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Statement by

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Human Rights Council

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Madam President,

I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to you for all your hard work and dedication in leading this eminent Council. I am fully confident that your effort will be crowned with a success in this Session of the Council. My gratitude also goes to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Madam Pillay and her staff for their tireless efforts towards the advancement and promotion of human rights in this turbulent world.

Last year, the Review Process of the Council was concluded and the first cycle of the Universal Periodic Review was completed for all the Members of the UN. This year, with this development, a new phase is beginning for the Human Rights Council. We are pleased to note that the first cycle of the UPR has fulfilled the important element of ‘universality’ with the participation of every member state of the United Nations. Now is the time to strengthen the UPR, taking one step forward from the previous cycle, by focusing on follow-up measures which have a concrete impact on the ground.

Since early last year, the Human Rights Council has also reaffirmed its credibility and effectiveness with its timely and relevant response to the human rights emergencies in North Africa and the Middle East. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya became the first case of the suspension of council membership, confirming that this Council, the principal institution for promoting and protecting human rights, has no place for states attacking and torturing their own citizens. The ROK is also pleased to see Libya regain its seat and I look forward to the new Libya contributing to the work of this Council in the months and years to come.

Syria is another serious matter. This Council held three special sessions dedicated to the human rights situation in Syria last year. Each time it took concrete measures - from the fact-finding mission to the commission of inquiry. However, we have seen the situation worsening ever since. The deteriorating situation was rightly described and reflected in the GA resolution adopted recently in New York. My Government urges the Syrian Government to faithfully comply with the resolution, including through the immediate end to all human rights violations and attacks on its civilians.

Madam President,

We are all well aware that recognition of the fundamental value of the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. We are also well aware that no one in this world shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Those fundamental values are declared and reaffirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the UN.

However, in some places of the world in this 21st century, people are still suffering from human rights abuses. It is regretful for me to mention that the DPRK is one such case and probably one of the most serious cases.

The continued efforts made by the international community have not yielded any positive developments in the DPRK. Unfortunately, the human rights situation in the DPRK has reportedly been further deteriorating. It constitutes a visible contrast to the situation in Myanmar where some progress has been made recently. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, Mr. Marzuki Darusman, has not even been able to visit the country.

The Special Rapporteur raised his serious concerns over the human rights situations in the DPRK, in particular, the issue of political prison camps, where it is reported that serious human right violations occur. The DPRK is strongly urged to allow Mr. Darusman to visit the country and to cooperate with him and other international human rights mechanisms to improve its human rights situation.

The Special Rapporteur also raised his concerns over the issues of abductees and prisoners from the Korean War detained in the DPRK and separated families between the North and the South. Many of them have passed away, not even knowing the fate of their loved ones. I would like to urge the DPRK to clarify the fates of those detained against their will and repatriate them immediately. I also call on the DPRK to respond positively to the request of the Red Cross of the ROK for the reunion of separated families as soon as possible. The families cannot afford to wait further.

Madam President,

Now, let me invite the attention of the Members of the Council and the international community to the abysmal situation of asylum seekers and refugees from the DPRK. In this august hall, I make the most sincere appeal to the human conscience of all who are involved in this issue for the protection of the basic human rights of those asylum seekers and refugees from the DPRK. The situation they are facing is unspeakably horrible. They are moving around to seek inalienable rights of human beings, in particular freedom and human existence, but many of them are in danger of being arrested and forced to return to the place where the horrendous persecution is waiting. This persecution may even take such severe forms as torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or even be life-threatening.

It is in this regard that the international community, including through the annual General Assembly resolutions on the human rights situations in the DPRK, has made continued calls for respect for the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*.

Nevertheless, numerous asylum seekers are forcibly returned to the DPRK, as pointed out by the Special Rapporteur and the Committee of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Republic of Korea once again with its profound sincerity urges all countries directly concerned to faithfully uphold the principle of *non-refoulement*, thereby refraining from exposing those in desperate situation to the risk of dire consequences. The issue of the asylum-seekers and refugees from the DPRK is not a matter of political consideration, but a matter of humanitarian and human rights consideration.

Madam President,

I would like to turn to violence against women in times of armed conflicts. The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned with increasing sexual violence against women in armed conflicts, with particular reference to systematic rape and sexual slavery. In this context, I would like to recall the so-called “comfort women,” the victims who were forced into military sexual slavery during the Second World War. These systematic rape and sexual slavery could constitute crimes against humanity.

In light of this, the Government of the Republic of Korea would like to urge the UN system and all member states to make the utmost efforts to end such crimes, not only taking all measures to protect women and girls in armed conflict, but also providing effective remedies and reparations for victims and also ending impunity, by bringing the offender to justice.

Madam President,

The Republic of Korea shares the belief that the reporting process and ensuing dialogue with human rights treaty bodies are a key part of the international human rights mechanisms, facilitating effective implementation of international human rights laws. In this regard, my government appreciates the initiative taken by the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the strengthening of the treaty body system.

The Republic of Korea is seeking membership of this Council for the term of 2013-15. If elected, the Republic of Korea would indeed faithfully discharge its responsibilities in the promotion and protection of human rights around the world which this Council stands for.

Thank you.

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