

**Draft speech by President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič at the 21st session of
the UN Human Rights Council**
Geneva, 11 September 2012

Madam President, Madam High Commissioner, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very much honoured to be the first ever president of the Slovak Republic to deliver a speech to you, only a few weeks before the 20th anniversary of the independence of my home country. A country that appreciates the role the UN plays amidst the current global turmoil, and actively participates in the work of UN bodies. In this context, I am very glad to praise the unique position Geneva holds as the crucial human rights headquarters of the UN system.

Today we honour the memory of the victims of the tragic terrorist attack on the United States of America that occurred eleven years ago. I would like to emphasise that no ideology, no belief can excuse such terrible deeds. I very much wish that the efforts pursued by this revered institution will further contribute to enhancing the respect for, and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide.

The origins of the United Nations Organization were accompanied by the commitment and resolution of its founding members, including the former Czechoslovakia, to avoid recurrence of the horrors, sufferings and injustice that the international community had to sustain during the Second World War. Faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person was enshrined in the basic principles of its functioning at the very beginning.

In spite of the unprecedented progress in science and technology and groundbreaking means of communication that we have at our disposal nowadays, a considerable size of population in various regions of the world is frequently confronted with challenges similar to those that preceded the establishment of the UN. Slovakia welcomed the “Arab Spring”, hoping for a similar scenario as the one followed by Central European countries, including Czechoslovakia and its Velvet Revolution, when overcoming the burdensome legacy left behind by totalitarian regimes. However, subsequent developments have revealed far more intricate background of these social and political movements. The initial euphoria was suppressed by bloodshed in a short time. Thousands of individuals calling for respect for their fundamental rights and freedoms died an unnecessary and senseless death in the streets, faced a brute organised force, including the use of heavy military equipment against unarmed civilians.

The United Nations Organization has made remarkable achievements in the field of human rights, perfecting the procedures and mechanisms of their protection. However, there is still room for further improvements; whether with respect to balancing the UN agenda, consistent prioritisation of the most pressing problems, or with respect to its capability to respond to crisis situations promptly and adequately. Since the human rights agenda is one of the three key pillars on which the Organization builds, the Human Rights Council deserves, in Slovakia’s opinion which we have presented on more than one occasion, to be promoted among the principal organs of the UN system.

The backbone of the Council's functioning – the Universal Periodic Review mechanism – has shown that basically none of the UN member countries can boast a perfectly spotless human rights profile. A long-term, targeted and focused effort is necessary in order to face numerous challenges. My country is prepared to openly share with the world its experience and knowledge of transition to democracy, for example, through official development assistance projects.

I assure you that having completed its first ever mandate on the UN Human Rights Council, the Slovak Republic and its foreign policy remain firmly committed to further actively work and participate in Council's activities, including its subsidiary mechanisms. Slovakia is prepared to be engaged in cooperation through a constructive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the non-governmental sector.

I highly appreciate the experience we have recently gained as a Council member, including with respect to the adoption of a new international human rights instrument, the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which we have signed as the first UN member state. We intend to fully capitalise on that experience in our efforts to be re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council in the second half of this decade. We will truly appreciate your support to our ambitions.

Madam President, Madam High Commissioner, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current 21st session of the UN Human Rights Council concentrates on various aspects of the extensive human rights family. They represent ambitious challenges in this complicated world. I would like to wish fruitful, creative and successful discussions to you and this forum. They aim at ensuring everyday accomplishment of a high-profile mission - respecting the dignity of the human person.

Thank you for your attention.

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