

**Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Nikos Christodoulides**

*Human Rights Council, 46th Session, High Level Segment, 23 February 2021*

Madam President,

Madam High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year we marked the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and we were set to celebrate three-quarters of a century of multilateralism in the modern age. However - much like all of our lives - anniversary celebrations, as well as multilateralism itself, have been inevitably affected by the “worst global crisis” since World War II, as the UN Secretary General has aptly described it. The COVID-19 pandemic posed, and continues to pose, unprecedented challenges for all countries around the globe, inevitably impacting the situation of human rights.

The international human rights agenda has always ranked high amongst the foreign policy priorities of Cyprus. On a wide range of issues, be it gender equality, the fight against human trafficking, striving for children’s rights or the protection of cultural rights, to name but a few, our commitment to work for the protection and promotion of human rights is now stronger than ever.

It is therefore with a particular sense of duty and honour that I announce today our decision that the Republic of Cyprus will be, for the first time, a candidate for the Human Rights Council for the period 2025-2027.

Firmly believing in the value of multilateralism and international cooperation, we are confident that Cyprus shall make a meaningful contribution as a member of this Council, and to this end we aspire to work even more closely with all Member States, towards the attainment of our shared objective: the strengthening of human rights, for all. Our commitments, our vision and our goals in this noble quest will be presented in due time, and I am confident that they shall be received with broad support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are bound by a collective duty to respond to the UN Secretary-General’s “Call to Action for Human Rights”. It is now more imperative than ever, to promote and protect the indivisibility and universality of human rights and deliver on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

To this effect, Cyprus will be submitting its Voluntary National Review on the progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ahead of the July High-Level Political Forum.

At the same time, the world is faced with a multitude of challenging situations across the globe that merit the Council's attention.

The immediate neighbourhood of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean is no exception and continues to be affected by upheaval and violations of human rights that result from armed conflict and terrorism.

In spite of the pandemic, the flow of migrants and refugees to Europe, especially via the Eastern Mediterranean route continues unabated. For the past four years, Cyprus has received the highest per capita number of asylum applications within the entire EU, with the vast majority of them hailing from Syria.

In order to more effectively address all regional challenges, Cyprus has been at the forefront of initiatives undertaken in recent years, aimed at setting up networks of trilateral or "minilateral" cooperation with a number of countries in the broader region, in the context of an inclusive and positive agenda. The fundamental tenet for participation is adherence to International Law and the principles of good-neighbourly relations.

In these efforts we are guided by our firm belief that the only way to protect and promote human rights is not through the use of gunboat diplomacy, but through respect for International Law and through the enhancement of peace, security, dialogue and cooperation.

Madam President,

During this session of the Council, the annual Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of human rights in Cyprus will be presented, under agenda Item 2.

Whilst the value of this annual exercise is unquestionable, it is fair to say that the report, as drafted, could more adequately reflect the mass violations of human rights caused by the unlawful presence of the Turkish occupation army and the forceful division of the island, which persist, in blatant disregard of International Law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. In doing so, the report would be truer to its mandate, which stems directly from the existence of these very violations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the coming weeks, President Anastasiades will participate at the informal 5+UN meeting that the UN Secretary General has announced he will convene, aimed at the resumption of negotiations for a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem. The framework as reaffirmed by the latest UN Security Council Resolution is unequivocal: a Cyprus settlement based on a State of Cyprus with a single sovereignty and international personality and a single citizenship, with political equality as described in the relevant Security Council resolutions, in a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation.

I wish to use this opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to continue to work tirelessly for the achievement of a solution within this framework; a solution that

will reunify the island, securing the unhindered enjoyment of human rights and basic freedoms by all Cypriots.

Madam President,

In closing, I join previous speakers in congratulating you on assuming the Presidency of the Council and I wish to assure you that you can rely on the steadfast support of my Government in the execution of your mandate.

In the face of additional challenges posed by the pandemic, Cyprus is determined to redouble its efforts and to work with all partners and stakeholders within this august Body and beyond, to make 2021 a better year for human rights globally.

I thank you.

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