

**National and Nordic Baltic Statements during the 49th Session of the
Human Rights Council, 28. February – 1. April 2022**

High-Level Segment

28. February 2022

**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland,
H.E. Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir**

Mr. President,

High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to address the Human Rights Council for the very first time.

As we meet today, a serious military conflict is ongoing in Europe.

In an unprovoked and brutal attack, Russia - a member of this esteemed body and a permanent member of the UN Security Council - has invaded the sovereign country of Ukraine, with all the destruction and human suffering a war entails.

This horrific war — the manifestation of a twisted worldview — is being fueled by the most sinister and low-based rhetoric. In fact the blatant lies that have been promulgated as justifications for these ongoing crimes are intended to appeal to the worst aspects of public discourse.

What I speak of are:

xenophobia, discrimination, violent nationalism, and authoritarianism.

Fear of the other. Contempt for those who are - by choice or by nature - different and unique.

This war is explicitly waged in order to turn back the clock, to stop the advance of tolerance, understanding, peace - to take back the individual liberties and rights that the civilized world has adopted as its hallmark since the dark days of totalitarianism in Europe.

Autocratic Belarus, a regime that has shown utter disregard for human rights and liberties of its own people, has been enlisted as an enabler of this war.

And let's be mindful that this war is not only against the people of Ukraine.

It is a part of an ongoing effort to sow discontent and suspicion against the values of democracy, freedom and human rights all over the world. This ideological battle is ongoing even in countries where those values have been firmly established for decades or even centuries.

And let us not forget - this war is also waged against the hopes and dreams of his own people, the people of Russia, who also suffer greatly and live in fear of what may come next. My thoughts are with them also.

Iceland strongly supports Ukraine's call for an urgent debate and welcomes its approval this morning.

Mr President.

We have a sacred duty to promote and protect high ideals. These high ideals cannot be taken for granted.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight three key points.

First of all, we need to be much more forceful in fighting the growing global pushback against human rights and democratic values.

There is increased repression of religious and ethnic minorities, growing racism, and violent nationalism. Autocratic pressures and voices are on the rise, seeking to intensify political polarization and infringe on fundamental human rights.

These trends have been aggravated by the global pandemic, during which many of the basic rights we may have thought to be secured and guaranteed, have been curtailed and even undermined.

Regrettably, too many governments have used the pandemic as an excuse to repress media, silence critics, and stifle open debate. This has been done on a scale, ranging from authoritarian regimes consolidating their power, to a less obvious slide-back in fundamental rights and freedoms, weakening the pillars of democratic societies.

I believe there is reason to believe that a frank and honest assessment must be made about how easily fundamental rights were curtailed during the pandemic. This happened with limited public debate even in societies where respect for those rights were thought to be solidly entrenched in culture and the national identity. This worries me.

The pandemic was only the last crisis. Other crises will follow. How well will we defend human rights when the next pandemic comes - or another type of crises that induce panic in the population.

Second, we must fight for an international order that is based on multilateralism and the rule of law.

The international rules-based order forms the basis for states' commitments to protect and respect the rights of their citizens and provides a platform for states to work together for peace, progress and prosperity.

The current Ukraine crisis threatens the rules-based international order with ramifications that go well beyond Europe. Already innocent civilians are suffering, and lives are being lost. Every

effort must be made to minimize human suffering. We must also ensure that the crimes being committed against the Ukrainian people be **recorded** and those responsible be **held** responsible.

This makes it even more urgent that we stand up for the fundamental principles of the rules-based international order, that we promote multilateralism and the rule of law and democracy.

Therefore, Iceland, has decided to run for a seat on the Human Rights Council for the term 2025-2027.

If elected, we will be absolutely resolute in our support for the council's mandate and will not shy away from calling on all and any of the members of this Council to live up to their human rights obligations and commitments.

To my third and final point; as long as women and girls don't enjoy the same human rights as men and boys, the world stands to lose.

We must continue advocating for the full and equal enjoyment of human rights for women and girls, including women's equal participation in political, economic, and social life, and not least sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

Iceland is also determined to continue to push for the protection of the human rights of LGBTQI persons. Our position is crystal clear: human rights are universal and apply to all, whatever their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Mr. President,

Times like these highlight the critical importance of this Council.

We need to hold each other to account, learn from each other and be ready to change course accordingly – all with the common objective of promoting and protecting universal human rights for all.

I wish you all peace. Thank you.

Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming
28. February 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We welcome this discussion and give our full support to securing universal participation in the entire UN system, including the Human Rights Council.

The Nordic-Baltic countries are fully committed in ensuring that the voice of all states, groups and individuals, in all their diversity, is heard in an equal and inclusive way in this Council.

Human rights are universal. It is therefore key that all countries are represented in discussions and decision-making processes that are aimed to protect everyone's enjoyment of all human rights in their respective countries.

In addition to the voice of UN Member States, we need expertise and grass-root knowledge of other stakeholders in this Council. The Nordic-Baltic countries highlight the importance of increasing the participation of civil society and human rights defenders, including not least women and girls, in our work. In addition, we are committed to enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in relevant United Nations bodies on issues affecting them.

Distinguished panelists,

In your view, how could we strengthen the voice of non-governmental stakeholders [from the least developed countries] in this Council?

Thank you.

**Urgent Debate on the Situation of Human Rights in Ukraine
stemming from the Russian Aggression**

3. March 2022

**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland,
H.E. Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir**

As we meet here today, a brutal war is being fought in Ukraine.

Russia has chosen a path of war and destruction: to invade Ukraine and create a serious threat to European and global security. It has enlisted Belarussian authorities, a regime that has shown utter disregard for the human rights of its own people, as its enabler.

This war is waged to turn back the clock, to stop the advance of tolerance, understanding, peace - to take back the human rights that we have worked so hard for, and this Council is tasked with promoting and protecting.

The human suffering will be severe – in fact, it already is. Civilians are being killed and injured. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have arrived in neighbouring countries. With humanitarian needs mounting, humanitarian access must be secured, and international humanitarian law respected.

Russia bears full responsibility for this military aggression and all the destruction and loss of life it will cause. We stand in full unity with Ukraine and call on Russia to stop this senseless war and to immediately withdraw all its forces from Ukraine without precondition.

Interactive Dialogue on the Oral Update by the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea
4. March 2022
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for his update.

We remain highly concerned about persistent human rights violations and abuses in Eritrea, including arbitrary detention, imprisonment of refugees and asylum seekers, indefinite national service, and restrictions on the rights to freedoms of expression and religion or belief.

We are deeply concerned about the reported human rights violations and abuses committed by Eritrean Defence Forces on Ethiopian territory and call for their immediate and unconditional departure from Ethiopia. We urge the Government of Eritrea to undertake investigations meeting international standards and to hold those responsible to account.

The inhumane prison conditions exacerbated by COVID-19 and reports of increased pervasive controls by the Eritrean authorities on its population are of great concern. We call on the Government to fully comply with its international obligations and to ensure respect for all human rights.

Finally, we reiterate our call to the Government to strengthen its engagement with the Council's mechanisms, including by granting the Special Rapporteur full and unhindered access to the country.

How can the international community support efforts to improve the human rights situation in the country?

Interactive dialogue on the OHCHR report on Sri Lanka
4. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, Mr. President

I have the honour of making this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

We thank the High Commissioner for her update, noting with regret the limited progress made on Council resolution 46/1.

We welcome the release on bail of Prevention of Terrorism Act prisoners, including Ahnaf Jazeem and Hejaaz Hizbullah, but remain concerned about others still in custody.

We are encouraged by the move to amend the PTA. However, we are concerned that proposed changes are insufficient to address human rights and due process concerns.

We urge Sri Lankan authorities to ensure freedom of speech, including for human rights activists, journalists, and members of minority communities. We call upon the authorities to put an end to surveillance and intimidation of civil society, including arbitrary arrests.

We are concerned about the lack of progress in the areas of transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliation, and encourage the government to increase their efforts in this regard. We urge the government to ensure the independence and effectiveness of institutions dealing with these issues.

We are also concerned about reports of deaths of persons in police custody and encourage proper investigations of these events.

We call upon Sri Lanka to cooperate fully and effectively with the High Commissioner and the UN institutions to ensure full implementation of Council resolution 46/1.

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue on the report by the High Commissioner
on the situation of human rights in Nicaragua
7. March 2022
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, Madam/Mr President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries. We thank the High Commissioner for her report.

In a time of democratic backsliding and questioning of human rights in many places, it is particularly important to raise our voices when systematic human right violations are observed. We remain deeply concerned by the ongoing human rights violations in Nicaragua including arbitrary detentions, violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and other media workers, political opposition, and civil society leaders.

The November elections in Nicaragua took place without respect for democratic principles. The Nicaraguan people was deprived of their right to freely elect their representatives and to vote in credible, inclusive, fair and transparent elections.

We urge the Nicaraguan Government to fully respect all human rights and to immediately and unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained. Impunity cannot be tolerated, and accountability must be ensured. We reiterate our call on Nicaragua to cooperate fully with international and regional human rights mechanisms, including the OHCHR.

Madam/Mr President,

What measures should in your view be taken in order to promote accountability for human rights violations in Nicaragua?

Thank you.

**Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the
High Commissioner oral update on the Sudan
7. March 2022
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, Madam/Mr President,

Sweden has the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic Countries. We thank the High Commissioner for the update.

Madam/Mr President,

The situation for human rights in Sudan has deteriorated since the last time we met in this format. We condemn the military coup of 25 October that put the civilian-led democratic transition to a halt.

We are deeply concerned about the continued excessive use of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary detentions, and unlawful killings of peaceful protestors. We are also concerned about the increased inter-communal violence in Darfur. We urge the military authorities to show restraint, to protect civilians and ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable.

A Sudanese-led inclusive dialogue is necessary to achieve a broad-based support for the path forward. The UNITAMS report (on the 28th of Feb), compiled on the basis of consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, identifies areas of consensus. We appreciate the commitment of UNITAMS, AU and IGAD to work together to support the process.

We appreciate the work of the independent human rights expert in Sudan and call upon the Sudanese authorities to fully cooperate with its mandate.

Madam/Mr President,

How can we and the Office best support the protection and advancement of human rights in Sudan?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner on her report on
the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan
7. March 2022
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We welcome the High Commissioner's report and this opportunity to highlight key concerns regarding the human rights situation in Afghanistan in the wake of the fall of the democratically elected Government.

Our countries have been actively engaged in efforts for the stabilisation and development of Afghanistan. We are deeply concerned by the findings of the report and the deterioration in the human rights situation, particularly by reports of arbitrary killings, violence and intimidation against peaceful protestors, journalists and other media workers, human rights defenders, persons associated with the previous government and persons belonging to ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

Equally, we are gravely worried about the erosion of the enjoyment of the rights of women and girls, in particular their access to education, and the exclusion of women from political, social and economic spheres of Afghan society.

We express our strong support for the new mandate of a special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan.

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner on the Situation
of Human Rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia
7. March 2022
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

I speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank the High Commissioner for her update.

We welcome recent positive steps taken by the Government of Ethiopia. However, we call on all parties to abide by international humanitarian law and allow full, safe and unfettered humanitarian access to all people in need, including in Tigray.

We remain deeply concerned about human rights violations and abuses in the Northern parts of Ethiopia. This must stop and accountability must be ensured for all crimes committed. We urge all parties to the conflict to cease hostilities, seek a negotiated settlement and respect the human rights, security and safety of civilians and humanitarian workers.

Finally, we urge the Government of Ethiopia to strengthen its engagement with the Council's mechanisms by granting the international commission of human rights experts full, safe and unhindered access to the country. The commission complements ongoing national efforts and is key to help hold all perpetrators to account for their actions, including non-Ethiopian actors.

Madam High Commissioner,

Taking into account the investigation and findings by the Joint Investigation Team, how can it best be ensured that the work of the international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia will complement those findings?

Thank you.

Item 2 – General Debate
8. March 2022
Statement by Iceland

Thank you,

Iceland thanks the High Commissioner for her Oral Update.

Mr. President,

We are concerned over intensification of restrictions on freedom of expression, media freedom, and right to peaceful assembly.

Iceland strongly condemns **Russia**'s unprovoked attack on Ukraine, as well as violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including attacks on journalists and media workers. Measures to restrict peaceful protests is of great concern. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly must be respected.

In **Egypt**, human rights defenders, journalists, and activists face repression, including by application of terrorism legislation against peaceful critics.

In **Sudan**, the use of excessive force and unlawful dispersal of protests countering opposition against the military coup is of great concern. We call for accountability and immediate end to impunity.

Mr. President,

Women and girls still face disadvantages due to discriminatory laws and practices in **Saudi Arabia**, we acknowledge women's increasing participation in society and workforce but remain concerned about severe restrictions imposed on women human rights defenders, including travel bans.

Finally, we are concerned regarding grave human rights violations and abuses committed against the Uyghur and other minority groups in **China**. Human rights must be ensured for all persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, also in Xinjiang.

I thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
in the field of cultural rights
8. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

President,
Madam Special Rapporteur,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

Our countries attach great importance to the promotion of all human rights, including the rights for each person - to access, participate and contribute to cultural life in society without discrimination.

The right to freedom of artistic expression includes the right to express ideas and opinions through arts or any media of one's choice.

We support the independence of your mandate and wish you all the best in the important work on promoting cultural rights.

In many countries artists and cultural workers are subjected to censorship, discrimination and persecution. Cultural professionals and the public alike are being denied the right to take part in the cultural life. Blasphemy laws and anti-terrorism legislation are increasingly used to persecute and detain artists of all kinds and to censor artistic expression.

Women artists and cultural practitioners and those with minority background, are disproportionately subject to harassment, persecution and imprisonment as a result of their work.

Cultural rights are for all, including individuals belonging to marginalized groups, irrespective of gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or ethnicity.

Madam Special Rapporteur,
How can we ensure cultural rights for marginalized individuals and groups?

Thank you!

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the sale
and sexual exploitation of children
8. March 2022
Statement by Latvia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, Mister President.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We wish to thank the Special Rapporteur on presenting her latest report, which provides a valuable overview of some of the key steps States can take to protect children from sale, sexual exploitation and abuse.

We, the Nordic-Baltic countries, are committed to the fight against the sale and sexual exploitation of children. This does not only include establishing a comprehensive legal and policy network, but also ensuring its effective implementation.

Information and communication technologies have increasingly been used as a means of child sexual exploitation, and this has become even more prevalent during the pandemic. To facilitate prevention, it is important to increase digital literacy among children and include other relevant topics in the school curricula, such as comprehensive sexuality education.

Regarding rehabilitation measures, we stress the need to ensure a trauma-informed and child-friendly victim- and survivor-centred approach, and provide child victims and survivors with access to justice while also avoiding secondary victimisation.

Madam Special Rapporteur, can you share some of the best practices of integrating a gender perspective in addressing the sale and sexual exploitation and abuse of children?

Thank you.

Panel discussion on ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

10. March 2022

Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mister President.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

The pandemic is not over. It is an ongoing health crisis. It is also an economic and broader societal crisis. Until covid-19 vaccines, treatment, diagnostics and other tools become available to all, the risks of new variants will stay high.

The inequity in access to covid-19 tools underscores the need for solidarity. In an interdependent world, we must take collective action to ensure the realization of health as a human right. Multilateral mechanisms, such as ACT-A and COVAX, are our best bet to do so. Accordingly, we must finance these initiatives to deliver.

The inequity in access to covid-19 vaccines is stark. A key challenge now is ensuring delivery of vaccines. Vaccines are not effective until persons are vaccinated.

We must collectively address global, regional and local bottlenecks. This ranges from supply and cold chains to inclusion of marginalized populations and vaccine hesitancy.

Our approaches to vaccination must be inclusive. No one can be left behind. Covid-19 vaccines must be made available in humanitarian settings.

Ending the pandemic is in the mutual interest of all countries. It is an equity imperative. It is sound economic policy. It provides global health security.

Multilateral collaboration remains our key strategy towards universal vaccination and health for all.

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on Freedom of Religion or Belief
10. March 2022
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report and for providing valuable insights. We are deeply concerned by systematic human rights violations and abuses directed at religious minorities in recent and ongoing conflicts.

We welcome attempts at a nuanced discourse on the relationship between religion and conflicts. While recognizing that many conflicts have underlying economic, political and even environmental drivers, religious extremism is also an important driver for conflict. We witness that in parts of Western Africa, Africa's Horn, the Middle East and elsewhere.

We stress the need to fulfil obligations to prohibit and prevent discrimination, hostility, or violence based on religion or belief, including in the context of Russia's ongoing illegal aggression against Ukraine, and urge Russia to refrain from any such acts. We condemn Russia's aggression in the strongest possible terms and reiterate our full solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

We support your call for including minority religious actors in the prevention of conflict, strengthening resilience, and promoting inclusive and just reconciliation. More could be done to include moderate faith leaders and interfaith engagements in efforts to prevent religious extremism.

Mr. Special Rapporteur, how do you see our possibilities to engage with moderate faith-based actors to prevent increasing religious extremism from driving conflict and human rights abuses?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
the right to privacy
10. March 2022
Statement by Latvia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, Mister President.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States: [Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country – Latvia.]

We warmly welcome you, Madam Special Rapporteur, and thank you for presenting your first report to this Council.

Our countries attach great importance to the promotion and protection of all human rights, both online and offline, including each individual person's right to privacy. The right to privacy is also essential to the realization and enjoyment of many other rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and of association.

We welcome the conclusion in your report that the existing mechanism for cooperation between Ibero-America and Europe on personal data protection could serve as a model for the development of privacy and data protection principles in the global context.

As noted in the report, the pandemic has rapidly led to technology being closely integrated into our daily lives, and this has increased risks for information security, privacy and personal data processing. However, establishing a common understanding and application of the privacy and data protection principles could ensure that the technology is used in a manner that prioritises and safeguards privacy.

Madam Special Rapporteur, what steps can be taken to ensure integration and harmonization of these principles on a global level?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on human rights and the environment
11. March 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries. We thank the Special Rapporteur for the report.

The report raises important issues on the human rights impacts of pollution and toxic chemicals. Individuals, groups and communities that are already enduring poverty, discrimination and marginalization suffer disproportionately.

As the report outlines, both government and business have responsibilities to safeguard the access to a healthy and sustainable environment. Special attention must be given to those in a vulnerable situation including children, indigenous peoples, minorities, older persons and persons with disabilities. It is vital to integrate a gender perspective and empower women for environmental sustainability.

The situation of environmental human rights defenders continues to be of serious concern. Ensuring that they can work without fear of harassment, persecution, or losing their lives is a priority for our countries.

Mr. Special Rapporteur, how can the international community best support a human rights based transition to a circular economy?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on on torture and other cruel,
inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
11. March 2022
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

The prohibition of torture is absolute. In light of the Russia's illegal military aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms, we have to recall that this also applies in times of war. Especially since Russia with its aggression has proven their willingness to discard their obligations under international law. Allow me also to use this opportunity to underline our full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

Mr. Melzer,

We thank you for your engagement throughout your last two terms. You have provided a tremendous contribution to the fight against torture.

In your latest report, you evaluate the reception and utilization by states of the thematic reports as a driver for change at national level. We are concerned by your findings, indicating lack of political will to effectively address alleged violations or shortcomings in ending torture. You also find that States generally engage only superficially with the mandate. This is disturbing.

Mr. Melzer,

With these reflections in mind, would you share your thoughts and recommendations as to the need of any adjustments to the mandate to improve cooperation and effect?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the situation of human rights defenders
11. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Norway.

We welcome the Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council. We thank the Special Rapporteur for bringing to our attention the interlinkages between human rights and corruption, and the role of human rights defenders in combatting it.

The report again proves the relevance of the mandate in bringing attention to the work of human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, and the challenges they face. We call on all states to engage constructively with the Special Rapporteur, including on individual cases.

We also encourage all states to participate in the negotiations on the resolution on human rights defenders that Norway has presented. The resolution addresses the protection needs of human rights defenders operating in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Madame Special Rapporteur,

We note the successes recounted in the report, illustrating the positive contribution of human rights defenders. Nevertheless, we are also deeply concerned for the instances of threats and attacks against human rights defenders who investigate and speak out about corruption. Reprisals against those who fight corruption can only undermine trust and confidence in public institutions. How can this Council best support human rights defenders fighting corruption, including ensuring better protection against threats and attacks?

Thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food
14. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mister President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

We are deeply concerned with the global state of food insecurity, as farmers worldwide are under a colossal pressure due to the devastating consequences of climate change and the disruptions of the global pandemic.

A plethora of humanitarian crises globally showcases how hunger and inadequate access to food can be both a cause and consequence of conflict. We are deeply concerned with the devastating effects the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, with the participation of Belarus, and the ensuing humanitarian catastrophe will have for food security worldwide.

We commend the Special Rapporteur Mr. Fakhri for his dedication to protect the right to adequate food. We believe the right of the farmer to save, use and exchange seeds freely is crucial to ensuring genetic diversity of crops and self-sufficiency of farmers and local communities across the globe.

We reaffirm our commitment to contribute towards ending world hunger by 2030 and urge the Council to focus on farmer's rights and seed security in this effort.

How can the Council and its members mitigate the consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on global food security?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
the rights of persons with disabilities
14. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his thematic study on artificial intelligence and the rights of persons with disabilities, which constitutes a groundbreaking contribution to this field. The report addresses how artificial intelligence and machine-learning technologies can be of benefit to persons with disabilities in several fields, including employment and education. Such technologies can offer positive contributions, particularly in assistive technology.

However, such technologies also present challenges and negative impacts to the rights of persons with disabilities, and the report describes risks the technology constitutes and how these risks can be addressed. For example can artificial intelligence use biased data sets and discriminatory algorithms. [Particularly in the employment domain we have seen increasing use of artificial intelligence tools that can have strong negative impact on persons with disabilities, both when it comes to recruitment and to surveillance of workers.]

We agree with the Special Rapporteur that the balance between human rights risks and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence system and their use in the context of disability should be debated both at international and national level.

We would like to ask the Special Rapporteur how States can ensure rights of persons with disabilities are protected while designing national artificial intelligence strategies.

Thank you.

Annual Debate on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
14. March 2022
Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank OHCHR for the report that gives a solid basis for our discussion.

Data collection should be disaggregated by disability and linked to human rights obligations. This will make it possible to understand and advance the situation of persons with disabilities and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It enables the effective formulation of policies, ensures equal rights, participation and opportunities of persons with disabilities within the society. The OHCHR report provides guidance to States in identifying actions to fulfil its obligations regarding disability data.

Disability assessment tools should be fit for purpose to ensure access to services and facilitate concrete actions to advance policy implementation. No person should be overlooked while we speak about full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms included participation in political and social life.

It is our duty to uphold ethical principles and human rights-based approach to data collection and at the same time respect the right to information outlined in the Convention by, inter alia, ensuring dissemination of statistics in accessible format. Data collection should be managed in full compliance with the right to privacy and confidentiality and with respect to human rights.

We encourage governments to collect, analyse and provide disaggregated data by disabilities in collaboration with organizations representing persons with disabilities.

We would like to ask the panelists, how could we best ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in designing, implementing and monitoring of data-related policies?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of
human rights by persons with albinism
15. March 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We thank Mme Miti-Drummond for her first report to the Council (on harmful practices and hate crimes targeting persons with albinism), which we find both timely and comprehensive

The Nordic-Baltic countries share the conclusions the Independent Expert has identified in her report on various forms of violence and harmful practices, including that persons with albinism, especially women and girls, today face multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination. It is important that all actors and sectors/segments of society, both public and private, address the elements that lead to these human rights violations at all levels, and equally important is sensibilisation of health professionals, nationally and regionally.

We support the call to States to prepare inclusive national action plans to address both harmful practices and hate crimes, online and off-line, and to promote awareness raising about albinism.

Madame Independent Expert,

In your view, what are the best ways support your important work in implementing your recommendations?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
on Violence against Children
15. March 2022
Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank the Special Representative for her important work in promoting the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children by 2030 and shedding light on immediate and long-term negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Disrupted mental health, exacerbated social inequalities and digital divide, increased risk of violence and abuse, child [early and forced] marriage and labour, trafficking of children, cyberbullying are just a few highly worrying issues catalyzed by the pandemic.

We are also concerned about the danger posed to children caused by war and conflicts, climate change and political instability. It is our top priority to provide them a stable and safe environment. No society will have social and economic development, unless all forms of violence are effectively eliminated.

We highly welcome decisions by states to include child rights-based approach and active children engagement in preparation of sustainable policies both on national and international level. It is crucial for implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and children's well-being.

Madam Special Representative, how could this Council contribute effectively to the actions of international community to fully recover from the pandemic and ensure adequate implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
on Children and Armed Conflict
15. March 2022
Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Estonia.

We thank the Special Representative for her report and welcome the work undertaken during 2021.

Our countries remain deeply concerned by the continuing high level of grave violations against children in conflicts worldwide and call upon all States and other relevant stakeholders to take effective steps to prevent and bring an end to these.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the unprovoked aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The Russian-initiated military conflict in Ukraine has lasted the past eight years and has already caused profound and lasting damage to children. The full-scale invasion has caused staggering civilian casualties in Ukraine, including dozens of children killed and more than a hundred wounded. Civilian areas and critical infrastructure, including the kindergartens, schools, orphanages, and hospitals have been indiscriminately bombed and destroyed. Children are forced to flee, many unaccompanied and separated from their parents, and at risk of threats such as sexual and gender based violence or disappearance.

Civilians, including children, and civilian infrastructure must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law, without discrimination of any kind. Those responsible for violations against children must be held accountable. There should be no impunity for acts like the horrendous bombing of the maternal hospital in Mariupol.

Madam Special Representative,

What are your planned activities to monitor the situation of children affected by conflict in Ukraine?

Thank you!

Item 3 - General Debate (Focus: Safety of journalists)

16. March 2022

Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you Chair.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Sweden and my own country Lithuania.

We thank the OHCHR for the reports.

The Nordic-Baltic countries condemn all forms of violence, online and offline, against journalists and other media workers, including women journalists and media workers. It is even more deplorable that in some cases the source of such violence, harassment and repressions is the state itself.

Independent media play a critical role in informing the public, in particular in the times of crises and global health emergencies. It is therefore crucial that the right to seek, receive and impart information through a broad range of diverse and credible sources, is ensured.

We strongly condemn the attempts to silence media sources and voices that challenge systematic manipulation and disinformation efforts by government-controlled media channels, in the Russian Federation following Russia's war against Ukraine. The situation is equally alarming in Belarus, who supports Russia's aggression against Ukraine and continues to exacerbate the already extremely troubling situation for media freedom in their country. We reiterate our condemnation in the strongest possible terms of Russia's illegal and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine, and our full solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

It is the responsibility of every state to create a safe and enabling environment for the critical work carried out by journalists, to address the issue of impunity for attacks against them, including impunity surrounding online attacks on women journalists and media workers and to ensure accountability through impartial, prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations.

The Nordic-Baltic countries call on all states to do their part in defending media freedom and the safety of journalists and by doing so - to promote the right to freedom of expression and information, which is vital to any democratic society.

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue on OHCHR report on
the situation of human rights in Belarus
17. March 2022**

**Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries
H.E. Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs**

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We are deeply concerned by the findings of the OHCHR examination, in particular that violations have been widespread and systematic, and executed as an official policy.

The Lukashenko regime is on a destructive path, at home and abroad. We reiterate in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of Russia's illegal and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it. We stand in full solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

Mr. President,

We call on Belarus to adhere to its international commitments and obligations under human rights law.

The relentless attack on civil society and independent voices, and the widespread use of disinformation in Belarus must stop. We urge an immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners and other arbitrarily detained persons, whose numbers rise constantly.

We continue to stand with the Belarusian people in their fight for a free and democratic society.

The Nordic-Baltic countries fully support a renewal of the OHCHR examination mandate, to ensure a further assessment of evidence from the perspective of applicable international criminal law.

Madame High Commissioner, how can civil society best continue to contribute to accountability efforts?

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue on the Oral Update by
the Special Rapporteur on Islamic Republic of Iran
17. March 2022
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for his update.

We remain deeply concerned about the persistent human rights violations and abuses in Iran, and the absence of a system of accountability. Iran must undertake fundamental reforms to establish appropriate legal and political structures of governance, and ensure independence of the judiciary.

The continuous use of death penalty, including the execution of child offenders remains an issue of deep concern. We urge Iran to abolish the death penalty for all offences and impose an immediate moratorium on executions. Moreover, the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, online and offline, peaceful assembly and association must be protected.

We regret the fact that discriminatory laws and practices against women and girls persist in Iran, including child marriage. We share the Special Rapporteur's grave concerns about the new family law and its consequences on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Finally, we urge Iran to fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur, including by granting full and unhindered access to the country.

I thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan
18. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

President,

I have the pleasure of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic Countries. We thank the Commission for its work in South Sudan.

Violence and insecurity continue to be fundamental obstacles to improving the human rights situation. Some steps have been taken by the Government in implementing the Peace Agreement, but progress falls well below expectations and agreed timelines due to lack of political will.

As a result, human rights violations, and abuses, such as extrajudicial, summary, and arbitrary executions, abductions, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and attacks on humanitarian workers continue with impunity. We urge the parties to make immediate progress on security arrangements, rule of law and other provisions of the Revitalized Agreement.

We are also deeply concerned by undue restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly by the Government, especially considering the forthcoming electoral process. The government must show their commitment to civil and political rights by allowing peaceful public discourse to take place.

Finally, a strong UN human rights monitoring mechanism is still needed. We believe the Human Rights Commission plays a vital role in that regard and urge the government to continue its history of cooperation with the Commission.

My question would be:

How can the work of the Commission best contribute to the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing and the Hybrid Court?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry
on the Syrian Arab Republic
18. March 2022
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

I speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

Eleven years have passed since a peaceful uprising in Syria descended into a brutal war that has since caused enormous human suffering, grave and widespread human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law.

As the Commission's findings reveals, the human rights situation continues to deteriorate, inflicting new levels of hardship and suffering, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, targeted attacks and killings, torture and sexual and gender-based violence.

Accountability is key. We call on all parties to fulfil their obligations under human rights law and international humanitarian law. Impunity must end, independent monitors given unimpeded access to places of detention, and the respect for human rights for all in Syria must be restored.

The Syrian regime must engage in the UN-facilitated political process in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 with the aim of creating stability and peace in Syria. Safe and unhindered access for international humanitarian and human rights organisations must be ensured.

We reiterate our strong support for the crucial work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, the Commission of Inquiry and the triple IM.

Commissioners: What can be done to accelerate the work to achieve accountability and justice? What more can be done for those missing and/or arbitrarily detained?

Thank you.

Enhanced Interactive dialogue on the report of the Secretary-General on Myanmar
18. March 2022
Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President,

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Estonia.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the recommendations on the involvement of the UN in Myanmar.

We remain extremely concerned about the continuing deterioration of the situation in Myanmar as a consequence of the military coup on February 1, 2021. We strongly condemn the coup and call on the military to release all those arbitrarily detained and ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We underline the need to ensure the protection of civilians, particularly all persons in vulnerable situations and call for to end the use of violence, to protect the civilian infrastructure and to participate in constructive dialogue in order to restore peace. Humanitarian access must be secured. We recognise the importance of neighbouring countries in supporting humanitarian efforts.

The military regime bears responsibility for this crisis, which has gravely undermined peace and stability in Myanmar. Those responsible have to be held accountable for their actions.

We encourage the UN to fill key positions in their country team in Myanmar as soon as possible, and to continue and intensify coordination with ASEAN.

Mr Secretary-General,

Ensuring unhindered access to all UN bodies and international mechanisms in Myanmar is of paramount importance. What are the prospects of enhancing the access of all UN bodies to all areas of Myanmar?

Thank you!

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
the human rights situation in Myanmar
21. March 2022
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, President.

I deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States.

Thank you, Special Rapporteur, for your update and the attention you draw to the ongoing serious human rights situation in Myanmar.

It is now more than a year since the brutal military coup in Myanmar. In recent months the violence and military build-up across the country have further escalated. The reports of mass killings, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, airstrikes and burning of villages and attacks on civilian facilities are horrific and unacceptable. Ensuring accountability for serious international crimes remains critical.

We continue to condemn the actions of the military and reiterate our call to immediately end all forms of violence against civilians and for the release of all those arbitrarily detained.

We are concerned about the continued repression of the right to freedom of speech including surveillance, harassment and arrests of journalists, human right defenders and civil society in general.

The crisis in Myanmar is also humanitarian – and it is becoming increasingly acute with over 14 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Safe and unimpeded humanitarian access must be ensured.

Special Rapporteur,

How can the international community address the increased repression of freedom of speech in Myanmar?

Thank you

Interactive dialogue on High Commissioner's report on Myanmar
21. March 2022
Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, President.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We strongly support the work of the High Commissioner and her office, and thank for the comprehensive report.

The Nordic-Baltic countries continue to condemn the military coup in the strongest terms and reiterate our call on the military to respect the human rights and democratic wishes of the people of Myanmar.

We express our grave concerns about the increasing level of violence and repression across the country and call upon the Myanmar military leadership to immediately end all forms of violence, including sexual and gender based violence, release all those arbitrarily detained, to end discrimination of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, including Rohingyas and to fully respect and protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

We urge to ensure accountability as well as to end impunity for all international crimes and human rights violations and abuses. We also urge Myanmar to fully cooperate with the UN human rights and international mechanisms.

The Nordic-Baltic countries continue to support the efforts of the ASEAN Special Envoy and the UN Special Envoy to find a peaceful solution to the crisis through meaningful and truly inclusive dialogue, and stand in solidarity with Myanmar people.

Madam High Commissioner,

How can we better address the consequences of the brutal repression by ensuring protection of civilians, accountability and redress for victims?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
21. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report on the human rights situation in DPRK.

We share the grave concern expressed in the report regarding the continued, systematic, and widespread human rights violations, and the lack of effort by the DPRK authorities to improve the situation.

We also share the Special Rapporteur's deep concern over the DPRK's coercive system of governance and the existence of political prison camps (kwanliso) which deprives the fundamental freedoms of its population. We urge the DPRK to dismantle the kwanliso, and to end the use of arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as the practice of forced labour.

The DPRK's prolonged and strict COVID-19 measures have exacerbated an already critical humanitarian and human rights situation in the country. It is vital that the DPRK reviews its COVID-19 measures, engages with the international community to ensure full vaccination for the entire population, and facilitates unimpeded access for humanitarian agencies providing critical assistance.

Finally, we call on the DPRK to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur, and to engage with the UN human rights mechanisms.

Thank you.

Item 4 – General Debate
21. March 2022
Statement by Iceland

Thank you, Mr. President.

We reiterate in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of **Russia's** illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Russian forces continue to demonstrate utter disregard for civilian lives through indiscriminate attacks that can amount to war crimes. We call on Russia to immediately withdraw all military personnel and equipment from Ukraine.

In **Venezuela**, we remain deeply concerned about restrictions of fundamental freedoms and the erosion of the rule of law. We urge the government to end its policy of repression and to restore judicial independence.

In **Myanmar**, we call on the military to cease all violations and abuses against the people of Myanmar, including ethnic minorities, and call for accountability and the immediate return to democratic rule.

Mr. President,

We urge all parties to the conflict in **Ethiopia** to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access across Ethiopia. Accountability must be ensured for all human rights violations and abuses and perpetrators must be held to account.

Lastly, in **Afghanistan**, we call for the full enjoyment of human rights of women and girls, including the right to education and the right to work, and strongly condemn the use of violence and arbitrary detention by the Taliban.

I thank you.

**Panel discussion on the importance of robust public policies and services for the
protection of economic, social and cultural rights
in contributing to the Covid-19 pandemic
22. March 2022
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic states.

The pandemic has put enormous pressure on access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, and individuals, exacerbated democratic backsliding, and weakened the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The pandemic has also amplified existing inequalities and has had a disproportionate impact on women, girls and persons in vulnerable situations.

The Secretary General's report "Question of the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights" is a timely call to action to invest in all human rights, drawing on the lessons from the pandemic.

We must leave no one behind and intensify our work to ensure that more people have access to social protection and facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Decent work is an important precondition for access to both social protection and adequate income.

More equal societies are also healthier, wealthier and more peaceful. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, we would particularly like to highlight the role of a human rights-based approach to social protection systems for promotion of global health, protection of everyone from the pandemic and its consequences and for preventing future crises from taking such a devastating toll.

We welcome the findings of this report on a human rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda and their complementary with the Secretary General's call for a new social contract anchored in human rights.

Esteemed panellists,

What do you see as the role for the OHCHR in taking the important work on a human rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda forward?

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on minorities
22. March 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland. We thank the Special Rapporteur for the report.

The full realization and protection of human rights of persons belonging to minorities is paramount in conflict prevention and crisis situations. The root causes of discrimination, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, must be addressed. Minorities, including women representing minorities, must be involved in decision-making processes and conflict prevention.

While the internet is an important tool for advocating for human rights, we are extremely concerned about the growth of online hate speech. This hate speech often harms especially minorities, persons in vulnerable situations and women, and can lead to hate crimes, physical violence and even conflicts.

Mr. Special Rapporteur, what action do you recommend for governments and businesses to take to allow all, including women and underrepresented people within minorities, to use their voices online, without threat of violence, harassment or hate speech, and thus prevent conflicts?

Thank you.

Item 9 – General Debate
28. March 2022
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We remain fully committed to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. All individuals must be treated with dignity and enjoy equal rights as also stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Racism can take many forms. Ranging from racist hate online to systemic racism and racially motivated violence. We condemn it in all its forms.

Despite the concerning fact that no society is immune from racism and racial discrimination, we need to also highlight and learn from the many positive initiatives and developments that exists.

Therefore, going forward, we need to build on the good stories. Build on the collective commitment to fight racism and racial discrimination. And not least build on the many existing structures and mechanisms, including within this Council.

In recent years, the fight against racism and racial discrimination have gained increased momentum globally. It has revitalized engagement at all levels of society. We acknowledge the need for strong Government leadership. But also that inclusion of wide range of stakeholders, including from civil society, is essential to achieve sustainable progress.

In conclusion, rest assure that we will continue our persistent efforts to combat racism in our own countries as well as promoting the cause internationally.

Thank you.

**Debate in commemoration of the International Day for the
Elimination of Racial Discrimination
28. March 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We commend and are committed to protect those who work at the forefront in combatting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including persons and communities of African descent. An inclusive civic space is imperative for positive change.

Racism causes suffering and mistrust between people. Being blatant or elusive, it can be a powerful tool to incite fear, even hate, and uphold power structures that serve only few.

It is key to increase full, equal and meaningful participation of persons from diverse backgrounds, especially those who have traditionally been marginalized, in all spheres of society. This requires dismantling structural inequalities and implementing well-targeted policy measures. Countering disinformation is crucial in preventing racism, including its use for political ends.

Women, girls as well as persons in vulnerable situations face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including based on racism. This can push them deeper into margins. Their concerns must be heard and acted upon.

Ending racism is hard but possible if we act decisively and have a shared mission pursued on policy, cultural and personal levels. We can reach a world free of racism where human rights are ensured for all and no one is left behind.

I thank you.

Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on oral updates on Democratic Republic of the Congo
29. March 2022
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr President,

I make this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Thank you, Madam High Commissioner and the Team of International Experts for your updates on the situation of human rights in the DRC.

We appreciate that the total number of documented human rights violations and abuses has decreased over the last year, including those related to the democratic space. The situation for civilians in Eastern DRC, however, continues to be of deep concern. We are for instance alarmed by attacks against camps for displaced persons. There has also been an increase in the number of attacks against humanitarian actors in the region, which makes their work even more difficult. This must be addressed urgently.

Madame High Commissioner, which consequences have you observed of the state of siege and of the joint operations between Uganda and DRC on the civilian population?

It is positive that the long legal process in the case of the murder of Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp has resulted in a first instance verdict. Welcome that the Congolese authorities have confirmed that the investigation will continue. All those responsible must be brought to justice. Noting that 51 of the accused have been sentenced to death, we urge the DRC authorities to maintain the de facto moratorium on the death penalty in place since 2003, and to consider abolishing it in law. We continue to call on the authorities to fully cooperate with the UN Follow-On Mechanism.

I thank you.

Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Mali
29. March 2022
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

We thank the Independent Expert, Mr. Tine, for the report.

We note with deep concern the Malian leadership's postponement of elections and the proposal to extend the transition period far beyond the agreed timeline. We urge Malian authorities to return to a credible transition process with a clear timeline and elections in the near future.

We continue to be deeply concerned by human rights violations and abuses in Mali, including the systematic targeting of civilians by extremist armed groups. We remain alarmed by the continued reports on violations committed by national forces. We are also very concerned that the Malian leadership's cooperation with the Wagner group will likely, as seen elsewhere, further undermine the respect for human rights.

In this context, strengthening the access to justice, fighting impunity and increasing accountability is crucial.

We are concerned about the shrinking space for freedom of expression and media freedom in Mali.

Let me assure you of our continued support to promoting human rights in Mali and allow me to ask the following question:

How can Malian authorities best work to combat human rights violations and abuses and increase accountability, and how can the international community most effectively support the respect for human rights in Mali?

Thank you.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Cambodia
29. March 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his longstanding work and today's important update on the human rights situation in Cambodia.

We appreciate Cambodia's engagement with the Human Rights mechanisms, including the planned country visit of the Independent Expert on SOGI.

The Nordic-Baltic countries continue to have concerns about shrinking civic space, limitations of rights to freedom of assembly and expression, including for human rights defenders, trade union members and media.

As local and national elections are approaching, it is essential that alternative and critical voices are not hindered nor silenced, as opposition parties are a prerequisite of political pluralism.

We are concerned about the recent sentences and convictions in the mass trial against opposition figures and the negative effect this will have on Cambodian democracy.

Mr Special Rapporteur,

How can we best support Cambodia to strengthen human rights, rule of law and democracy?

Thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Fact-Finding Mission on Libya
30. March 2022
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We fully support the mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission. Its work is key to ensure accountability in Libya.

The authorities in Libya and all parties to the conflict need to fully cooperate with the Mission. Unhindered access inside the country should be guaranteed. Civil society and individuals must be able to interact with the Mission without fear of reprisals.

We stress accountability for violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by all parties in Libya, including sexual and gender-based violence and violence against activists, women's rights defenders and migrants. The Mission has established that some of these grave violations may amount to war crimes, which is deeply concerning.

The systematic silencing of civil society and the continued involvement of mercenaries has created an environment of impunity. Every avenue should be explored to exert pressure on foreign powers that continue to fund mercenaries in Libya to ensure their departure.

Distinguished experts, what in your view is needed for the complete fulfillment of the Mission's mandate?

I thank you.

**High-level Interactive Dialogue on human rights situation in
the Central African Republic
30. March 2022
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries. We thank the Independent Expert for his ongoing efforts and remain supportive of the OHCHR's human rights mandate at MINUSCA.

The continuously deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in the CAR remains a great concern. Both armed groups, the national army and their partners, the Russian Wagner Group, are responsible. We are appalled by the reported high number of gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence, the grave violations against children, and the targeting of religious minorities. We condemn in the strongest terms the targeting of humanitarian workers and the repeated attempts to obstruct the operations of MINUSCA.

The government must continue to provide MINUSCA and humanitarian organisations with access. All allegations of violations and abuses must be effectively and independently investigated, and the Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security must be implemented.

We would like the Independent Expert's assessment of the effectiveness of existing accountability mechanisms in CAR to prevent further atrocities, and inquire whether the SOFA violations and attempts to obstruct MINUSCA's work have impacted the human rights section's monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses and violations in any way.

Thank you

Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's Oral Update on Ukraine

30. March 2022

Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

H.E. Gabrielius Landsbergis, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries, I thank the High Commissioner for her oral update and the UN Human Rights monitoring mission in Ukraine for its work.

We stand united with Ukraine facing large scale unprovoked, unlawful and unjustified aggression by Russia, enabled by Belarus. We admire the courage of the Ukrainian people defending their country and legally binding norms of the international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter.

We urge Russia to immediately cease the attacks and deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, especially using explosive weapons, such as cluster munitions, in residential areas, which are grave violations of international humanitarian law. We demand Russia to immediately and unconditionally withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine.

Russia is responsible for the bloodshed of innocent people, including women and children, and for millions lives destroyed. All human rights violations and suspected war crimes must be investigated and accountability ensured.

Accountability matters.

Justice cannot be escaped.

The international community must do everything to hold Russia and its accomplice Belarus to account.

The Nordic-Baltic countries commend the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry and call for its immediate operationalization.

Madam High Commissioner, what more could be done to strengthen our efforts in seeking justice for victims and accountability of perpetrators?

Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's Oral Update on Ukraine
30. March 2022
Statement by Iceland

Mr. President.

Iceland thanks the High Commissioner for her Oral Report and the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine for its work.

Iceland reiterates its support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders. Our position remains clear: we do not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia and strongly condemn Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

We are witnessing an escalating pattern of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including Russia's indiscriminate attacks on civilian lives and infrastructure. We urge Russia to uphold its obligations for safe and unhindered humanitarian access in Ukraine.

Mr. President,

We are deeply alarmed at the security risks faced by journalists and human rights defenders in areas occupied by Russia, as well as increased repression of media freedom and right to freedom of expression in Russia relating to the war in Ukraine. The right to freedom of opinion and expression must be respected.

Prisoners of war must be treated humanely and protected against acts of violence or intimidation, including public curiosity.

Iceland stands in full unity with the people of Ukraine and demands the withdrawal of all Russian military personnel and equipment from Ukraine.

I thank you.

Item 10 – General Debate
30. March 2022
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We welcome the High Commissioner's report on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and technical assistance achievements in the field of human rights.

Our countries have been actively engaged in efforts for the stabilisation and development of Afghanistan. We are deeply concerned by the deterioration in the human rights situation, including as concerns the rights of women and girls.

As the report makes clear, the Taliban deprives Afghan women and girls of their rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to work, education, freedom of movement and peaceful assembly. This stands directly opposed to 20 years of hard-won progress made by Afghans on gender equality and non-discrimination.

We deplore the Taliban's failure last week to adhere to commitments to reopen schools for girls above the sixth grade, in spite of repeated commitments towards girls' education. As stressed by the High Commissioner, such structural discrimination is deeply damaging for Afghanistan's prospects of future recovery and development. We echo her call on the Taliban to respect all girls' right to education and to open schools for all students without discrimination or further delay.

We welcome the recent extension of UNAMA by the UN Security Council and its clear human rights mandate, including as concerns the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation, engagement and leadership of women in all levels and stages of decision-making.

We urge the Taliban to heed the High Commissioner's recommendation to engage with UNAMA and OHCHR regarding specific incidents of alleged human rights abuses and violations of international law.

Thank you.