



## **HRC52 - Mr. Volker Türk United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights- 27FEB23**

27-02-2023 | Conference extracts

### **Shotlist**

- Opening remarks by **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Volker Türk**

### *MORNING PROGRAMME FOR INFORMATION:*

Opening of the session by the President of the Human Rights Council Mr. **Václav Bálek**

Opening Statements by:

- President of the 77th session of the General Assembly Mr. **Csaba Kőrösi**
- Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. **António Guterres**
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. **Volker Türk**
- Host country Mr. **Ignazio Cassis**, Chef du Département fédéral des Affaires étrangères de la

High-Level dignitaries:

- Democratic Republic of the Congo M. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, Président de la République démocratique du Congo
- Montenegro Milo Đukanović, President of Montenegro
- Colombia Gustavo Petro Urrego, President of Colombia

## Story

### Opening remarks by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk at the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council

Geneva, 27 February 2023

Secretary-General,

President of the General Assembly,

President of the Council,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Human rights is the common language of our shared humanity.

It is about how we interact with each other – as individuals, within societies, between countries, as well as with our environment and the planet. At its heart is the recognition of human dignity, the need for power dynamics and relationships to be based on respect.

Human rights unifies us and it can overcome polarization, especially in its striving for equity, shared prosperity and justice.

Let me begin at the beginning.

Seventy-five years ago, in a world shaken by unprecedented horror, the modern human rights movement took its source from many currents, from many cultures and traditions in the never-ending story of the pursuit of freedoms.

The great wave of independence movements, which pushed back against foreign domination, colonisation and exploitation. Anti-racist and anti-apartheid struggles, and further back, the struggle to end slavery. The labour movement. Feminism. And most recently, the fight for our lives – for environmental and climate justice.

At a time of existential threat, States from Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Middle East conceived, together, a manual for the prevention of destitution, warfare and harm.

Over the past 75 years there have been profound gains and many singular achievements -- achievements which need to be honoured, preserved, and far better funded.

We have a treaty-based system, and a whole institutional architecture for the promotion and protection of human rights – including this Council and its ground-breaking Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures.

There is far greater awareness today of the values and commitments that underpin them.

We have also seen the growth of other innovative movements that draw on human rights principles. Among them, movements for the rights of indigenous peoples; Black Lives Matter; #MeToo; and Fridays for Future – to name a few. Young people, in particular, consistently speak in the language of human rights when giving voice to their concerns. I pay tribute to all human rights defenders of the past and present.

Human rights is a force to reckon with, not because it serves the interests of the powerful, but because it has captured the imagination of the powerless.

Still, as we know too well today, the oppression of the past can return, in various disguises.

The old authoritarianism, with its brutal limits on freedoms writ large, and the suffocating straitjacket of patriarchy. The old destructive wars of aggression from a bygone era with worldwide consequences, as we have witnessed again in Europe with the senseless Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The new, supple artificial intelligence, blurring fact and fiction and raising uncharted risks – and the tumultuous online world where viral deceptions threaten our elections, our health, our security, and more.

Let us hope that 2023 will be the moment in which we finally shift the balance from exploitation of digital technology for profit and oppression, to greater investment in digital innovation to tackle our biggest challenges – poverty, climate change, and inequality.

If there was ever a moment to revitalise the hope of human rights for every person, it is now.

Yet, much of the progress made over decades is being reined back and even reversed in some parts – most

conspicuously for women and girls, the civic space and the freedoms enjoyed at times of peace and through sustainable development. The list is long.

With an eye to the past, as well as to the future; in the spirit of “never again”, and in the interest of inter-generational justice, it is critical that we rekindle the spirit, the impulse and the vitality that led to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 75 years ago.

We need to forge a new world-wide consensus on human rights, broadening its base of support and moving forward together in recognition that our survival depends on finding our way back to that common language.

Our institutions – which exist to advance all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, on an equal footing, as well as the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment — are in a unique position to rebuild this shared respect for each other's dignity.

Our goal must be to promote and implement a 21st century human rights vision that is transformative; solution-oriented; unifying; and that speaks directly to every person's need for justice and search for meaning in life.

It is against this backdrop that we have embarked this year on the [Human Rights 75 initiative](#), first and foremost, to rebuild trust.

Trust between States: that they will act in line with international law and the agreements which they themselves have crafted, and jointly work to advance the common good.

Trust between people and their Governments, which have promised to represent and serve them.

Trust between communities.

Trust with future generations and the planet.

We can rise above the fray, and use human rights, not as a weapon in the context of geopolitical shifts — not as a nice-to-have for sunny days in the future — but as what it is and was always meant to be: a solution to help us get out of the harms that are destroying our world.

I invite all Member States, and all relevant actors, to take the lead in advancing all human rights across the world and in their own nations. As we commemorate these important anniversaries\* this year, let us use this opportunity to re-energise and update our work. And to de-escalate.

To overcome our differences, through solidarity and genuine dialogue, working across geopolitical divides with a clear vision to advance the needs of every country and the rights of all.

And so I ask all of you to deepen cross-regional engagement – to revive the spirit of universality that is the foundation of our work, and to ensure that important discussions on worrying situations – to which no country is immune – as well as on racism and the right to development, move forward, in the interests of all.

I encourage you to ensure that serious violations and abuses are addressed, wherever they may occur, and not to fall into the trap of denial or obfuscation.

I encourage you to address your people's rights to freedom from want and to freedom from fear on an equal footing and with the same emphasis – so that all human rights can strengthen each other and support the renewal of the much-needed social contract between the institutions of the State and their peoples.

I urge you to communicate to the public your sincere commitment to human rights and to counter the rising tide of hatred and division.

I urge you to help put the world back on track to realise the promises of enduring peace, sound development, and justice. To strive for greater solidarity within and between countries in much-needed discussions on reform of the international financial architecture, the legacy of colonialism, and compensation for climate change.

And I ask you to help re-establish our generation's commitment to human rights by sharing with us transformational promises that you would like to make at the high-level event that we have planned in December.

I am committed to principled and practical engagement with States. It is my responsibility to reflect back to you the reality that we see, in our careful and methodical monitoring, and to work with you to assist improvement. And I am duty bound to speak out on trends that are detrimental to human rights. As is standard practice, I will provide a detailed global update on specific country and regional situations on 7 March in addition to the various country-specific statements that form part of the agenda of this Council session.

I will always be ready to listen to your concerns. Willingness to engage in genuine dialogue – a desire to seek common denominators, even in the midst of fierce disagreements – is, I believe, core to our common language. Engagement, however, is not an end in itself but must take us forward and ultimately effect positive change in people's lives.

And so I will endeavour to promote advances in all human rights, without distinction, in every region, and across all UN activities.

I will do my utmost to fulfil States' requests for cooperation, good offices and guidance, and for my Office and the human rights ecosystem to be inclusive and responsive.

We have more in common than we think. And if we hark back to our origins – and look forward to what the world could be in the future – we can see that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights not only voices ancient wisdoms from all cultures but will ensure our survival.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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