STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR GUILLERMO E. RISHCHYNSKI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, TO THE THIRD COMMITTEE ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

OCTOBER 30, 2013

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Canadians seek a world where freedom including freedom of religion, the rule of law, democracy and human dignity are respected.

Whilst significant progress has been made, voices are marginalized, persecution and violence against individuals and communities continue. These remind us that we need to continue to work together, and we are hopeful that we can find common ground.

The grave state of human rights in Iran has been a subject of international concern for many years. Canada welcomes the more conciliatory tone and approach of the new Iranian president, and we note Iran’s release of a small number of political prisoners. All of us, who have long held profound concerns about the Iranian government’s ruthless oppression of its own people, want to believe that Iran is genuinely committed to positive change at home and in its foreign relations. But, we must judge Iran by its deeds, not its words. Women continue to face serious discrimination in law and practice. Iran’s ethnic and religious minorities continue to face disproportionate discrimination by authorities. Over 100 members of the Baha’i faith alone remain imprisoned on charges related to the practice of, and organizing for, their religion and advocating for their rights. The Iranian authorities continue to place serious restrictions on the rights of their citizens, including by severely limiting freedom of assembly, freedom of opinion, freedom of association and freedom of expression.

We work with the international community to urge Iran to respect the rights and dignity of the Iranian people.

The people of Syria continue to face unfathomable hardships. Canada strongly condemns the ongoing, widespread violations of human rights. Of particular concern are the chemical weapon attacks orchestrated by the Syrian regime against the Syrian people. These are weapons that indiscriminately kill innocent and combatant alike, weapons that the Syrian government itself promised never to use. The deliberate targeting of civilians and the obstruction of humanitarian activities in conflict-affected areas of Syria is unacceptable. Canada calls urgently on all parties to the conflict to cease attacking civilians and other protected persons. We fully support the United Nations Security Council October 2, 2013 statement calling on the Assad Regime to take immediate steps to facilitate access for humanitarian workers and the expansion of humanitarian relief operations. We further remind all parties of their obligations under international law to ensure the protection of civilians during armed conflict.

Canada and Canadians are deeply disturbed by the existence in North Korea of total control zones and labour camps, and the use of collective camps and coercive measures that target the rights of persons with disabilities including forced medical testing, the practices of arbitrary detention, forced abortions,
intergenerational punishment, indefinite holding of political prisoners, mistreatment of workers and lack of overall freedom, including freedom of religion. We demand that the regime put an immediate end to the abuse of its citizens. While the average North Korean continues to suffer under the yoke of oppressive Kim dictatorships, the regime propagates absurdities, removed from reality. It is difficult to imagine a place that has for so long had so little freedom. Canada calls on all countries to fully implement UN Security Council sanctions against the rogue regime in Pyongyang.

Mr. Chair,

Our collective efforts will achieve results when we all respect our international obligations and undertake efforts to bring about much needed changes.

There are areas where we can all work together more to promote freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and Canada will continue to be at the forefront of these efforts.

Canada remains very concerned by rising restrictions on freedom of religion and belief around the world. Earlier this year we opened an Office of Religious Freedom to promote freedom of religion as a foreign policy priority. The Office is a priority for the Government in response to increased targeting of religious communities in different parts of the world, characterized not only by a rise in social hostilities, but also by increasing government restrictions on those expressing religious belief, both individually and collectively as members of religious communities.

We stress that the role of governments is central to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief. However, we remain concerned by government actions in many parts of the world to actively curtail this human right or government inaction that allows violations to occur in wider society.

Canada's Foreign Minister, John Baird, emphasized that we must ensure women have the opportunity to participate fully in all parts of our society, in all countries. A stronger, more secure, more prosperous and more peaceful world is built on this. But, girls and women remain at greater risk of being exposed to various forms of violence.

Canada acknowledges the tremendous work undertaken by Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani activist whose courage, perseverance and dedication to universal education for girls and boys are an inspiration to Canadians and the rest of the world. Since recovering from the vicious Taliban attempt on her life, Miss Yousafzai has rallied millions worldwide around her cause and vividly illustrates the enduring power of education as a force for peace. In recognition of her achievements, Canada will bestow an honorary citizenship on Miss Yousafzai.

Child, early, and forced marriage is of significant concern for Canada. This practice disrupts girls' access to education, and severely jeopardizes their health. Canada has committed to intensifying our diplomacy and development work to end child, early, and forced marriage in every corner of the world. As part of these efforts, Canada is leading the first-ever stand-alone resolution on child, early, and forced marriage at the UN General Assembly this year, that will set the stage for future discussion and initiatives toward eliminating this practice. We appreciate the support we have received so far for this resolution, particularly from Zambia and the core group of co-sponsors, and encourage you all to join us in supporting this resolution, and working towards eradicating child, early, and forced marriage and advancing the rights of girls.
Roughly 40% of UN member States have laws that criminalize same-sex relations among consenting adults in private. While some of these laws are not enforced, others are actively implemented. Canada calls on all States to decriminalize homosexuality and to confront crimes and violence targeting people based on their sexual orientation.

Mr. Chair,

Together we can work to advance human rights and fundamental freedoms, and realize the full potential of the Universal Declaration.

Canada is committed to its partnership with the international community.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.