



THE PERMANENT MISSION  
OF MALTA TO THE UN GENEVA

## HRC 52 – High-Level Segment 28 February 2023

Statement by the Hon. Dr. Ian Borg  
Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Malta

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*Check against delivery*

Mr. President,

High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council. I wish to congratulate H.E. Václav Bálek of Czechia on his election as President of the Human Rights Council. We look forward to working with you during 2023.

I also wish to congratulate H.E. Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for his recent appointment. Our support to OHCHR is unequivocal, and I look forward to continuing our fruitful collaboration with your Office.

Mr. President,

A year ago, Russia's brutally devastating war was just four days in. This Council acted quickly at a Special Session with the establishment of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry in Ukraine to ensure accountability.

A year later, the devastation in Ukraine continues. Civilian infrastructure is indiscriminately targeted. Civilians are being left without the most basic necessities in the dead of winter. Children have been forcibly deported away from their families to Russia. Thousands of Ukrainians, mostly women and children, have fled - the largest population movement due to conflict in Europe since the second world war.

The war's repercussions have been severe, and not only in Ukraine. This act of aggression is having worldwide implications – including on food security and energy supplies.

Last Friday, as UN Security Council President, I presided over a meeting recalling the first year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The meeting was a sobering reminder of what is at stake if those who have pledged for over 77 years to act as guardians of the UN Charter fail to do so.



Mr. President,

This year we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We welcome the High Commissioner's focus on upholding the human rights obligations we have all freely subscribed to. We also welcome the work of the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, as well as the HRC's Special Procedures and Investigative Mechanisms in identifying human rights issues that require the attention of Member States.

Malta continues to support the Human Rights Council in all its activities, including its work on justice and accountability and the Universal Periodic Review. We are also proud to be among those Member States that have presented their mid-term review following the Third UPR Cycle.

Mr. President,

We remain concerned about the appalling human rights situation in different countries. In Afghanistan, we are seeing the reimposition of laws and restrictions that have eliminated women and girls' public space, closed their schools and restricted them from any form of employment.

Peaceful protestors are also facing severe restrictions in Belarus and Russia.

In 2022, this Council acted to respond to the deteriorating situation in Iran at its Special Session in November and established a Fact-Finding Mission. We urge Iran to fully cooperate with the Mission, and to take all necessary measures to ensure that women's rights are fully safeguarded.

Syria is another situation of concern. We urge the Syrian authorities to act decisively and abide by their international obligations to protect the rights of their citizens.

Mr. President,

Malta continues to advocate further strengthening for the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons.

Similarly, we need to be ever mindful of the plight of children, particularly in conflict areas as highlighted in our UNSC Presidency event earlier this month on children and armed conflict. Our work at the HRC should result in allowing children to be children, enjoying their childhood, families and right to education. The Safe Schools Declaration can serve as a beacon for children to receive an education in a safe and enabling environment.

Gender equality is an essential part of our life as a nation. While challenges remain, Malta is working hard to overcome stereotypical pressures that may hinder women's activity and their role in society. In 2022, we in fact published our Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy an Action Plan, focussed on creating an equal society and overcome discrimination and structural inequality.



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Mr President

Media freedom and the safety of journalists are vital components in our democratic society. Over the past years we have decisively acted to strengthen journalists' role in promoting free and open debates and we are committed to continue doing so.

Combating racism is another challenge we all face. The Government has implemented the "I Belong" program which provides a framework specifically tailored for the integration of migrants into society. While there is more work to be done, we are convinced that integration is a key issue in combating racism. Furthermore, implementation of our National Anti-Racism Strategy is continuing, on the basis of the pillars of equality, diversity, interaction and participation.

Mr. President,

Human Rights are often described as the United Nations' Third Pillar, and thus a vital component together with security and development. All Member States, large and small, should prioritise implementation of international human rights standards. Only in this way can our citizens' individual rights be protected.

Thank you.