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**TOWARDS SUSTAINING PEACE:  
STRENGTHENING SYNERGIES BETWEEN SSR AND HUMAN RIGHTS:**

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*Excellences, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen...*

I am very happy to welcome you here. This is a very important event for Slovakia and me personally as well. Because – let's dissect its tittle.

1) Sustaining Peace – has been a key priority of my agenda during the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. Me and my team had a goal to bring sustaining peace to a greater attention of leaders and inject the agenda with a new momentum. So I am glad I can follow-up on our activities also through this meeting.

2) SSR – has been championed by Slovakia on multilateral platform for many years. We co-chair Group of Friends of SSR in several international organizations, including the UN, where we started the Group in 2007.

3) Human Rights – as a member of a Human Rights Council, we want to contribute to bringing the human rights promotion to the forefront of UN activities.

*So* I am glad to kick-start today's discussions and right at the outset let me thank our co-hosts:

DCAF has been a partner to Slovakia in promoting SSR for many years and we highly value this cooperation. So many thanks – Director Guerber.

And it's very symbolic that we co-organize this event also with Czech Republic, because Slovakia's engagement in promoting SSR stems directly from transformative experience of Czechoslovakia of 1989.

When after the collapse of totalitarian regime, the security sector institutions - including the *army, police and intelligence services* - were put under democratic control. And all took place without war, conflict or violence.

Our nations are to this day very proud of this. Because – unfortunately - for many - this is not the case. In 1989, there were not many precedents for peaceful change of regime and non-violent democratization of its security sector. And there are not many to this day.

Because for states in transition, or those coming out of conflict, the security sector services not only embody the state, but many times remain the only surviving institutions. And the only institutions projecting national aspirations. And when it comes to projecting and consolidating state power, there are many painful historical lessons.

Lessons, where nothing else mattered. *Where the security actors* were (1) politicized, (2) stroke fears and tensions, (3) abused their position, (4) targeted and persecuted groups and communities. We are all sitting here today because we realize, that we cannot let this be the case. That other things matter. That human rights matter.

And that is my first message to you today.

## **1. There is a key place for human rights in the SSR agenda.**

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The relationship between security and human rights has never been easy. The discussions often circled to a sort of “chicken or the egg” puzzle: *Which comes first? Which is more important?* But these are not the right questions to ask.

The relationship between security and human rights can be neither a matter of sequence nor hierarchy. They go hand in hand.

Because every time it becomes a matter of hierarchy, every time concerns for security unequivocally trump human rights – we are getting on perilous path, on which peace, democracy and stability are threatened.

So I say again – they must go hand in hand. Security, peace and human rights are inter – related. No peace design is sustainable in situations of grave and systemic violations of human rights. So the primary objective of SSR must be to create a:

- *security sector which* supports the democratisation process, but which also identifies with the everyday needs of the people.
- *security sector which* creates the environment

(1) *Where the security actors* instead of politicization – work to maintain stability during periods of tensions.

(2) *Where the security actors* instead of stroking fears and tensions - protects people from violence and intimidation.

(3) *Where the security actors* instead of abusing their position – provide feeling of safety for the most vulnerable groups, women and children.

(4) *Where the security actors* instead of targeting and persecuting groups and communities - build trust with and among them.

To come to that, states need to implement human rights safeguards as part of the institutional and legal frameworks for the security sector.

Safeguards which

- *Specify* powers and limits of the security sector.
- *Conform* any human rights restrictions to rule of law, in accordance with international human rights standards.
- *Ensure* vetting and training security personnel in human rights matters.
- *Guarantee* justice for those whose human rights have been violated by the security actors.
- *Warrant* independent and democratic oversight and control mechanisms.
- *Address* accountability and strengthens compliance with human rights by the security sector.

As my second point today, I want to come back to Sustaining peace.

Too often after a conflict, we look back and cry that we should have done more at the outset. Back then. Before lives were lost. That we should have seen the warning signs. That they have been there and we should have acted upon them. All too often these warning signs involve human rights violations and abuses. And the *security actors* can be key in fighting them and protecting people, or, sadly, the security actors can be perpetrators themselves.

So as my second point, I want to say that

## **2. There is a key place for human rights and SSR in the sustaining peace agenda.**

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I am actually just coming from another Geneva Peace Week event, where we discussed sustaining peace. The new approach the United Nations has been bringing to our understanding of peace since the 2 landmark resolutions of 2016.

Their philosophy is based on understanding that for many years, we placed too much focus on responding to conflict. But not enough on prevention.

We came to realize that building peace should not be limited to the context of conflict. It is not enough to just react, resolve, rebuild. We must act sooner – before the outbreak, escalation or recurrence. We must prevent it. We must watch for the warning signs.

And systemic abuse and human rights violations – well – that’s a big one.

- People who do not bother going to the police or a courtroom, because they think justice is out of their reach.
- People who are punished and imprisoned, because of what they believe or say.
- People who are discriminated against...violated...and attacked by those who are supposed to protect them.

*Where is their breaking point? How far are we from the edge of unrest and conflict?*

This can happen to individuals. It can happen to certain groups. And it can happen on a massive scale – to whole societies. Sadly, we are seeing all of these cases, around the world, today.

And a security sector has a key role to play. Because it can be the tool to stop the abuses. Unfortunately, instead, many times the security sector actually plays an active role in them.

And so we need SSR.

*SSR that* strides to produce a security sector that is a guarantor of security and rights. Not a threat to them. *SSR that creates security sectors that drive peace – not conflict.*

But too many times, SSR efforts do not take human rights consideration fully into account. And so we must infuse a human rights based approach into SSR. And do it at every level and every phase of its lifetime. Seeing human rights as a cross-cutting issue that is relevant for all security actors – since human rights and security are indivisible.

Because human rights abuses can be at the root of conflict. They can be a warning sign that war is on the horizon. But human rights can also be the driver for stronger and more resilient societies.

And so looking at today's program - topics on the agenda promise lively debate and useful food for thought. So I feel very encouraged.

Because SSR and human rights promotion work towards sustainable peace, stability and development.

And after all, isn't that the shared goal of us all.

*I thank you.*