

E ngā mana, e ngā reo,

Tēnā koutou katoa

Madam President, High Commissioner, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I welcome this opportunity to reinforce Aotearoa New Zealand's strong and enduring support for the international human rights system and universal human rights.

The global struggle against COVID-19 over this past year has been unprecedented - and I would like to start by sending my deepest sympathies to all those who have lost loved ones, and all those affected by the resulting social and economic crisis.

This pandemic is presenting unique challenges to the protection of human rights around the world.

It has exacerbated existing human rights issues including gender based violence and socio-economic inequalities, and disproportionately affected the world's most vulnerable groups.

We have a double duty in our response to ensure our approach to care maintains the principles of equity and access.

The pandemic has also been used as an opportunity by some states to erode democratic rights - such as freedom of expression and assembly.

Ongoing conflicts around the world - including in Syria and Yemen, continue to result in serious human rights abuses.

Human rights violations against minorities - including the Rohingya and the Uighur, continue to be deeply concerning.

Recent challenges to free and fair elections and democratic norms are extremely troubling and require international attention. The military coup in Myanmar is a notable example.

The climate crisis risks further widening of existing inequalities worldwide, and undermining our multilateral effort to address basic human rights for many.

It is in this challenging international context that we must remember what can be achieved when we work together in partnership and with mutual respect.

We must recognise the value of the international human rights system that we have built together - including this Council - while striving to make it more effective.

The international human rights system provides us with a framework for collaboration on human rights.

It provides an opportunity for all states to engage as equals regardless of size, for us to hold each other to account, and share lessons and report on progress achieved.

It provides guidance for states to improve human rights, and for the international community to work together to shine a light on human rights abuses and to collaborate to address them - such as during the recent special session on Myanmar.

The system works best when states engage openly and when all participate and cooperate.

Our multilateral effort works best when we work together.

New Zealand warmly welcomes the recent announcement from President Biden that the United States will reengage with the Human Rights Council.

The system is also most effective when civil society can actively engage, and when those groups whose rights are not being met are given a voice and agency to participate.

New Zealand will lean in to the international human rights system, and work hard to foster collaboration in order to progress the human rights outcomes we have long championed.

We bring to the table our unique and independent bi-cultural identity and values drawn from both our “tirohanga Maori” - or Māori world-view, and the Western institutions on which our country is founded.

Values that will guide our international engagement including on human rights are:

- manaaki – kindness or the reciprocity of goodwill;
- whanaunga – our connectedness or shared sense of humanity;
- mahi tahi and kotahitanga – collective benefits and shared aspiration; and,
- kaitiaki – protectors and stewards of our intergenerational wellbeing.

Thematic priorities for New Zealand’s human rights engagement will continue to include gender equality and women’s empowerment - with a focus on the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the rights of persons with disabilities, LGBTI rights, the death penalty, and democratic rights – including freedom of expression and assembly.

We will also engage actively on indigenous issues, drawing on our rich experience and the lessons we have learned and progress we have made – at times painfully.

New Zealand will continue to engage openly and constructively with the special mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and ensure our international human rights obligations are actioned domestically. We encourage all member states to do the same.

We look forward to continuing to work with you all with shared empathy, humanity and aspiration, to progress universal human rights in order to realise a safer, more prosperous and more equal tomorrow for future generations.

No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa