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From: General Secretariat of the Council

On: 26 February 2018

To: Delegations

Subject: Council Conclusions on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2018

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2018 adopted by the Council at its 3598th meeting held on 26 February 2018.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON EU PRIORITIES
AT UN HUMAN RIGHTS FORA IN 2018**

1. Respect for human rights is a founding value of the European Union. Commitment to human rights is a central pillar of our external action, as reflected in the EU Global Strategy on foreign and security policy. The promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of multilateralism and a central pillar of the UN system. Peace and security, human rights and development are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. The European Union is and will remain a leading player on these three fronts.
2. Particularly in light of this year's 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Union strongly supports the pledge by the UN Secretary General to raise the profile of human rights and to make prevention and sustainable peace a priority of the UN system, by tackling root causes of conflicts, including by addressing human rights violations and abuses. The EU also reiterates its strong position, in line with this year's 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related. Furthermore, the EU recalls its commitment to implementing the Responsibility to Protect, preventing and halting human rights violations in the context of atrocities. It supports the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, and calls on states to take action to implement it.
3. The European Union reaffirms its strong support for the independence and work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office, and the entire UN human rights system in tackling human rights abuses and violations, including through country-specific and thematic statements and resolutions, commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and the special procedures, the Universal Periodic Review, and active support to all human rights defenders against abuses or violations committed by state and non-state actors.

4. The EU underlines that all UN members, including members of the Human Rights Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms. It reaffirms its support to the effective and efficient functioning of the HRC and remains committed to cooperating with all countries and with NGOs in a transparent, cross-regional process in order to strengthen the HRC while protecting the Council's achievements and as part of the importance of human rights in wider UN reform.
5. In parallel to its strong engagement in UN human rights fora, the European Union will continue, including through the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and in close cooperation with EU Regional Special Representatives, to make full use of the range of instruments and policies available to promote and protect human rights worldwide, including bilateral human rights dialogues, mainstreaming human rights in EU policy and the other bilateral or multilateral dialogues and fora, election observation, public statements, public diplomacy, funding of projects and diplomatic action. We will also welcome positive progress in partner countries, exchange good stories and good practices on human rights across the globe, and continue to seek dialogue and cooperation with partners from all regions.
6. The EU will remain actively engaged in international efforts to achieve gender equality, women's empowerment, and the advancement of women's rights as a matter of priority. It will continue to seek the integration of the gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and other human rights fora. Recalling the European Consensus on Development, the Council remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, in this context. The EU will continue to pursue efforts to implement effectively UN Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security, and step up efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world.

7. In this year when we mark the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the European Union is gravely concerned by the increasing pressure in all regions against human rights defenders, including violent attacks, forced disappearances, malicious prosecutions, punitive registration regimes but also restrictions on the receipt of funding. The EU will continue to staunchly defend civil society organisations fighting for human rights, individual human rights defenders, including bloggers, journalists, other media actors and human rights lawyers. It will pay particular attention to the specific risks faced by women, indigenous human rights defenders and other human rights defenders in vulnerable situations, including LGBTI human rights defenders, and to multiple threats faced while defending against business-related abuses and cases concerning land rights. The EU will continue to oppose and condemn intimidation, harassment and reprisals against individuals and groups cooperating with the UN, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, and in this regard reiterates its support to the UN Assistant Secretary-General for human rights, including for his work in this area.
8. The international community must never accept impunity, when genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or violations and abuses of international humanitarian and international human rights law occur. The EU will therefore continue its long-standing efforts to end impunity, strengthen accountability and support transitional justice. In line with international humanitarian law and principles, civilians and civilian objects enjoy general protection, are not to be made the object of attack and humanitarian assistance should be able to reach them. Furthermore, particularly in this year when we celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the EU expresses its concern at the frequency and scale of acts of destruction of cultural heritage, and commits its support to relevant efforts and initiatives undertaken in various UN fora in highlighting and seeking ways to prevent such acts.

9. The European Union reiterates its support to the International Criminal Court and the universality of the Rome Statute, which this year marks its 20th anniversary. We welcome the decision to activate the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression in the framework set up during the last Assembly of the State Parties. The full cooperation of States Parties and universality of the Court are essential for the ICC to fulfil efficiently its promise of real justice. In this regard the EU deeply regrets the unprecedented withdrawal by Burundi from the Rome Statute.
10. The EU will also continue to support a strong system for the protection of human rights on the European continent, of which the Council of Europe and the European Convention of Human Rights must remain cornerstones.
11. The EU will continue in all its external relations to promote respect for diversity by protecting and promoting human rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including already acquired rights, in accordance with applicable UN and Council of Europe norms and standards.
12. At the HRC and UNGA Third Committee the EU will continue to spearhead initiatives concerning the situation of the human rights in DPRK, Myanmar/ Burma, and Burundi. It will support action on Iran, the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine), the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria. The EU will continue to call on states and other parties to cooperate fully with the HRC mechanisms and special procedures and to give them full, unconditional and unhindered access. It will continue to demand that the delivery of life-saving assistance be granted to people in need, including in Yemen, Syria, Myanmar/ Burma, Libya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, as well as the Gaza strip and the non-government controlled areas of Ukraine. The EU will promote appropriate attention in all relevant human rights fora, including the Human Rights Council to the situation of human rights in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region / South Ossetia. The EU will continue to demand the immediate end of the horrific human rights abuses and violations, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity, and the prosecution of those responsible in the DPRK, Syria, Myanmar/Burma, Burundi, and South Sudan.

13. The EU opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and considers that the death penalty constitutes a serious violation of human rights and human dignity. Where the death penalty has been abolished we encourage governments to protect this important achievement in the constitution and to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Where a moratorium is in place we encourage governments to uphold it and progress towards abolition. Any regressive steps should be refrained from. Where the death penalty still exists, the EU calls for its use to be progressively abolished and insists that it should be carried out respecting international minimum obligations. The EU will continue to speak out against executions particularly in the case of mass executions or when the death penalty is applied for offences committed by those under 18 years of age or in violation of other minimum standards. Following the strong cross-regional support to the resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty at UNGA 71, the EU will continue to support the work of the UN towards the abolition of the death penalty worldwide, in particular at the Human Rights Council and during UNGA 73.

14. The EU will continue to be engaged in the fight against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in particular when used by law enforcement personnel and security forces. The EU will as necessary remind countries concerned, including Syria, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar/ Burma, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh and Libya of their obligations in that respect. The EU remains concerned about the reported cases of mistreatments and torture under detention in China and calls on the authorities to thoroughly investigate them.

15. The EU calls on all states to ensure that enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions by public or private forces are promptly and effectively investigated in an impartial and transparent manner, which ensures appropriate prosecution of those responsible, and expresses concerns on such cases notably in Libya, Syria, Myanmar/ Burma, Bangladesh, the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine), the non-government controlled areas of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the Philippines, Pakistan, Burundi and Venezuela.
16. Recalling its previous Conclusions, the EU reiterates its strong and unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever and for whatever purpose. While fully aware of the serious challenges posed by the terrorist threat and violent extremism to countries' stability and security, the EU calls on all states to ensure that the response to terrorist crimes is taken in full compliance with international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. It underlines the importance of the protection and promotion of the rights of victims of terrorist crimes.
17. In line with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the EU will maintain its increasing focus on the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as continue efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through a rights-based approach to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals including the human rights to health, education, food, housing, safe drinking water and sanitation, and decent work, as well as the development and increased coverage of social protection floors, and to closing the gender gap. It will support and advance participation as a relevant tool for good governance.

18. The EU reaffirms that all forms of trafficking in human beings, including of migrants and refugees, is a grave violation and abuse of human rights, a form of organised crime, and a threat to peace, democratic governance and the rule of law. It will continue to work in particular with the UN and the African Union to improve the protection of human rights of migrants and refugees, in Libya and elsewhere.
19. Furthermore, the EU underlines the need to protect effectively human rights, paying particular attention to the specific risks faced by those in vulnerable situations. It recalls that forced displacement often present complex challenges. Irregular migration can raise major challenges and can impact negatively on the countries of origin, transit and destination. The EU will continue to underline the importance of compliance with international refugee law including the principle of non-refoulement, the upholding of human rights law, and the obligation to protect people from trafficking in persons and other abuses, and remain steadfast in its commitment to guarantee the right to seek asylum. The EU remains fully engaged in the discussions on the UN Global Compacts based on the UN Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of September 2016. It recognises that States have a sovereign right to determine whom to admit to their territory and have rights and responsibilities to manage and control their borders as an important element of security for States in full compliance with their international obligations.
20. The EU will continue to condemn cases where the liberty and security of individuals or groups is disregarded, including confirmed situations of arbitrary arrest and detentions, as notably witnessed in Venezuela, in Eritrea, in China, in Turkey especially following and since the July 2016 attempted coup and in the Occupied Palestinian territory, including arbitrary arrest by Israel of Palestinian minors.

21. The EU will remain a staunch supporter of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression offline and online, including for journalists and bloggers, and of freedom of assembly and association worldwide, and continue to call on states including the Russian Federation, China, Bahrain, Burundi, Belarus, Sudan, Egypt, Turkey, Vietnam, Iran and the Democratic Republic of Congo to stop restricting these liberties, applying disproportionate legislation limiting them and unduly restricting space for civil society organisations. The EU will continue to condemn killings, acts of violence, intimidation and harassment against journalists and other media actors by state and non-state actors.
22. The EU calls on all countries, including Cambodia, Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Gabon, Togo, the Russian Federation, and Belarus to uphold their obligations regarding political freedoms, including the rights of the political opposition, the right to peaceful protest, the right to participate in public affairs and respect of democratic norms and the rule of law.
23. The EU will continue to promote freedom of religion or belief for all persons, strongly oppose religious intolerance, and strive for greater protection of persons belonging to religious and other minorities across the world against discrimination, persecution and violence. It will pursue its initiatives on freedom of religion or belief at the Human Rights Council and UNGA with a particular focus on the implementation of the commitments previously undertaken. The EU will continue to oppose worldwide all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It will continue to promote the principles of equality and non-discrimination in UN fora and in its external action, and to combat any discrimination based on any ground including sex, race, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity.

24. The EU will continue to take initiatives on upholding the rights of the child in UN fora, and engage with the wider UN membership to advance this priority, in particular the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including in the context of armed conflict, children living in poverty, and the elimination of all forms of violence, including bullying, and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
25. The EU will continue to cooperate with all stakeholders globally on initiatives to ensure the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including through national action plans, and to promote accountability for human rights violations and the need for effective remedy for all victims of human rights violations and abuses, welcoming peer learning opportunities on the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

