

Rede
des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen
Heiko Maas, MdB

im 46. VN-Menschenrechtsrat
(Videostatement)

Berlin/Genf, 22. Februar 2021

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

To stand still means to lose ground.

This is all too true for human rights. We are witnessing every day that we cannot take human rights for granted:

- In many places, journalists and activists who voice criticism are detained.
- We see discrimination and persecution based on ethnicity, religion and gender.
- And in armed conflicts worldwide, parties violate human rights every second of every day.

The members of this Council have been elected to counter such dangerous trends.

If we don't hold the ground on human rights, we will lose the ground that our international community is built on.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This quest for human rights starts at home, for all of us.

In Germany, we have stepped up efforts to counter racism, antisemitism and xenophobia. But more still needs to be done to build a truly inclusive, fair and equal society for all of our citizens.

And in the European Union, we have recently adopted a human rights sanctions regime. Because those who trample on human rights have no right to enjoy their holidays in

European capitals or to park their money in our banks.

To hold our ground on human rights also means keeping up with new challenges:

- Climate change increasingly threatens human rights. We are working to address this issue in all *United Nations* bodies and in the *Alliance for Multilateralism*.
- The digital revolution and new technologies create human progress – but also risks. Hate speech is triggering violence. Artificial intelligence can worsen discrimination. Protecting freedom of speech, human dignity and privacy in the digital age should therefore remain at the top of our agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tackling these challenges requires a stronger *United Nations* human rights architecture – with the *Human Rights Council* at its core.

This is especially true in times of a global pandemic that also poses threats to human rights.

- And that is why Germany will increase its voluntary contribution to the *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* by almost 50 percent, to 11.5 million US dollars this year.

- We continue advocating a closer link between the *Human Rights Council* and the *Security Council*. Sustainable peace depends on respect for human rights.
- And we welcome the renewed commitment of the United States to this *Council*.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There has been much criticism of the composition of the *Human Rights Council* after last year's election. On the one hand, different perspectives trigger debates and lead to better outcomes. And inclusiveness strengthens the *Council's* credibility.

But let me be clear: Different cultural backgrounds or national perspectives cannot be an excuse for Member States to hamper the *Council's* work.

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Every state, especially those elected to this *Council*, is bound to defend this commitment – and the other 29 articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

- That is why this Council was right in speaking up on the overthrow of a democratically elected government in Myanmar.
- Our commitment to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* also leaves no room for the arbitrary detention of ethnic

minorities like the Uighurs in Xinjiang or China's crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong.

- We must speak up against severe violations of civil liberties in places like North Korea and Syria.
- We have to highlight the growing restrictions imposed on civil society, whether in Iran, Venezuela or elsewhere.
- And we will not be silent when peaceful protesters and opposition leaders are attacked and imprisoned, as has occurred in Belarus or Russia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Protecting human rights means putting those who suffer from violations at the centre of our efforts.

- That is why we have launched a programme sponsoring short-term stays of human rights defenders in Germany and other places. It allows them to get out of the line of fire – at least for a while.
- And as a member of the *Security Council* in the last two years, we invited a record number of briefers from civil society, most of them women.
They confronted the *Council* with their first-hand experiences of conflict and violence.

And we are committed to making their voices heard here in the *Human Rights Council*, as well.

Madam President,

Germany looks forward to working with you and with all our fellow members on this Council: to respond to new challenges, to advance human rights – and to stand our ground.

Thank you.