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# Secretary-General

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#### **SECRETARY-GENERAL CITES SEXUAL-ORIENTATION BIAS, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

#### **AMONG CHALLENGES REQUIRING HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL'S ATTENTION**

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, 10 September:

*Je suis heureux de l'occasion qui m'est offerte de m'exprimer devant le Conseil des droits de l'homme. Vous jouez un rôle d'une importance capitale dans la quête universelle du respect de la dignité humaine et d'une vie décente pour tous.*

*Je félicite le Conseil pour la réponse qu'il a apportée récemment aux crises naissantes et aux problèmes rencontrés par certains pays en cette période de défis et de bouleversements de grande ampleur.*

*Vous disposez d'une panoplie d'outils très diversifiée, allant des procédures spéciales aux enquêtes, aux débats et à d'autres initiatives, qui offre au monde un dispositif dynamique permettant de faire connaître les problèmes et de promouvoir, défendre et protéger les droits qui nous sont chers.*

*Les droits de l'homme sont au cœur de l'Organisation des Nations Unies – ils sont au premier plan de toutes nos activités, et ils font partie de notre identité même.*

*Les femmes, les hommes et les enfants de tous pays, qu'ils soient confrontés à de graves crimes commis ouvertement lors d'un conflit ou qu'ils soient victimes d'une discrimination quotidienne plus insidieuse, sont en droit d'attendre que nous soyons à leur côté. Ils veulent savoir que nous sommes prompts à réagir, fidèles à nos principes et efficaces.*

*C'est là notre vocation commune, notre mission perpétuelle.*

I last spoke to this Council in January 2011, as momentous transformations across the Arab world were first beginning to unfold. In its response to the Arab Spring, the Human Rights Council has had an awakening of its own. You have held special sessions and expanded the use of fact-finding and commissions of inquiry. I welcomed your decision to suspend the membership of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in response to abuses. I encourage full respect for pledges by all States that are members of this body.

Policing the Council's standards holds members – and aspiring members – to their obligations. This is crucial to the Council's legitimacy. This Council must respond to all human rights violations in an even-handed manner, without disproportionately emphasizing any one situation over another. Taking a selective approach to human rights violations has the effect of damaging the credibility of the institutions concerned. Your efforts must be universal and consistent.

I commend the Council for acting quickly in response to the crisis in Syria. I am deeply troubled by the aerial bombardments of civilians by Government forces; by the increasing sectarian tensions; by the deteriorating humanitarian situation; and by the apparent choice of both sides to pursue a solution through force rather than dialogue. All of this complicates our efforts to facilitate a

transition and promote the peace the Syrian people deserve. I urge all involved to unite behind the diplomatic efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi.

While the Security Council has been divided on the situation, the General Assembly and this Council have acted. I welcome this stepped-up engagement. I regret that your recommendations were not followed-up by other relevant United Nations organs. I encourage this Council to maintain its vigilance on Syria, including on the question of accountability.

We must ensure that anyone, on any side, who commits war crimes, crimes against humanity or other violations of international human rights or humanitarian law is brought to justice. This is a shared responsibility for this Council, for United Nations Member States, for the international community as a whole. We must use all our many tools to shine the light of human rights everywhere.

The critical human rights situation in the Sahel is also cause for concern. The crisis in Mali has worsened conditions there. Grave violations are being committed against the population in the north. I share the High Commissioner's deep dismay about reports of abuses against civilians. I count on this Council to respond.

Later this month, a high-level meeting on the Sahel will take place on the margins of the General Assembly debate. The African Union, ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] and European Union will participate, along with Governments from the region and key donor countries. Our goal is to advance a comprehensive strategy for dealing with an already urgent and complex crisis before it escalates further still.

I also remain concerned about the unfulfilled human rights of the Palestinian people, in particular the right to self-determination. A sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires a negotiated agreement that ends the 1967 occupation and results in an independent, sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. This objective must be supported by developments on the ground, including respect for human rights and international law, and concerted efforts to build the foundations of a future Palestinian State.

The situation in Gaza remains tense and troubling with indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza and Israeli airstrikes and incursions. Serious human rights, humanitarian and socioeconomic problems only add to the immense human suffering. I urge Israel to lift its harsh restrictions in order to ease the plight of civilians and bring an end to the closure. Keeping a large and dense population in unremitting poverty is in nobody's interest except that of the most extreme radicals in the region.

Let me turn now to five clear challenges that warrant your attention.

First, we need to do more to ensure that the output of this Council and other United Nations human rights mechanisms shapes policymaking across the United Nations. I remain strongly committed to mainstreaming human rights throughout the Organization. This is especially important as we embark on efforts to define the post-2015 development agenda and to implement the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development.

Second, States have a responsibility to protect those who courageously advocate and risk their lives to defend human rights and the values of the Charter. I welcome the panel discussion you will be having on this issue on Thursday. I urge you to send a strong signal that there can be no impunity for reprisals and intimidation against those who advocate for human rights, including through cooperation with the United Nations. States have an obligation to create an environment where human rights defenders can carry out their critical work safely, without fear.

Third, I commend the progress made by the Council in various thematic debates. In particular, I welcome the groundbreaking, first-ever intergovernmental discussion, in March this year, on discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This should not be a

one-time event. I urge you to deepen your engagement on this issue so that protection and dignity truly reach all members of the human family.

Fourth, we must fight for the rights of women, including their reproductive rights and their political, social and economic empowerment. Unleashing the power of women will usher in a new era of respect for human rights.

Finally, I wish to express my full support for Ms. [Navi] Pillay and her team. Her ability to speak out on violations and systemic human rights concerns is one of the international community's most important early warning tools. With the growing dynamism of this Council, demands on her office will continue to grow. I urge you to give her your complete support while fully respecting her independence. I also appeal to all United Member States to increase budget allocations for human rights so that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has the resources it needs to carry out its critical work.

My action agenda for the next five years stresses a preventive approach to human rights. By investing in human rights, you invest in the peaceful, prosperous, sustainable future we want. We have a solid framework for action: the special procedures, United Nations treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review. The time to act is particularly ripe, as we have just entered the second cycle of Universal Periodic Review, which focuses on exactly that – implementation.

Here I want to make a strong call to all States: first, engage and cooperate with all United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the special procedures and investigations of the Human Rights Council. I urge Governments to see the Special Rapporteurs as indispensable sources of expertise and as valuable partners in building more just, equitable and secure societies.

Second, do not break the virtuous cycle of 100 per cent participation in – and cooperation with – the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. The Universal Periodic Review is both a national framework and an international process that can strengthen human rights protection everywhere.

And finally, devote as much attention to economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, as we do to civil and political rights. It is an affront to our conscience that millions of people still struggle against poverty, hunger and disease. These conditions violate their fundamental human rights.

You must be in the forefront in upholding the indivisibility and equal treatment of all human rights. I count on you to rise to the challenge. That is what the Charter demands, and it is our collective responsibility to act to make this world better for all.

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