



**Permanent Mission Of Turkey
To the United Nations**

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**STATEMENT BY H.E. RAFET AKGÜNAY
DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TURKEY
UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, SEVENTH SESSION
HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT**

(PALAIS DES NATIONS, ASSEMBLY HALL)

(4 March 2008)



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Mr. President,
Madame High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address such a distinguished audience. As I am taking the floor for the first time since the inauguration of this august body and since your election, let me congratulate you as the President and also, thank you for your tireless efforts while guiding this ship through challenging and uncharted waters.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment of the Human Rights Council is indeed a milestone in the long journey towards human freedom and security. The Universal Declaration, which we are marking the 60th anniversary this year, is one of the great inspirational documents of the history.

Turkey, as a founding UN member, attaches special importance to the celebration of the 60th anniversary. In this regard, along with our planning for commemorations at the national level, we have also provided a voluntary financial contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in relation to the 60th anniversary at the UN level.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, the past six decades have witnessed the establishment of a wide-ranging, broadly encompassing normative framework in which many human rights have been clearly articulated and enshrined as universal legal entitlements. While promoting the respect for human rights we have also enhanced peace, security and stability in the world.

Mr. President,

For much of the past 60 years, our focus has been on articulating, codifying and enshrining rights. Needless to say, the era of declaration is now giving way, as it should, to an era of implementation. With the Human Rights Council, the cause of human rights has entered a new era. Our task is to make sure that the jurisprudence created in this domain is observed and respected. The Council has an important responsibility to that effect. The task is not easy. Needs, priorities and expectations are diverse. The challenge is to identify common grounds for cooperation while preserving the focus and quality of our proceedings and their outcome.

All human rights are the products of collective wisdom, and pertain to the individual's inner sense of justice. Indeed, nobody has a monopoly over human rights virtue. Yet, it is a reality that the concept itself involves different meanings, resonates differently in various parts of the world depending on local conditions and capabilities. The gap between perceptions in the field of human rights must be narrowed down.

The responsibility for the enhancement and the protection of human rights lies with each and every state. Striving to achieve the ultimate aim requires, however, a collective

endeavor. I believe the Human Rights Council should help us out in this endeavor and in building a credible culture of dialogue and cooperation.

Mr. President,

The need for dialogue among different cultures or value systems continues to appear high on the agenda of the international community. On the other hand, a true dialogue can only be sustained when there is genuine understanding of and respect for other cultures, religions and value systems. The main problem emanates from lack of knowledge (of each other), the stereotypes and prejudices.

I want to underscore that it would be a big mistake to assume that any culture or value system is intrinsically more advanced or more suitable to respond to the basic needs of human beings. There can be no hierarchy among cultures, nor there superiority in manifestations of human achievements.

The history of relations between different cultures is vast, complex and controversial. It is important not to let the extremists to divide the mainstream along artificial, ethnic, cultural or religious lines. They should be denied such an opportunity. This can only be done through a genuine intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

In fact, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, which we signed up together with Spain, is a direct response to the need for dialogue. It aims to facilitate harmony by putting emphasis on the common values of different cultures. This initiative is a bold and visionary step. In this process that we have embarked upon, our success will depend largely on whether we can collectively follow through. We must focus on result oriented projects and prepare a more peaceful, less confrontational environment for future generations. This requires a mobilization of all means and resources which are available. International organizations or institutions can provide a significant contribution to these efforts. Transparency, interaction, cooperation and coordination will help us to avoid duplications and waste of resources.

With this understanding Turkey, together with Spain, led an initiative to invite the High Representative of the Alliance Civilizations His Excellency Jorge Sampaio to address the Human Rights Council. We are pleased to see that this proposal enjoyed cross-regional support. On this occasion, let me thank the High Representative for informing us about the implementation plans of the Alliance. I believe that this project is of great relevance and contribution to much needed solidarity and cooperation, and a strong political commitment.

Mr. President,

UN Human Rights mechanisms have played an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights for all. Without doubt the former Human Rights Commission had made significant contribution to universal standard setting. In the past two years, extensive reforms were undertaken within the UN human rights system. We have a new Council. The institution building phase is successfully completed. Now we are embarking upon the implementation phase. The Council as the main pillar of the universal human rights machinery should respond to the present human rights challenges in an efficient manner and with the least possible involvement of political motivations.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is one of the most prominent products of the reform process. It is an important novelty which is designed in a truly universal and non-selective manner. It is up to us to use this mechanism as a means for constructive dialogue

among nations. A good start will help to ensure a smooth and productive evolution of the process. The tone of discussions during the review will be of critical importance. We invite all actors to act in cognizance of this fact. A constructive atmosphere must prevail from the very beginning and it must be sustained over the cycles of the reviews. Following the first reviews, we may undertake a lessons learned exercise either on a national basis or collectively with a view to ensure its proper functioning.

Mr. President,

It is our common conviction that respect for human rights, democratic pluralism and rule of law are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. In today's world, it is not possible to think of a democracy without human rights; nor is it possible to think of human rights without democracy. The deepening and consolidation of democracy in a country depends to a large extent on the protection and advancement of human rights.

There is no end to reach the point of perfection for human rights as no single country can be considered as perfect in this regard. For its part, Turkey has undergone a comprehensive reform process conducted with a firm determination since the advent of the Millennium. We are of course prepared to share our experience and expertise with other countries. A substantial legislative revision involving the enactment of numerous laws and regulations has been realized through 9 reform packages and constitutional amendments. As a whole it indeed bears testimony to our strong commitment to achieve the highest standards of democracy and human rights corresponding to the aspirations of the Turkish people. Our commitment to the reform process has already been reaffirmed by the present Turkish Government formed after the general elections in last July.

Mr. President,

The spirit of constructive cooperation, which we believe exists in the human rights system of the UN, reflects that we, all the UN members, envision the universal world of human rights through common values and principles. Let me thus conclude by reiterating our commitment to the universality of human rights and our full support to the efforts in the Human Rights Council.

Thank you.