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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

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Subject: Council Conclusions on EU Priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2017
- Council conclusions (27 February 2017)

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on EU Priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2017, adopted by the Council at its 3521st meeting held on 27 February 2017.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON EU PRIORITIES
AT UN HUMAN RIGHTS FORA IN 2017**

1. The EU is strongly committed to the United Nations Human Rights system and will remain actively engaged at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Third Committee of the General Assembly to defend and promote the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of human rights. Consistent with EU support for a global order based on international and human rights law, as set out in the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, the EU will continue to draw the attention of these fora to human rights violations and abuses worldwide, and the need for accountability and to fight impunity. The EU will also seek to highlight positive experiences where action was taken to prevent or remedy human rights violations and abuses.
2. The EU reiterates its strong support for the dedication and work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office (OHCHR), whose integrity, independence and effective functioning in delivering his mandate we will continue to defend. The EU calls on all states to offer their full cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, including by ensuring mandate holders' unhindered access to and contact with individuals and civil society. It underlines the importance of the Universal Periodic Review and calls upon all countries to fully engage in and commit to this process. It will oppose any attempt to weaken the role and effectiveness of the Human Rights Council. Similarly the EU reaffirms its unwavering support for independent UN Human Rights Treaty bodies, and attaches great importance to the strengthening of their effective functioning. The EU restates the importance it attaches to the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and their Optional Protocols, and will continue to call for their universal ratification and implementation.

3. The EU remains seriously concerned at the persistence of human rights violations and abuses worldwide. It will continue to seek dialogue and cooperation with partners from all regions to ensure that the UN bodies pursue an ambitious thematic agenda and address the gravest human rights situations around the world, clearly condemning in the strongest terms human rights violations and abuses, including violence and discrimination. The EU will continue to staunchly support the ICC, which is a key institution for holding perpetrators to account and assisting victims in achieving justice for the most serious crimes, where investigations or prosecution is not possible at the national level.
4. Human Rights NGOs and human rights defenders play an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU will give high priority to the promotion of a safe and enabling environment for these NGOs and defenders to operate, including a focus on responding to the particular risks faced by women human rights defenders. The EU will speak out against harassment, intimidation or persecution, including violent attacks and killings of human rights defenders, journalists or bloggers, and promote the participation of civil society in UN Human Rights fora. It will continue to oppose the imposition of unjustified or disproportionate restrictions on the activities, registration, and access to funding of Human Rights NGOs and other civil society organisations.
5. The EU also commits its full support to the UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights in his efforts to put a stop to all intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the United Nations on human rights. It invites the UN Secretary General and the HRC President and its bureau to continue to follow up on specific cases brought to their attention. It will also prioritise the importance of respect for freedom of opinion, and freedom of expression offline and online, of association and assembly. The EU will be a strong advocate for the implementation of UNGA, UNSC and HRC Resolutions on the safety of journalists, especially focusing on fighting impunity, and will aim to address new threats to freedom of expression online and offline.

6. The EU reiterates the need to maintain a strong focus on efforts to advance the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. It underlines the importance of comprehensive and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, including the human rights dimension in areas such as health, education, food security, housing, water and sanitation, decent work, the development and increased coverage of social protection floors, and to closing the gender gap. The Council 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 this problem.
7. The dire human rights and humanitarian situation in Syria deserves the continuous full attention of the UN human rights bodies. The EU will condemn in UN fora the continued, systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies. It will continue to call for full unhindered humanitarian access, accountability for all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and access of the UN mandated Commission of Inquiry to all parts of Syria's territory. The EU will support the one year extension of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry and welcome further steps towards a swift operationalization of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. It recalls its conviction that the situation in Syria should be referred to the ICC and renews its call to the UN Security Council to take action in this respect.
8. Given the grave human rights situation and the lack of action by the government of the DPRK to stop the continuing violations of human rights and having taken note of the relevant discussion at the UN, including at the UN Security Council, the EU will continue working with Japan and other partners to draw attention to the human rights violations committed by the DPRK, and the need for the DPRK to fully and credibly engage with all the relevant UN human rights mechanisms, and implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, including on accountability.

9. Concerned by the ongoing violations of human rights in several regions of Myanmar/Burma, in particular against persons belonging to the Rohingya population in Rakhine State, the EU reiterates its call for the elimination of discrimination and persecution against persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, credible and independent investigations into reported human rights violations and abuses, accountability for all perpetrators of violence and hatred, and full humanitarian and observer access. It will support the adoption by the Human Rights Council of a resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, and closely follow developments in the country, as well as engage with the government and other partners to identify the best ways to address issues of concern. The EU will continue to highlight the importance of an OHCHR office being opened in the country.
10. The EU remains extremely concerned by the human rights situation in Burundi and will continue to closely follow developments on the ground as well as the first update to be issued by the newly-created Commission of Inquiry. It will continue to engage with the government of Burundi, African and like-minded partners, and consider appropriate additional steps should human rights violations and abuses persist.
11. Further to the special session of the Human Rights Council in December 2016 and appalled by the initial findings of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, in particular concerning violence against civilians and widespread cases of sexual and gender-based violence, the EU will engage at the Human Rights Council to end impunity and ensure accountability, and support the extension of the mandate of the Commission and its expansion to include investigation of all alleged violations of human rights and the call for South Sudan Government to appoint a Special Representative on Sexual Violence.
12. The EU remains concerned by the human rights violations and acts of repression in the DRC undermining the rule of law and restricting fundamental freedoms. It will continue to closely monitor the situation in the DRC, in particular in the context of the preparation of the elections and the challenging implementation of the transition agreement, to work with the country concerned and all relevant stakeholders, and intensify its cooperation with civil society.

13. The Council continues to be deeply worried by the situation of human rights in Eritrea, and will closely follow the updates to be provided by the Special Rapporteur as well as the cooperation of the government of Eritrea with the OHCHR and implementation of UPR recommendations.
14. The EU will work with the US and the African group to ensure the adoption by the Human Rights Council of a resolution reflecting the situation of human rights in Sudan and extending the mandate of the Independent Expert. It will engage with African partners to support continued Human Rights Council attention on Mali and the Central African Republic. Given the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in Yemen, the EU will continue to support independent investigation of all alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by all parties to the conflict. 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, Libya, and the occupied Palestinian territory. It will lend its full support to keeping Sri Lanka on the Human Rights Council agenda with a view to promoting reconciliation and accountability in the country.
15. In light of persisting human rights concerns and the high rate of application of the death penalty in Iran, and with a view to improving the human rights situation, the EU will again support the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and continue to call for her unhindered access. The EU remains concerned about the high rate of application of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, especially to minors or adults for actions they committed as minors, and about a hardening of the stance on human rights activists.

16. The EU does not recognize and continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. In light of the deeply concerning human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula and the serious human rights violations and abuses linked to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the EU will continue to support initiatives led by Ukraine addressing these issues within the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, as well as to lend full support to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. It will continue to call for the unrestricted access to Crimea and eastern Ukraine by established regional and international human rights monitoring mechanisms in order to overcome the current obstacles impeding them from carrying out their mandate. The overall strengthening of the rule of law also remains of fundamental importance for the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine.
17. While taking note of some progress including the resumption of the human rights dialogue between the EU and Belarus, the EU will continue to follow the human rights situation in Belarus closely. In particular, the EU is gravely concerned about the continued application of the death penalty and continues to discuss these concerns with Belarus. It urges the Belarusian authorities to reinstate the rights of former political prisoners, end limitations on the freedom of expression, association and assembly, and eliminate all obstacles to the exercise of a free and independent media.
18. The EU is fully committed to promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in its dialogue with partners held in the framework of the revised ENP, in particular with countries with which new partnership priorities are negotiated.
19. As a firm and longstanding advocate of the abolition of the death penalty, the EU is opposed to the death penalty whenever and wherever it is used. The EU will continue to speak out against executions particularly in the case of mass executions or when the death penalty is applied to offences committed by those under 18. The EU will continue to draw attention to violations of 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.

20. The absolute prohibition of torture in all circumstances is inscribed in international human rights law. 30 years after the UN Convention against Torture entered into force, fighting torture remains a major human rights challenge, a human rights priority for the EU, and one of our main objectives is to achieve universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.
21. The EU will continue to uphold the rights of the child in UN fora, and engage with the wider UN membership to advance this priority. At the Human Rights Council, the resolution will address the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while the General Assembly will deal with the issue of violence against children. In that context, the EU will seek to address urgent issues relating to the two topics, including the issue of children deprived of liberty, the protection of children against all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including in the context of armed conflicts, the protection of girls as well as boys from child, early and forced marriage, and from other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Furthermore, the EU again strongly condemns the abuses of human rights perpetrated by terrorist groups against women and children, including the attacks targeting children by Boko Haram in Africa, and the atrocities committed by Daesh, and seeks accountability for these violations.
22. The EU will continue to promote freedom of religion or belief, strongly oppose religious intolerance, and call for greater protection of persons belonging to religious and other minorities against persecution and violence. It remains particularly concerned with persecution of and discrimination against persons belonging to religious minorities across the world.

23. The EU will continue to promote the principles of equality and non-discrimination, firmly opposing discrimination on any ground or status. In this context, in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, the EU will engage with the relevant special procedures, including the new Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and encourage States to be open to dialogue with them and grant them access. The EU will continue to oppose worldwide all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. It will continue to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in its external action, including their equal participation and social inclusion.
24. The EU will continue engaging in the consultations led by the President of the General Assembly on the possible measures to enable the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant UN bodies on issues affecting them.
25. The EU will remain actively engaged in international efforts to achieve gender equality; women's empowerment, and the advancement of women' 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 its Conclusions on Gender in Development of 26 May 2015, 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.

26. The EU is committed to the implementation of the New York Declaration for refugees and migrants of September 2016 and will support initiatives in UN human rights fora upholding the human rights of refugees and migrants. The EU will continue to underline the importance of compliance with international refugee law including the principle of non-refoulement. It reiterates that this is a shared commitment of all countries concerned to protect the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and all displaced persons, particularly bearing in mind the specific risks faced by women and vulnerable groups including children and persons with disabilities, in full compliance with international law. The Union remains steadfast in its commitment to guarantee the right to asylum.
27. The EU will continue to work with partners on the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including the encouragement of more states to adopt national action plans, and will engage in the work streams of the UN Working Group as well as OHCHR, including its Accountability and Remedy Project. While further legal developments are being discussed, the EU believes that much remains to be done to implement existing obligations to prevent abuses, and ensure access to remedy when abuses occur.
