

Eighth Budapest Human Rights Forum

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OPENING STATEMENT

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I'd like to thank you, Minister of State Mikola and Minister Szijarto, and your great team here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary for organizing and hosting this Eighth Budapest Human Rights Forum, and for inviting me to speak here today.

We live in turbulent, tense and troubling times.

Yet there is one steady constant, as there has been over the past seven decades, and that is the United Nations' commitment to human rights as one of three pillars of its work, together with development and peace and security.

There is little doubt that precisely because we are experiencing turbulence and tension that tolerance and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights have never been so important.

So, it is appropriate and greatly appreciated that you have chosen to devote this opening segment to the UN contribution to the protection of human

rights since our organization was established in 1945.

As we all know, the opening words of the Charter of the United Nations say that “We the peoples of the United Nations” are determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

As we also all know, just three years after the Charter came into force the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, recognizing clearly that human rights and the rule of law must be the central priority for each and every country.

The Declaration has been at the heart of all the international human rights instruments that have emerged since, emphasizing fundamental principles and values that are necessary for sustainable development and peace.

While these universal values remain constant, it is also true that the United Nations human rights system has dramatically changed and evolved in the last seventy years.

International human rights treaties were adopted, along with bodies of independent experts to review and monitor compliance.

Intergovernmental bodies on human rights were established, with their wide-ranging human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review, which applies equally to all Member States; Austria just very recently and Hungary next year, for example.

And there is the system of special procedures – more commonly known as the “eyes and ears” of the human rights system.

There are 55 special procedures at the moment, about a quarter dealing with countries or territories and the rest with particular themes. The experts work independently and exhaustively, and often make waves.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Looking more broadly at the role of the United Nations; through intervention and mediation, many conflicts have been resolved or prevented. We have assisted and promoted independence and democratization in many countries.

There has been tremendous progress in recognizing and ensuring respect for the rights of previously marginalized groups. The United Nations defends human rights for all, regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender or sexual orientation.

Yet, we are now seeing global and multidimensional challenges that are testing the very foundations of the United Nations system.

Conflict and internal armed conflict, violent extremism, massive humanitarian emergencies, mass displacement, multiple refugee and migration crises, failed states, extreme poverty, persisting inequality and discrimination are having an impact on each and every region of the globe. A profound impact.

In the face of such challenges, we must not go backwards.

Instead we must respond through a strengthened commitment to reinforce the key international values and principles that were so clearly articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And the timeless values of the Charter must remain our guide.

In September in New York, world leaders took a bold step by adopting Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This puts people first, with a promise to leave no one behind and to protect the planet.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said, this new approach does not just add goals to the eight Millennium Development Goals.

Instead, this new, universal framework weaves the goals together, with human rights, the rule of law and women's empowerment as crucial parts of an integrated whole.

The fourth panel tomorrow at this Forum neatly reflects this approach too, with its focus on analyzing the human rights elements in Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

Your first panel later today on the Universal Periodic Review is a chance to discuss one of the most intriguing and practical instruments available to the international community to help improve human rights.

Last week I was in St. Petersburg at the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The conference brings together Member States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the business community every two years to discuss ways to improve the fight against corruption.

It is good to see that, in effect, a strand of that conversation will continue here in Budapest in the second panel at this Forum on human rights and business.

And the third panel on minorities and the media is equally relevant especially given the global need to tackle hate crimes and other forms of intolerance against marginalized communities.

Human rights abuses. Weak institutions. Inequality.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

These are among the drivers of conflict. We at the United Nations must clearly demonstrate that we can respond to these challenges.

The Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative is vitally important in this context because it places human rights front and centre as we respond to the complex peace and security environment.

Our response to the disturbing developments in Burundi is a vivid example of this at work.

Addressing the root causes of violations and providing adequate redress are central in preventing conflict or further escalation.

This is not a new vision for the United Nations. This is simply a recognition of what should be the priority building on seventy years of experience and looking ahead to the next seventy years.

So, this forum is an important opportunity to further build understanding.

The photo exhibition that we will see shortly also helps in that regard, illustrating the work of the United Nations, in the conference halls and in the field, over seven decades.

I'd like to thank the Ministry for hosting the display as part of your contribution to marking this anniversary.

I would also note that Hungarian school students have again this year been active participants in the annual Human Rights Short Film and Art competition, which features entries from Austria, Slovakia and Slovenia too.

Thank you once again, Minister, for the excellent initiative of holding this Forum.

Thank you. Köszönöm

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