

**Statement by the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador
Martin I. Uhomoibhi at the Opening of the Tenth Session of
the Human Rights Council
Geneva, 2 March 2009**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour and privilege to declare open the Tenth Session of the Human Rights Council.

I wish warmly to welcome the Vice President of Colombia, H.E. Mr. Francisco Santos Calderon, the Vice President of Maldives, H.E. Dr. Mohamed Waheed, distinguished Foreign Ministers and other high level officials who have honoured us with their presence here today.

2. This Session is unique in more than one respect. First, it is the first time the Council is holding its regular session in this beautifully renovated room, aptly called Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room. We are especially thankful to the Spanish government for this very magnificent contribution. Second, this is the third in the series of main sessions of the Council since its establishment in 2006. Third and perhaps the most important, with the dedication of the first and second cycles of the Council to institutional building and test-running of new structures and processes, this third cycle is expected to consolidate on these gains to make possible the discussion of all human rights issues without discrimination. One of our more essential tasks during the third cycle is to ensure that the operationalisation of the mechanisms as provided for in the institution building text and to ensure that discussions in the Council and progress on our work are conducted in atmosphere of decorum, good order, with appropriate respect for different viewpoints and perspectives.

3. In the past few months the HRC was able to accomplish some tasks of great significance. We conducted the 3rd and 4th sessions of the UPR Working Group, met three times in the context of special sessions, twice on country

situations and once on a thematic issue of great significance. Within the same period, the Council embarked on the refinement of its working methods. We conducted special panels on a variety of issues, relevant to the agenda of the Human Rights Council. These panel discussions provided opportunity for the Council to benefit from expert ideas. Similarly, some of the newly created subsidiary bodies of the Council commenced work and have begun to render reports: indeed, we are hopeful that this session would afford us the opportunity to assess their initial inputs and provide guidance for further work.

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4. We have made considerable progress on the review, rationalization and improvement of the mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the former Commission on Human Rights, setting the stage for a realistic evaluation of the additional efforts necessary for the fulfillment of the Council's mandate in the coming years. However, some additional work need to be done and a few mandates still need to be further discussed to determine their status and future. Regarding the Durban process, whilst Council has completed all preparatory work for the holding of the Review Conference in April this year, negotiations are still ongoing to achieve consensus on the outcome document. I believe this is an agenda of considerable interest and therefore urge all stakeholders to remain and positively engaged in order to achieve a fruitful outcome.

5. One area of positive and outstanding success has been the UPR process. With the completion of the 4th UPR Working Group, the Council has reviewed 64 countries, almost a third of the entire membership of the United Nations. Although these exercises have not being without their challenges, we must be courageous to acknowledge the positive gains achieved. For instance, several Member States that have undergone the review have already begun implementing recommendations, while some others have adopted new polices, programmes and measures aimed at improving human rights in their respective countries for the benefit of their citizens.

Excellencies,

6. This Council will be the first to recognize that human rights defenders around the world and the victims of human rights violations everywhere expect this Council to provide real, effective and prompt remedies to all incidents of human rights violations anywhere and everywhere. That being the case, States must raise the bar and set high targets, not least because the old ways of doing things will never measure up to the expectations of the international community. Times have changed, so must our responses to all forms of rights violations. In this new era, we must work together, combining our strengths for the effective realization of all human rights.

7. In our endeavour to defend and entrench respect for human rights in the international system, dialogue and cooperation remain indispensable. Tolerance and respect for different viewpoints will not dilute the intensity of our engagement and commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. On the contrary, it will deepen and enrich our work. Because mutual respect and dialogue promote a sense of inclusiveness and shared ownership, these can also foster international cooperation, progress and development. These are important human rights goals we would do well to preserve. It is for these reasons that I urge robust support for all human rights initiatives and processes so as to move us nearer the goal we have set for ourselves.

8. In conclusion, this High Level Segment is well placed and well timed. It not only brings the Council a desired visibility but also enhances its efficiency and effectiveness in the conduct of its work.

I thank you.