Statement on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 20 March 2015

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The UN General Assembly proclaimed this day in remembrance of the massacre that took place 55 years ago in Sharpeville, South Africa, where 69 people were killed and many others injured during a peaceful protest against apartheid.

This month, we also commemorate another significant event in history, the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama. It was there on March 7, 1965, on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, that state troopers violently attacked a peaceful civil rights march.

Today, we join in expressing our solidarity with present and past victims of racism and racial discrimination. We pay tribute to inspirational leaders like Nelson Mandela, who courageously led the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and Martin Luther King Jr., who led thousands of peaceful demonstrators in the historic voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery. We also pay tribute to the ordinary people who made extraordinary contributions and helped to sustain these movements against racial discrimination. These collective efforts have been crucial in the global fight against racism and in the development of both international and national frameworks aimed at the elimination of racial discrimination.

Mr. President,

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In 1965, it was the first core international human rights treaty and today with 177 States Parties, the convention is nearly universally ratified. The independent experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination play an essential role in monitoring the implementation of the Convention and in helping States as they adopt policies aimed at combating racism and racial discrimination.

Over the past 50 years progress has been made in the fight against racial discrimination. Yet, we must acknowledge that racism and racial discrimination are still embedded in all societies and that in some instances tensions run high and require us to take urgent action. History has proven time and again that racism and racial discrimination threaten the very foundations of societies and leave a damaging impact on generations. We must learn from past tragedies and redouble our efforts to combat racism today. We need to ensure the effective implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and honour our commitments.
On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, let us embrace tolerance and join together to put an end to racial discrimination wherever it occurs. Let us reaffirm the fundamental principle that is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.