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Statement
by
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of the Republic of Croatia
to the United Nations

at the

Third Committee of the
68th Session of the UN General Assembly,
Agenda item 69: Promotion and protection
of human rights
d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up
to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of
Action

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Mr Chairman,

Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, as reaffirmed by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted in 1993 as the outcome of the World Conference on Human Rights. The 20th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action represents an opportunity to assess the progress that has been achieved since the adoption of this far-reaching document. We are looking at obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Vienna commitments. We are exploring ways to improve human rights education, strengthen national capacity and institution-building and address special concerns such as the human rights of women and other vulnerable groups - indigenous peoples, minorities and persons with disabilities.

Mr Chairman,

Today, we are faced with systematic degradations and violations of human rights, suppression of political rights, stalled attempts at post-conflict reconciliation, outbursts of violence and the worrying re-emergence of xenophobia and nationalism in an alarmingly increasing number of countries. It is clear that there are many places where our eyes should not remain blind, our ears never deaf.

For that reason the capacity to monitor the global implementation of the human rights norms is the responsibility of all of us. Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action represent an essential cornerstone of our endeavours to improving human rights worldwide.

Mr Chairman,

Today, many people are unemployed or are working hard but cannot live off their work. Economic, social and cultural rights cannot be separated from political and civil rights - the need for food and water, for health and housing is a prerequisite to human dignity. As the economic and financial crisis continues to unfold across the world, we are witnessing a wave of drastic
social cuts, and a worrying trend of reforms introduced in order to contain budget deficits. Many of these policy changes carry the risk of potential regressions in the achieved levels of economic, social and cultural rights.

Therefore, it is imperative that we take into consideration the potential impacts of economic downturns on those people who are already living in precarious and marginalized situations, such as women and children, minorities, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. Crises deepen poverty and worsen income inequality in a number of ways and we know that when the economic situation gets rough the poor suffer disproportionately more than well-to-do. We need to know that austerity measures alone may not work to address economic problems. Human rights issues including education, employment, and in general the opportunity of a life in dignity, as well as transparency, accountability, and good governance must not be neglected.

Mr Chairman,

We are living in a world with an increasing accountability for human rights violations. There is a considerably greater expectation nowadays than twenty years ago that international human rights treaties are not just aspirational norms, but fundamental obligations that have to be translated into reality at the national level. Most countries have domestic human rights offices or human rights ombudsmen. Most countries have ratified majority of the key human rights treaties. The International Criminal Court is gearing up to investigate some of the worst atrocities. Today, there is no doubt that an overwhelming majority of people in the world we live in support the human rights ideal. Our task is to mobilize that majority into a force too powerful to be overlooked.

That majority should never allow the use of arguments based on religion, tradition and cultural practices to justify violence, discrimination and violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms. Possible attempts to justify human rights violations by relying on cultural conventions could undermine international human rights agreements, especially relating to
women's and LGBT rights, as well as the very basic principle of universality and indivisibility of human rights.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, allow me to express our great appreciation for devoted and very important contribution of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in addressing human rights crises and deteriorating situations throughout the globe. Croatia supports the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner, which has significantly enhanced the profile and dissemination of human rights within the United Nations system and on the ground. We commend the quality of the work carried out by her Office, and fully support the High Commissioner in her continued efforts to pursue her task efficiently and with integrity.

Thank you.