

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 49th SESSION

Opening of the Session

28 February 2022, 09h00-09h40

President of the UN Human Rights Council – H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas

The Human Rights Council (HRC) continued to work fully with virtual and hybrid modalities during the pandemic. As States, international officials, civil society organizations, independent experts, we 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. All actors should preserve the space for dialogue, understanding, and cooperation to strengthen the Council and the UN human rights pillar. Members and observers should not lose the sense of collective responsibility in the deliberations in spite of the difficult circumstances of the session. Positions should be asserted positions with respect for differences and diversity, seeking common interest through dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding.

President of the Swiss Confederation (host country) – H.E. Mr. Ignazio Cassis

Switzerland condemns the attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, constituting a flagrant violation of international law. Russian Federation should immediately cease the fighting, withdraw from Ukraine, and take military de-escalation measures. Russian Federation's attempts to legitimize its action are not credible. The invasion has claimed many victims, especially among the civilian population, and thousands have had to flee their homes. Switzerland calls on the parties to the conflict to ensure rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, to respect IHL and human rights, to protect the civilian population, prisoners of war and other detainees, and medical personnel and infrastructure. There are serious restrictions on media freedom in the Russian Federation and a number of arrest of peaceful demonstrators against the invasion of Ukraine in Russia. The international community should consider development and strengthening of monitoring mechanisms for human rights of the UN in Ukraine and ensure those persons who committed grave violations of human rights law and IHL are brought to justice. The Council should not to lose sight of the other subjects of concern, as stability and prosperity is better guaranteed when the fundamental rights of all individuals are respected. Diversity is essential for sustainable development and realization of economic, social and cultural rights. Switzerland is committed to ensuring that human rights are taken into greater account in the "Peace and Security" pillar of the UN and supports efforts to strengthen the UN's capacity for action.

President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly – H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid

Great importance should be attached to gender equality, empowering women and girls, and ensuring youth participation. Human rights perspective in recovery from the pandemic should be upheld, while stronger political will was needed to remove the barriers to vaccine access.. The needs of the planet must be prioritized, and the Council's recent work including two resolutions on climate are welcomed. There is a need to mobilize political will and accelerate momentum for making the fight against racism and protection of victims a high national priority.

United Nations Secretary-General – H.E. Mr. António Guterres

Human rights are under attack around the world and autocracies, populism, nationalism, racism and extremism are on the rise. The COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities and climate change are stripping populations of economic and social rights. The solutions are anchored in fundamental freedoms and human rights, that pose a threat to autocrats' rule. Closing of a recognized human rights organization, abducting women's rights activists, and oppression and control of minorities demonstrates a state's weakness, not strength. The solutions to five crisis areas of COVID-19, global finance, climate action, cyberspace, and peace and security are all rooted in human rights. All governments, pharmaceutical companies and

partners should provide political and financial support for the WHO's global immunization strategy to tackle vaccine inequality. A New Global Deal is called for to ensure power, wealth and opportunities are shared more fairly, and a renewed Social Contract is essential to tackle poverty and hunger. Regulatory frameworks of digital technologies must be anchored in human rights and agreed through inclusive consultations. A Global Digital Compact and Code of Conduct could promote integrity in public information. The military operations by the Russian Federation in Ukraine are leading to human rights violations. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine is continuing its work, and humanitarian agencies will step up their operations. The offensive should be ended and dialogue and diplomacy restored. Freedom of expression is under attack with reports of journalists and activists arrested in Russia. The authorities in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and beyond should step up the protection of minorities and respect the equal rights of all their people during and after conflict. A credible visit by the High Commissioner to China, including Xinjiang Autonomous Region, should take place.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – Ms. Michelle Bachelet

There is a need for strong and visionary leadership as the progress made over two decades in every region is in jeopardy. Many societies are evolving into increased repression and violence. The military attack on Ukraine is putting at risk countless lives, hundreds of civilians have been killed, millions are forced to bomb shelters, 422,000 people have fled the country and many more are internally displaced. An unprecedented number of dignitaries will participate in this High-Level Segment which is a vital opportunity to meet this grave and pivotal moment with multilateral and human rights-based action. Decisions that are taken at this crucial time will have lasting impact. It is urgently needed to end the conflict, respect the UN Charter, abide by international law, eradicate discrimination, ensure digital technology advances rights, enable full participation in decision-making, revive the health of our planet, fight corruption, tackle the root causes of grievances and instability, and allow vaccine development without restriction.