68th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commemoration of the sixty fifth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

African Group Statement

Delivered by H. E. Mr. MAMADOU TANGARA
Ambassador, Permanent Representative

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Mr Chairman

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 54 Members States of the African Group. Today as we commemorate the sixty fifth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this important meeting gives us an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the Universal Declaration to humanity.

The African Group would like to reaffirm its strong commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. Africa’s commitment is shown through the achievements of the African Union in the field of human rights, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights adopted in 1981, the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the creation of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights under a Protocol to the Charter adopted in 1998 and the African Peer Review Mechanism, which reviews the progress of African States in the protection and promotion of human rights.

The achievements that have emanated from the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are undeniable. The Universal Declaration affirmed the universal values that are shared by all and established the basic standards in the field of human rights, which led to many subsequent regional and international instruments.

Mr Chairman

The African Group reaffirms its conviction that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and reiterates the need for the international community to treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis.

The African Group is convinced that the values enshrined in the Declaration called for moral, legal and political action to promote the realization of freedom, equality and dignity for all human beings.

The African Group would like to emphasize that tolerance and respect for cultural diversity are important to facilitate the enjoyment of all human rights by all. The African Group opposes all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief; it condemns all acts of violence falsely claimed by perpetrators to be done in the name of religion and reaffirms that terrorism could not and should not be associated with any religion, nationality,
civilization or ethnic group. Overall, inter-religious dialogue and a culture of peace should be promoted in such a way as to foster unity for all peoples and mankind, with due respect to all cultures and religions.

The Group is concerned by the increasing trend aiming to create new rights, concepts and categories and standards that are not recognized in the international human rights instruments, neither universally agreed by UN Member States. The Group asks therefore for the full respect of national sovereignty and cultural values, the ability of all societies to make choice in a democratic way for what is acceptable for them.

The African Group reaffirms that the enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights is essential to the full achievement of the purposes of the Universal Declaration. In this context, progress in the field of human rights should be achieved through cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect. The exploitation of human rights as an instrument for political purposes should be prohibited.

Mr Chairman

Despite all the progress achieved, there are still too many men and women deprived of their fundamental rights. Many phenomena, such as neo-colonialism, poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, hunger, discrimination, racism and religious intolerance continue to prevail. All these issues should be addressed in order to ensure dignity and justice for all.

The fate of peoples under foreign occupation and colonial or alien domination should not be forgotten, and their right to self-determination and its exercise remains valid and essential.

The African Group expresses equally its full adherence to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference. The African Group attaches great importance to the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and advocates that economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights should be treated equally.

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development, known as NEPAD, is a cornerstone initiative towards this purpose, as it aims to promote and protect the social and economic rights of African people. The right to development needs to be recognized as an essential and integral part of human rights and
fundamental freedoms. The right to development is an inalienable human right, from which all countries and individuals should benefit.

The African Group stresses the urgency of addressing extreme poverty around the world. It is the belief of the African Group that the international community cannot continue to speak highly of our success in promoting human dignity while millions of our fellow human beings are still struggling in extreme poverty. The international community cannot continue to talk about success in advancing social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom when millions of people around the world are still struggling daily, in search of the basic needs, such as food, safe drinking water and sanitation, shelter and basic health care.

It is thus very important that the international community do all it can to advance the right to development as a process towards the effective fulfilment of human potential. More attention should further be paid to economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to life, the right to food, the right to safe drinking water and basic sanitation and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and international cooperation should be promoted in this regard.

The developed countries should to this end do more to honor their commitments in terms of development assistance, technology transfer, debt reduction and market access so as to create favourable conditions for the effective promotion of universal realization of the right to development.

Furthermore, the African Group recommends the integration of the economic, social and cultural rights and the rights to development to be a top priority in the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Mr Chairman

The African Group would like to express once again the importance of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up. Moreover, the Group is alarmed by the increase of acts of racial discrimination, including the challenges faced by the migrant women, men and children. Hatred speeches, political measures for exclusion have become tools of political leaders and parties. Measures should be taken to ensure safe and legal migrations in order to avoid tragedy such as the latest boat tragedy off
the coast of Lampedusa. Governments should refrain from devising new methods of exclusion.

The African Group attaches great importance to the Human Rights Council and its added value. We also attach great importance to the Universal Periodic Review and underline the central role that this mechanism should play and in enhancing constructive dialogue and cooperation between Members States and in bringing about the realization all of human rights for all. It has demonstrated its added value by the commitment of all States to the review and the acceptance of many recommendations formulated during this exercise.

Mr Chairman

Human rights education constitutes an essential contribution to the prevention of human rights abuses over the long term. It represents an important investment in the endeavour to achieve a just society, in which all human rights of all persons are valued and respected. Human rights education promotes values and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone’s common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community. In this context, the African Group wishes to express its support for all initiatives aimed at ensuring the education and human rights learning and looks forward to contributing in the elaboration of the Plan of Action of the third phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

In addition, particular attention should be devoted to enhancing the capacity-building of developing countries, at their request, in the field of human rights.

I would like to conclude my statement by reaffirming the commitment of the African Group to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which remains the common standard of achievement for all peoples. We will continue to support the efforts of the international community in the promotion and protection of all human rights around the world.

I thank you Mr Chairman