Mr. Chair,

Norway would like to thank the President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Baudelaire Ndong Ella, for the way he has chaired the Council in 2014 and for presenting this year’s HRC report. The Human Rights Council has continued to be relevant and able to make important decisions. Cross-regional agreements and alliances increase the relevance and credibility of the Council, and this way of conducting its business has become the rule rather than the exception. On several potentially contentious issues, the Council manages to achieve consensus.

This year, Norway negotiated the extension of two mandates at the HRC. We are grateful for the co-sponsorship of a record number of countries from all regions in March, for the resolution that extended the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders. We also thank states for their support in achieving consensus for prolonging the
mandate of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights through a resolution that also addressed important issues such as remedies for victims of human rights abuses carried out by States and business. We were glad to see that several other resolutions adopted this year also included language on protection of human rights defenders, on condemning reprisals and on widening the space for civil society.

Unfortunately, these gains in the normative sphere of the Council have not been translated in an improved situation for Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders several places in the world, and in many countries their space is shrinking. We are also appalled to note that threats, attacks and acts of intimidation continue against many of those who cooperate or seek to cooperate with the UN, including the Human Rights Council and its Mechanisms. Reprisals cause pain and suffering, but also undermine the credibility of the UN, and its ability to carry out its work. This shameful practice needs a firmer response from the UN and member states. We acknowledge the role of the HRC president in such issues, and the need to take a principled and vocal stance. We have high expectations also for the General Assembly in this regard, and urge the speedy implementation of last year’s important HRC resolution 24/24 on reprisals.

Mr. Chair,

We were very pleased that the Council adopted a resolution on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity during the September session. Only the second in history, this year’s resolution was adopted with a great majority, gaining the support from new countries. We thank Colombia, Uruguay, Brazil and Chile for their leadership.

The Universal Periodic Review still maintains a 100 per cent participation rate from States. This year, Norway was one of the countries to undergo the review, and we again found it extremely helpful in addressing important issues, and guiding in human rights implementation in our own country.
Complementing the UPR mechanism, the Council proved once again that it does not shy away from raising serious human rights situations when needed. In 2014, this included an African lead initiative to establish a Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea, a cross regional effort to establish an OHCHR lead investigation on Sri Lanka, as well as three special sessions. We also saw a steady demand for country specific resolutions and initiatives from States on their own situation, attesting to the growing positive reputation of the Council and its ability to set in motion action to support countries’ efforts in promoting human rights.

Mr. Chair,

Norway is concerned by effects of the heavy workload on the Council as it takes on an increasing number of issues and creates an unprecedented number of new mandates. The ability of its secretariat, the OHCHR, and of States to follow up is not developing in the same pace. The chronic under-funding of the Human Rights Pillar – in theory one of three main UN pillars - is well known. Receiving only 3 % of the regular budget, it is unsustainable that the OHCHR now instead of expanding has to cut posts.

UN member states have a responsibility to ensure that OHCHR – a key institution for promoting and protecting human rights in the UN system and in supporting the Human Rights Council – can fulfill its mandate in the light of increasing demands.

While recognizing several successes, Norway is concerned also that the Council agenda is increasingly filling up, to the extent that it could damage the quality of its work. While not aiming to stifle the innovativeness of States, there may be a further need to reduce the frequency of certain resolutions, panels or debates. We hope to engage with States from all regions in further discussions on this matter in the coming year.

Thank you.