General Assembly
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Third Committee
General Discussion
H.E. Mr. Geir O. Pedersen
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Chair,

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Vienna declaration and the establishment of the OHCHR, people around the world are increasingly demanding the fulfillment of their fundamental rights. In recent years popular demand has brought about democratic transitions in various regions of the world. We also see that the path towards democracy may be paved with social unrest and even violence.

In these situations the guidance provided by universal human rights is of particular importance. Tribute should be paid to the entire UN human rights system – the Special Procedures, the Treaty Bodies, the UPR, and not least the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

These mechanisms provide invaluable guidance to the on-going struggle to narrow the gap between the universally agreed human rights standards and the too often harsh realities on the ground. They deserve our gratitude and our strong and explicit support.

Chair,

The large scale use of chemical weapons in Syria was a shocking crime which we condemn in the strongest possible terms. Those responsible for any use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

Norway welcomes the principled voice of the Secretary General and the High Commissioner in addressing the on-going atrocities and increasing levels of suffering in Syria. We demand that all parties, especially the Syrian authorities, put an end to the gross human rights violations, killings and abuses.

(Check against delivery)
We are deeply concerned about the situation for the millions of refugees and internally displaced people. It is crucially important that all parties, and especially the Syrian authorities, provide safe and unhindered access to humanitarian relief operations.

Norway fully recognizes and appreciates the significant efforts made by neighbouring countries to assist those who have fled across the borders, and we will continue to provide support to those in need.

Chair,

Recently, how to safeguard freedom of expression and privacy in light of technological development has rightly become more important in the global human rights debate.

Technology development, with its immensely positive aspects for communication and development, also means that it is much easier and cheaper than before to monitor, filter, censor and block communications.

We are particularly concerned that especially journalists, human rights defenders and political activists risk being increasingly subject to arbitrary surveillance activities, both because they are singled out for special monitoring, and because they increasingly are using Internet as a communication tool.

There is general agreement that international law apply to the cyber sphere. This means that human rights standards, such as the right to privacy, have to be respected, also when states’ security concerns are addressed. However, applying generic international norms to cyber can give rise to many factual and legal challenges. It is imperative that we continue our collective efforts to determine how international law should be applied to modern technology.

Chair,

The landmark UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly in 1998, establishes that states have a particular responsibility to protect human rights defenders. The declaration seeks to ensure that efforts to promote and defend human rights in all parts of the world can be carried out without restrictions or threats to human rights defenders or their families.

At the same time, human rights defenders are subject to serious threats, attacks and acts of intimidation. We are particularly concerned about systemic and structural discrimination and violence faced by women human rights defenders and the many reports of impunity for gender-specific violations. We also note the increasing number of reports on harassment, persecution and reprisals faced by human rights defenders working on specific issues, such as corporate related human rights violations.

Norway is the main sponsor of UN resolutions in support of human rights defenders. At this session of the General Assembly, Norway will facilitate negotiations on a thematic resolution on protecting women human rights defenders.
We invite all delegations to take part in this process. And we ask for your support for this resolution in the defense of human rights for the benefit of all people – in accordance with international law and standards.

Chair,

The right to protection against discrimination applies equally to all groups and all individuals. The ability of governments to protect the rights of all citizens, including different minorities, is the ultimate test for our common democratic values.

There are countless reports of grave violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and religious minorities are often the most vulnerable. In some countries religious minorities have little or no protection against violence and attacks. They are victims of hate speech and discrimination and are excluded from important positions in the society, including in the labour market.

We also see a need for increased focus on discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We fully subscribe to the message of the UN Secretary-General on this issue: human rights apply to all, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We need to confront extremist ideologies, prejudices and stereotypes of cultural, ethnic and religious intolerance in the public debate and to bring out the counter-arguments. Governments and politicians must clearly and unequivocally condemn manifestations of hate in public discourse and acts of violence based on prejudice and negative stereotyping.

The solution is however not censorship. On the contrary: the best way to answer hate speech and negative stereotyping is not through legislation and censorship, but rather through more speech. Freedom of assembly and freedom of expression have proven to be more powerful than any other tool in the fight against discrimination and intolerance.

Chair,

The process of defining the Post 2015 development agenda is well under way. We are pleased to see that the human rights imperative is increasingly claiming its rightful place at the core of the agenda.

Norway strongly supports the call of the High Commissioner for the international community to embrace the notion that the values of universal human rights need to underpin the new development agenda. The enablers of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and rule of law provide a strengthened foundation for inclusive development paths.

This is promising, and reflects the fact that the promotion and protection of human rights is the third pillar on which the United Nations was founded. We are concerned, however, that this pillar is chronically underfunded and that further cuts are proposed in the regular budget.

An unprecedented number of mandates established by the Human Rights Council and the increasing number of requests for support in the field from OHCHR are creating a growing gap
between expectations and financial resources. We are particularly concerned by the OHCHR's extensive and increasing dependence on voluntary contributions, including for mandatory activities and field operations.

We urge all countries to join the effort to establish a sustainable resource base over the coming years that does not infringe on the independence of the High Commissioner and her office.

We should use the 20th anniversary of the Vienna declaration and the establishment of the OHCHR as an opportunity not only to take stock, but to discuss how to strengthen the UN's engagement in protecting and promoting human rights. This is even more relevant at a time where human rights become increasingly relevant for peace, security and development.

Thank you.