

**Human Rights Council – 26<sup>th</sup> session (10-27 June 2014)**

**Statement by Ireland under agenda item 8 –**

**Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**

**24 June 2014**

Mr. President,

Ireland aligns itself with the Statement made on behalf of the European Union and makes the following additional comments.

The human rights landscape was significantly altered by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Its importance persists today although, unfortunately, despite our clear agreement and the passage of 21 years, some of its elements are yet to be fully realised.

The importance of the Declaration in institutional terms is well known – mainstreaming of human rights and the creation of the role of High Commissioner for Human Rights both arose following calls in the Vienna Declaration. Ireland, in our statement under item 2, spoke of the role and crucial independence of that Office and so we will today focus on some other key aspects.

Mr President

This week, UNHCR confirmed that the number of displaced persons worldwide is now at its highest level since the Second World War. 51.2 million people around the world are now internally displaced or living as refugees, an increase of fully 6 million people on the previous year.

In that context, we recall the recognition in the Vienna Declaration that gross violations of human rights, including in armed conflicts, are among the multiple and complex factors leading to displacement of people. We echo the Declaration's call for safe and timely access for humanitarian assistance and for full respect for humanitarian law in all situations of armed conflict in all current conflicts[, including Syria.]

Second, Ireland recalls the recognition contained in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the important role of NGOs at the national, regional and international levels. The emphasis on dialogue and cooperation between Governments and NGOs was a key innovation in 1993 and remains as crucial today as it was then. Ireland, together with a core group of States, presented a new initiative at the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Council on civil society space, which has come under increasing pressure in recent years. Our view is that the commitment made at Vienna that NGOs should be being free to carry out their human rights activities without interference must extend to the creation and maintenance of an enabling environment for all civil society actors, without restrictions such as prohibition of foreign funding, which in some cases threatens the very existence of civil society organisations.

On a related point, as consistently pointed out by Ireland, the role and voice of NGOs in this Council is an important and a valid one. At its best, the Council serves as a platform for open

dialogue, for sharing opinions and experiences and – whether we agree or disagree with the opinions they put forward - the input of civil society is a vital component of that discussion.

Finally, Ireland recalls that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action put the universality of human rights beyond doubt. It states in the clearest possible terms that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. At Vienna we agreed that “it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms” and that promotion and protection of all human rights is “a legitimate concern of the international community”.

These fundamental statements underpin the work we carry out here in the Council. Although we may differ in our cultures and our histories, none of us can credibly object to other States – or this Council – expressing concern in relation to the protection of human rights in our territories. Nor can any of us unwind the clock to argue that some rights, or some types of rights, take precedence over others.

And so, although ensuring respect for all human rights presents differing challenges for each State, depending on our histories and legal systems; and although we all have room for improvement, the reality of our undertakings at Vienna is that where a conflict arises with our national or regional cultures or traditions, it is the universality of human rights which must prevail.

Thank you