

**Organisational session of the Human Rights Council for the 10th cycle  
(January - December 2016)**

**Statement of Ireland  
7 December 2015**

Mr President,

This year marks Ireland's 60th year of UN membership. We hold the principles and values of the UN Charter in high esteem and it was for this reason that in 2012 we sought election to the Human Rights Council. It has been a privilege and an honour for Ireland to serve for the past three years. As a member, we have been guided by the principles of international law and the pledges and commitments we made as a candidate. We have sought to strengthen and preserve the integrity of this institution, and to uphold the spirit of the Council's mandate, particularly "*the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, constructive international dialogue and cooperation*".

We have taken forward two initiatives with the support of cross-regional core groups – one on civil society space; and one on a human rights-based approach to child mortality. We have done so out of a sense of urgent need – we find the alarming threats to civil society in many parts of the world unacceptable; and we refuse to accept that nearly 6 million children under the age of five should die every year from preventable and treatable causes. On both issues we believe this Council, and indeed OHCHR, has much guidance to offer, to enable States to fulfil their obligations.

We have also engaged across all areas including new human rights challenges such as business and human rights, climate change, armed drones and internet freedom; as well as more long-standing areas of work including human rights defenders, freedom of religion or belief, the death penalty, gender equality, the rights of LGBTI persons and many others.

We commit Ireland to continue our positive engagement in the Council as an observer and to continue to contribute to outcomes strengthening the protection of human rights.

As our membership comes to an end, we wish to briefly reflect 3 key points which are so fundamental they should go without saying. Unfortunately, practice indicates that this is not the case and we wish to again draw the attention of all members and future members to them.

- First, this Council was explicitly created as a place for dialogue. We believe that invoking a no-action motion runs contrary to the obligations

of States serving as members of the Council. We call on all members, current and future, to respect the purpose and spirit of this Council and desist from calling or supporting no-action motions.

- Second, civil society participation in this Council, free from threats, intimidation or reprisals, is critical. While we are pleased to have seen the reduction in interruption of NGO speakers in the Council over the past year, we are concerned that interference with civil society participation has intensified in other fora, including blatant threats and intimidation in the UN building. We call on all States to condemn such acts unreservedly and to cooperate with all relevant mechanisms.
- Third, country specific issues have an explicit and important place in the mandate and work of this Council. Subsequent political statements of opposition, including in this room, cannot override the fundamental basis of international human rights law and the commitment freely given by all States at the time of the Council's creation. The principles of impartiality and non-selectivity do not mean that country situations cannot be discussed - rather only that the basis for deciding on the States for discussion should be objective and not politically motivated. We call on all States to engage with the substance and merits of country-specific initiatives rather than object to them in principle.

Mr President

Sixty-seven years ago, "*barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind*" inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights framework which was subsequently developed. While progress has been made, it is sadly the case that the "*disregard and contempt for human rights*" referred to in that Declaration have not yet been eradicated. We all bear the responsibility of promoting and protecting all human rights, individually and collectively. As an observer in the Council, Ireland will continue to work to ensure that this Council remain a safe and open space; and to advance promotion and protection of the rights, dignity and worth of every human person.

Finally, we thank you Mr President for your extraordinary work. And we wish the incoming President, Bureau and members of the Council every success in meeting their commitments and obligations to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Thank you