**U.S. National Intervention – High Level Segment,**

**Human Rights Council – Geneva, Switzerland**

United States Mission to the United Nations in Geneva

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AS DELIVERED

Thank you, Madame Vice President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues.

Over the past year, the United States has actively pursued Council action on two related fronts: improving the Human Rights Council and addressing critical human rights issues.

The United States continues to look closely at our participation in the Council. We want to see the Council succeed. To be most effective, the United Nations needs a body to hold countries accountable, to provide a platform for human rights defenders, and to assist countries that are working to improve human rights at home.

Therefore, it is an outrage that this body, dedicated to human rights, has once again served as a platform for officials who are known to be associated with human rights violations and abuses. Their presence makes a mockery of the Council’s work.

To improve the Council, we have highlighted three areas that we believe need focus: membership, agenda, and workplan effectiveness.

First, on membership. The Council cannot act effectively to help the oppressed when oppressors hold seats here. The legitimacy of the body is in question when countries like Venezuela and Burundi hold seats. It is appropriate for HRC membership to include states that have work to do – we all do. But there is a difference between a state making an effort, and one refusing to cooperate with HRC mechanisms or regularly depriving individuals within its territory of their rights. Members must meet a higher standard, for example, by participating in a candidates’ forum in the General Assembly. We also need to increase the pool of HRC candidates that run. We must find a way to fulfill the HRC’s mandate to consider candidate country’s human rights records and, once members, to uphold the highest standards of human rights. If we do not, we are failing our mission.

Regarding the HRC’s agenda, it is unacceptable that the HRC treats Israel differently from every other UN member. The charter itself says the UN organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members. That is not the case when the special rapporteur’s mandate on the Occupied Palestinian Territories – unlike every other Council mandate – never requires renewal. That is not the case when only one UN member state has an entire agenda item dedicated to it. When it comes to human rights, no country should be free from scrutiny, including Israel. But the institutional integrity of the Council demands that the efforts to delegitimize and isolate Israel through such blatant bias must end.

On effectiveness: we are greatly disappointed that the Council failed to agree to the efficiency measures the Bureau put forward. We urge HRC members to return to these discussions, and to improve the Council’s program of work within its existing authority. Ultimately, strengthening the Council will increase the positive impact its work can have on the ground.

For that reason, the Council must not shy away from difficult conversations. In the case of Sri Lanka, when the Council shined a spotlight on its human rights concerns, the government committed to making improvements that are still underway. We hope they will continue. This session, the Council will focus attention on human rights in the DPRK, Iran, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Syria. We hope Council members can come together to adopt robust resolutions for each.

In particular, given the ongoing human rights crisis in Syria, the Council must support the renewal of the Commission of Inquiry. Failure to act with a strong voice would ignore countless and horrific human rights violations and abuses in that country.

We also strongly urge the Council to renew the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. It is crucial that the government and the opposition take steps to end ethnic, sexual, and gender-based violence in the country. The Commission’s work will be invaluable in bringing about future accountability, as evidenced by its recent serious report.

The Council’s continued focus on Iran is a testament to the work of Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir, a passionate, distinguished human rights defender in her home country of Pakistan and across the globe. I share my condolences with Ms. Jahangir’s family and friends, and call upon the Council to renew the Special Rapporteur’s mandate to keep Madame Asma’s contributions alive.

We are deeply concerned by the situation in Myanmar, and continue to call for humanitarian and media access to Rakhine State, as well as accountability for ethnic cleansing and other human rights violations that have occurred. We must renew and strengthen the Special Rapporteur’s mandate. If the situation is genuinely improving, as the government claims, it should cooperate with the Council’s Fact Finding Mission and Special Rapporteur rather than deny them access.

Non-cooperation with UN mechanisms is unacceptably and particularly egregious for Council members. Beyond Myanmar, several countries, some members of the Council, refuse to cooperate with HRC mechanisms, including Burundi, North Korea, Syria, and Iran. Despite their lack of access, the United States commends OHCHR and UN mandate holders for their excellent reporting on human rights concerns in these countries, often relying heavily on civil society, who take enormous risks to document atrocities and abuses on the ground.

In that light, threats of reprisals against UN officials and civil society actors are unacceptable. This Council should not tolerate such actions, and instead should advocate for and promote civil society’s access to the Council and its mechanisms.

The United States will continue to fight for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and looks forward to working with all of you to reform this Council so that it achieves the goals it was established to advance.

Thank you.