

Human Rights Council – 31st session (29 February – 24 March)

**General Debate Item 8:
Follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**

Statement by Ireland

21 March 2016

Ireland aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and adds the following.

Mr President

23 years ago, all States by consensus agreed the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. We agreed, in clear and plain language that “All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated” and that “the promotion and protection of all human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community”.

Ireland recalls these clear statements today, as we deeply regret that each Council session, arguments are advanced by some States that protection of human rights is contingent rather than obliged; or that the Council should not examine the situation of human rights in specific States, even where grave and widespread violations of human rights are occurring. These arguments do not have any basis in international law and further go against the clear commitment of all States, freely given at Vienna.

Mr President

We are also reminded of the distance which we still have to travel in achieving all the commitments and undertakings set out in the Vienna Declaration.

We deeply regret that procedural devices continue to be used to seek to deny a voice to civil society in the Council and associated meetings. At Vienna we all recognized the importance of NGOs in relation to human rights and emphasized the ‘importance of continued dialogue and cooperation between governments and NGOs’. Both the institutional framework of the Council and its longstanding practice is to offer such a space to civil society. This is a vital element in the institutional framework of the Council and makes a significant contribution to the effectiveness of our work.

Finally, Ireland notes that a resolution before the Council this session embodies the spirit of the Vienna Declaration at its best- namely the draft resolution on human rights defenders, presented under item 3. This draft resolution reminds us of the interdependence and indivisibility of all rights; the important role of non-governmental actors in relation to the promotion of human rights; as well as of the important role of ‘real and effective participation of the people in decision-making processes’ agreed on at Vienna. The draft resolution - as this Council has previously agreed by consensus - recognises the important and legitimate role of human rights defenders, identifies some of the challenges they face, and brings valuable attention to an area which may have been less commonly understood in the past, namely human rights defenders working on economic, social and cultural rights. We urge all States to support

this draft resolution through cosponsorship and express our wish that it be adopted as tabled, by consensus.

Thank you