

Mr President

We are here today because of a decision taken at the highest levels in all of our countries. At the World Summit last year, leaders agreed to reaffirm the status of human rights as a pillar of the United Nations, alongside security and development. The establishment of the Human Rights Council is a milestone in our progress towards that objective. New Zealand worked hard to bring this Council into being and is committed to working with others to bring it to its full potential.

As the Secretary-General reminded us at Monday's opening ceremony, "the eyes of the world are upon you". The international community has clear expectations of this Council. We must ensure a robust, transparent and effective body. It must make concrete decisions that can be implemented by States and be upheld by the UN system. It must deal effectively and swiftly with urgent and emerging situations and issues.

To achieve our objectives, we need to come to the Council with a new way of thinking, and a new way of acting. We can't afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. The Commission on Human Rights, despite its many successes, became entrenched in stale, repetitive debates with predictable outcomes. The Human Rights Council should look, feel, and act differently. We must concentrate our efforts on real dialogue. We will all have to demonstrate tolerance, balance and respect. We need to create a new culture that will give effect to the vision of our leaders at the World Summit.

New ways of thinking will require new tools. We all agree that the Commission was weighed down by the plethora of resolutions, many of which did little to promote new approaches. We should be open to exploring a more sophisticated range of processes – for example, focused panel discussions, a decision to return to an issue when more information has been gathered, or a referral elsewhere in the UN system. We must focus on quality in our work and always have in mind our objective, which is to enact change and truly improve the situation of human rights.

Standard setting will continue to be important. The draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an important issue for the human rights community. New Zealand is honoured to chair the negotiations on the draft Convention, which we will strive to conclude this year.

New Zealand is committed to advancing the rights of other groups including women, children and indigenous peoples. However, consensus in setting new standards must be an objective. And, the new Human Rights Council needs to make sure that it delivers quality outcomes and supports proper process. Sadly, that is not yet the case with the Chair's text for the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. New Zealand cannot associate itself with this

text which, despite our most strenuous efforts and genuine intentions, remains fundamentally flawed. We want a consensus decision and a text that is capable of practical implementation.

We all know that implementation of GA Resolution 60/251 goes well beyond what happens at this and future sessions of the Human Rights Council. Governments must work in tandem with the High Commissioner and the United Nations system to make a genuine difference in the lives of our own citizens. We must commit ourselves to follow-up our decisions, or be held collectively accountable for our failure to act.

Members and observers alike must ensure that this Council is at the forefront of a new and dynamic era of human rights protection and promotion. Members have a particular responsibility to live up to the pledges they made before the Council elections.

Let us be under no illusions. The Council's credibility will be judged by its actions at this meeting and beyond. We can make this work or we can allow it to fail – either through benign neglect or deliberate action. We must stay the course that our leaders have set for us.