



PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE  
GENEVA

**Commemorative session of the Human Rights Council  
on the occasion of the  
sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
Geneva, 12 December 2008**

**Address of**

**H.E. the deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs**

**of Greece**

**Mr. Theodore Kassimis**

Mr. Secretary General,  
Madame High Commissioner,  
Mr. President,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

We celebrate here today the **60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights**, the cornerstone of all fundamental freedoms. Over 250 international instruments dealing with human rights have already been signed since its adoption.

Ever since 1948, the **Universal Declaration on Human Rights** remains the basic reference document for their protection and promotion. It represents a wise balance between the will of the western world to promote civil and political rights and the desire of developing states to give emphasis to social and economic rights.

**Greece**, the birthplace of democracy, has always been a staunch supporter of the United Nations. The UN is the guardian of the international legal order and the key forum for the protection of human rights.

Demonstrating our strong commitment to the cause of human rights, we have signed and ratified all relevant basic international treaties and conventions as well as most of the relevant Optional Protocols.

Beyond Greece's commitments at a national level, my country also contributes to strengthening human rights, democratisation and the rule of law in third countries, within the framework of the E.U. Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Human rights are not merely one of the EU's priorities but rather an issue of global concern. We firmly support the **universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights**, both individual civil and political rights, on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights, on the other.

Greece firmly believes that respect for human rights, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law are all inter-twined with peace, justice, security, stability, the eradication of poverty and cohesive socio-economic development.

We are fully aware of the need for constant efforts in the area of protection of human rights. We are committed to:

- ◆ Combat **racism** and **xenophobia**
- ◆ Pay particular attention to the humanitarian aspects of **asylum and migration**.
  - ◆ Constantly improve measures **against discrimination** and **in favor of** integration of persons belonging to **minorities**
  - ◆ Prevent and **combat human trafficking** through a comprehensive policy and international cooperation
  - ◆ Protect the **rights of children, women and disabled persons**.

Openness, transparency, judicial control and international scrutiny, are fundamental to the Greek policy on human rights. Greece believes in cooperation and consultation with all human rights actors, including non-governmental organizations and institutional mechanisms for the protection of human rights, such as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council.

The last 15 years we have witnessed **considerable progress** in the promotion and protection of human rights in general, and in the implementation of the **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action** (VDPA). The **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** has, amongst others, been instrumental in the functioning of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

60 years after the adoption of the **Universal Declaration**, both individual countries and regional groups continue to strive to enhance promotion and protection of human rights, through the **Council of Human Rights**. This is a body where a continuous dialogue takes place, a compromise is sought and usually – not always - a wise balance is achieved. It is worthwhile to try to increase its operability and strengthen its clout in the international scene.

There has indeed been some criticism on the ability of the Council to promote human rights. There are allegations that it often becomes too politicized or that it is a forum where the “powerful” criticize the “weaker states”, or, even, that some use groups’ power politics in order to have resolutions adopted according to their interests alone. Even if this criticism is to an extent justified, I still deem the Council as a unique forum where the voice of all is heard and where there is an opportunity to strike a unique balance of views, aspirations and concerns. The more we talk and strive for

a **consensus**, the more we achieve a **culture of true cooperation and compromise**.

**Greece** is ready to contribute to that end both now, as an observer, and later, hopefully, as a member of the Council, should UN member states trust us to serve the term of 2012-2015 for which we have presented our **candidature**.

Finally, I would like to encourage all of us to not only recall what has been achieved since 1948, but to contribute to the accomplishment of what has been promised in 1948.

Thank you