



European Union

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

23rd Session

(27 May – 14 June 2013)

Item 8

Statement by

H.E. Mr Gerard CORR

Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Ireland

on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 10 June 2013

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

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EU Statement

General Debate

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Follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Mr. President,

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

The following countries align themselves with this declaration: Croatia^{*}, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia^{*}, Montenegro^{*}, Iceland[†], Albania^{*} and Liechtenstein[‡] and Georgia.

This June, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights and the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. After twenty years, it remains as relevant as ever in guiding our efforts in responding to today's global human rights challenges. The European Union looks forward to celebrating this event by taking stock of the advances – and, where necessary, the current difficulties – in the promotion and protection of all human rights for all persons.

The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action contributed greatly to the protection of human rights through the encouragement of institutional development. Most importantly, in this respect, it laid the groundwork for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose 20th anniversary we are also celebrating this year. The European Union reaffirms that the Office is part of the UN Secretariat and must enjoy independence from States. The European Union attaches great importance to OHCHR's operational independence as the High Commissioner's effectiveness in

^{*} Accessing Country Croatia and the Candidate countries former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia as well as potential candidate countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

[†] Candidate Country Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

[‡] Norway and Liechtenstein are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

fulfilling her mandate to promote and protect human rights for all, requires that she be independent and politically impartial. The European Union cannot and will not support any attempt to interfere with OHCHR's operational independence. The European Union is also committed to contribute to the resources needed for effective fulfilment of OHCHR's mandate.

Mr. President,

The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action reminds us that – and I quote – “Special emphasis should be given to [...] strengthening of a pluralistic civil society.” In addition, the General Assembly emphasised that the VDPA had to be translated into action inter alia by non-governmental organizations. The European Union fully endorses the VDPA's emphasis on the indispensable role played by civil society, NGOs, Human Rights Defenders and journalists, to remind governments of their human rights obligations, to highlight violations of human rights and to support them in their implementation. Civil society reflects the plurality of voices that is the bedrock for any open and democratic society. States have the responsibility to ensure that those that speak up for human rights are protected.

Mr. President,

It is, therefore, a development of great concern to the European Union that by a number of governments, systematic action is being taken to suppress the legitimate activities of civil society, NGOs, human rights defenders and journalists. The European Union is seriously concerned about recent and on-going activities in Countries like the Russian Federation and Egypt that aim at suppressing the activities of NGOs. Attempts to outlaw NGOs, by way of legislation that runs counter to international human rights obligations, or by way of sham or arbitrary judicial proceedings, make a mockery of the rule of law and fly in the face of any open and democratic society that is committed to upholding the human rights of its citizens.

I thank you.

