



REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Statement by H.E. Mr. Alexandros N. Zenon
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
at the High-level Segment of the thirty-first session of the Human
Rights Council

Geneva, 1st March 2016

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Mr President, Mr High Commissioner, Ministers Ladies and Gentlemen,

“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government”, Thomas Jefferson has written. Two hundred years later, this remains as pertinent as ever and should be the fundament of our exertions.

Despicable acts of terrorism and armed conflict, indiscriminately targeting civilians, cause widespread loss of lives and constitute a direct affront to the values of our civilisation.

We have a moral, as well as a **legal** obligation to do our utmost to defend first and foremost the value of life, as all other rights are rendered meaningless the moment life perishes. The right to life is the most sacred human right.

Last year we commemorated the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Charter and the establishment of this Organisation. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Council.

We wish that upon these anniversaries, the world would be closer to the fulfillment of the aims of the UN Charter and of the Human Rights Council.

The picture though, is regrettably grim. The scourge of terrorism and violent conflict spread misery and death around the globe.

But this is not the time to despair.

This year's Session of the Council, should be an opportunity to set aside our differences, reaffirm our common values, our faith in the value of human life and fundamental human rights and determine a course of action in the light of current challenges.

It is also the occasion to praise and support the courageous work of human rights defenders all over the world, in view of the alarming tendency in some countries to repress civil society and to restrict the activities of NGOs.

Mr President,

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”.

Not only is the value of life enshrined in the UDHR, as in many other global and regional instruments, but **it is also universally sacred across religions.**

Yet, from the squares of Istanbul to the streets of Paris, from the marketplaces of Beirut to the villages of Nigeria or over the skies of the Sinai, terrorists are brutally taking innocent lives, abusing religion to justify their heinous crimes.

But terrorism does not stop there; today, it affects human life and dignity on a global scale **and with far-reaching consequences.** As His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan has aptly put it recently: *"Winning or losing this global war will shape global values and define our security and way of life long into the 21st century"*.

Blatant disregard for basic human rights and liberties is an everyday phenomenon in areas under the control of terrorist organisations.

Its destabilising impact on institutions, society and the economy can have long-term consequences on the enjoyment of human rights.

States **have an obligation to protect the lives and rights of their citizens;** this definitely necessitates measures to counter terrorism. But it is also our responsibility to ensure that such measures are

morally sound, proportionate and do not undermine rights and freedoms.

Reconciling civil liberties and national security is a fiendishly difficult task – but one to which we must pay utmost attention, for the repercussions of getting it wrong can be tremendous.

We must be careful not to create new, or exacerbate existing grievances and that we leave no margin for misinterpretation and abuse. Excessive measures may foster alienation, mistrust and feelings of injustice, and provide pretexts for exploitation by extremists.

In addition to security measures, it is indispensable to counter radicalisation and violent extremism within our societies.

Important as it is to adopt efficient and proportionate counter-terrorism measures, we also have to eliminate situations that serve as breeding ground for extremism, such as civil strife and lawlessness.

This is an additional reason as to why conflicts like the ones in Yemen, Libya and Syria must be resolved without further delay.

Especially with regard to our neighbouring Syria, my Government supports the efforts to establish a lasting ceasefire and an **inclusive**

political dialogue and urges all sides, directly or indirectly involved in the conflict, to seize every opportunity to achieve a solution as soon as possible. A solution that will eradicate terrorism and terminate the plight of innocent people, who are forced to leave everything behind to escape death.

Mr President,

During the current session of the Council, the annual Report on the question of human rights in Cyprus will be presented.

This report is of vital importance to my Government, since it highlights human rights violations in Cyprus, a result of the Turkish invasion, still taking place to date.

It is **regrettable** that, despite existing judgements of the European Court of Human Rights, finding Turkey guilty of continuous violations of the Convention of the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Cyprus, Turkey has so far failed to implement the Court's decisions.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are certainly aware that the two communities on the island have resumed negotiations, aimed at achieving a lasting settlement and that there has been significant progress on a number of issues.

This is reason for cautious optimism.

It should be stressed, however, that a lot of ground remains to be covered on some of the most difficult and sensitive aspects of the problem.

President Anastasiades remains fully committed and determined to continue working closely and sincerely with the Turkish Cypriot leader in order to reach a settlement.

One should bear in mind, though, that **however** much goodwill the two communities show, the active contribution of Turkey, which, **I remind**, maintains more than 40,000 troops on the island, is **indispensable** for a viable and lasting solution.

Mr President,

During this session Cyprus [– as part of a cross-regional core group]– will be presenting, under Item 8, a Statement on the impact of the destruction of cultural heritage on cultural rights, drawing the Council's attention to the worrying rise, **in frequency and scale**, of

destruction that occurs especially during, or in the aftermath of armed conflicts.

This Statement, coupled with a high-level panel discussion, aims at highlighting the human rights aspect of the problem.

Through enhanced cooperation with UNESCO and other international actors, the Statement also calls for innovative ways to be explored and best practices to be shared, in order to prevent or mitigate the impact of damage (and destruction) to cultural monuments on cultural rights.

I wish to call upon all Members and Observers of the Council to support this Statement, reaffirming the importance of cultural heritage, as a way to understand better our common past, and through it, our common destiny for the future.

Before closing, allow me to express my Government's sincere appreciation, in particular, to the High Commissioner and his Office, for their inspired leadership, to the Treaty Bodies, the Special Rapporteurs and Commissions of Inquiry, for their dedicated work and for gathering, processing and publishing vital information on the situation of human rights across the world.

I also wish to congratulate **you**, Mr. President, on your election and assure you that you can rely on the support of my Government in the execution of your mandate.

I thank you for your attention.