

26th session of the Human Rights Council (10-27 June 2014)

Statement by Ireland under item 2 – Report of the High Commissioner

High Commissioner

Ireland aligns itself with the Statement delivered by Greece on behalf of the European Union.

We thank you for the Reports submitted by your Office and for your oral update to the Council today. Ireland will respond to those Reports – thematic and country-specific – throughout the session. But now, at the outset of our work - and nearing the end of your term as High Commissioner - we wish to make some broader comments in response to your statement.

Ireland greatly appreciates the dedication and leadership which you have brought to the role of High Commissioner. As the 6th and longest-serving High Commissioner, you have overseen many changes not alone in your Office but also within the wider international human rights architecture. Yet a constant touchstone throughout has been the **independence and impartiality of your Office**.

On this point, we note and whole-heartedly agree with your opening comments on the need to safeguard your Office from financial constraints or political influence.

For none of the States represented here in this Room can claim to be beyond reproach. The uncomfortable reality is that even though we commit to respect, promote and protect all human rights, we – all of us – face times where we fail to do so, in greater or lesser respects. It is vital, then, that at any given time, the High Commissioner is free to challenge us to recognise where we are failing; and to support us to do better. This constant and cooperative relationship offers the best hope for a community of States vigilant to and protective of all rights for all.

It is for this reason that Ireland attaches such importance to the independence of your Office, including the crucial point that - although it services this Council - it does not and should not answer to us in this forum in respect of budgeting or programme planning.

It is our clear view that this independence is a necessary guarantee to all States that the High Commissioner and Office will at all times remain free to act impartially, without political influence or double standards. We urge all States to provide practical support to this impartiality and non-selectivity of UN human rights activities by making an unearmarked contribution to the Office.

Concerning structural changes under your tenure, we look in particular to the **treaty body strengthening process** which came to fruition shortly after the last Council session, with adoption by the General Assembly of Resolution 68/268. Ireland is proud to have played a small part in this process through hosting the meeting of treaty body members which led to the 2009 Dublin Statement on the Treaty Body System Strengthening Process. The treaty bodies play a crucial role in holding us, the States, accountable and – increasingly – as standard-setting bodies. With these reforms, we look forward to increased efficiency and

effectiveness and particularly welcome your comments this morning that the cost-saving measures envisaged will help to finance the process to the tune of 20 million dollars.

Although that is a very positive development, other challenges remain. We note the areas of **future challenge** which you identified for us to consider, including prevention of mass human rights violations; business and human rights; privacy and surveillance and climate change. To this list we would add the need for protection of **civil society space**- not alone in our domestic spheres, but here in the UN and Human Rights Council too.

High Commissioner,

Ireland welcomes the commitment of your Office, as expressed today, to improved UN responses to early warning of human rights crises. In that regard we strongly welcome the increasing requests of the Security Council to OHCHR for information and advice on human rights issues. The range of your recent reports and briefings to the Security Council – including most recently Central African Republic, Syrian Arab Republic, Libya, Mali and South Sudan – is impressive and we hope that this level and quality of interaction between the Security Council and the Office will continue as a concrete expression of the interdependence of human rights and peace and security.

We are acutely conscious of the need for the importance accorded to human rights in the Charter – where it stands as one of three pillars of the UN – to be reflected equally in the organisation's structures and activities. This process of **bringing human rights from the margins to the mainstream** has been a long one. It has required advances in our theoretical understanding of human rights and international law as well as practical, functional changes in the organisation.

Although the language may have changed, we see this imperative reflected across many of the initiatives and innovations of the UN system, beginning with creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 1993, a mere 20 years ago. Building on that foundation, we recall

- the reform process initiated in 1997 by former Secretary General Annan and related mainstreaming efforts of then-High Commissioner Robinson;
- the conceptual leap brought to us by UNDP in 2000 with release of its Report on Human Rights and Development;
- the 2005 World Summit Outcome, System-Wide-Coherence and the 'Delivering as One' approach; and
- today, the "Rights Up Front" initiative of Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

We welcome and support the blending of both mainstreaming and the preventative agendas in the "Rights Up Front" Plan of Action; and will fully support your Office in its efforts to participate in that initiative.

High Commissioner

6 persons have now held the role of High Commissioner. Each has faced his or her own challenges and each has left his or her mark on the Office. Beginning with Jose Ayala-Lasso of Ecuador; Ireland's own Mary Robinson; the late and much missed Sergio Vieira de Mello

of Brazil; Bertrand Ramcharan of Guyana; Louise Arbour of Canada; and you, Navi Pillay of South Africa – it is a roll-call of the highest distinction.

Ireland thanks you for your service, for your unflagging integrity and for the significant legacy which you leave behind including a reinvigorated Office, run on the solid and measurable basis of Results-Based Management.

Thank you