

**Address by  
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**Opening session of the High Level Segment  
10<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**



**2 March 2009  
Geneva**

Mr. President,  
Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address this High Level Segment of the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. Later during this session, I will present my first annual report as High Commissioner for Human Rights. That report contains a detailed account of the whole range of activities that my Office undertook in the past year. It also illustrates deeds and results of the vision that underpins our efforts.

The many challenges to human rights described in the annual report have been a constant of our focus. Poverty, impunity, armed conflict and authoritarian rule continue to undermine the well-being and human rights of countless victims. The imperatives of fairly managing migration and combating terrorism within the parameters of human rights and the rule of law are also of pressing concern.

All these long-entrenched factors challenge the international community's capacity to cope in an environment of compassion fatigue and shrinking resources. At the same time, new threats, such as climate change, scarcity of food, and the global economic crisis expose the most vulnerable to additional risk. These perils have been starkly illustrated in the course of the thematic special sessions on the food emergencies, as well as on the financial collapse and economic downturn, that the Human Rights Council has convoked. The latter debate, held last month, highlighted the critical vulnerabilities of the most marginalized members of our global society, those who are likely to bear the brunt of crises, particularly women and children, migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, minorities and persons with disabilities. They stand at the frontlines of hardship and are most likely to go hungry, be exposed to natural disasters, lose their jobs and access to social safety nets and services.

It is important to recognize that the roots of the current crises can only be addressed if the policies and strategies we put in place are participatory, take into account existing inequalities and discrimination, and provide for sound and viable accountability mechanisms. These are the tenets of a human rights-based approach. I urge all those concerned and in a position of responsibility to ensure that these elements inform and underpin both international and national strategies and remedial action to alleviate the effects of the crises.

Mr. President,

Vulnerability is almost invariably related to discrimination and inequality. Combating discrimination and inequality remains a priority for OHCHR. Let me point out that this Human Rights Council session precedes a major event, and a crucial opportunity to address some of the most invidious forms of discrimination. I refer to the review conference on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which will begin on April 20. The review conference will meet in Geneva to evaluate the

implementation of commitments governments made eight years ago in Durban to eradicate intolerance, racial hatred and discrimination. These are problems which affect all countries. I therefore urge governments and all other stakeholders to actively participate in this review process.

I am fully aware that the legacy of the 2001 Durban Conference has been tainted by the anti-Semitic behaviour of some NGOs at the sidelines of that conference. And now the review conference has also been the target of a disparaging media and lobbying campaign on the part of those who fear a repetition of anti-Semitic outbursts. This is unwarranted.

As Secretary-General of the Conference, I countered such distortions in order to set the record straight. I have taken and will continue to seek all possible opportunities to draw attention to the fact that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the document that emerged from the conference in 2001, transcended divisive and intolerant approaches. I also forcefully underscore that the DDPA offers the most comprehensive framework and platform to combat intolerance and racism in their many forms anywhere and everywhere.

It cannot be overemphasized that it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms and eradicate inequality and discrimination.

A persuasive outcome of the review conference and beyond hinges upon the genuine commitment of all States to seek consensus. Narrow, parochial interests and reflexive partisanship must be cast aside in the interest of a greater common good. Let me underscore that a failure to do so may reverberate negatively on the full spectrum of human rights work and mechanisms for years to come. We need to prevent the acrimony of the past from encumbering the fight against intolerance which is—and I am sure we all agree— both of urgent concern and in the best interest of everyone.

History teaches us that different perspectives, traditions and geopolitical considerations have not impeded progress on human rights. The inherent soundness and universal appeal of human rights standards have made them take root in many countries. They keep spreading, albeit not uniformly and despite regrettable setbacks. Indeed, we should continue to pursue and build on the progressive affirmation of international human rights that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ushered in six decades ago.

And we should never lower our guard. Rather, we need to work harder to ensure full compliance with international human rights and squarely face human rights conditions. In order to do so, we will need to strengthen human rights institutions with commonality of purpose and action. Indeed, we should seek to enhance the ability of these institutions, including the Human Rights Council, to promote and protect all human rights. In parallel, we should also examine how to rectify any shortcomings in methodology and practices. This examination will be particularly crucial prior to the

2011 review of the Council. We don't need to reinvent the wheel from scratch. We should rather find ways to make it run ever more efficiently and responsively.

For my part, let me reiterate that—sustained by the United Nations principles of impartiality, independence and integrity—I regard my office as a springboard for the betterment and welfare of all and a place where all are given a fair audience.

I am aware that progress must be skillfully led, and then soundly managed. And I am convinced that the full enjoyment of human rights is bound to happen only if many stake-holders, diverse in their composition, but like-minded in their objectives and actions, join together to affirm their leadership and commitment to human rights.

I wish you a very productive session. Thank you.