

27 February 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the 19th Session of the Human Rights Council**

Madame President,
Madame High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to address the 19th session of the Human Rights Council.

My presence here today in Geneva illustrates the close working relationship between the Council and the United Nations General Assembly – a relationship that is strong and mutually reinforcing.

This relationship was enhanced by the outcome of last session's Human Rights Council review. I am pleased that, under my Presidency, the first interactive dialogue was held between the President of the Human Rights Council and 3rd Committee delegates in New York. Such measures are important strides towards strengthening coordination and dialogue between United Nations Headquarters both in New York and Geneva.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this moment in world history, the human rights work of the United Nations is as critical, as pivotal, as pressing, as it ever has been. Underpinning the shifts taking place across the world are strong calls for rights, for freedom, for dignity and for justice. I would venture to say that never before has human rights parlance crossed the lips of so many people- young, elderly, disabled, men, women- across the world. This speaks to the universality and the legitimacy of the UN's human rights work.

A key player in this work is of course the Human Rights Council. I would like to acknowledge the recent, effective response of the Council in responding to urgent or emerging situations of thematic or country focus. I would recall that recent review of the Council created the momentum for the Council to enhance its capacity in this respect, and I commend the Council for its courageous action in responding to the aspirations of peoples worldwide.

This is particularly evident in the case of Syria, on which the Council has held three special sessions and, tomorrow, an urgent debate.

Before arriving to Geneva I visited a number of countries for deliberations with heads of state and governments, where the Syrian crisis was the utmost of the concerns discussed due to flagrant

violations against civilians, however, strong will and necessary momentum are available to continue all efforts for saving lives and protecting Syrian civilians from authorities oppression.

On the 13th of this month, I held a meeting of the General Assembly to consider the Report of the Human Rights Council on its 18th special session of 2 December 2011, on the Human Rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, where member states heard a historical briefing by Madam. Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, thankfully, on the perpetrated violations against Syrian civilians where crimes against humanity are likely to have been committed in Syria. I carried out this duty based on the responsibility on my shoulder as President of the UN General Assembly.

During this meeting, an overwhelming number of Member States expressed their concern about the ongoing violence in Syria and the need to end the killings. They also underlined the necessity to put an end to all human rights violations.

Based on the above, a momentum was generated where Arab States presented a draft resolution that was adopted on the 16th of February with majority of 137 votes in favor. This resolution endorses the Arab initiative, acknowledges the violations perpetrated against civilians by the Syrian Government. According to the resolution, Mr. Kofi Anan was appointed as joint special envoy to Syria for the UN and League of Arab States. I issued a statement on this occasion, that came timely with convening of the friends of Syria conference in Tunisia to be followed by a second conference in Turkey.

Another human rights issue that occupies the conscious of mankind for more than six decades, is of course the situation in the Occupied Arab Territories.

Foreign occupation is incompatible with democracy and human rights, particularly the right to self determination. The Arab Awakening sweeping the region must not divert attention from this obstacle in the face of International peace and stability. Rather, efforts should be accelerated to ensure that the Palestinian people freely realize their right to self determination, notably by establishing their independent state, and ensure freedom and dignity for the Syrian people in the Occupied Syrian Golan .

There is global consensus on the urgent need for the Israeli settlements to cease. This was reaffirmed by International Law.

I would like to emphasize that agenda item 7 on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, requires the Council's attention to maintain this item that was established and will be discussed until the end of Occupation.

I emphasize here that there are many human rights situations requiring the attention of both the Security Council and the General Assembly. We all have a duty under the United Nations Charter to respond to human rights situations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are with no doubt aware, resolution 60/251 reaffirmed the need for all States to continue international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations, cultures and religions. This issue occupies a special place in my heart and all peace loving countries.

The Human Rights Council plays an important role in strengthening such dialogue and understanding.

Enhancing cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue is also a key focus of my Presidency of the General Assembly. In this respect, I will hold a High Level thematic debate on the Alliance of Civilizations on the 22nd of March, at the UN General Assembly in NY.

In the same context, the peaceful settlement of disputes is also one of the cornerstones of my Presidency. Resolving conflicts peacefully is integral to ensuring lasting peace, security and human rights. I would encourage the Human Rights Council to consider creative approaches, such as through mediation, for dealing with situations of conflict or divergent views on important issues. I convened a meeting on mediation last November and addressed a meeting on mediation in Istanbul, these events paved the way for the high level meeting on mediation I intend to convene on the 23rd of May at the UNGA.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN General Assembly adopted resolution on the "Inter-governmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system". The functioning of the treaty body system has been one of the success stories of the United Nations. Yet, this system needs to be strengthened. My Office looks forward to undertaking the mandate assigned by this resolution which requests that I start consultations, launch intergovernmental negotiations, appoint co-facilitators and to report on the state of these consultations and negotiations.

I believe that the practical implementation of the resolution will serve as an important contribution to strengthening the international protection and promotion of human rights.

I am confident that proposals stemming from the Assembly's consideration of this issue will include measures to ensure timely response to requests for resources for urgent human-rights related activities, and the most efficient and effective utilization of existing resources for human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We should continue to strengthen this dialogue between Geneva and New York. Our goals are shared. Working together, we can protect the rights and dignity of every member of our global family. In conclusion, it is important to remind the unanimous agreement on the respect of human rights, which was reached by Member-States in the 2000 Millennium Declaration. There can be no world peace and no security when human rights are threatened. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) can only be achieved in a context where human rights are thoroughly respected, in a world where people feel safe on their lives and fundamental rights.

I thank you.