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ORAL STATEMENT

High-level panel discussion on the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

UN Human Rights Council
Thirty-seventh session
26 February – 23 March 2018

Mr. President,

Despite significant progress, the full aspirations of the UDHR have not been fully realised, and in some States the rights listed therein are routinely violated.

“[B]arbarous acts which [...] outraged the conscience of mankind”¹ prompted the drafting of the UDHR, yet barbarous acts on a large scale continue unabated. The UN must do more to prevent, respond to, and ensure accountability for serious human rights violations and abuses, including mass atrocity crimes.

The VDPA reaffirmed the right of victims to safe and timely access to humanitarian assistance,² and called on the UN to assume a more active role in the promotion and protection of human rights and ensuring full respect for international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict.³ And yet, some States represented here today have actively blocked such efforts, including in the Security Council.

Amnesty welcomes recent attempts to address the historic neglect of economic, social and cultural rights. However, across the world millions are denied access to adequate food, clean water, decent health care, education and basic shelter. The call in the SDGs to “leave nobody behind” is a call to ensure human rights play a central role in addressing growing inequalities.

While the challenges remain significant, the past year has shown that people will always call for those universal human values: freedom, equality, dignity, justice... human rights. Across the

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.

² Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993, para 29.

³ Ibid., para 96.

world, people are clamouring for justice, breathing new life into old struggles and igniting a new era of human rights activism. The Women's marches and the #MeToo and "Ni Una Menos" movements are powerful examples.

Mr. President,

It is wholly unacceptable that, among States participating in the celebrations today, are those who routinely harass, detain, and kill human rights defenders, journalists and others for calling for the very rights proclaimed by the UDHR and VDPA. Amnesty's own staff have recently come under unprecedented attacks, the most prominent example being in Turkey.

To be credible, States participating here must create a safe and enabling environment for free and open discussion and engagement on all human rights issues at the national level.

Thank you Mr. President.