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OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

AT THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Madam Vice-President of the Human rights Council, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, congratulations to His Excellency, Ambassador Coly Seck of Senegal for assuming the Presidency for this year.

And I thank the former President, Ambassador Vojislav Šuc of Slovenia, for the hard work in steering this body.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here at such a decisive time - for human rights around the globe and for the future of this body.

This Council was founded to remind the international community of the responsibility to protect universal rights and to hold the countries accountable when they fail to meet them. Both in fast-breaking emergencies as well as in slow motion, chronic tragedies.

Slovakia is proud to be a Member of this Council and subscribes to its purpose, as an indispensable part of our multilateral cooperation system.

And this is a system we will continue to promote and champion, including by assuming responsibility and taking the wheel.

Just last year, I have addressed this body as the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

And in 2019, Slovakia took on the Chairmanship of the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe.

With taking up these duties, we want to reconfirm our clear stand – not to be only a passive consumer of human rights guarantees. But stand ready to contribute actively to human rights promotion – within this Council and within the OSCE's human dimension.

So now, I will try to seize this opportunity to do just that.

And in doing so, I will focus on three key words: **prevention, credibility and multilateralism.**

I. First, prevention

I believe in preventive diplomacy.

It was one of the defining themes of the 72nd UN General Assembly session and it is the number one priority we set for our OSCE Chairmanship.

It is now widely accepted that our organizations must do more to prevent – rather than to react to – conflicts.

United Nations is now living with the Sustaining Peace agenda, trying to better capture the cycle of peace.

Because too often - after a conflict - the international community looks back with regret.

Realizing more should have been done at the outset. That the warning signs were there.

All too often - the early warning signs include human rights abuses.

And we should pay attention – see the red lights and spot where our action is needed before it's too late.

There is no doubt that prevention starts with the protection of human rights.

And if we are serious about conflict prevention, we must place human rights at its heart.

It can start in this very room.

It is the Human Rights Council that can help shed light into every dim corner of our planet.

It has a potential to make us see, help us shape a response and in the effect – elevate human rights.

This room is the right place to have a credible discussions on human rights developments around the world.

And there is the second key word I want to use today.

II. Credibility.

When the stakes are as high as they are today.

When people in different corners of this planet are denied rights they deserve on a daily bases.

This Council must live up to the standards upon which it was created.

Not to point fingers. Not to punish. But to assist and advice.

It is important that we name problems clearly, and then engage, communicate and if needed, offer constructive, meaningful criticism.

It's the kind of organization that will help all of our nations live up to the ideals we share.

But there must always be credibility in our criticisms, and there must always be self-reflection on the other end.

Slovakia has just completed the Universal Periodic Review and we highly value the recommendations for our country.

We will study them closely and consider their implementation carefully.

The experience further reinforced our belief in meaningful international cooperation, sharing lessons learned in human rights promotion and the indispensable role of this Council.

Where else would the countries be given this opportunity. What body is better suited to recommend, assist and offer best practices.

There are many good stories to tell from this room.

And there are many sad ones ...

In Slovakia, we just last Thursday marked precisely one year since our society was left in shock, after the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé Martina Kušnírová.

Vibrant and free press is critical to sustaining the rule of law. We continue to strongly condemn this crime and place faith in the authorities to bring perpetrators to justice.

And then, there are stories that should stay on radar, to assist the work towards sustainable solutions.

Such as in Ukraine, where the situation requires our continued attention. In the absence of protection guaranteed by international human rights treaties, human rights prospects for the Eastern Ukraine remain uncertain.

To assess the current and developing human rights situation and possible risks in this regard, Slovakia reiterates the importance of keeping Ukraine also on the agenda of the Council.

We remain worried about the widespread and grave violations of human rights committed in many places around the world.

We continue to be concerned about the situation in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and political rights' violations in Nicaragua; and especially grave humanitarian crisis and suppression of basic political rights in Venezuela.

As my third and last point, I want to speak about –

III. Multilateralism.

I am a strong believer in multilateralism.

Multilateralism gave us the Universal declaration of Human Rights, confirming that certain rights that can never be taken away.

Sometimes we seem to forget, that what we now consider one of the most accepted norms of our international order, was over 70 years ago just an ideal.

And just like these days – coming to the result was not easy. It took almost 3 years to negotiate.

But our predecessors did not give up – on the organization, on the system, on compromise.

And neither should we.

We need to preserve and build upon their achievements.

For that, we need to stand up for the essence of global governance in human rights promotion and for the future that rests on multilateral pillars.

For that, we need to stand up for the Human Rights Council.

With this Council – we have reserves of normative power, reinforcing the universality of human rights.

With every credible recommendation passed.

With every passionate speech in defense of human rights delivered.

With every reminder to those in position of power.

With this Council – we have tangible impact delivered on the ground.

With every successful fact-finding mission.

With every complaint examined.

With every interview that gave voice to the victim of human rights violation.

The world needs this organization.

To give voice to those silenced by oppressors.

To shine the light for those locked in dark cells for what they believe.

To give faith to those who fear their suffering may never end.

Respecting human rights is not just a moral, or legal obligation. It's an opportunity to harness the full energy of a society.

Slovakia remains committed to active participation and engagement in this Council, and to promotion of values it stands for.

I thank you.