



**SLOVAKIA**

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**61<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on Human Rights**

**Address by**

**H. E. Mr. Eduard KUKAN**

**Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic**

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*Check against delivery!*

Mr. Chairman, Madam High Commissioner, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to your high office. May I wish you, as well as the other members of the Bureau, every success in performing your important duties?

Slovakia fully supports the statement made by H.E. Mr. Jean Asselborn, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Luxemburg, speaking on behalf of the European Union on Monday. Slovakia, as an EU Member State, is strongly committed to putting the principles of human rights in the centre of interest of the international community.

Earlier this afternoon I had the opportunity to meet the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Louise Arbour. I am confident that the dedication and commitment with which she set to work from the outset since she took up her function, deserves our full support. Today there is no doubt that the establishment of the post of the High Commissioner by the United Nations General Assembly was a landmark event in the series of actions aimed at improving the management of the UN human rights machinery. I am proud that back in 1993, I personally had the opportunity to closely witness the process leading to the establishment of that post from the position of the Chairman of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee.

Mr Chairman,

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This famous first sentence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has over the years become something like a universally valid, eternal philosophical and moral principle. When the drafters of the Declaration put this idea on the paper, they surely had in their minds among other things, the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. Some weeks ago, when I watched the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp where thousands of hundreds of Jews, Roma and persons belonging to other “hated” ethnic and social groups were exterminated, I recalled that first article of the Universal Declaration. Looking with respect to the survivors of the tragedy, I was deeply moved by the strength of their character, by the admirable ability of those people to preserve their human dignity even after what had happened to them.

All too often, in the last 60 years, has the concept of human dignity enshrined in the Article 1 of the Universal Declaration been neglected, forgotten and even trampled down by states and political regimes all over the world. Justifications for doing so have been found many: national sovereignty, political interests, cultural traditions, and religious habits. To whatever extent the states, however, have the right to defend their sovereignty and integrity and to advocate their nation’s specific cultural and historical development, the concept of human dignity cannot be compromised on under any circumstances. Human dignity of all individuals is respected and cherished in each and every major culture or religion. When it is not the case, it is usually a sign of that the fundamental ideas of a culture or religion are being monopolised by particular groups. Human dignity must always be protected and the perpetrators of gross violations of human rights and breaches of humanitarian law must be brought to justice.

Bearing in mind the primordial task of this Commission to defend the human dignity of all individuals, we entirely share the position expressed in the opening statement of the EU, namely, that in order to effectively perform their duties, the Commission, its mechanisms as well as the High Commissioner should exploit all the means and ways of action that are at hand: that means beside normative activities also monitoring and direct criticism on one hand, and technical cooperation, dialogue and education on the other hand.

It is mainly with these considerations in mind that we welcomed the Secretary-General's second report on United Nations reform in 2002 and its recommendations and observations towards further integrating human rights throughout the UN system. We support the objectives outlined in all five actions proposed by the Secretary-General, especially in Action 2 aimed at strengthening national human rights promotion and protection systems. We believe that the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change should be read in the context of and complementarily to the actions proposed in the Secretary General's report. We do not look at the report of the High-Level Panel only through the optics of an institutional reform. On the contrary, we welcome the fact that the line and case of human rights winds through the entire text of the High-Level Panel report as a crosscutting issue.

There is no doubt that the Commission on Human Rights is the most important body of the UN system in the area of the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. A relevant question could be raised in this connection: whether the Commission's status as a functional subsidiary body of ECOSOC matches the significance of the human rights in the activities of the Organisation. Seen from this perspective, we believe that the proposals for universalisation of the Commission membership, or creation of a completely new body such as the Human Rights Council, are worthy of our attention.

We are of the view that the time has come for both the Commission and the Office of the High Commissioner to shift the focus of their activities more vigorously from the normative phase - which has been a very successful one - to the phase of implementation of human rights standards. We fully support in this respect the follow-up to Action 2 taking place under the framework of the UN Development Group and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, as well as the implementation-driven agenda of the OHCHR.

If human rights are not respected, the situation very often results in violence and even in armed conflict. We realise the closely intertwined character of human rights and peace, security and stability. Slovakia as an endorsed candidate for the seat of a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the term of 2006-2007, will stand ready to support the integration, when appropriate, of human rights considerations in the Security Council agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

On a positive note, I would like to express the satisfaction of my government that the case of human rights, democracy and rule of law is resolutely taking ground in states and societies in our close neighbourhood. We wish all the best in their endeavours to our friends in the Western Balkans, in Ukraine and further east. Let me mention in this respect as well, that Slovakia has progressed in building up her development assistance strategy with its first 5-year's programme adopted in 2003. Albeit with modest sums at disposal at the beginning, many approved projects focus precisely on strengthening democratic institutions and supporting educational and social infrastructure, mainly in countries of Western Balkans and Central Asia.

I would like to refer to another positive development of the recent past, namely the progress in the Middle East Peace Process. Slovakia welcomes the commitments taken by both parties in Sharm-el-Sheikh and strongly hopes that the process will continue unimpeded, with a positive effect on the proceedings of this Commission, too.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me now to make a few remarks concerning Slovakia's stands vis-à-vis her own international obligations. Slovakia has been ready to cooperate with the UN treaty bodies as well as with the special procedures of the CHR. Slovakia is one of those countries that have issued a standing invitation for the office holders of the special procedures: we encourage other states to do so as well.

Let me mention in this connection that the dialogue with our UN partners has stimulated the implementation of new projects and activities focused on improving the human rights standard of our citizens, while adhering to the principle of non-discrimination.

At the last year's High-Level Segment, the Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia envisaged the early adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. I am pleased to announce today that the Law on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination (the Antidiscrimination Act) has since been adopted and entered into force on 1 July 2004. The purpose of the law is to guarantee protection against any discrimination on grounds of sex, religion or belief, racial, national or ethnic origin, disability, age and sexual orientation. The law also guarantees the victims the possibility to claim adequate and effective protection by court, including compensation of damages and non-property loss. The Act affords specific positive affirmation measures in order to prevent disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic origin. Those measures are not meant to favour one group over the other; rather, they are aimed to reach a real equality of opportunities for all and shall be in force until the equality is reached in practice. This provision corresponds to the relevant article of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

In addition to that, the Slovak Republic carries out a number of positive programmes directed towards the most vulnerable groups of the population, in particular the Roma community. A number of tasks outlined in the strategic document on "Basic Theses of the Slovak Government's Policies for the Integration of Roma Communities", adopted in 2003, were implemented in the course of 2004 and 2005. They include, for instance, approval of the concept of integrated education of Roma children and youth, and the long-term concept of housing for marginalized groups of the population. Non-governmental organisations play an important role in its implementation. The results of cooperation with NGOs are an example of the effectiveness of joint activities, and the Slovak Republic wants to continue pursuing this road. I am confident that we shall attain further progress also in the framework of Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015, launched in February this year.

Mr. Chairman,

By concluding, I would like once again to wish you every success in your deliberations and in the fulfilment of your mandate.

Thank you for your attention.