



European Union

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

33rd session

(13-30 September 2016)

Item 4

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 19 September 2016

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

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EU Statement

Human Rights situation that require the Council's attention

Mr. President,

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

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is highly committed to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide and welcomes this opportunity to discuss human rights situations in various parts of the world that require the Council's attention. The EU underlines that it is the primary responsibility of states to protect populations and take effective measures to prevent atrocity crimes.

With regard to the situation in **Syria**, as well as the situations in **Sudan, Ukraine and Burundi**, we would like to refer to our interventions in the respective interactive dialogues.

The EU is seriously concerned about the human rights situation in **Egypt**. The arrests of journalists, activists, protesters and human rights defenders, as well as the pressure imposed on civil society and on human rights defenders, including through travel bans, court summons, prolonged pre-trial detention and the threat of asset freezes, continue a worrying trend of restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Moreover, the EU remains particularly concerned about reports of torture, enforced disappearances, poor detention conditions and the handing down of death sentences, as well as mass trials and underlines the need for accountability for all violations. The EU calls on the Egyptian authorities to continue their efforts to shed light on the circumstances of the deaths of Italian citizen Giulio Regeni and French citizen Eric Lang and bring about justice.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The EU is fully aware of the serious challenges posed by the terrorist threat to Egypt's stability and security, in particular the impact of terrorism on the Egyptian population. The EU recalls the need to tackle terrorism in full respect of international human rights standards and fundamental freedoms, as also enshrined in the Egyptian constitution. The EU also recalls the importance of assuring economic, social and cultural rights that are essential in order to achieve sustainable stability, prosperity and human security. The EU stands ready to help Egypt in fulfilling these objectives, taking also into account Egypt's pivotal role for the regional security.

In **China**, the detention of human rights lawyers and defenders since mid-2015 and the harassment of their families remain as major concerns. The EU calls for the immediate release of all individuals detained or convicted for seeking to protect the rights of others or for the peaceful exercise of their freedom of expression, including Liu Xiaobo, Illham Tohti, Xu Zhiyong, Li Heping and Wang Quanzhang. The use of closed hearings and public confessions raise serious questions about China's respect for its international human rights obligations, and for its own legal and constitutional safeguards and stated commitment to upholding the rule of law. We are also concerned by the reports that detained human rights defenders are regularly subjected to coercion and prevented from choosing their own defence council or receiving visits from their families. The EU is concerned that China's new law on the Management of Foreign NGO Activities could hamper the development of independent civil society and urges China to provide a safe and fair environment for all NGOs to operate freely and effectively. The EU also urges China to respect cultural diversity and freedom of religion, not least in Tibet and Xinjiang, and foster dialogue with the different ethnic groups

The EU remains concerned about the ongoing implementation of the laws on "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" and the ever increasing limitations on the freedoms of assembly and expression online and offline in the **Russian Federation** leading to a shrinking space for independent civil society. The EU condemns the attacks against the opposition, journalists as well as human rights defenders. The EU remains particularly worried by the situation in the north Caucasus region. It calls on the authorities to align their policies with Russia's international human rights commitments. As regards yesterday's elections, we will wait for ODIHR's interim assessment.

In **Ethiopia**, the recent protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions present a crucial test for Ethiopia's stability and unity. Only by increasing the political space and engaging in meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders can the legitimate grievances of the protesters be addressed and a

peaceful outcome secured. The use of excessive force, killing and injuring, which we deplore, cannot be part of that. We continue calling for restraint and for the release of those who were peacefully protesting and were arrested during the demonstrations, and support calls for an independent investigation into the recent events. An Ethiopia that accommodates its internal pluralism and growing prosperity is not only essential for its people but also for the country's contribution to stability and peace in the wider neighbourhood. More in general, we support requests for access of international human rights mechanisms to all UN member states, especially for HRC members.

Regarding the situation in the **occupied Palestinian territory**, the EU remains gravely concerned at the reports of human rights violations. The EU firmly condemns all terror attacks and violence from all sides. A new outbreak of violence should be prevented. The EU underlines that the denial of Palestinian development and the settlements, that are illegal under international law, threaten to make the two state solution impossible. The EU is deeply concerned about the human rights implications of the increasing number of demolitions, as well as confiscations and evictions. The use of administrative detention, especially of minors, is also of deep concern. The EU is increasingly worried about the pressure and restrictions imposed on Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations and the civil society. The EU recalls that compliance of all parties with international humanitarian law and respect for human rights, including accountability, is a cornerstone for peace and security. The EU calls on all parties to fully cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza strip is of grave concern. Fundamental improvements in living conditions are needed particularly as regards the most vulnerable, i.e. children and older persons.