the question of where human rights begin. Mrs. Roosevelt believed that they begin with each and every one of us making a commitment to treat our neighbors with respect, with basic tolerance and fairness.

“Human rights begin in small places,” she said, “close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. [...] Equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination – unless these rights have meaning at home, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold human rights close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

With this in mind, it was a great privilege for Iceland to present its second report before this Council during the Universal Periodic Review session last autumn. We are grateful to all the sixty-six member states that made the effort to provide us with guidance. Even though we pride ourselves on our culture and heritage of democracy and human rights, Iceland has benefitted from the UPR, by taking the opportunity to look critically at our own performance.

Since the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has proven a valuable tool as it allows each member state – even those that may think they are beyond reproach – to listen to the comments and questions of others, to receive criticism and recommendations to improve their human rights record.

Mr. President,

The simple, yet profound, insight of Mrs. Roosevelt must also extend to our obligations as States – to uphold the principle of universal and indivisible human rights; to foster cooperation in our constant struggle to fulfill those fundamental goals; and to speak out against any human rights violations, near or far. My Government, for its part, will continue to lend its voice to those who speak out when States disregard their human rights obligations, and work towards improvement wherever possible.

Iceland is committed to strengthening the universality of human rights and to protecting the plurality of voices in civil society who speak up for those rights. The human rights system ensures that all States, big or small, are bound by the same rules and obligations. We must continue to safeguard this system, for we must remember that it was borne out of need, and over time, from the ashes of the League of Nations and of World War II.

We will continue to condemn gross violations of human rights by regimes such as North Korea, and the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines. We will also continue to speak out against the disregard for civilian casualties in conflict zones such as Yemen and Syria, the systematic discrimination of women in Saudi Arabia, of religious or ethnic minorities in Myanmar, and of LGBTQ persons that continue to face discriminatory laws in more than 75 UN Member States. We will also argue for the humane treatment of migrants and refugees, the people who are only seeking to flee war and destruction.

We need to speak honestly to each other with compassion and respect, and hold each other accountable when we fall short of promoting and protecting human rights – and aim to do better. That, after all, is one of the main purposes of this Body.

Mr. President,

Iceland continues to be alarmed by the war in Syria and the scourge of terror, made worse by ISIL and other terrorist groupings. We strongly condemn the continued abuses and violations of human rights committed by all sides and urge that those responsible be held to account. Iceland is also concerned about the situation in eastern Ukraine and the frequently reported violation of Tatar human rights in Crimea, the illegal annexation of which we continue to condemn.

We express our sympathies to the Turkish people who have suffered greatly this past year from repeated terrorist attacks and condemn the attempted coup d'état of July last year. It is of paramount importance that due process and respect for the rule of law and human rights is ensured going forward, including safeguarding the independence of the judiciary and the freedom of the media.

Mr. President,

Human rights, equal opportunity for all, respect for diversity and freedom, are key concepts that Icelanders hold dear, with emphasis on women's rights, the rights of the child and the rights of LGBTQ individuals. Iceland contributes actively to the promotion and protection of human rights, including sexual and reproductive health

and rights. We commend the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Denmark for their “She decides” initiative.

Iceland has also focused on engaging men and boys for gender equality by organizing Barbershop conferences and discussions across the world. We have partnered with UN Women to make available through the HeforShe campaign a Barbershop toolbox that will allow others to do the same. We also do our part by advocating for and supporting the human rights treaty body system, our strongest common commitment to human rights we have made.

Mr. President,

Iceland is grateful to all who champion human rights around the world – including brave human rights defenders across the globe who often risk life and limb to fight for our common rights. Allow me also to pay tribute to the work of the High Commissioner, who has proven fearless in casting light on abuses regardless of where they occur and has given a voice to the voiceless. Rest assured that my Government reaffirms its full support to the work and independence of the High Commissioner, and we urge all States to cooperate with his Office and the mechanisms and instruments mandated by this Body.

We will continue to do our part, including with our Nordic family. We are therefore proud to support the candidature of Denmark to the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021.

Finally, Mr President

Today, we are facing challenges and threats for which borders no longer exist. Many of these challenges require global solutions and, here, the Human Rights Council, and its member states, must remain accountable and fit for purpose. Sustainable development, peace and security cannot be achieved without the promotion and protection of human rights.

We must safeguard these human rights in the global context, in places far away from our own shores, but let us not forget that they begin in small places, close to home, as Mrs. Roosevelt reminded us.

Thank you.