Mr. Chair,

Norway would like to thank the President of the Human Rights Council for the way he has chaired the Council in 2013. In particular we would like to commend the leadership of the President in securing Israel's participation in its Universal Periodic Review last month. Based on this the universality and legitimacy of the Universal Periodic Review process has been confirmed.

We believe that the Human Rights Council has proven its relevance and ability. It is increasingly capable of addressing a wide range of important human rights challenges, to take decisions that can make a difference on the ground and to establish mandates that secure monitoring, analysis and policy making in many difficult and complex areas. Cross-regional agreement, often with consensus, on potentially controversial issues also demonstrates the ability of the Council.

Norway would like to draw attention to three examples:

Firstly, the continuous engagement of the Human Rights Council in following up the landmark UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly in 1998.

Adoption of several resolutions on protection of human rights defenders, on reprisals and on widening the space for civil society in 2013 demonstrates that the Council can take decisions to strengthen protection and reduce threats, attacks and acts of intimidation against human rights defenders and their families.

(Check against delivery)
Secondly, during the last two years the Council has established four new country mandates. This is a record number and strengthens the UNs ability to monitor and react to human rights crises in the relevant countries.

A third example is the Council’s endorsement in 2011 of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The consensus on States obligation to protect against corporate related human rights abuses combined with business responsibility to respect human rights provided a crucial drive for reforms in business and initiatives by governments to improve working and living conditions in all regions.

Mr. Chair,

We highly value the Human Rights Council as a forum with strong potential for fact-based cross-regional agreement on issues of increasing global importance. In certain areas Norway would have liked to see far stronger decisions by the Human Rights Council, including on protection and promotion of rights of women and LGBT-persons and on country specific human rights crisis.

As the Council is taking on an increasing number of issues and creating an unprecedented number of new mandates, the ability of its secretariat, the OHCHR, and of states to follow up these initiatives in Geneva and in the field, is not developing in the same pace. The chronic under-funding of the third pillar upon which the United Nations was founded is well known. At the same time further cuts are proposed in the regular budget of the OHCHR.

We are particularly concerned by the OHCHR’s extensive and increasing dependence on voluntary contributions, including for mandatory activities and field operations. The UN membership has a responsibility to ensure that OHCHR – a key institution for promoting and protecting human rights in the UN system – can fulfill its mandate in the light of increasing demands.

Norway is also concerned that the Council agenda is increasingly filling up, to the extent that States with normal sized missions are unable to follow up the discussions and informal consultations in a suitable manner. The number of panel debates and inter-active dialogues is rapidly increasing, together with record-breaking numbers of resolutions in 2013. This situation is not sustainable and could damage the quality of the Council’s work. This will have to be addressed by States in the coming year.

The Human Rights Council has in many respects become a success, and this development has continued under the leadership of the current President. The challenges that come with success should be addressed. The 20th anniversary of the Vienna declaration and the establishment of the OHCHR is an excellent opportunity to strengthen the UNs engagement in protecting and promoting human rights.

Thank you.