Mr Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, and Iceland†, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania align themselves with this statement.

The EU's commitment to human rights, under the aegis of the UN and the framework of international law, is unshakeable. The very foundations of the EU, built out of the rubble of war and tyranny, are based in fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

Human rights, the silver thread, woven into the fabric of the EU, are at the forefront of our foreign policy. The EU's unified Strategic Framework, which sets out our principles, objectives, and priorities, is our bold statement of intent. The EU is, of course, not complacent about developments within its own borders. Human rights are universal, no state is immune from criticism, and the EU welcomes the frank and critical dialogue at the UN about human rights, including in the context of Human Rights Council elections.

Since we last debated this item almost a year ago, we have seen huge changes around the world. Some cautious but positive developments are to be welcomed. But the broader picture has regrettably been one of attacks on freedom, insidious new laws, and a wanton disrespect for human life. Freedom of expression is being curtailed, and journalists reporting on human rights violations are coming under ever increasing pressure. We cannot, however, falter in the face of adversity: human rights require eternal vigilance and those at the frontlines deserve our unwavering support.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
† Iceland continues to be a member of EFTA and the European Economic Area.
For those people, around the world, fighting to protect their fellow citizens, often at great personal risk, we must not fail. For women everywhere, battling for the equality that is their human right, we must not doubt. And for people like Malala Yousafzai, recently awarded the Sakharov Prize, who has campaigned for the right to an education since she was just 11 years old, we must tackle – head on – the human rights challenges we face.

Mr. Chair,

The human rights defenders – those people, on the ground at the front lines, in the political debates – who are increasingly under attack deserve our vigilance and support. It is incumbent upon us both to create and enforce the legal framework that can protect such defenders where they live, but also to ensure that their voices continue to be heard in all forums.

In Iran, whilst we welcome the recent moves – particularly on the release of a number of political prisoners –the human rights situation in that country remains very troubling. In the spirit of the developments over the past month, the EU calls on Iran to honour its international human rights obligations and to cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed. Moreover, the continued high rate of executions remains a matter of serious concern to the EU. The General's Assembly engagement with the situation therefore remains necessary.

In Sudan, the EU strongly condemns the on-going human rights violations, which are perpetrated in total impunity. Civilians in the Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile regions are subject to indiscriminate aerial attacks by the government and affected by ongoing fighting between the Government and rebel groups as well as between tribal communities. We deplore the excessive use of force by the Government during the September protests against subsidy cuts, which brought about a significant loss of life, and we call on the Government to respect the freedoms of expression, media, and peaceful assembly.

The situation in the South Sudanese state of Jonglei is of grave concern, and the EU urges the Government to pursue its efforts to hold accountable those accused of committing human rights abuses against civilians. The EU is convinced that a resolution can only be achieved by negotiation, and stands ready to support the Government's peace efforts in any appropriate manner.

We also cannot ignore the enduring grave human rights situation in the DPRK. The grave, widespread and systematic human rights abuses, documented at length by the reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteur, leave the EU no choice but to present a resolution again this year. We would like to highlight the work of the Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK, which has, in vivid and tragic oral testimony, brought to public attention one of the longest running human rights tragedies in the world today.

Mr. Chair,

The basic, fundamental right to be who you wish to be and to believe what you wish to believe, something that so many of us take for granted, is under threat. The EU will present a text on freedom of religion and belief, and hopes that, as in all previous years, we will once again find consensual agreement on such an important subject.

The EU notes the reduction of death penalty cases in China but would welcome more transparency regarding the actual number of cases and the review process by the People's
Supreme Court. The EU encourages China to ensure that the civil, political, economic and social and cultural rights of all persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities are respected particularly in the Tibetan-inhabited regions and Xinjiang. The EU also calls on the Chinese authorities to release all those who have been detained or put under house arrest for peacefully expressing their views, including in the context of China's UPR proceedings on 22 October. Finally, the EU urges China to ratify the ICCPR.

In the **Russian Federation**, the EU continues to be concerned by the adoption and the implementation of restrictive legislation affecting the work of civil society and human rights defenders. The EU notes with concern the increasing stigmatization of Russia's LGBTI community and calls upon the Russian Federation to uphold its commitments to ensure a non-discriminatory framework for all. The EU encourages Russia to actively strive towards a more conducive attitude concerning the inclusion and tolerance of minorities in society.

Two years ago, we were all inspired by the events of the "**Arab Spring**", and the EU will remain a faithful friend to all countries transitioning to democracy, stability and prosperity. These transitions will be supported – not hampered – by more public debate and citizen participation in public life.

In this spirit, the EU underlines the importance of seeing a return to civilian government in **Egypt**, and, whilst we respect the Egyptian Government's responsibility for the security of its citizens, calls on the authorities to respect human rights for all, end the state of emergency, restore an inclusive political process, and end arbitrary detention. The EU welcomed the Egyptian Government signalling its readiness to host a regional OHCHR office in Cairo, and hopes for a swift deployment of human rights officers. Finally, the EU also deplores all use of violence in Egypt, and calls for swift justice for the victims and full, impartial investigation of recent events.

The EU continues to closely monitor the situation in **Bahrain** and supports the framework set by the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry and the UPR recommendations. Some positive steps have been taken, but more should be done to rebuild trust, including by considering the release of those arrested in the context of peaceful political activities, so that genuine national reconciliation can start. We strongly condemn the recent violence and we call on the authorities to ensure protection of basic liberties, particularly freedom of opinion and assembly. Achieving national reconciliation will require a constructive and inclusive cooperation between the government, the opposition and all Bahraini citizens, and we continue to encourage all parties to take part in the National Consensus Dialogue without preconditions.

The mechanisms that the international human rights system offers are essential in the continuing fight to realise human rights around the world. The situation in the **Central African Republic** is just one example: summary and extra-judicial executions, sexual violence, torture, and the recruitment of child soldiers. The EU calls upon the Central African Republic authorities to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are held to account and to cooperate with the Independent Expert. The EU also calls upon the transitional authorities to take action to prevent further aggravation of communal tensions.

We are encouraged by the developments in **Myanmar/Burma**, where the EU provides support for political, social and economic development, the peace process and works to foster respect for human rights. The situation is evolving in the right direction, but significant
challenges remain, including legal and judiciary reform, the release of political prisoners, the reconciliation with ethnic and religious minorities. The EU calls on Myanmar's Government to facilitate the creation of an OHCHR country office. We are particularly concerned by inter-communal tensions and the situation of the Rohingya minority, and will continue to monitor developments. The EU's proposed resolution on Myanmar reflects this period of transition.

The EU also remains deeply concerned by the situation in Eritrea, where journalists and opposition politicians have been detained without trial since 2001. We continue to urge Eritrea to act upon its national and international human rights obligations, and release these prisoners immediately and unconditionally. The EU notes the exceptional work of the UN Special Rapporteur in this context, and will continue to offer its full support.

Mr. Chair,

Civil society has a unique role to play in enforcing human rights standards across the world: the bloggers, the activists, the community organisers – who help to hold states accountable. But the space for civil society is being shrunk – both legislatively and through intimidation, and we need to ensure the creation of an environment conducive for a vibrant civil society that can defend human rights and democracy.

We are therefore concerned about the situation in Belarus, where the harassment of civil society and of regime critics continues unabated, and the EU calls for the immediate release of all remaining political prisoners. The EU regrets the continuous use of the death penalty in Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying it, and urges the Belarusian authorities to examine and explore all possibilities available in order to introduce a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition.

In Sri Lanka, the EU was deeply concerned by reports of reprisals against those human rights defenders who engaged with the visit of the High Commissioner; we encourage the Government to fully cooperate with the UN Human Rights mechanisms. We urge the Government to implement effectively the recommendations of the LLRC as well as to conduct independent and credible investigations with regard to allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law which we believe is important for the process of national reconciliation.

Turning to Mali, where the EU, the African Union, ECOWAS and the UN are working together to promote lasting peace and stability while facilitating reconciliation and reconstruction, we urge all parties to respect their commitments under international human rights law. Respect for human rights, the fight against impunity and the full implementation of justice must constitute a fundamental element of reconciliation and peace building. The recent presidential elections, observed by EU election monitors, are an important step in restoring constitutional order. We expect that the envisaged legislative elections in November and December will be held with identical transparency and credibility.

In the Sahel region more generally, weak governance and its impact on State institutions have dramatically diminished the capacity of the States to effectively protect human rights. It is clear that a renewed commitment to, and effective implementation of the democratic, governance and human rights standards subscribed to by the countries in the Sahel, have the potential to strengthen the rule of law and advance the protection of human rights in the region.
Mr. Chair,

The EU is deeply concerned about the pervasive human rights violations against civilians that continue to take place in the DRC, which include arbitrary arrests, summary executions, torture and forced recruitment, including of children, and gender-based violence, including rape. Both armed groups and government forces are responsible for human rights violations and abuses, and we urge the government of the DRC to take action to prevent them. The latest crisis in eastern DRC has demonstrated the need for a reinvigoration in the international community's approach to tackle the local, national and regional roots of conflicts in Congo, especially in the Kivus. The EU will continue to steadfastly support all work to mitigate tensions and protect civilians throughout the DRC.

Mr Chair,

The EU continues to be extremely concerned by the deteriorating situation in Syria, which makes it all the more urgent to put an end to all violence and to the suffering of the Syrian people, and find a political solution that meets their legitimate aspirations in the framework of the Geneva communiqué. The EU condemns the unprecedented use of force by the regime. It also condemns the continuing widespread and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in Syria, including increasing attacks on religious and ethnic communities. The EU calls on all sides to the conflict to allow for local ceasefires to facilitate humanitarian work and to respect obligations under international humanitarian law. Only a political solution that results in a united, inclusive and democratic Syria can end the terrible bloodshed, and grave violations of human rights.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair,

When surveying the gamut of human rights violations worldwide, it is hard to find reasons to hope. But, as we touched earlier on the story of Malala Yousafzai, we must not permit ourselves any time for despair. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that human rights are the foundation of our policies.

The states represented at the General Assembly, other human rights bodies, civil society, human rights defenders, ordinary people, must remain united in their determination to fully realise human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. The EU will continue in its unwavering support for democracy and human rights, and we draw courage and inspiration from the everyday stories of heroism and resilience that have been touched upon today.