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European Union

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Subject: Council Conclusions on EU priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2015

On 9 February 2015, the Council adopted the Council Conclusions on EU priorities at the UN Human Rights Fora in 201, as attached to this note.

**Council Conclusions on
EU priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2015**

1. The EU is deeply committed to the realisation of universal and indivisible human rights. The EU reaffirms its strong commitment to the role and work of the United Nations bodies tasked with the promotion and protection of human rights as spelt out in the EU Strategic Framework for Human Rights and Democracy.
2. Through close cooperation with all countries, institutions and stakeholders, the EU will participate actively at the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly sessions of 2015. The EU will express its concerns and positions, contribute to debates in a constructive manner and pursue thematic and country-specific initiatives.
3. The EU welcomes the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. The dedication and work of the High Commissioner and his staff are invaluable to human rights efforts worldwide. The EU will continue to support and defend the independence and integrity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
4. The EU will continue to promote full cooperation with, and support to, the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, supporting their free and unfettered cooperation with relevant interlocutors. The EU also reaffirms its commitment to the Universal Periodic Review and calls upon all countries to effectively and constructively cooperate with this mechanism. The EU restates its unwavering support for the independence and impartiality of the UN Human Rights Treaty Body system so it is able to fulfil its mandate.

5. The UN is a vital forum for international action against human rights violations and abuses. The EU is committed to working at the UN to prevent and respond to such violations and abuses, and to fight persistent discrimination and violence. As such, the EU remains extremely concerned by the situations in Iraq and Syria and will ensure that they are addressed in the strongest terms in the UN human rights fora. The EU condemns the brutal atrocities perpetrated by ISIL/Da'esh and in particular those against women and girls, and vulnerable groups, and calls for an immediate end to all human rights violations and abuses. In Syria, the ongoing grave human rights violations and abuses, committed in particular by the Assad regime, and terrorist groups, demand accountability and an end to impunity, including through the Commission of Inquiry.
6. The human rights impact of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and of the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation will also be brought to the fore. The EU is concerned by the growing number of victims and serious human rights violations and abuses in the eastern Ukraine and further deterioration of the human rights situation in Crimea, particularly the continuing persecution and intimidation of the Crimean Tatars. Moreover the EU will continue to call on all parties to the crisis in eastern Ukraine to respect international humanitarian law and principles to protect civilians.
7. In view of the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the EU strongly supports the investigatory work conducted by the Commission of Inquiry and will ensure follow-up to its report and recommendations. Deeply concerned by the continuing human rights violations and the high rate of executions in Iran, the EU will continue to call for tangible improvement and support the extension of the Special Rapporteur's mandate.

8. Following the consensus UN General Assembly resolution on Myanmar/Burma, which reflects progress made as well as the remaining concerns, the EU will continue to call for human rights improvements in the country. While welcoming the commitments announced by the new Sri Lankan government on rule of law and reconciliation, the EU will encourage the government to work with the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Council to address ongoing human rights concerns and make credible domestic progress on reconciliation.
9. The EU calls on all parties in the conflict in the Central African Republic to end attacks against the civilian population and to implement the resolution of the HRC Special Session. The EU will press for an adequate and effective response from the HRC to the worrying state of affairs in South Sudan, where hostilities have led to large-scale human rights violations. The EU will continue to support the HRC's efforts to address the worrying human rights situation in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, and Mali.
10. The EU will refer to persistent violations of human rights in Belarus and therefore seek renewal of the UN Special Rapporteur's mandate and call for the unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. The EU will also continue to pay close attention to the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Taking into account developments on the ground the EU will also, when appropriate, draw attention to the situation of human rights in other countries.

11. The United Nations is the central forum for defending and advancing the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ensuring that they are fully observed. The right to freedom of opinion and expression online and offline will continue to be upheld by the EU as a fundamental human right and cornerstone of democracy and peace. In view of recent cases of intimidation, persecution, and inhuman punishment, such as flogging, close attention will be paid to the safety of journalists, bloggers, and other media actors.
12. Freedom of association and assembly are key elements of democracy, and yet these freedoms are being restricted in many countries. The EU will continue to address these restrictions, as well as all forms of intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, and civil society representatives. Similarly, the EU will continue to ensure that multilateral fora remain open and safe spaces for these actors, and will speak out against any reprisal targeting those who cooperate with the UN human rights bodies.
13. The EU holds that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and we therefore firmly oppose all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, the EU notes the 50th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The EU reaffirms its strong opposition against all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. The EU will continue to work against all forms of discrimination, including antisemitism. The EU will also continue to advocate Freedom of Religion or Belief and will call for greater efforts to protect the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities.

14. Twenty years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action the EU is ever more engaged, in partnership with UN agencies, in the advancement of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and women's rights. We remain 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 International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights. As we also celebrate the 15th anniversary of UN Security Council resolutions 1325, the EU steps up its work on women and peace and security. The EU opposes all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence in armed conflict.
15. In accordance with its longstanding policy, the EU works to advance all rights of children worldwide, including the right to education, and to step up the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The EU is also engaged in the protection of girls from abuse and harmful practices. The EU will continue to foster international cooperation to address current challenges, including against the trafficking in human beings, which is a grave human rights violation and a severe form of organized crime.
16. Following the strong cross-regional support to the resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty at UNGA 69, the EU will continue to support the work of the UN towards the abolition of the death penalty worldwide. The EU will also pursue efforts to put an end to torture, and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment.

17. The year 2015 offers the international community a rare opportunity to agree on a truly transformational and comprehensive approach to poverty eradication and sustainable development worldwide. The EU will continue to call for a rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights, and gender equality, for the post-2015 agenda. We will also intensify our efforts to promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights. The EU will also contribute to the further implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

 18. The EU supports all efforts to mainstream human rights across the United Nations' work, including in development, and peace and security, as well as its ongoing efforts to prevent and to step up its responses to acute human rights crises. The EU will work in partnership with countries from all regions and regional organisations, including through the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, to actively support an effective UN human rights system that can foster the realisation of all human rights for all people everywhere.
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