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European Union

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Item 4

Statement by

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HRC61: Item 4 General debate; Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Mister President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Albania, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

The EU follows developments in Iran and the Middle East with utmost concern. We call for maximum restraint, protection of civilians and full respect of international law, including the principles of the United Nations Charter, and international humanitarian law.

With regard to the situations in Belarus, DPRK, Iran, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Syria, and Venezuela, we would like to refer to our statements during the respective interactive dialogues.

During this HRC session, we also address other human rights situations, including in the General debate on item 2.

We reiterate our condemnation in the strongest possible terms of **Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine** that grossly violates international law, including the UN Charter. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its repercussions for European and global security in a changing environment constitute an existential challenge for the European Union.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's continuing violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine, such as summary executions of prisoners of war and civilian detainees, arbitrary detention, systematic and widespread use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including rape and other conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.

The EU is deeply concerned about the increasing number of civilians killed and injured, due

to Russia's use of drones and explosive weapons, including with wide area effect in urban areas, and on other civilian infrastructure. The EU condemns these attacks, which deprive the civilian population of access to services necessary for their survival this winter. The Commission of Inquiry has concluded that Russian authorities have committed crimes against humanity of torture, enforced disappearances, murder and forcible transfer of population, and war crimes, including deliberate and intensified targeting of civilians. We express our deepest concern about Russia's continued indiscriminate and targeted attacks on Ukraine's civilian population. The year 2025 was the deadliest for civilians in Ukraine since 2022, according to the January 2026 report by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU). The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms the increasing number of executions of POWs, as observed by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) report. The EU expects international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war, to be fully respected.

We call on Russia, and its accomplice Belarus, to immediately end the grave violation of child deportation and forcible transfer, which – according to the Commission of Inquiry - constitute war crimes, to stop the illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children and to ensure their immediate, safe and unconditional return to Ukraine. Russia must stop the illegal adoptions of these children, which violate their right to their Ukrainian nationality, their identity, name and family relations. We call on Russia to immediately stop the militarisation and indoctrination of Ukrainian minors and youth as per the latest OHCHR reports.

The EU is firmly committed to ensuring full accountability for all international crimes and human rights violations and abuses stemming from Russia's war of aggression, including through investigations by the prosecutor of the ICC, and to uphold the rights of victims to justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition. In this context, the EU takes note of the signing of a new convention establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine and calls for work to continue. The EU will continue supporting further efforts related to the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine, and the work towards the establishment of a comprehensive compensation mechanism.

We demand that Russia ceases its aggression, withdraws all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine immediately, completely and unconditionally, and fully respects Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, grounded in the principles of the UN Charter and international law and welcome all efforts towards that end.

Regarding **Russia**, the EU condemns the structural system of human rights violations, which are part of a further intensifying systematic, state-sponsored internal repression, including use of arbitrary detention and widespread and systematic use of torture and ill-treatment. The EU is deeply concerned about the systematic crackdown on civil society, especially on human rights defenders, lawyers, independent media and journalists, as well as the repression of political opposition, LGBTI persons and citizens with dissenting voices in Russia, alongside transnational repression. We urge Russia to abolish its repressive legislation, and to align its domestic legislation with international human rights law and to ensure a safe and enabling online and offline environment for all. We also call on Russia to end its political misuse of the judiciary and law enforcement. We remain concerned about reports, including the recent report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Russian Federation, that extensive abuse of counter-terrorism, extremism, treason, espionage and other national security-related provisions in the Russian Criminal Code disproportionately targets dissent, anti-war expression and peaceful protest protected under international law. We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners and persons arbitrarily detained. The EU calls on Russia to fully implement all outstanding rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. The EU also calls on Russia to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of Indigenous Peoples as set out in the UNDRIP and other international human rights law. 16 February 2026 marks two years since the death of Russian opposition leader politician Alexei Navalny for which the ultimate responsibility lies with the Russian authorities. The EU also recalls the eleventh anniversary of assassination of Boris Nemtsov, which took place in Moscow on 27 February 2015. The EU recalls the obligation under international law to conduct independent and transparent investigations of these deaths and to bring all those responsible to account. The EU calls on the Russian Federation to cooperate fully with the UN and all special procedures.

The EU strongly condemns the gross, systematic and widespread human rights violations, restrictions to political participation and to independent media in **Belarus**. The EU remains concerned about intimidation campaigns against all segments of Belarusian society. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to halt any type of repression and refrain from any further arbitrary arrests. The EU expresses its deep concern about the closed civic space in Belarus. The EU reiterates its previously expressed concerns about the fairness and legitimacy of elections. The EU notes the recent release of some political prisoners and urges Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, ensuring the resolution of judicial processes upon their release and ending all forms of harassment or pressure that may result in their forced departure, deportation or deprivation of consular services. The EU is concerned about the inhumane detention conditions and reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Belarus as well as systematic

violations of due process and the right to a fair trial. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to halt their internal as well as transnational repression and to adhere to the country's international obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to abolish the death penalty, and, as a first step, to introduce a moratorium. The EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to engage in a genuine and inclusive dialogue with all elements of society. We urge the Belarusian authorities to cooperate fully with international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms. The EU remains committed to support all efforts towards accountability and to the victims' rights to reparation, truth, and guarantees of non-recurrence. The EU demands that the Belarusian authorities stop their involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and halt their instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes, in complicity with Russia. The EU supports the work of the Special Rapporteur and the Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus.

The EU condemns all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in **the occupied Palestinian territory**. The EU welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2803. The EU continues to stress the need for rapid, safe and unimpeded delivery and sustained distribution of humanitarian aid at scale into and throughout Gaza. Israel must fully comply with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. The EU continues to call on all parties to facilitate full and unimpeded humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip, including through the full opening of crossing points, to respond to the urgent needs of the population, and urge for aid to be effectively distributed in accordance with international law, including by UN agencies, notably UNRWA, international organisations and NGOs. The EU calls on Israel not to implement the NGO registration law in its current form and stresses the need for the UN and its agencies, and humanitarian organisations, to be able to fulfil their mandate independently and impartially without restrictions. The EU continues to support the Commission of Inquiry and other relevant OHCHR mandates.

The EU strongly condemns the further escalation following massive increase of settler violence against Palestinian civilians, and the policies of intimidation and forcible displacement and threats of annexation, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as the terrorist attacks against Israel. The EU calls on the Government of Israel to reverse the expansion of settlements, which are illegal under international law, to refrain from any annexation and to hold the violent settlers accountable.

The EU remains firmly committed to international law and to a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace based on the two-state solution in accordance with relevant UN Security Council Resolutions where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side-by-side in peace within secure and recognised borders, and supports diplomatic efforts in this

direction which are anchored in international law. The EU recalls the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the 'New York Declaration' on Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and Implementation of the Two-State Solution. It is crucial to maintain a political horizon towards the two-state solution.

The EU strongly condemns the brutal repression of peaceful protests across Iran, and the use of violence by security forces against peaceful demonstrators, including the use of excessive and lethal force, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians, including in health care institutions and medical facilities. We also condemn the reported widespread arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as any use of the death penalty and other harsh punishments as a means to suppress internal dissent.

Such gross violations and abuses must immediately stop. The EU urges Iranian authorities to fully adhere to Iran's international obligations and fully uphold international law, including international human rights law and the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. All individuals arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising these rights must be released immediately. The EU calls on Iran to end all forms of discrimination, in law and in practice, against women and girls as well as persons belonging to ethnic, religious, linguistic or other minorities. We urge Iranian authorities to restore all communications, including full access to the internet, and to ensure the right of free access to information for all.

There must be accountability for these dire events, and justice must be done for all those who were killed, injured or detained only for exercising their human rights and for voicing legitimate demands. Therefore, the EU welcomes the decision of the Special Session of the Human Rights Council of January 2026 which renewed the mandates of the Fact-Finding Mission and of the Special Rapporteur on Iran and mandated an urgent inquiry into these events. The EU calls the Iranian authorities to allow free and unhindered access to the country for relevant UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures mandate holders and to fully cooperate with the independent, international Fact Finding Mission.

We reiterate our concerns about the very serious human rights situation in **China, including in Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia**. We urge China to abide by its obligations under national law, including its own Constitution, and international law, to respect, protect and fulfil human rights for all and to uphold the rule of law. We also urge China to abolish the death penalty and as a first step to introduce a moratorium on its use and to adopt rigorous and transparent procedures for reviewing capital sentences and reporting death penalty cases. Civil society continues to be exposed to harassment, intimidation and surveillance, including transnational repression. China must respect the principle of non-refoulement and refrain from extraterritorial activities (including coercion) that are not in line with international law. We condemn all reprisals against individuals and/

or civil society organizations. We reiterate the rights of persons belonging to religious groups to conduct their basic affairs without interference and freely choose their religious leaders. We call on the release of all those arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of religion or belief.

Numerous reports by UN Treaty Bodies and Special Rapporteurs, and in particular OHCHR's assessment report on human rights in China's **Xinjiang** Uyghur Autonomous Region, confirm that the human rights situation requires the urgent attention of the Chinese Government and UN bodies and the human rights system. We remain concerned about political re-education and mass arbitrary detentions, widespread surveillance, including Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location (RSDL), systemic and severe restrictions on the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief. We urge the eradication of forced labour and labour transfer schemes. We remain concerned about reports on torture, forced abortion and sterilization, birth control and family separation policies, and sexual and gender-based violence, especially in Xinjiang. We urge China to cooperate effectively with the UN High Commissioner and his Office, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee against Torture, and with all international human rights mechanisms, including towards the implementation of the recommendations included in the assessment report on the human rights concerns in Xinjiang and follow-up to the report as well as through the facilitation of visits of the High Commissioner and the Special Procedures mandate holders to regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet.

The human rights situation in **Tibet** continues to be dire. Indicators of this include large-scale coercive enrolment in obligatory boarding schools and the suppression of protests. We are concerned about reports that Tibetan schools teaching Tibetan language and culture have been shut down and that Chinese authorities have insisted that all students attend state schools where Tibetan is only taught as a stand-alone subject. We encourage China to cooperate with international human rights mechanisms, including all relevant Special Procedures mandates and treaty bodies, in particular the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee against Torture.

We continue to closely monitor the situation and call for the immediate and unconditional release of human rights defenders, including Gulshan Abbas, Anya Sengdra, Ekpar Asat, Chadrel Rinpoche, Rahile Dawut, Ding Jiayi, Dong Yuyu, Du Bin, Gao Zhen, Gao Zhisheng, Go Sherab Gyatso, He Fangmei, Huang Qi, Huang Xueqin, Hushtar Isa, Yalkun Isa, Ji Xiaolong, Pastor Jin Mingri, Jimmy Lai, Li Yanhe, Peng Lifa, Qin Yongming, Ruan Xiaohuan, Semkyi Dolma, Tashi Dorje, Tashpolat Tiyp, Sakharov Prize winner Ilham Tohti, Wang Bingzhang, Pastor Wang Yi, Xie Yang, Xu Na, Xu Zhiyong, Yang Henjung, Yang Maodong, Yin Xu'an, Yu Wensheng, Pastor Zhang Chunlei, Zhang Yadi and Zhang Zhan, as well as EU

citizen Gui Minhai whose right to consular access must be respected.

We remain concerned about the human rights situation and the shrinking civic space in **Hong Kong**. We urge the Chinese government and the Hong Kong authorities to restore full respect for the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, and democratic principles, and to preserve Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy under the 'one country, two systems' principle, in compliance with Hong Kong's Basic Law and China's domestic and international obligations. The repressive use of the National Security Law and of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance continues to undermine human rights and fundamental freedoms. The extraterritorial application of these laws is of particular concern, notably the repeated issuance of arrest warrants for individuals living outside Hong Kong, including an EU citizen. The sweeping changes in the electoral system have eroded democratic principles and political pluralism.

The EU reiterates its serious concerns about the continued deterioration in the areas of democracy, rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the independence of the judiciary in **Türkiye**. The EU remains concerned about targeting of political parties, democratically elected mayors, civil society representatives, journalists, academics, human rights defenders, LGBTI persons, and others, including through arbitrary arrests and detentions. The rights of elected officials as well as the right of peaceful assembly need to be fully respected. As an EU candidate country and member of the Council of Europe, Türkiye is expected to apply the highest democratic standards and practices. In this context, in line with Article 46 of the ECHR, we call on Türkiye to comply with the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights, including the release of Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş. The EU reiterates its calls on Türkiye to comply with its obligations under international law, including international human rights law and to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and the rule of law - including the property rights of persons belonging to minorities and legal entities representing minorities. Human rights are non-negotiable and will continue to be an integral part of EU-Türkiye relations.

The EU is concerned about the rising insecurity and persistent grave human rights violations in **the Central Sahel countries**, particularly in Mali where the human rights situation has been further aggravated by the escalating level of violence and the activities of the Africa corps. The EU urges the authorities to ensure full accountability for human rights' violations and abuses by non-state armed groups, security forces, and foreign security personnel. The EU also expresses serious concerns about the severe restrictions on the political and civic space as well as media in **Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger**, including dismantling of democratic institutions, dissolution of opposition parties, and silencing of dissent through discriminatory conscription and arrest of human rights defenders, journalists and political opposition. Several political figures have recently been arrested.

The EU continues to call on **Burkinabe, Malian and Nigerien** authorities to uphold human rights, international humanitarian law, and democratic values and principles through a comprehensive multi-layered approach to protect individual dignity, limit armed conflict, and support open, resilient societies. As part of the renewed EU approach for the Sahel, the EU interests include supporting peace and security, protecting and promoting multilateralism, defending universal values and human rights.

The EU remains seriously concerned about the continued deterioration of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in **Nicaragua**. We call for an immediate end to repression, including transnational repression, against political opponents, journalists, civil society, NGOs, indigenous and religious organisations. The EU is deeply concerned about the closed civic space which together with fundamental freedoms must be restored. We call for the immediate release of all political prisoners and all those arbitrarily detained. The EU denounces Nicaragua's weaponisation of deprivation of citizenship. We urge Nicaragua to adhere to its human rights obligations and cooperate with international human rights organisations and mechanisms.



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