**Statement by**

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**Madame Vice President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,**

**It is indeed a distinct honor and pleasure for me to address the Human Rights Council. I was last in this august chamber five years ago as a member of the OHCHR Family. As I stand here today, I recall the pivotal moments of progress as well as set-back for human rights around the world, and also of the ups and downs of the Office that I was privileged to be a part of for so many years. My current responsibilities are much broader in some sense, but also much narrower in others. But I remain deeply committed to the centrality of human rights in tackling my foreign policy challenges, and my government is endeavoring to strengthen human rights standards in all areas of life, of all members of society.**

**I must begin by paying a very special tribute to High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein and his staff. The High Commissioner has been fearless, passionate, and tireless in shining the piercing light of human rights, even in the most opaque and convoluted situations. Thus keeping up the hope for the hopeless, and our faith in shared humanity. My former colleagues and friends in the Office deserve our fullest support and admiration in their mission of upholding the norms that have safeguarded human dignity, especially in these times of harsh headwinds.**

**I would also like to pay tribute to the Human Rights Council as it celebrates the 12th anniversary. The vast array of issues and situations that call for human rights scrutiny and engagement has continued to expand in the intermittent years, reflecting the rising expectations that everyday people of the world have come to place upon the Council.**

**So, we must ask, are we meeting their expectations. Has the work of the Council translated into real progress for human rights on the ground where it matters most? The answer is not an across-the-board yes or no, but one thing is clear. The gap between the commitments made in this chamber and the reality on the ground is still too wide in too many places. And herein must lie the focus of the on-going efforts to make the Council more efficient and effective. My government will constructively engage in this endeavor.**

**Madame Vice President,**

**This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even in the most remote and far-off corners of the world, people continue to be inspired and motivated by the Declaration, because it gives powerful expression to the innate spirit of freedom and dignity that is at the core of all human beings.**

**Unfortunately, this spirit is being suppressed, discouraged and even cowered in situations of repression, protracted conflicts and terrorism, poverty and inequality, misguided nationalism and hostility toward others. The result is discrimination and marginalization, violence and hatred, further exacerbated by the impunity for human rights abusers and reprisals against human rights defenders. Systematic, gross human rights violations and abuses continue in too many countries.**

**The High Commissioner has warned against leaders who view human rights as a “tiresome constraint”, as of secondary values as he stated this morning. But they must know that the human spirit may be dismissed and suppressed for some time but not forever, and peaceful and prosperous societies are best constructed and sustained upon firm grounding in human rights. Indeed, at a time when the very idea of what it means to be human is being shaken by the many unknowns of the 4th industrial revolution, steadfast and enlightened leadership committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of all is all the more necessary.**

**Madame Vice President,**

**I am deeply proud and humbled that my country, the Republic of Korea, is frequently cited as an exemplary case of successful socio-economic development and democratization. Recently, candlelight rallies of peacefully demonstrating citizens ushered in a new era for our democracy. But this did not happen overnight. Decades of civil society activism had inculcated a sense of ownership and participation among the public. Indeed, civil society has played a vital role in the growth of Korea’s vibrant democracy and the embedding of human rights into our national life. It is thus disheartening to note the shrinking space for civil society in many countries. Civil society leaders, such as our courageous and irrepressible friend Asma Jahangir, whose passing away we deeply mourn, are to be celebrated rather than silenced. Snuffing out civil society activism may serve short-term political interests, but not long-term political development. Korea’s experience clearly speaks to this point, and we would strongly urge governments to work with civil society actors as sounding boards for solutions to present challenges and partners on the road to the future.**

**Madame Vice President,**

**In his presentation of the twelve priorities for the year, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres singled out “empowering women” as the “cross-cutting” issue. My delegation greatly applauds his efforts and those of senior leaders in the UN, which have now achieved the goal of gender parity in the Secretary-General’s Senior Management Group.**

**My country is also making progress. As promised during his election campaign, President Moon Jae-in has met the target of 30% women among his cabinet members, and the government is pushing for reforms that will enable women and men to live and work as equals.**

**My government is also determined to actively contribute to the efforts of the international community to protect and promote the rights of women and girls and eradicate all forms of violence against them, in peace times as well as in conflict. The “me too” movement which is spreading in many countries, including in my own, demonstrates how much more needs to be done in this regard.**

**A particularly insidious and persistent form of this crime is sexual violence committed during wartimes. And in the efforts to this tackle this scourge in today’s war zones, we must remember and learn from the past, including the “comfort women” issue, the victims and survivors of which, elderly women in their 80s and 90s, are still striving to restore their dignity and honor. In doing so, we must embrace the principles of truth and justice and a victim-centered approach.**

**My government has humbly acknowledged that previous efforts to resolve the issue had clearly lacked a victim-centered approach. And thus, honoring the testimonies of the victims and survivors and working with their families and civil society support groups, my government will take steps to help heal their scars and restore their dignity and honor. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure that current and future generations learn from their painful history so that the mistakes of the past are never repeated. My government will work with all stakeholders to keep the protection of women and girls in conflict and in peace times at the forefront of our human rights agenda.**

**Madame Vice President,**

**The Pyeongchang Olympic Winter Games which ended yesterday sent a message of peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and beyond. The Pyeongchang Paralympics, to be held March 9th to 18th, will demonstrate the greatness of the human spirit, irrespective of disabilities and indeed the heartfelt aspiration for peace.**

**It is imperative to ensure that the spirit of Pyeongchang lives long after the Games so that peace can take firm root on the Korean Peninsula and the dire human rights situation in the North can be improved.**

**The resumption of reunion visits for families separated across South and North is urgent. This is a humanitarian and human rights issue that warrants immediate attention. Most members of the separated families have already passed away, and those surviving are now over the age of 80. My government continues to call upon the North to resume talks for the reunions. The immediate release of the South Korean nationals as well as other citizens detained in the North is also pressing.**

**North Korea must heed the call of the international community and abandon its nuclear and missile programs. It should invest more of its resources in its people and the protection and promotion of their human rights, and abide by its obligation as recommended in numerous resolutions and conclusions of human rights bodies. My government will continue to join the international community in urging North Korea to change course, both on the security and human rights fronts.**

**Madame Vice President,**

**In my country, the aspiration for peace is particularly strong. The memories of war may be fading, but we know that peace cannot be taken for granted. So is our aspiration for freedom and human dignity, which also cannot be taken for granted. They both require the hard work of government, supported, prompted and sometimes criticized by civil society representatives to keep our democracy transparent and accountable. My government has much more to do in bringing the ideals of the UDHR closer to all of our people, but we are confident that we are on the right course. And we humbly join the efforts to close the gap in human rights norms and reality around the world. The 70th anniversary of the UDHR calls for a redoubling of our efforts to build inclusive and open societies in which no one is left behind. The journey begun seven decades ago is far from over. Indeed, the road ahead looks rough and winding and the end seems still too far away. But let us persevere, keeping faith in the human spirit to prevail. Thank you.**