

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 49th SESSION

WEEK 1: 28 February – 4 March 2022: [Outcomes](#)¹

On 28 February – 3 March 2022, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) hosted its annual **High-Level Segment (HLS)**, during which more than **140 Dignitaries**, including the Presidents of Tunisia, Lithuania, Colombia, Marshall Islands, Costa Rica and Venezuela addressed the Council. The HLS was followed by the extension at ambassadorial level with 7 more speakers taking the floor.

An **urgent debate on “the situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression”** took place on 3–4 March 2022, with an eponymous Resolution adopted with 32 votes in favour, 2 against and 13 abstentions.

On 4 March, the Council held two Interactive Dialogues (ID) under **Agenda Item 2**, on the situations in Eritrea and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and have started an ID on Sri Lanka. On 28 February, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of LDCs and SIDSs, the Council also held an **annual high-level panel on human rights mainstreaming** focusing on universal participation to the Trust Fund.

[Opening of the Session](#): 28 February 2022

H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas, of Argentina, the incoming president of the UN Human Rights Council, opening its 49th session, stressed that States, international officials, civil society organizations, and independent experts must remember the historical perspective of our collective responsibility to ensure future generations enjoy greater protection than generations of the past, beyond their nationality and geopolitical contexts. **H.E. Mr. António Guterres**, UN Secretary-General, chose to focus in his statement on a broad range of human rights issues, noting that the solutions to five crisis areas of COVID-19, global finance, climate action, cyberspace, and peace and security were all rooted in human rights. **Ms. Michelle Bachelet**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her opening statement referred to the military attack on Ukraine but refrained from mentioning to the names of the countries, saying that “there were no winners and no losers, and we were all diminished by conflict”. **H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid**, of Maldives, President of the General Assembly, opted for not referring to the situation in Ukraine all together, but provided a detailed overview of his *Presidency of Hope* focused on solutions and concrete actions, with *Five Rays of Hope* to direct the work of the 76th session. **H.E. Mr. Ignazio Cassis**, President of the Swiss Confederation, the host country, condemned in the strongest possible terms the attack by the Russian Federation on Ukraine, saying that it constituted a flagrant violation of international law.

→ For more on the Opening Session, please refer to the [Geneva Centre’s short summary](#).

[High-Level Segment \(HLS\)](#): 28 February – 3 March 2022

At least 60 foreign ministers and other dignitaries addressed the Council in person during the High-Level Segment, with more than 70 doing so by video messages. The topic of **Russian Federation’s aggression on Ukrainian territories** was dominant, as a number of speakers condemned in the strongest terms Russia’s attack on Ukraine and called for the immediate cessation of hostilities. Particularly strong statements were delivered by the representatives of the *President of Lithuania*, a number of European Union states, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada (with H.E. Ms. Mélanie Joly, Minister for Foreign Affairs, noting that “the Russian invasion of Ukraine – the largest threat to global peace in 7 decades – was a cold, calculated and carefully planned series of events by the Kremlin”), United Kingdom (with H.E. Ms. Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for Foreign,

¹ Please, also refer to the Geneva Centre’s earlier report “[Overview of Week 1](#)”

Commonwealth and Development Affairs saying that “there were no shades of grey in this war”), and *Japan*, among others. The speakers also condemned the involvement of **Belarus** in the aggression against Ukraine. A number of states chose to focus on their **national priorities and recent progress in promoting and protecting human rights**. The latter included *Tunisia, Colombia, China, Cambodia, Serbia, Mauritius, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, Sri Lanka, Angola, Mozambique, Equatorial Guinea, India, Gabon, Ecuador, Iraq, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, Benin, Mexico, United Arab Emirates, Dominican Republic, Mauritania, Jordan, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Honduras, Botswana, and Saudi Arabia*, among others. A number of states also referred to their recent or upcoming participation in the **Universal Periodic Review** process and its follow-up. Many speakers addressed **COVID-19** recovery efforts and regretted the persistent vaccine nationalism.

Some speakers chose to focus on human rights situations in **other states and regions**, mentioning in this regard situations in *Russian Federation, Belarus, Afghanistan* (with some countries recognising that in order for the Taliban to start respecting human rights, especially the rights of women, there was a need for gradual engagement with them), *Sudan, Tigray region of Ethiopia, Yemen, Myanmar, Syrian Arab Republic* (recognising European States holding trials for those who had committed serious crimes in Syria), *Libya, Egypt, China* (with several countries calling for unhindered access to Xinjiang for the High Commissioner, and *Turkey* mentioning that they were in contact with China to prepare a visit by national delegation), *Mali, Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Central African Republic, Occupied Palestinian Territories, South Caucasus, Sahel, Lake Chad region, Crimea and Jammu Kashmir*.

The *United States* said they would continue to counter anti-Israel bias and the unfair and disproportionate focus on *Israel* in the Council. *Iraq* brought up the issue of children descending from the families of ISIS, insisting that all countries should take care of their nationals, whether underage children, or those who had served their sentences for the crimes they had committed under the Iraqi judicial system. *Bahrain* reminded that wars and conflicts had been going on in *the Middle East* for more than a decade, leaving millions dead, injured, refugees and displaced, and depriving millions of young people of education, health care, shelter, peace and security. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of *Kazakhstan* referred to the events in January 2022, saying that President Tokayev immediately agreed to the demands of peaceful protesters, and regretting that initially peaceful protests were hijacked by extremist and terrorist groups, including some foreign fighters. *Philippines* spoke of strengthening accountability, mentioning that fifteen special investigations teams had been looking into cases of extrajudicial killings, and prosecutions were underway against a number of law enforcement officials. H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the *Russian Federation*, regretted not being able to physically attend the meeting due to “anti-Russian sanctions”, and noted that the *US* and its allies continued to aggressively impose the so-called “rules-based world order”, and what this “order” did to human rights was illustrated by the example of Ukraine.

➔ For more on the MENA Region Dignitaries’ statements, please refer to the [Geneva Centre’s summary](#).

Turning to thematic issues, a number of States, predominantly from the Western Group, addressed the need to protect civil society members, including human rights defenders and journalists, **against reprisals and intimidation**. A significant amount of States, including a number of African and Latin American states, as well as SIDS and LDCs, referred to the negative impact of **environmental destruction and climate change** on human rights, saluting the recent creation of mandate of Special Rapporteur on climate change. A number of States, particularly from the African Group, referred to the need to combat **racism**, the need to effectively implement the **Durban Declaration and Programme of Action** and the operationalization of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent. Other states expressed their concern about the growing **Islamophobia** and the negative

impacts of **UCMs**. Other topics addressed included gender equality, violence against women, rights of the child, the fate of the missing persons, terrorism, migration (*with Hungary insisting on protecting its people from "illegal migrants"*), refugee crises, protection of vulnerable groups, rights of minorities, including the Rohingya and the Uighurs, freedom of religion, the SDGs being pushed back, and the growing digital divide. Opposing opinions were expressed on topics such as **death penalty, abortion, LGBTIQ rights** (*with Organization of Islamic Cooperation noting that "family was the key unit of the society, could not be redefined and needed to be protected"*), and the maintaining of **Item 7** in the Agenda of the Council. Some countries referred to the 10th anniversary of the **LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund** and the need to support it, as well as the upcoming 30th anniversary of the **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action** and its legacy.

A number of States, including *Spain, Belgium, Timor Leste, Iceland, South Africa, Peru, Morocco, Costa Rica, Bahrain, Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovenia*, among others, also announced their plans to present their **candidature for the Human Rights Council membership**.

Several countries, including *Venezuela, China* and *Russian Federation* delivered particularly detailed statements, more than doubling the speaking limit of 7 minutes. Most of the States expressed their happiness at the possibility of return of physical meetings of the HRC. Others also acknowledged that the Council had shown its capacity to respond to crises, holding five special sessions in 2021.

A number of countries exercised their **rights of reply**, including *United Kingdom* (in response to the statement by Argentina, on the Falkland Islands; and to Mauritius, on the Chagos Archipelago), *India* (in response to Pakistan, on Jammu Kashmir), *Cabo Verde* (to Venezuela, on the Colombo-Venezuelan nationals), *Cyprus* (to the statement by Turkey, on Turkish-Cypriots), *Venezuela* (to Colombia, on human rights violations in the country), *Republic of Korea* (to Japan, on comfort women), *Israel* (to Iran, Syria and Palestine, on occupation of Palestine), *Azerbaijan* (to Armenia, on Nagorno-Karabakh), *Turkey* (to the statement on Turkish-Cypriots), *Cuba* (to Czech Republic, on UCMs), *China* (in response to several states, on the human rights in China), *Armenia* (to Azerbaijan, on Nagorno-Karabakh), *Syria* (to France, Israel and Turkey, on chemical weapons in Syria), *Japan* (to the Republic of Korea, on comfort women), *Argentina* (to the UK, on the Falkland Islands), *Mauritius* (to the UK, on the Chagos Archipelago), *Pakistan* (to India, on Jammu Kashmir), *Iran* (in response to Israel, on OPT), *Algeria* (to Morocco, on Western Sahara), *Morocco* (to Algeria, on Western Sahara), and *DPRK* (to the statement by several states on human rights accusations in DPRK). *Cabo Verde, Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, Algeria, Argentina, Mauritius, Japan, Morocco, and DPRK* also exercised their **second right of reply**.

Urgent debate on “the situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression”:

3 –4 March 2022

36 representatives of Member States, 66 Observers and 28 NGOs took part in the Debate, following the Opening Remarks delivered by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Chair of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures. The *resolution “Situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression”*, as orally revised, was presented by Ukraine, while the representative of the Russian Federation called for a vote. The results of the vote were the following:

In favour: 32 (*Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Côte d’Ivoire, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Montenegro, Nepal, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Somalia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States*)

Against: 2 (*Eritrea, Russian Federation*)

Abstentions: 13 (*Armenia, Bolivia, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Gabon, India, Kazakhstan, Namibia, Pakistan, Sudan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela*)

➔ For more details on the Urgent Debate, please, refer to the [Geneva Centre’s detailed summary](#).

Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming: 28 February 2022

20 states, 3 NGOs, UN Women, and UNDP took the floor. The Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund has enabled 172 LDC and SIDS government officials to attend regular sessions of the Council, in 95% of cases, for the first time. **71 out of 72 eligible LDCs and SIDS have benefited from the Fund's programmes**, with 60% of beneficiaries being women. While recognising the important work of the Trust Fund, many voiced the concern over **falling number of donors** and highlighted importance of financial support to its operation. Speakers said respect for diversity was vital and many highlighted importance of enhancing multilingualism. The effect of climate change on LDCs and SIDS was recognized and the SR in the context of climate change was welcomed. Universal access to the Council was still to be reached and more technical assistance was needed for equal participation. One NGO regretted that the list of NGO speakers in this high-panel failed to include NGOs from LDCs and SIDS.

ID on the report of the High Commissioner in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice: 4 March 2022

During her opening statement, the High Commissioner voiced concern over the **deteriorating human rights situation in the OPT**, and *“significant increase in violence, including the largest escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza since 2014”*. She called on Israeli authorities to conduct investigations into all alleged violations and abuses; to revoke the designations against Palestinian human rights and humanitarian organisations as terrorist or unlawful organisations; and on Palestinian authorities to strengthen efforts towards accountability. She also mentioned it had been 18 months since Israel ceased to renew visas for staff of the OHCHR working in the OPT. Many speakers voiced their concern over the continuing suffering of the Palestinian people, highlighting the illegality of the settlements, calling for concrete steps to end the Israeli occupation. The allegations of humanitarian crimes should be investigated and the solution of two States with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine was mentioned as the only feasible solution.

The EU reiterated its opposition to Israel's settlement policy and highlighted the imperative to consolidate the ceasefire in Gaza. The **Syrian Arab Republic** condemned the gross and systematic violations of human rights by Israeli occupation forces and settler gangs, as well as the *“racist practices against the Palestinian people.”* **Lebanon** reminded that the international efforts to hold the perpetrators of human rights violations in Ukraine accountable should not blind from the daily perpetration of an occupying power and crimes committed in the OPT. **Israel** was not present to take the floor, while **State of Palestine** as a country concerned said the international community had not lived up to its responsibility to protect human rights of Palestinians.

ID on the oral update of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea: 4 March 2022

The Special Rapporteur regretted the **continued lack of progress** in the human rights situation in Eritrea: political opponents, activists, journalist, and religious leaders were subject to arbitrary detention in inhumane conditions, in some instances amounting to torture; lack of independent media and one of the lowest internet penetration in the world; continuing forced labor and children as young as 11 forced to join the military; continued limitations on civic space and freedom of religion, assembly, association and expression. The Special Rapporteur voiced the need for a comprehensive reform of the justice system to reestablish the foundation of the rule of law; called on the Eritrean authorities to cooperate with his mandate and asked neighboring countries to effectively protect Eritrean refugees without discrimination. **Eritrea** as a country concerned, said it had been targeted for political reasons with the objective of destabilizing the nation on the pretext of human rights, noting that the positive developments in the country continue to be ignored. Eritrea further regretted the sanctions imposed by the **USA** and **EU**.

A number of speakers, including **EU, Iceland** on behalf of Nordic and Baltic countries, and **France**, remained concerned with the human rights situation in Eritrea and called on the government to cooperate and comply with human rights regulations, and put an end to the conflict in Ethiopia. **DPRK** noted reports based on unproved data sets the fundamentals of the UN mechanisms in doubt, **Djibouti** regretted the lack of information on Djibouti prisoners in Eritrea, and the **Philippines** asked to direct the funds of this mandate to promote the rights of Eritrean people instead.

Selected Quotes:

from the Statements delivered during Week 1 of the HRC49:

- H.E. Ms. Naledi Pandor, Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, during the HLS (28 February 2022): *"Africa should matter the way the rest of the world matters"*
- H.E. Mr. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, during the HLS (28 February 2022): *"The 2022 FIFA World Cup finals in Qatar will be the first environmentally friendly and "carbon neutral" tournament."*
- H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, during the HLS (28 February 2022): *"The door to Xinjiang is open. The claims of genocide, forced labour and religious oppression are sheer lies."*
- H.E. Mr. Carlos Alvarado Quesada, President of Costa Rica, during the HLS (1 March 2022): *"The safety of our planet is being jeopardized by human action. The worst threat to our planet is the lack of sense."*
- H.E. Mr. Jeppe Kofod, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, during the HLS (1 March 2022): *"Future generations will judge us by the decisions we make in the coming hours and days. They will ask if we did enough to support Ukraine when it mattered the most. And this is what I ask of you now."*
- H.E. Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, during the HLS (1 March 2022): *"Human rights are the law: are international law. They are about the dignity of human beings. And they do not belong to any state or system. They belong to people."*
- H.E. Mr. Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States of America, during the HLS (1 March 2022): *"Council members should stop using language implying that all sides bear equal responsibility for the unprovoked attack of one side."*
- H.E. Ms. Emine Dzhaparova, First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, during the HLS (1 March 2022), quoting President Zelensky who, when offered shelter, said *"we don't need a ride, we need your help"*.
- H.E. Ms. Yevheniia Filipenko, Permanent Representative of Ukraine, addressing her Russian and Belarusian colleagues in Geneva, in closing remarks to Urgent Debate (4 March 2022): *"Being here you can see for yourself very clearly, you understand it all. And each one of you has the possibility to make the choice: to continue to defend evil or to maintain human dignity. And this is Your choice, the choice You have to make."*