Speech by Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the UN Human Rights Council

2020-02-24

Show larger version of image

Close

Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the

UN

Human Rights Council

© Felix Zahn/photothek.net

Last September, 174 member states supported our election to the Human Rights Council. So, let me start by thanking all of you for that expression of trust. It encourages us to be a strong voice for our common cause: defending human dignity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Swiss author Hans Ulrich Bänziger once said “Sometimes horror opens your eyes”.

When the United Nations was founded 75 years ago, the world had faced unspeakable horror.

The Second World War and the most horrendous crime committed against humanity, the Shoah, led to one oath: “Never again!”.

For the founding mothers and fathers of the United Nations, it was obvious that the new multilateral order needed to be based on human rights. In the face of ongoing colonialism and racial discrimination, they invoked the dignity and the fundamental rights of each and every human being. Thus, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was born, only three years after the

UN

Charter.

To this day, the quest for peace and the respect of human rights remain two sides of the same coin.

As a member of both the Human Rights Council and the Security Council this year, we will therefore pursue a human-rights based approach when dealing with peace and security. And we will do our utmost to strengthen institutional exchange between Geneva and New York.

Last week, we invited the Commission of Inquiry on Syria to brief Security Council members on its findings.

And at the end of this week, I will be travelling to New York to discuss human rights challenges with member states there.

One of the most dangerous risks to both human rights and security is the lack of accountability in conflicts. We will therefore continue our fight against impunity.

And we will defend and support the valuable work of the International Criminal Court, as well as of the Investigative Mechanisms on Syria and Myanmar, the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen and the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

Together, we want to bring the perpetrators to justice. We will step up our work to achieve this goal – both here in Geneva and in New York. But also within the Alliance for Multilateralism that is meeting here today to discuss next steps in the fight against impunity.

The various investigative mechanisms and tools that this Council has set up are encouraging signs of Progress.

But progress cannot be taken for granted. All over the world, we are seeing a worrying pushback.

Human rights face increasing pressure.

“Adhering to cultural norms” or so-called “traditional values” or claiming that development has priority over human rights cannot justify violations of universal and fundamental human rights.

Globalisation, climate change, and the digital revolution raise further questions:

How can we protect human rights in cyberspace?

How can we mitigate the growing impact of climate change on human life and health?

And how can we finally create real gender equality?

Those were some of the questions that we addressed at a Ministerial Conference in Berlin last December. And we will continue our search for answers together with all of you here in this Council.

Madam High Commissioner,

Your office is a key ally in this. And it is simply unacceptable that it continues to suffer from such chronic underfunding. I am therefore glad to announce a voluntary contribution of at least 6 million euros for your work this year.

There are also other situations causing concern:

the continued severe violation of basic liberties in North Korea,

shrinking scope for civil society and human rights defenders, for example in China, Egypt and Russia,

chilling restrictions on journalists in a growing number of states,

the maltreatment of ethnic and religious minorities such as the Uighurs,

the worsening human rights situation in Venezuela

and the human toll of the conflicts in Yemen and Syria.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Some of the threats to human rights might still be in their infancy. But there is one threat which is as old as humankind itself.

Its name is hate.

Hate against people who look different, live differently, or love differently. Hate against people who think differently or believe in a different god.

And let me tell you: this threat is the hardest to overcome. It is a disease that plagues the entire world. A disease we must all fight together.

Last week, in the town of Hanau in Germany, a right-wing extremist murdered ten innocent people, leaving even more wounded.

Hate and racism have once again shown their deadly face.

And as we tighten our laws against guns and hate crime, we ask ourselves: Did this horror have to happen to make us see?

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can wait for more attacks, more abuses, more violations of human rights to happen. More horror.

Or we can decide that we have seen enough. And take action.

That is our duty.

Thank you!

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-un-human-rights-council-2309498