

10 December 2010

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
on Human Rights Day**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, is one of the fundamental purposes of the United Nations. Human rights are, together with peace and security and development the interlinked and mutually reinforcing pillars of the United Nations system.

On the occasion of Human Rights Day, we are celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1948. The Declaration draws on the values of the great religious and philosophical systems. It is reinforced by the aspirations of people in every part of the globe for a world of peace, justice and development rooted in individual freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

The Declaration is now the most universal document in the world: it was translated into more than 300 languages and dialects, from Abkhaz to Zulu, for the good of promoting a common language for everybody, the language of human rights.

We have to pay particular tribute to the human rights defenders around the world who strive to make the content of the Universal Declaration a reality. They often do so at great risk for themselves and for their families.

Too many human rights defenders, in every region of the world, are the target of abuse, harassment, intimidation, defamation, death threats, as well as beatings, torture and even executions. Many are the victims of false accusations, arbitrary arrest, unfair trial and detention. Their freedom of movement, opinion and expression as well as their freedom of peaceful assembly and association are often seriously curtailed.

Human rights defenders acting against discrimination face very specific risks because they speak up for the most vulnerable in our societies.

Despite these obstacles, human rights defenders do outstanding work in all parts of the world. It is very clear to me, that without their engagement and courage we would not be where we are today.

Indeed, the General Assembly strongly benefits from the work of the defenders. They bring a grassroots perspective to our debates, they galvanize action, they advance issues and they play a pioneering role; they thus lay the ground for the intergovernmental processes that take place at the General Assembly.

The role of Human Rights Defenders has been widely recognized and a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders has been appointed by the Human Rights Council.

During the coming months, we are undertaking the Review of this important body. This is a key priority for my Presidency.

The Human Rights Council has the mandate to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner, and to address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations.

It is of utmost importance that we complete the review as expeditiously as possible, by July 2011, as I have outlined jointly with the President of the Human Rights Council. This will enable the Human Rights Council to concentrate on its important core mandate for the greater good, for the good of the victims of human rights violations and of their defenders.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I pay tribute to all the organizations, groups and individuals who are devoting their energies and their lives to ensuring that our world will be shaped in the image of the Universal Declaration.

As the author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the General Assembly is also the principal depository. I therefore call upon you, the Member States, to be, in a committed and constructive manner, the unconditional and faithful guarantors of the Declaration.