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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATEMENT BY MR. STEFAN BARRIGA, MINISTER, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

ITEM 63: REPORT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Mr. President

We welcome President Ndong Ella and thank him for presenting the report of the Human Rights Council. The report illustrates once again the relevance of the Human Rights Council and its ability to address emerging human rights challenges. The Universal Periodic Review also continues to be a most valuable mechanism, and we are pleased to see that its universal nature has been safeguarded. The UPR's value added lies in particular in effective follow-up and implementation of recommendations that States accept in their dialogue with their peers. The coming years will therefore be decisive for the effectiveness of this mechanism.

Mr. President

At the time of his election, the President of the HRC emphasized his support for efforts aimed at protecting those persons who have cooperated with human rights bodies. This is a central challenge for the United Nations' human rights machinery, and we therefore fully supported the adoption of HRC resolution 24/24 on ending reprisals against individuals or groups cooperating with the United Nations last year. When human rights defenders face retaliation for speaking up, not only are their individual rights violated, but the human rights mechanisms themselves are under attack. It is unfortunate that this resolution still awaits implementation due to action in the Third Committee, which was contrary to

the understanding established of the institutional relationship between the GA and the HRC. We look forward to your leadership in this respect.

In resolution 27/31 on “Civil Society Space”, the HRC underlined the significance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society and in particular for persons belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups. We commend the Council on this important decision and are particularly pleased that it was adopted by consensus. The resolution promotes fundamental freedoms that are very important for the work of the Council and the United Nations in general. Liechtenstein strongly supports this resolution and hopes that it will be implemented shortly.

Mr. President,

An increasingly important tool of the Human Rights Council are Commissions of Inquiry, which it has established in connection with some of the most serious human rights crises, including Syria and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The Syria Commission of Inquiry has carried out valuable work in gathering evidence of mass atrocities. Regrettably, it has not been able to galvanize the political action necessary to put an end to these atrocities – quite to the contrary, relevant efforts were stymied in the Security Council earlier this year by a double veto. We therefore believe that the Commission should focus more strongly on gathering and preserving information in such a way that it can be used in court at a later stage. Those who have perpetrated the most serious crimes under international law must not be allowed to run out the clock on justice. Liechtenstein continues to believe that the International Criminal Court would be the appropriate institution to deal with the situation in Syria. At the same time, complementary accountability tracks will certainly be necessary, due to the sheer scale of the crimes committed and the number of perpetrators involved. We must continue exploring all viable options to ensure accountability for the crimes in Syria.

Mr. President,

The Council has also expressed itself again on right to privacy – an issue that is also high on the agenda of the General Assembly. The digital era has allowed States to pursue law enforcement in a manner that greatly challenges the right to privacy. It is high time that we discuss surveillance practices – both at the

individual level as well as on a larger scale – from a human rights perspective. In doing so we must preserve the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Fighting all forms of crime, including terrorism and transnational organized crime, are of course legitimate aims that may justify surveillance. But just because electronic surveillance has become an easy tool, States must not become complacent in making the sometimes difficult call as to whether surveillance would be proportionate to the privacy interference. Mass surveillance certainly seems almost impossible to justify from that perspective. This and many other complex questions regarding the right to privacy in the digital age require further discussion and study, which is why we support the establishment of a special procedure on this topic.

Finally, Liechtenstein notes with deep concern the under-resourcing of the OHCHR, the extent of which has caught all of us by surprise – and apparently also the new High Commissioner for Human Rights. This issue is of obvious concern for the work of Human Rights Council, because a considerable amount of the very limited regular budget resources allocated to the Office is spent on servicing the work of the Council and activities attached to it. In a letter signed by Liechtenstein and 54 other Member States in July 2014, we emphasized that the UN regular budget for the OHCHR should at least cover all costs of the activities mandated by the Human Rights Council. Sufficient funding of the human rights pillar of the UN is not only crucial for the Human Rights Council, it is essential for the whole of the United Nations.

I thank you.