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## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION AT THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ON THE SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

**28 February 2018**

*The following statement was delivered at the United Nations Human Rights Council on 28 February 2018, at the high-level panel discussion to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.<sup>1</sup>*

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It is clear that significant progress has been made on human rights over the past 70 years, since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Today, we have a comprehensive international human rights legal and institutional framework. Not only do we have a wide range of human rights conventions and important mechanisms, including of [the Human Rights Council], but we also have the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, brought into existence by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA).

It is also clear, however, that much more remains to be done to truly fulfil and implement the letter and spirit of the UDHR and VDPA. 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”<sup>2</sup> prompted the drafting of the UDHR, yet barbarous acts on a large scale continue unabated – for example in Syria, South Sudan, and Myanmar to name just a few. It is clear that [the Human Rights Council] and the wider United Nations (UN), must do more to prevent, respond effectively to, and ensure accountability for serious human rights violations and abuses, including mass atrocity crimes.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: due to time constraints, the statement was delivered in a shorter format.

<sup>2</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.

The VDPA reaffirmed the right of victims to safe and timely access to humanitarian assistance,<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> And yet, some States represented [at the Human Rights Council to celebrate this anniversary] have actively blocked such efforts, including in the Security Council.

The UDHR and VDPA both reflect the indivisibility and interdependence of all rights. 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 housing. The call in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to “leave nobody behind” is a call to ensure human rights play a central role in addressing the growing inequalities both between, and within, States.

While the challenges remain significant, the past year has shown that people will always call for those universal and basic tenets that underpin the UDHR and VDPA: freedom, equality, dignity, justice... human rights. Across the world, people are clamouring for justice on a host of economic, social, civil and political rights related issues, breathing new life into old struggles and igniting a new era of human rights activism. The indomitable spirit of the Women’s marches and the #MeToo and “Ni Una Menos” movements are powerful examples.

2018 also marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>5</sup> It is wholly unacceptable that, among the States participating in the celebrations [of these two important anniversaries], are those who routinely harass, arbitrarily detain, disappear and kill human rights defenders, journalists and other activists for calling for the very rights proclaimed by the UDHR and VDPA. Hundreds of activists have been killed over the past 12 months alone, as authorities have sought to silence campaigners and muzzle the media. Amnesty’s own staff have recently come under unprecedented attacks, the most prominent example being the arrest and indictment of Amnesty’s staff in Turkey. Amnesty Turkey’s chairperson is still in detention.

To be credible, States participating [in these important celebrations] must recommit to the full implementation of the UDHR and VDPA, and – as part of that – must create a safe and enabling environment for free and open discussion and engagement on all human rights issues at the national level to enable the true fulfilment of the promises of these two historic documents.

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<sup>3</sup> Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993, para 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., para 96.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Declaration.aspx>.