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**STATEMENT BY
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**HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
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**PALAIS DES NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS
ROOM
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Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner,
Excellencies,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this august body. I wish to share with you our vision on the protection and promotion of human rights in our world and on the role of the Human Rights Council in that context.

We are going through turbulent times. Our globe is facing a paradigm shift. A new order is being established where individuals are in the lead. In this new order, ordinary people are able to make a difference.

Systems which disregard the right to life are no longer tenable. A way of life that wholly embraces human rights has become essential. Recent changes have placed the human factor in the forefront in the establishment of this new order.

On such occasions we should remember those who not only set out on the path of making a change on their own, but changed their respective countries and eventually the world with millions behind them. They are Gandhi, Malcolm X, Mandela but to name a few. They did not only help liberate their countrymen by mobilizing the masses. They liberated minds worldwide and made a difference. They all led by example.

This august body should be empowered to provide the foundation for this philosophy. Equally, it should be able to adapt itself in line with the ongoing transformation. We all feel the need for an institutional framework where this mindset prevails. The Human Rights Council should not lag behind developments. Indeed, the review process was meant to enable the Council to evolve in order to address contemporary challenges.

The raison d'être of this body is to protect and promote human rights and freedoms. In these times of change, such fundamental values should be upheld indiscriminately and in a non-selective manner.

The famous Turkish philosopher/poet of the 13th century with universal reach, Mevlana Jalaladdin Rumi says, "the human being is both the cause and end of all happenings". The Tunisian experience proved to be a case in point where a single human being shook a whole nation and an entire region and in conclusion the whole world. Muhammad Al-Bouazizi, on December 17, burned himself to death and proved us how a simple fruit-seller can spark a revolution on his own. We should keep in mind at all times why Al-Bouazizi was driven to such a desperate act. The lack of personal freedoms and rights can and does constitute a burden which in many cases is impossible to bear.

The transformations in Tunisia and subsequently in Egypt were followed by other popular movements. These have sometimes been coupled with unfortunate and disproportionate repression, as is the case of Libya.

The peace and welfare of these countries, with which Turkey shares a common past, is of paramount importance for us. As another thinker of the same century, Shems-i Tebrizi says and I quote "Don't forget, the wrath of one person can upset the whole of humanity. The joy of one person can make all humanity smile."

Turkey has always been of the opinion that sustainable stability can only be ensured through guaranteeing the welfare, prosperity and security of the people. In order to realize these objectives, it is essential that the fundamental rights and liberties of the masses are duly protected. We should all heed the call of our fellow men and women. Al-Bouazizi of Tunisia is not the first in displaying such a desperate act, but we must attempt to make sure that he is the last.

The international community has the responsibility to provide the concerned countries with the input and resources needed for a successful transformation.

I myself have recently visited Tunisia in my capacity as the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, accompanied by Secretary General Jagland. This visit was an opportunity to offer Tunisia the benefit of the expertise of the Council of Europe, as the oldest pan-European organisation upholding and promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Transformation initially started in Tunisia and we have to do our utmost to see a successful transformation in this country. This will set an example to others. Naturally, each and every country has different dynamics and each require careful approaches.

I had also visited Kirghizistan last year in my national capacity as well as my capacity as the Chairman of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) to this end.

We cannot and should not dictate our own solutions to these countries. As in every democratic system, these countries must find their own solutions, based on their people's will. We can only offer guidance based on our own experience. International institutions with an important accumulation of expertise on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, such as the United Nations, OSCE and the Council of Europe, CICA, have a long-standing experience in assisting countries on this path. Human rights is of universal nature and any discussion of this nature does not constitute meddling in the internal affairs of sovereign countries. National sovereignty is not an armour of which states can hide behind.

Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council must also contribute, through its various mechanisms, to the success of democratic transformation in the region. Our consensual action will enable us to contribute substantially to the efforts of these countries in order to help them build a better future based on democratic values. We must show our solidarity with the peoples of these countries. The new human rights order to be established must carry the respect of all. This order must be all encompassing and in this order there can be no room for exceptions or privileged states.

Mr. President,

In this vein, allow me to underline a case where nine months ago, the Human Rights Council took immediate action against grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Following the Israeli assault that targeted the humanitarian aid flotilla on 31 May 2010, the Council, to its credit, reacted without delay and without hesitation. It held an urgent debate and dispatched an independent international fact finding mission to investigate violations of international law resulting from the Israeli attacks.

Some members of the Council voted against the establishment of the Fact Finding Mission. Some others abstained. However, at the end wisdom prevailed. I salute those who acted as the

Council's true conscience. For those who voted against or abstained, I must make a warning. Such positions carry the risk of emboldening those countries who persistently violate human rights. One day others may follow suit. In the end it may be one or more of your countrymen whose rights are violated in the gravest manner. On that day it will be those countries that look upon this Council for solutions.

The Fact Finding Mission, in its report dated 27 September 2010, established that – and I quote –

- *“the blockade [of Gaza] is unlawful and cannot be sustained in law”;*
- *that “the Israeli conduct was not only disproportionate to the occasion, but demonstrated levels of totally unnecessary and incredible violence”;*
- *that “Israeli forces committed violations of international humanitarian law, including wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment”*
- *that “It constituted a grave violation of human rights law and international humanitarian law.”*

Today, five months after the report of the Fact Finding Mission, the international community still expects Israel to take the necessary steps for implementing the conclusions of the report. No state can be exempt from responsibility.

In light of the conclusions, we expect Israel to offer a formal apology for its crimes and provide compensation to the victims and their families.

The Human Rights Council should remain seized of this issue until the conclusions of the Fact Finding Mission are fully implemented.

The High Commissioner must renew her strong call to Israel for necessary action to be taken. The appeal she transmitted to the Israeli authorities during her recent visit to the region and her statements at the press conference held in Jerusalem on the 11th of February should not fall on deaf ears.

We request the High Commissioner to continue to report on the implementation by all concerned parties of the conclusions of the report A/HRC/15/21 submitted to the 15th session of the Council.

On the other hand, unfortunately the New York process, the Palmer Commission has not produced results. Israel is using this mechanism to push the issue into oblivion and prevent the international community from taking action.

I would like to remind you that on 31 May 2010, nine civilians were shot dead by the Israeli soldiers, many others were wounded, one of them still in a coma. The demise of one individual is the demise of humanity. The reason behind my words is to highlight that human beings were lost. I am not stressing the fact that Turks were killed. I am stressing that humanity was the victim, regardless of citizenship.

The Holy Quran says, “if one kills an innocent person, it is as if he had killed the whole of humanity! By the same token, if one saves a life, it is as if he had saved the whole of humanity!”. This teaching exists in holy scripts of all faiths making it our common principle.

Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council must pursue its objective to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. One of the issues on which the action of the Council is much needed today is the fight against intolerance and discrimination.

The rise of Islamophobia - which is a form of intolerance and discrimination motivated by deep ignorance, fear, suspicion and hatred of Islam - is a reality. It is often accompanied by racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance. The manifestation of Islamophobia becomes all the more unacceptable when it is made the subject of domestic political aspirations.

We believe that a global approach should be adopted to address this plague. We should fight religious intolerance regardless of which religion. On the other hand, we should also diligently assess the discrimination that believers of different religions may be faced with. Our aim should be to ensure greater cross-cultural perception within an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Turkey, on her part, as the co-chair of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative together with Spain, has spared no effort in building bridges across different cultures and civilizations as well as fighting intolerance and discrimination. By the way, let me express my deep gratitude to be able to make this address in this room named "Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations" where our Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was guest of honour during the inauguration. Taking this opportunity let me clarify once again that Turkey will continue to support any effort towards nurturing an environment of mutual respect and tolerance.

Mr. President,

Turkey has been pursuing a global and dynamic reform process and now aspires to become a member of the Human Rights Council.

The major reform process that Turkey has undertaken since 2002 has enabled us to realize unprecedented progress.

The most recent achievement which testifies to our determination is the constitutional reform package adopted in September 2010. However, this naturally does not constitute an end in itself. We are aware that Turkey must continue to progress in many fields.

The implementation of the recent reforms constitutes tangible progress with regard to the relevant obligations of Turkey. In fact, these constitutional amendments are in line with the recommendations accepted by Turkey during its Universal Periodic Review, as well as the objectives established towards its candidature to the Human Rights Council.

Mr. President,

Allow me to finish with a plea to everyone including individuals, nations and human rights organizations. The world is entering a new era. As we face new challenges and uncertainties, we must all join forces to be the voice of the people. This voice calls for the supremacy of human rights. Let us build a new order that crowns human dignity based on universal values. Let us be deliberate in our steps and not shy away from taking them. Let me make it clear,

Turkey is determined to heed this call. Turkey will engage both domestically and with the international community to further improve the well-being of humanity.

I thank you.