



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 15 February 2016
(OR. en)

6012/16

COHOM 14
COPS 49
CONUN 26
COASI 14
MAMA 27
COEST 27
COAFR 32
CFSP/PESC 117
GENDER 7

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
On: 15 February 2016
To: Delegations

No. prev. doc.: 5851/16 COPS 42 COHOM 11 CONUN 21 COASI 8 MAMA 25 COEST 15
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Subject: EU Priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2016
– Council conclusions (15 February 2016)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Conclusions on EU Priorities at the UN Human Rights Fora in 2016, adopted by the Council at its 3447. meeting held on 15 February 2016.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON
EU PRIORITIES AT UN HUMAN RIGHTS FORA IN 2016**

1. In this 10th anniversary year of the UN Human Rights Council and ahead of its 31st session, the EU reaffirms its strong commitment to the United Nations bodies tasked with the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU will again actively engage with the Human Rights Council and General Assembly Third Committee to defend and promote the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights, and will continue to draw the attention of these fora to human rights violations and abuses worldwide.
2. Welcoming the dedication and work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and his staff, the EU will continue to support and defend the integrity, independence and functioning of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which undertakes essential work in advancing human rights worldwide and translating norms into improvements on the ground.
3. The EU promotes a proactive, responsive, and impactful UN human rights system and strongly supports further mainstreaming of human rights across the work of the United Nations. In that vein, the EU seeks cooperation with partners from all regions to ensure that the UN bodies pursue an ambitious thematic agenda and address the gravest human rights situations around the world, clearly condemning in the strongest terms human rights violations and abuses, as well as violence and discrimination.
4. The EU calls on all states to offer their full cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, including by ensuring mandate holders' unhindered access to and contact with individuals and civil society. The EU underlines the importance of the Universal Periodic Review and calls upon all countries to fully engage with and commit to this process. Similarly, the EU reaffirms its strong support for the UN treaty bodies, which play a fundamental role in monitoring compliance with human rights obligations.

5. Syria is host to the most acute and dire human rights and humanitarian crisis of recent history, which must be given the full attention of the UN human rights bodies. The EU calls for an immediate end of human rights violations and abuses by the Assad regime and all other parties to the conflict; supports the continued work of the Commission of Inquiry; urges all actors to allow immediate, unhindered, and ongoing access for humanitarian assistance; demands full accountability and an end to impunity; and again reiterates its call to the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. The EU also continues to condemn in the strongest terms the continued gross, systematic and widespread human rights abuses carried out by Da'esh, including in Syria, Iraq and Libya, and calls for accountability for these acts. Furthermore the EU urges the Government of Iraq, as well as the Kurdistan Regional Government, to uphold the rights of all Iraqi citizens and ensure that allegations of violations and abuses are fully investigated.
6. Given the ongoing and grave human rights situation in the DPRK, the EU will continue working with Japan and like-minded partners to draw attention to the human rights violations committed by the DPRK, and to keep up the momentum for international accountability efforts, and renews its call for the UN Security Council to consider the referral of the situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court.
7. The EU will highlight the serious human rights violations and abuses linked to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the deeply concerning human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula, the illegal annexation of which by the Russian Federation the EU does not recognise and continues to condemn. The EU lends full support to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and calls on all actors involved to respect international humanitarian and human rights law. The overall strengthening of the rule of law also remains of fundamental importance for the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine.

8. The EU will ensure that heightened attention is devoted to the deteriorating human rights situation in Burundi, and reiterates its call for an end to violence and human rights violations and abuses. The EU will continue to insist on an adequate and effective response from the HRC to the distressing state of affairs in South Sudan, where hostilities have led to massive human rights violations. The EU again condemns the abuses of human rights perpetrated by terrorist groups in Africa, especially the attacks targeting women and children by Boko Haram. In this, the African Year of Human Rights, the EU will engage with African partners to support Human Rights Council action on the Central African Republic, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, and Sudan.
9. In light of ongoing human rights violations and the high rate of executions in Iran, and with a view to improving the human rights situation, the EU will again support the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. The EU will also promote appropriate Human Rights Council attention to the situation of human rights in Libya and the occupied Palestinian territory. The EU will also seek appropriate action on the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in Yemen. The EU remains concerned about individuals sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia for actions they committed as minors and mass executions. The EU will continue to follow closely the human rights situation in Belarus.
10. Welcoming the historic elections in Myanmar/Burma in November 2015, the EU will review its initiatives in the light of developments on the ground, encouraging the new government to take swift and bold action to address ongoing human rights concerns and bring about further improvements. The EU will also follow closely Sri Lanka's efforts in addressing human rights issues and in establishing a credible process of transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliation.

11. As a firm advocate of the abolition of the death penalty, the EU is opposed to the death penalty whenever and wherever it is used. The EU will speak out against executions particularly in the case of mass executions or when the death penalty is applied to offences committed by those under 18. The EU will continue to draw attention to violations of minimum standards. Concerned by the number of countries resuming executions, the EU will seek to reinforce cross-regional support to the resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty at the General Assembly. The EU will also speak out and support the UN's work against torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment.
12. The EU will further uphold the freedoms of opinion and expression offline and online, and the freedoms of association and assembly, as cornerstones of democracy and contributors to the peaceful resolution of conflict. Valuing a strong partnership with civil society, the EU opposes the imposition of unjustified or disproportionate restrictions on the activities, registration, and access to funding of civil society organisations, including in the name of combatting terrorism. The EU further condemns all instances of harassment, intimidation, or persecution, including violent attacks and killings, of human rights defenders, journalists, or bloggers; and deplores all acts of reprisal against individuals and civil society organisations for cooperating with the United Nations.
13. The EU will promote the principles of equality and non-discrimination, firmly opposing discrimination on any ground or status, including discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The EU reaffirms its strong and worldwide opposition to all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. The EU will also continue to promote freedom of religion or belief, strongly oppose religious intolerance, and call for greater protection of persons belonging to religious and other minorities against persecution and violence. As freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are interdependent, promoting both is integral to the fight against intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

14. Resolved to promote gender equality, women's empowerment and the advancement of women's rights, the Council recalls its conclusions on Gender in Development of 26 May 2015 and renews its strong commitment to gender equality, human rights, the empowerment of women and girls and the eradication of gender-based violence. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, in this context. The EU will continue to pursue efforts to implement effectively UN Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security. Moreover, the EU will step up efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls around the world.
15. In keeping with its longstanding policy, the EU will work for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child worldwide. The EU will intensify work to protect girls and boys from all forms of violence and abuse, sexual exploitation, and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage. The EU will also remain invested in the international work to protect and assist children affected by armed conflict.
16. The EU underlines the importance of comprehensive and effective implementation of the Agenda 2030, including through a rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights and gender equality, to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, and will advocate for the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. In 2016, the EU will moreover step up efforts to advance the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. The EU will also implement and promote, including with third countries, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and support efforts to improve access to effective remedies.

17. The EU will underline the importance of compliance with international refugee law and of protecting the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and all displaced persons, particularly bearing in mind the specific risks faced by women and children. The Union, amongst many others, faces a major challenge in responding to the global refugee crisis, but remains steadfast in its commitment to guaranteeing the right to asylum and the highest level of protection of human rights for all.

18. Fifty years after the adoption of the International Covenants on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights in 1966, the EU issues a renewed call for their universal ratification. Recalling the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2015–2019, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. The EU will engage countries, organisations and stakeholders from all regions, including through the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, to promote the realization of all human rights, everywhere and for everyone.

