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Third Committee

Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

Agenda Item 69 (b) & (c)

Statement by
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Mr. Chairman,

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and, in its national capacity, wishes to make some additional remarks.

Allow me first to commend the valuable work carried out by the special procedure mandate-holders and to thank them for their in-depth reports on various fields of human rights. Their work is essential for the promotion of human rights around the world and I would like to reaffirm our unreserved support to their mission. Last year, we received visits by Mr. François Crépeau (Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants), the Working Group for arbitrary detentions, and Mr. Cephas Lumina (Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights).

Moreover, we firmly support the work and the role of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the independence, impartiality and expertise of the human rights treaty body system.

Greece has always strived for the effective implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and applicable rules and provisions of human rights and humanitarian law, both at national and international levels. Beyond being legally binding rules, human rights are the essence of human dignity and, as such, their respect is a substantial element of our society and the basis for human co-existence. It is obvious that these conditions cannot be achieved without sustained efforts on the part of States, international and regional organizations, as well as an active interaction with civil society, which plays an increasingly important role in the promotion of human rights.

There is certainly much to be done to ensure that tangible improvements can be achieved to alleviate the plight of those in need of international human rights protection; regional and international cooperation are indispensable to address widespread abuses of human rights. In this context, we believe that along with the important contribution of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations in general, and the General Assembly in particular, play a vital role in dealing with human rights violations and in effectively promoting human rights.

Greece will present its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2017-2019. If elected, my country will aim at tackling various challenges by working in a spirit of cooperation, transparency and constructive dialogue with all UN organs and member states, convinced of the merits of a consensus based approach. We have supported the reinforcement of the role of the Human Rights Council as the key intergovernmental body responsible for advancing human rights within the UN system and for strengthening UN member-states' ability to fulfil their human rights obligations effectively. And this, through technical assistance, interregional dialogue and, where appropriate, exchange of know-how best practices.

The promotion of democratic institution-building and the respect of the rule of law, as prerequisites for sustainable development, the promotion of freedom of religion or belief and religious tolerance, as well as the protection of religious minorities during armed conflict or social unrest, the combat against racial discrimination, xenophobia and racism, together with the empowerment of women and the mainstreaming of the disabilities agenda in the UN system, all these will be our focus during our membership.
We should ensure full enjoyment of human rights for all, therefore, on our part, we are already in the process of elaborating the first National Action Plan of Greece on Human Rights, aiming at promoting a human rights-based approach to all our policies, through a relevant comprehensive strategy.

Mr. Chairman,

Greece remains fully aware of its primary human rights obligations, with the constant aim to maintain a free, nondiscriminatory and democratic society. The authorities have undertaken a number of initiatives towards safeguarding all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons residing in the country’s territory.

After the recent occurrence of violent forms of racism in the Greek society, the Greek authorities have stepped up their efforts to fully combat any racist or xenophobic acts, which undermine the values underpinning the Greek society. A number of measures have recently been taken at the level of law enforcement and criminal prosecution in order to investigate and punish criminal acts committed by organized groups. Such acts are unequivocally condemned by the Greek society as a whole and by the political authorities, which have conveyed a message of zero tolerance for any manifestation of racism and xenophobia. In this vein, the Greek Parliament voted, last week, a bill to suspend state financing for political parties whose leaders or elected officials are charged with serious crimes.

At the same time, there is an imperative need to improve the social and economic conditions that can serve as a pretext for racist acts. Enjoyment of human rights can be gravely affected by the ongoing economic crisis, as is the case in many parts of the world. Increasing inequalities and social exclusion are only some of the negative aspects that we are striving to eradicate in our determined efforts to address this challenge and follow a sustainable path towards economic recovery and growth. Also, we shall spare no effort in protecting vulnerable segments of society, including refugees and migrants. Recent tragedies off the coasts of Italy have demonstrated the need for a more coordinated action in the field of migration. Based on the imperative of prevention and protection and guided by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, determined action should be taken in order to prevent the loss of lives at sea and to avoid that such human tragedies happen again.

Greece poses great emphasis on the full enjoyment of the freedom of expression by all persons, without any form of discrimination, as it is deemed a necessary prerequisite for the substantial and effective functioning of a democratic society. To this end, Greece stands ready to intensify efforts in order to enhance the protective framework for all those people, who raise their voices to reveal truth and expose crimes, especially media professionals, working many times under hazardous conditions, such as authoritarian regimes and armed conflicts, as well as to combat impunity of the perpetrators. Therefore, Greece, along with Argentina, Costa Rica and Tunisia will table a resolution in the Third Committee on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, I would like to reiterate that the promotion and implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms remains high in our national and foreign policy agenda.