



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

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Statement by

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of the Czech Republic

Geneva, 29 February 2012

As delivered

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Madam President, ladies and gentlemen:

It was three months ago that we bid farewell to one of the democracy's most principled voices and great defender of human rights, Mr Václav Havel.

This body, the Human Rights Council, has a noble role in upholding the highest standards in the promotion of human rights. Havel never ceased to champion these values, always reminding us of the work that is required in this field to demonstrate that the fate of the victims of human rights abuses does matter to us.

Yes, our task is to strive for respect of human dignity. 30 years ago, Václav Havel was labeled as an „enemy of the state“. Today, too many human rights defenders around the world are still being vilified in the very same way.

For instance, Ales Bialitski, imprisoned in Belarus, as well as many others behind the bars in the President Lukashenko's jails, stands for the same values and ideals as Havel, who actually sent him a personal letter, only a few days before his passing.

Similarly, the Chinese human rights defender Ni Yulan, disabled after a police beating, faces charges of “making trouble” fabricated against her and her husband, Dong Jiqin.

In spite of their repeated imprisonment, José Daniel Ferrer and the association *Damas de Blanco* prove their desire for freedom and remind us of the continuous human rights repression in Cuba. Unfortunately, they are not alone. The young lady, Jazmín Riverón, and her husband Yusmani Rafael Esmori are arbitrarily detained without any formal accusation by Cuban police.

Only free, self respecting and autonomous citizens could create a truly independent nation. Indeed, an active dialogue between the government and the civil society is vital for open democracy. In this respect, we are concerned by the recent measures against NGOs in Egypt. *Konrad Adenauer Foundation, National Democratic Institute, Freedom House* and others are facing trial. This may mean a real setback to a democratic process in that country.

We notice with great concern the uncontrolled activities of militias in Libya. The reports from the cities of Zintan and Misrata on human rights violations, including forced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture are alarming. I am convinced that the establishment of the rule of law is a precondition for a prosperous and democratic Libya.

In Venezuela and Ecuador, freedom of expression has been increasingly restricted. An alarming number of media, including television and radio stations, had their licences revoked.

Madam President,

The spectacular development of new technologies helped the whole fermentation of the political events in Middle East and North Africa. The role of journalists is multiplied by the pivotal mission of bloggers who strive for the same freedom of expression. Their vulnerability in Syria or in Iran is of great concern. In similar terms, the Saudi poet and journalist Hamza Kashgari who is in jail and potentially faces execution for his tweets, is a real test case for Saudi Arabia.

With serious unease, we follow the continued escalation of tensions in Tibetan areas of China as evidenced by a spate of self-immolations. Last year, 22 Tibetans decided to act in such a tragic way in order to wake up the establishment and attract our attention.

The freedom of religion is another challenging issue. Religious and ethnic minorities are under severe attacks, in Nigeria, by Boko Haram. In Iran, the death sentence for the Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani alarmed our attention: he simply exercised his right to choose a religion other than Islam. The situation of Bahá'í and Copts remains disturbing. In Northern Sudan, the targeted attacks against minorities in Nuba mountains region need to be addressed with all the authority of this distinguished institution.

The rule of law can not be undermined by any attacks against the independence of the judiciary. Unfortunately, the raising number of prisoners in Georgia calls into question to what extent the right to a fair trial is still respected. Undoubtedly, the judicial system in Georgia should protect human rights better.

Similarly, in Ukraine, general deficiencies in the functioning of the judicial system seriously hinder respect of human rights. The recent case of the former minister Yuri Lutsenko bears all the marks of selective justice. But we can not forget about many others.

In Uzbekistan we witness continuing and systematic use of torture in detention facilities. Last year, we saw an equally disturbing development in Kazakhstan, where the police firing on striking oil workers seriously violated their freedom of assembly. Equally, the freedom of expression encountered serious setbacks in Azerbaijan last year.

We regard the active participation of the Nobel Prize laureate Ms Aung San Suu Kyi in the political life in Burma/Myanmar as the first step on a very promising path. Nevertheless, we wish to see release of all political prisoners soon.

Many citizens were compelled to express their opinion after the recent parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation. The nature of their move was not in a way of a political party meeting, but rather a movement of citizenship. It is truly good news. The force of their protest was inspired by the desire to see the rule of law and civil rights situation improved. And there is still a lot to be done.

Let me recall a single example, which has not been clarified in a proper manner yet: the case of the lawyer Sergei Magnitski. Engaged in a major corruption case, he was arrested, and died in custody.

Madam President,

In the past year, the Human Rights Council reacted swiftly to the events in Libya or Syria. It is truly important because by doing so, we could meet the historical challenge of our time.

We should live up to our responsibility we have in addressing the human rights violations.

Václav Havel, to whom I wished to pay a special tribute today, stood firmly behind the universality of human rights. I am convinced that his example still matters. And that we can succeed in cherishing this unique value to meet the hope with which the victims of the human rights violations look up to us.

I am aware that in each and every country power can be misused and respect for human rights endangered. Let me assure you that the Czech Republic will continue to do its utmost to promote and protect human rights and to meet also its own challenges in this field.

Thank you for your attention.

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