

# **Joint Statements supported by Iceland in the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**

## **Item 2**

### **Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's Report on Afghanistan**

**7. March 2022**

#### **Joint Statement delivered by Australia**

President

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Spain, my own country Australia, and a group of over 60 countries.

We are deeply concerned by reports of significant violations and abuses of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, including threats to their safety and barriers to their rights to education, work and full participation in civic life. We are committed to preserving and building on the political, economic and social achievements of the Afghan people.

We reiterate that without women's full, equal and meaningful participation in civic and economic life, women do not have the opportunity to freely express and represent their own interests, enjoy the security of generating livelihoods, or contribute to the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan.

Girls' education and women's economic participation leads to better living standards for all. We are deeply concerned that women have been increasingly and systematically excluded from public life in Afghanistan, with reports of job losses and restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including through arbitrary detentions, restrictions on political participation and lack of access to essential services. We support the right to freedom of opinion and expression as exercised by peaceful demonstrators during recent women's rights protests in Afghanistan.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is marked by gender-specific restrictions which must be addressed. Easing the humanitarian crisis requires that women have the agency to partake equally in all aspects of the response, and that girls are free to continue their education as the schooling year begins this month.

Women's empowerment and girls' education benefits all Afghans without distinction.

Afghan women have demonstrated they are active and tireless agents of change and are crucial in shaping the future of their country. We must stand by our commitments to support Afghan women to participate fully, equally and meaningfully at all levels of decision-making, as acknowledged by HRC resolution 45/28, Special Session resolution 31/1 and HRC resolution 48/1.

Afghan women and girls deserve to live in safety, security and dignity. We remain steadfast in amplifying their voices to ensure their concerns are heard.

Thank you.

#### List of Co-Signatories

1. Albania
2. Andorra
3. Australia
4. Austria
5. Belgium
6. Bosnia and Herzegovina
7. Brazil
8. Canada
9. Chile
10. Colombia
11. Costa Rica
12. Croatia
13. Cyprus
14. Czech Republic
15. Denmark
16. Ecuador
17. Estonia
18. Finland
19. France
20. Georgia
21. Germany
22. Greece
23. Guatemala
24. Hungary
25. Iceland
26. Ireland
27. Israel
28. Italy
29. Japan
30. Latvia
31. Liechtenstein
32. Lithuania
33. Luxemburg
34. Malta
35. Marshall Islands
36. Mauritius
37. Mexico
38. Monaco

39. Mongolia
40. Montenegro
41. Namibia
42. Netherlands
43. New Zealand
44. North Macedonia
45. Norway
46. Peru
47. Poland
48. Portugal
49. Republic of Korea
50. Romania
51. Serbia
52. Slovakia
53. Slovenia
54. Spain
55. Sweden
56. Switzerland
57. Timor Leste
58. Turkey
59. United Kingdom
60. United States of America
61. Uruguay
62. Vietnam

**Item 2 – General Debate**  
**7. March 2022**  
**Joint Statement on the situation in Yemen**  
**Joint Statement delivered by the Kingdom of the Netherlands**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of 50 countries\*.

In recent months, the international community has been witnessing with great concern a rapid intensification of hostilities and cross-border attacks in Yemen and the region. This upsurge in hostilities as well as reports of killings of civilians, of strikes impacting civilian infrastructure and of human rights violations and abuses are a cause of great concern to us all.

In this context, all parties are called upon to comply with their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. In particular, we reiterate the vital importance of ensuring humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and health workers and their facilities, as well as the importance of access for human rights workers to conduct impartial documentation and investigations into alleged human rights abuses and violations.

We strongly support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy to bring an end to the conflict in Yemen. These are reinforced by the broad international consensus on the need to end the war in Yemen and work on lasting peace in the region. We urge all parties to the conflict to engage urgently and seriously in support of the Special Envoy's efforts. Justice and accountability are key to an inclusive, durable peace in Yemen.

A collective effort is needed to respond to these challenges and to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and just future for Yemen. To this end, we should overcome our differences and collectively engage in favor of inclusive solutions. Central to these efforts, should be the protection of the rights of Yemeni people, including women, children and people in vulnerable situations.

We would like to encourage the international community to continue to explore options to prevent human rights violations, address impunity and work towards a just and inclusive peace for the people of Yemen.

Thank you.

\*Cosponsored by:

Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States (50)

**Item 2**  
**8. March 2022**  
**Joint Statement on International Women's day**  
**Joint Statement delivered by Finland**

Thank you, President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on the occasion of International Women's Day on behalf of Mexico, Finland and XX States.

During the last years, we have witnessed a backlash against women's and girls' rights and gender equality. These regressions jeopardize the progress achieved on this agenda. Advancing gender equality is crucial to comply with our human rights obligations, but also key to enable peace and sustainable development.

We have observed that topics such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's participation in public affairs, activism, gender-based discrimination and violence and even girl's education, have been questioned, contested, and actively attacked.

The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated pre-existing gender-based discrimination and violence. Women and girls have disproportionately carried the burdens of pandemic-induced labor, with increased amounts of work at homes and work places, including care work, and reductions in income. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a second, nefarious "shadow" pandemic of gender-based violence, particularly for women and girls living through humanitarian crises. It is time to create a new momentum, break the current impasse, and get up to speed in reaching SDG5. Women and girls have the capacity to take action and build resilient futures for their communities, this however is dependent on removing structural barriers, discriminatory social and gender norms and gender gaps.

The right to education that is accessible and high quality for all girls is a key element for the recovery process. Unpaid care work and social and gender norms remain a key barrier to this. Girls' education strengthens economies, reduces inequalities, and ensures their active participation in all areas of their lives. We want to see indigenous women and girls better represented in all levels of education. Women and girls need to be provided the opportunity to become lifelong learners – participating in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Closing the gender gaps in education must be a priority for States. We must ensure a safe return to school for the girls who dropped out due to the pandemic

Digitalisation and new technologies can also accelerate positive change towards gender equality. We should harness this potential more equally across the globe. We must thoughtfully close the gender digital divide while mitigating risks to women, girls and persons in marginalized situations.

Digital space is significant for women and girls' empowerment and we must make it safe. It is important to combat all forms of online violence and harassment and ensure that the development and implementation of new technologies incorporates a human rights approach.

We cannot achieve gender equality without eradicating gender-based violence. It is a form of discrimination and constitutes a human rights violation. It causes fear and suffering and destroys the fabric of societies. Violence and discrimination against all women and girls remains a widespread problem around the world. Political will is needed to accelerate gender equality, and to respond to attempts to roll it back.

If half of the population is left behind, a society cannot reach its full potential. We need to address the root causes of gender inequalities. This can only be achieved, inter alia, by ensuring women's and girls' active participation in all spheres of public and private life. Men and boys are key advocates and partners in these efforts. Together, we must promote and protect the rights of all women and girls without discrimination of any kind. This is essential for our COVID-19 recovery and for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The current crisis also offers opportunities to step forward into concrete positive changes for women and girls.

Thank you.

**Item 3**  
**Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
for Children and Armed Conflict**  
**15 March 2022**  
**Joint Statement delivered by The European Union**

Madam Special Representative,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of a group of ... countries.

We welcome the joint statement on the situation in Ukraine delivered by your mandate in cooperation with the Special Representative on Violence against Children, reminding all parties that the protection of civilians must be the first priority.

Over 2.8 million people have now fled Ukraine as war continues to ravage the country. The UN estimates that 30% of the country's population - is in dire need of life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Many of them are children. UNICEF has renewed its call for safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to reach populations in need and for the safe passage of civilians.

We strongly condemn the heinous attack by the Russian Federation against a children's hospital and maternity ward in Mariupol, while a ceasefire was supposed to be in place to allow civilians to evacuate. The indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure must stop immediately. Attacks on homes, schools, orphanages and medical facilities are unacceptable. Respect for international humanitarian law is paramount.

Madam Special Representative,

It is currently snowing in Ukraine with temperatures frequently going below 0°C. Children in Ukraine need help and protection. They need supplies and other critical support, and access to basic social services like health and education.

In your view, what are the main risks and needs for children affected by the conflict in Ukraine?

**List of signatories**

1. Albania	35. Lithuania
2. Andorra	36. Luxembourg
3. Australia	37. Malawi
4. Austria	38. Malta
5. Bahamas	39. Marshall Islands
6. Belgium	40. Mexico
7. Bosnia and Hercegovina	41. Moldova



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54. Romania
55. Sierra Leone
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57. Slovenia
58. Spain
59. Sweden
60. Switzerland
61. Timor Leste
62. Turkey
63. Ukraine
64. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
65. United States of America
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**Item 3**  
**Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for  
children and armed conflict**  
**Joint Statement on Safe Schools Declaration**  
**15 March 2022**  
**Joint Statement delivered by Argentina on behalf of the Group of States of the Safe  
Schools Declaration**

I take the floor on behalf of a group of states of the Safe Schools Declaration.

The Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) is an intergovernmental political commitment to protect education from attack and continuing education during armed conflict. Since it was adopted in 2015, one hundred fourteen States have endorsed the Declaration.

The Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration was held in Abuja, Nigeria in 2021. States, international organizations and civil society took stock of progress on implementation of the Declaration, shared good practices, and strengthened collaboration to ensure that all students and educators can learn and teach in a safe way. We thank the Special Representative, Virginia Gamba, for her participation in the Conference and her strong support for the Declaration.

We welcome the activities of the Special Representative to address the military use of schools, and the repeated calls made by Ms. Gamba to Member States to endorse and implement the SSD.

We deplore the on-going violations of children's rights in conflict worldwide, including attacks and threats of attacks on schools and universities as well as the military use of educational infrastructure. We welcome the adoption, in 2021, of the first standalone Security Council Resolution 2601, on protection of education in conflict.

Education is not only a fundamental human right; it is also an essential protection mechanism.

We welcome Tunisia as the last endorsing State and we reiterate our call to all states to endorse and implement the SSD and its Guidelines.

**Item 3 - General debate**  
**16 March 2022**  
**Joint Statement on Environmental Human Rights Defenders**  
**Joint Statement delivered by Sweden**

Mr President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Costa Rica, the United States of America, and Sweden, as well as over 60 countries\*.

The world today faces multiple challenges - climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, an inequality crisis, exacerbated by the socio-economic effects of the global pandemic, and a democracy crisis, with the global trend of weakened respect for human rights and democratic principles.

Human rights defenders play a crucial role in tackling and mitigating these challenges.

Human rights defenders, including those working in environmental matters, referred to as environmental human rights defenders, face increasing resistance for mobilizing to protect the environment and confront climate change, and for speaking out to address the adverse human rights impacts resulting from the unprincipled or otherwise flawed exploitation of land, water and natural resources.

According to reports, over 200 environmental human rights defenders, including members of indigenous peoples, were killed in 2020. This is unacceptable.

Accountability for all threats, harassment, attacks and killings – both by state and non-state actors – must be ensured and further threats, harassment, attacks and killings must be prevented. No country is immune from challenges in this area.

Women environmental human rights defenders often face additional obstacles, risks and reprisals, including sexual and gender-based violence – both online and offline. Women defenders, especially in rural and indigenous areas, are often at the forefront of these movements, but due to gender discrimination they often lack the resources, contacts, and power to mitigate attacks, which frequently go unreported. Support to security and safety measures for environmental human rights defenders must be gender-responsive and adapted to the specific gendered attacks, threats and harassments that they encounter.

Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and other minority environmental human rights defenders, in particular those who live in remote areas, are disproportionately subject to violence, comprising over 40 percent of the reported killings. Many of these defenders may have little formal education and may not speak the official language. Community leaders who raise concerns often become a target for violence to silence the broader community. Protection measures need

to be adapted to reflect their specific circumstances, including connecting at-risk communities to networks that can protect them from violence and defend their rights.

When building back better from the pandemic, it is of paramount importance for states to protect and support environmental human rights defenders, as well as to acknowledge their role as agents of change to mitigate and adapt to climate change, protect the environment and improve conditions for food security. Environmental human rights defenders, including indigenous peoples and small-holder farmers, often have unique knowledge about local sustainable solutions that can help drive a just transition that leaves no one behind.

Further we call on states to ensure access to justice in environmental matters, to protect the defenders and to ensure their safety, and to acknowledge and address the specific threats to women, indigenous, Afro-descendent, and other minority environmental human rights defenders, whether the threat comes from state or non-state actors.

We recall the steps set out in Council resolution 40/11 and reiterate the Council's call to implement them without delay. Council resolution 48/13 highlights the role of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as an important tool for businesses in this context.

We welcome the United Nations' efforts to protect environmental human rights defenders, and in particular efforts by UNEP, OHCHR and UNDP in relation to the SG's Call to Action for Human Rights.

We commit to continue working together to find effective ways to defend and support environmental human rights defenders.

Thank you.

\* Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Cabo Verde, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Eswatini, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, and Vanuatu

**Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**  
**22 March 2022**  
**Cross-regional joint statement**  
**Joint Statement delivered by Poland**

*Madam President,*

*I have the honour to deliver this joint statement on behalf of 51 states.*

We, the signatories to this statement, are concerned about the dramatically deteriorating situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Russian Federation over the past 12 months. This has particularly manifested in recent days in the context of Russia's brutal, unprovoked, and unjustified aggression against Ukraine.

In 2021, during the 46<sup>th</sup> session of this Council, numerous states expressed their concern about the human rights situation in Russia. Sadly, developments in the intervening period prove that these concerns were well-founded. We are concerned about the steps Russia has taken to suppress a growing number of dissenting journalists and independent media outlets; arbitrary arrests of dissident activists, trials seeking to eliminate political opponents; and profound restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right of peaceful assembly. Particularly concerning is a continuous use by the authorities of repressive laws on 'undesirable' organizations, under the pretext of fighting extremism and terrorism, or allegations against individuals of acting as "foreign agents" to suppress civil society, media, and political opposition. We express great alarm at recently adopted Russian legislation that would punish those who contradict the Russian government's false narratives about its war against Ukraine with up to 15 years imprisonment.

Most recently, we are concerned by attempts made by Russian authorities to silence all critical voices, including those of Russian citizens protesting Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We are appalled by the unjust detentions of more than 13,000 individuals who exercised their right of peaceful assembly during nationwide protests and by unnecessary and excessive use of force by police during the aftermath of the arrests. Likewise, we are shocked by growing restrictions placed by Russian authorities on access to reliable and credible information, including demands to remove content on the war in Ukraine from the internet; censorship of media outlets and blocking of social media platforms.

These new restrictions are the latest part of a long-standing campaign by Russian authorities to shrink the space for freedom of opinion and expression more broadly. Just one example of this campaign occurred on February 28, when the Russian Supreme Court upheld a decision to forcibly close down Memorial International, one of the oldest, best-known and most distinguished Russian NGOs, whose activists have been at the forefront of defending human

rights and seeking historical truth and reconciliation in post-Soviet Russia. This plunges the future for all NGOs in Russia into uncertainty.

We also reiterate our concerns once again about the continued arbitrary detention of political prisoners, particularly in the case of Alexei Navalny. We are monitoring Mr Navalny's latest court hearing closely and repeat our calls for him to be released without delay.

The human rights situation looks set to continue to deteriorate at an increasingly sharp rate in the coming months, even compared to the past year. We join numerous international organizations in their calls for Russia to immediately release all those it has arbitrarily detained for participation in peaceful anti-war demonstrations, end all sweeping restrictions on independent media, and allow the people of Russia to have free access to information on Russia's continuing war in Ukraine. We urge the Russian authorities to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right of peaceful assembly, and to freedom of opinion and expression.

We will continue to monitor the situation in the Russian Federation.

*Thank you.*

The list of sponsoring states :

1. Albania
2. Andorra
3. Australia
4. Austria
5. Belgium
6. Bosnia and Herzegovina
7. Bulgaria
8. Canada
9. Columbia
10. Costa Rica
11. Croatia
12. Cyprus
13. Czech Republic
14. Denmark
15. Estonia
16. Finland
17. France
18. Georgia
19. Germany

20. Greece
21. Hungary
22. Iceland
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43. Slovenia
44. Spain
45. Sweden
46. Switzerland
47. Timor-Leste
48. Ukraine
49. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
50. United States of America
51. Uruguay

**Item 8: Joint Statement on VDPA**  
**25 March 2022**  
**Joint Statement delivered by the United States of America**

Mr. President,

I read this statement on behalf of a diverse, cross-regional group of over 70 countries.

When the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was adopted in 1993, it was a time of great change. As the world order that had guided our relations for half a century was undergoing profound transformation, the Members of the United Nations realized the importance of reaffirming their commitment to the purposes and principles reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Human Rights Covenants, the Geneva Conventions, the United Nations Charter, and the UN Declaration on Friendly Relations.

The UN Charter sets forth the purposes of the United Nations and the principles by which its Member States shall act. Article 2(4) states that “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”

The UN Declaration on Friendly Relations, adopted by consensus at the General Assembly, expounds the principle of sovereign equality of States. This principle includes six elements: “States are judicially equal; each State enjoys the rights inherent in full sovereignty; each State has the duty to respect the personality of other States; the territorial integrity and political independence of the State are inviolable; each State has the right freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems; and each State has the duty to comply fully and in good faith with its international obligations and to live in peace with other States.”

Mr. President,

I speak to you at another moment of great change. The international legal order under which States committed to promote and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and that has contributed to peace, prosperity and freedom for so many, is under increasing challenge. In this troubled landscape, we find that the VDPA and the foundational texts it



reaffirmed are no less relevant today than they were thirty years ago. For this reason, we declare today our continued commitment:

... To promote and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all —

... To the principle of sovereign equality of states —

... To the prohibition against the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state —

... And to the duty each state bears to live in peace with other States.

Thank you.

**Item 10: General Debate**  
**30 March 2022**  
**Joint Statement delivered by Luxembourg**

Thank you, Mr President,

I am pleased to deliver the following statement on behalf of 54 countries from all regions.

The provision and facilitation of ‘technical assistance and capacity-building’ is a crucial part of the mandate of this body.

We believe there is an urgent need to give thought to how the Council and the wider UN can better deliver the mobilisation and on the ground implementation of such support.

We believe that such a process of reflection should pursue seven interconnected objectives.

First, the body’s work under item 10 should serve to unite all actors behind the common purpose: namely to work together, through cooperation and dialogue, to help all States implement their human rights obligations and commitments, and thus deliver on ‘Our Common Agenda’ and the ‘Call to Action’ on human rights.

Second, we propose to bring the real-world challenges and achievements of States and other actors to the Council, the good practices and lessons learnt, as well as the faces and stories of rights-holders.

Third, the Council must work and deliver for all, taking into account the full diversity of rights-holders and of the UN’s membership.

Fourth, as recognised in GA resolution 60/251, the delivery of ‘technical assistance and capacity-building [should be provided] in consultation with and with the consent of Member States concerned.’ This means creating a space where all countries feel free to speak of their own national human rights experiences and request assistance. This will in turn encourage a spirit of introspection, national ownership, and cooperation.

Fifth, our work under agenda item 10 should serve the triple goals of promoting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights for all, supporting progress towards the SDGs while leaving no one behind and achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and helping build national resilience for long-term or ‘upstream’ prevention.

Sixth, we should encourage the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the UN system. This should include hearing from UN Country Teams on their achievements and challenges in working with States to support the implementation of recommendations generated by the human rights mechanisms, as appropriate.

And lastly, while continuing to speak out against human rights violations and abuses and giving a voice to the voiceless, the Council should also recognise and celebrate success and progress – whether by States, UN Country Teams, businesses, civil society, or human rights defenders.

Mr President, over the coming sessions, we will work together with you and all other interested stakeholders to take forward this common agenda. We call on all States to join us on this journey.

Thank you, Mr President.