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Dutch FM address to the Human Rights Council

Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maxime Verhagen, addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on 3 March.

In his address, he warns against politicisation and the forming of blocs within the Council, in the interests of effective and reliable supervision of international human rights instruments.

The Human Rights Council comprises 47 member states, which are chosen by the United Nations General Assembly. The Netherlands has been a member since 2006 and from 2007 to 2008 served as a Vice-President of the Council. The March meeting is the Council's tenth session.

Common interests, shared values: the need for engagement, empathy and effectiveness

Mr President, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

How great a distance is there, really, between one person and another? Naturally, there are noticeable differences between us. We look different; we speak different languages; we worship in a different way or not at all. Our trials and tribulations in life are different: too many people are struggling each day for mere survival, while others are born in luxury the world can ill afford. The circumstances we live in define our identity. But despite these many diverse identities, our nature – our *human* nature – is the same everywhere. People the world over strive to live peaceful and prosperous lives, to feed and educate their children, to protect themselves from violence and disease. Everyone worries in times of crisis; everyone rejoices in times of happiness. Fundamentally, we are not so different, whether we were born in Maputo, Manila, Medina, Miami, Montevideo or, like me, Maastricht. And we all have the same, inalienable human rights.

Even people who may feel that they are worlds apart – Sinhalese and Tamils, Kosovars and Serbs, Israelis and Palestinians – ultimately share the same hopes and the same fears. They love; they mourn; they work hard to improve their prospects. The world's citizens all long for the same basic things in life: security, prosperity and freedom. And we, as representatives of the world's governments, should do our utmost to give them precisely that: security, prosperity and freedom. In times of global crisis, we should try even harder. We cannot let our citizens down: they are bearing the brunt of the economic crisis.

The protection and promotion of human rights, both at home and abroad, is central to our task. For without respect for human rights, there will be no sustainable security or development. This is not just a moral obligation to the peoples of the world, who are entitled to live in dignity, free from fear and oppression. Respect for human rights is also in all our interests: we all benefit from it. It will be easier to manage our affairs if human rights and the rule of law are respected. Respect for human rights creates economic opportunities, and makes lasting peace possible. Respect for human rights is thus as vital for any society as providing security and encouraging economic development. This is no less true in times of economic crisis; the fact that we are facing stormy weather economically is no reason to suddenly neglect human rights. Human rights are not a luxury that we can choose to do without; in the long run, our economic future and global stability depend on respect for rights. We should therefore stick to our commitments. A safer, more

prosperous world in which human rights are respected is in our true common interest.

Yet despite this common interest, the world is more often than not portrayed in terms of divisions. Especially with the global power shift we are witnessing today, and the uncertainties of the global economic crisis, the world's nations seem at times to be drifting apart rather than working more closely, as they should be doing, to shoulder today's challenges together. I sometimes observe a 'West against the rest' mentality at the United Nations. It is as if Huntington's infamous 'clash of civilisations' were unfolding on the UN's main stage, though subtly. The very concept of human rights is a bone of contention. Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that guiding document is regarded by some as merely a Western invention that does not concern them – a set of one-sided impositions rather than a reflection of universal values.

I am worried by these developments. I strongly believe that we can only meet the challenges of the 21st century *together*. It is obvious to me that emerging powers should have a greater say in the world's affairs and in envisaging solutions to today's problems. Their representation should be improved, first and foremost in the UN Security Council, so that they can make their voices heard and take on more responsibility, in line with their standing. *Even* if this means that the West has to sacrifice some of its vested interests. The Netherlands is a staunch supporter of inclusive reforms, both at the UN and at the international financial institutions.

However, I strongly disagree with the notion that human rights are a new form of colonialism. The fallacy in this argument deeply disturbs me. Human rights apply to all people, in all places, at all times. The nations of this world may have their political disputes, they may disagree on many things – but they should not fight their battles at the expense of millions of people worldwide whose rights are being trampled on. Human rights violations deserve our full attention, and the people who suffer these violations deserve our full protection, no matter who they are or where they come from. The human rights of our fellow citizens should matter more to us than scoring points for eloquence and jockeying for position.

The Human Rights Council has been in operation for almost three years now, and will be reviewed in two years' time. It has already achieved some meaningful results; the Universal Periodic Review mechanism is one of its most notable successes. However, in order to tip the balance firmly to the positive side, we still need to do better. 2009 will be a crucial year in this respect. We need to make some changes now, while we still have two years left to improve our record prior to the review in 2011. It is our joint responsibility to do so.

All too often, we find ourselves at a standstill, unable to proceed because we are crouching in our trenches, hiding behind our respective group positions. But the Human Rights Council should not be a battleground on which regional blocs settle their scores. We should not allow the Council to degenerate into a politicised and ineffective body. If this is the outcome of the review in two years' time, we will have badly failed the peoples of the world. I believe that a number of changes are called for, mainly in the way in which we UN member states operate.

First of all, we need **engagement**. All of us should invest in making the world a better place. From the outset, the Netherlands has tried very hard to make the Human Rights Council a success, so that human rights can be put on an equal footing with security and development, as world leaders foresaw at their Summit in 2005. And we are still firmly committed to that objective. I always encourage all my opposite numbers to engage energetically and constructively in the Council's work. And now is really the time to take a step forward, if we wish to see the Human Rights Council succeed. People all over the world were moved by Barack Obama's election as President of the United States. Now that a new administration is in place in Washington – an administration that has clearly signaled a break with the recent past – expectations for US involvement are running high. I therefore warmly welcome the United States' decision to engage with the Human Rights Council. I feel strongly that the US *belongs* here, as a traditional human rights defender with the capacity to inspire the world.

Secondly, we need **empathy**. At the beginning of my statement, I reflected on the similarities between people: on how we all want the same things in life. And yet we often fail to understand each other, because we are so engrossed in our own way of thinking. We should *reach out* to one

another more than we do.

For example: I share the concerns that many members states have expressed about double standards at the Council. I have repeatedly stated that there can be no double standards when it comes to the protection of human rights; everyone's rights are of equal value. That means that we should not always lash out at the same countries, while choosing to ignore others. We should be guided by the scale of the violations: no one, friend or foe, should get away with gross atrocities.

Another example: I agree that the Human Rights Council should not just devote itself to defending political rights. It should also focus on economic, social and cultural rights. As I outlined in the Dutch human rights strategy, human rights are indivisible: freedom from want is as important as freedom from fear. There is no need to create artificial barriers between our countries. The special session on the food crisis that the Council held last May is a good case in point, as is the recognition of the right to water as a human right. These initiatives deserve our full support, and the Netherlands stands ready to provide such support.

Reaching out to one another does not mean we will always agree. It is safe to say that we will continue to have our differences. And that is legitimate. What is not legitimate is holding the entire UN human rights system hostage to those differences. Take the Durban Review Conference as an example. The Netherlands is firmly committed to eliminating racism and related forms of intolerance. We would like to report on our progress in implementing the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. But I am deeply disturbed by the turn this event is taking. The way in which the preparatory process for this review conference has been proceeding suggests that it is unlikely to be a useful exercise, a meeting that will really assist in reaching our shared objective: abolishing racism. I therefore fully understand why some countries have decided not to participate in these proceedings any longer. For the Netherlands, too, the draft outcome document is not acceptable in its present form. It does not focus on the main challenges to address the problem of racism. Instead, the thematic world conference is used by some to try to force *their* concept of defamation of religions and *their* focus on one regional conflict on all of us. That is certainly not what I have in mind when I call for a more empathetic approach. To all the delegates who doubt the Netherlands' intentions, I say this: we *do* want to participate and work together on a useful outcome – but not at any price. We cannot accept any text, which would:

- put religion above individuals;
- not condemn discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation;
- condone anti-semitism or
- single out Israel

These are clear red lines for the Netherlands.

Finally, we need **effectiveness**. There are many ways in which we can still improve our record here. I would like to reach out to other regional groups and build cross-regional coalitions of member states that hold human rights in high esteem. However, we will not succeed in doing so if we always attach ourselves immovably to group positions, committing ourselves irrevocably to a predetermined outcome and foregoing the flexibility to engage with others. The Netherlands will challenge the usual regional blocs and standard coalitions, within and beyond the European Union, and strive for new allies and coalitions in promoting human rights. We are happy to work with *all* countries that are committed to promoting respect for human rights, not just with those within our own regional group.

What we absolutely do need in order to be effective is impartial information – this is the basis for our deliberations and decisions. An independent Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is a necessary condition for effective action. I would like to thank the High Commissioner and her staff, as well as the Special Rapporteurs and independent experts – the Council's eyes and ears – for their work. I trust that we will allow them to maintain their high standards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that if we are all guided by these three principles – engagement, empathy and effectiveness – we can make the Human Rights Council function better. There will always be

countries that have no intention of making the Council a success, because they wrongly believe that they can infringe the human rights of their citizens with impunity. There is a quotation from Samuel Johnson that sums up very nicely an important lesson for those governments. As early as the eighteenth century, Johnson said, 'No government power can be abused long. Mankind will not bear it. There is a remedy in human nature against tyranny.'

The many human rights defenders around the world are living proof that Johnson's words still ring true today. Like him, I am convinced that human rights defenders will eventually be victorious; in the end, freedom will prevail. We should help these human rights defenders where we can, and not side with the tyrants of this world. After all, the Human Rights Council was created to make a real difference in the lives of real people. Let us work shoulder to shoulder towards that noble goal. Thank you.

Muslims must face their own monsters

Piers Akerman | The Daily Telegraph | 2 March

Hope springs eternal, and Dan Gillerman, former Israeli ambassador to the UN, is an optimist. He must be.

He believes that there is hope of some sort of settlement to the Palestinian problem in the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead, Israel's retaliatory strike against the Hamas terrorists in Gaza who ordered the eight-year rocket bombardment against Israel.

But his optimism rests not so much upon Palestinians as upon moderate Muslims and moderate Arabs who he hopes may now see that the world is not witnessing the clash of civilisations Samuel Huntington predicted in his best seller over a decade ago, but within a civilisation, the Islamic civilisation.

"Most of the horror, most of the killing, is within the world of Islam, whether it is in Dubai or Sharm el-Sheikh, or Afghanistan or Morocco, Muslims are killing each other," he said in Sydney yesterday.

"We are not seeing moderates saying, 'Enough is enough'. The wars in Lebanon and Gaza may bring about some sign of awakening to the fact terrorism is being exported by a extremist regime in Iran."

The former business leader, who had some notable diplomatic successes during his 2003-2008 posting to the UN, including being elected as a vice president of the UN General Assembly, said the Gaza operation initially brought about an unprecedented level of support and understanding for Israel's action from much of Europe, the US, nations like Australia and even from some parts of the Arab world.

As it dragged on, some of that support eroded but many nations conceded they would have acted in a similar fashion if their people had been under rocket attack for eight consecutive years.

"Moderate Arabs and moderate Muslims are awakening to the reality that Hamas is a monster that brought suicide bombings to the region, sometimes as young as 11-years-old, who would don their bomb belts sometimes helped by their parents," he said.

"They know that Hamas holds the Palestinian people hostage, that it is persecuting its own people."

Gillerman said no other country in the world had instituted the protective measures taken by the Israelis in their attempts to reduce civilian casualties, citing 250,000 telephone calls made to Palestinians to warn them to leave homes containing Hamas arms caches.

Yet civilians were killed, though not in the same proportions that they lost their lives in Kosovo, Afghanistan or Iraq - and Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

The difference between Israel and Hamas in their approach to civilian deaths was marked, he said,

by the reality that Israelis sheltered their children and Hamas used them, and celebrated the death of every child. Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir said there would be no peace until the Arabs learned to love their children, he said.

Four messages could be drawn from the conflict: That the Israelis were not to be messed with; that Hamas had been weakened; that the strike was about current and future events, and that extremists in Iran and other rogue regimes should learn that the Israelis will stand on the side of moderates in their conflicts with extremists. There was another “missing link”, he said - the number of world leaders eager to see a settlement, from the US, the UK, across Europe and in other parts of the world.

The solution Gillerman envisages is not just a two-state answer, but a 23-state solution that would also embrace the whole Arab world.

Which makes it more remarkable that two Western Sydney Councils, Marrickville and neighbouring Canterbury, would waste their ratepayers’ time and money by passing resolutions which gave both overt and tacit support to Hamas.

Apart from exposing the ignorance of the councillors who supported the resolutions, backing proscribed terror organisations like Hamas is unlikely to foster the ideals of peace embraced by the inner-urban Green councils. Perverse contradiction is the new green mantra.

Real support for the Palestinian people, including those in Gaza is coming from an entirely different source - the UK-based Portland Trust chaired by Sir Ronald Cohen, which has offices in London, Ramallah and Tel Aviv.

It is committed to promoting peace and stability between Palestinians and Israelis through economic development and has had some success raising funds for a \$1 billion development in Ramallah, which includes 15,000 homes.

Its global conferences dedicated to rebuilding a Palestinian economy, giving Palestinians real futures, would be alien to the terrorist-supporting councillors.

Well-meaning idiots perhaps, but the futile motions will bring joy to extremist generators of international terrorism in Iran as they bundle up weapons for Hezbollah and Hamas. Moderate Arabs and moderate Muslims will only despair at such a demonstration of stupidity.

Combating Anti-Semitism: It’s about time

Lawrence Haas | Northern Star Writers Group | 3 March

Welcome to “Israeli Apartheid Week,” the fifth such global event, which runs this year from March 1 to 8 and is designed, its organizers say, to “educate people about the nature of Israel as an apartheid system.”

With activities in over 40 cities from Berkeley to Johannesburg, this yearly event is designed to build support for sanctions against Israel as well as boycotts of, and divestments from, Israel-related individuals and institutions.

“Israel Apartheid Week,” however, is merely a piece of the larger puzzle – the global focus on Israel as supposedly the world’s biggest abuser of human rights and its most serious threat to peace.

Israel-bashing (as opposed to an even-handed critique of Israeli policy) reflects something even more odious – a resurgence of anti-Semitism that is manifesting itself in a growing number of threats against, and attacks on, Jews not just in the Middle East but in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.

Fortunately, some global leaders are beginning to take note. Late last month, 125 lawmakers from 40 countries met for three days in London to address this uptick in the world's oldest form of bigotry, and they crafted a program of action called the "London Declaration on Combating Anti-Semitism."

"We call upon national governments, parliaments, international institutions, political and civic leaders, NGOs, and civil society," they wrote, "to affirm democratic and human values, build societies based on respect and citizenship and combat any manifestations of anti-Semitism and discrimination."

After reviewing the "dramatic increase" in attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions and expressing "alarm" at both the return of the old language of prejudice against Jews and at state-supported genocidal anti-Semitism, the leaders pledged to launch a multi-faceted effort to address the problem.

They resolved, among other things, to expose leaders and governments that practice anti-Semitism and to challenge multi-national institutions to do the same; to challenge governments to address anti-Semitic and genocidal incitement; to encourage governments to document and investigate anti-Semitism; and to raise awareness of anti-Semitism by training police, prosecutors and judges and teaching the Holocaust in schools.

While their agenda is laudable, their challenge is huge. From the United Nations to the centers of power in Iran and Venezuela to the streets of major cities across the world, it is increasingly open season on Jews and the Jewish State.

At the UN and under the auspices of its oxymoronic Human Rights Council, a 20-nation committee, chaired by Libya, is making plans for "Durban II" – a follow up to the notorious 2001 conference on human rights in Durban, South Africa that deteriorated into such a cesspool of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism that Secretary of State Colin Powell ordered the U.S. delegation to leave.

Based on the documents that it has produced so far, Durban II has all the makings of its predecessor. Israel and Canada have said they will not attend, and the United States and Europe may well follow.

In Iran, the radical regime reiterates its threat to annihilate Israel and to pursue the nuclear weapons to follow through on it. In Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez, who has nourished increasingly close ties to Tehran, accused Israel of "genocide" in Gaza and cut ties with the Jewish State. As if on cue, Venezuela's government-sponsored media launched an anti-Semitic campaign on the airwaves and in print. Meanwhile, vandals painted anti-Semitic slogans on the walls of Jewish institutions and businesses.

Across Europe, attacks on Jews are up, fueled by opposition to Israel's retaliation against rocket attacks from Gaza and by the global economic crisis that encourages its victims to find a convenient scapegoat.

British Parliamentarian Denis McShane says Jewish students at the London School of Economics face abuse by Islamist students, and "Kill the Jews" graffiti is appearing near synagogues in London.

In anti-Israel demonstrations in Berlin, protestors held signs that read "It was a good idea to use gas" and "I'm anti-Semitic and that's a good thing." In Milan, graffiti urges citizens not to buy from Jewish-owned stores. In Toronto, a Muslim protestor shouted, "Jewish child, you're gonna f . . . 'n die."

The United States is not immune to such ugliness. In Los Angeles, Muslim demonstrators yelled, "Long live Hitler. Put Jews in ovens. Jews are fossil fuel." In Fort Lauderdale, demonstrators yelled, "Nuke, nuke Israel" and "Go back to the ovens."

By themselves, the 125 lawmakers who gathered in London will not eliminate anti-Semitism. But here's hoping they make a dent – and that other lawmakers joined the effort to address this spreading global disease.

[Lawrence J. Haas, a former White House communications strategist, award winning journalist, and author, writes widely about foreign and domestic affairs]

Israel can't afford any more dangerous concessions

Tom Gross | Wall Street Journal Europe | 2 March

Obama shouldn't push the Jewish state to give territory to terrorists.

Hillary Clinton arrives in Israel today on her first visit since becoming Secretary of State, at a time when many influential people in America and beyond are clamouring for the Obama administration to pressure Israel into making major concessions. Before she succumbs to those pressures, she might want to bear in mind the pain Israel suffered the last time it was forced to make such concessions - when Mrs. Clinton's husband was president.

It is a pain that has many names and faces. One of them is Kinneret Chaya Boosany. At the very moment that Barack Obama was delivering his historic victory speech in Chicago's Grant Park in the early hours of Nov. 5, a small miracle was happening over 6,000 miles away in Israel when Kinneret gave birth to her first child. Six years earlier, Kinneret, then 23, was blown up as she worked as a waitress in a coffee shop in Tel Aviv.

Her injuries were so horrific that the doctors gave her a 2% chance of survival. She remained in a coma for 88 days. When she awoke, she changed her name from Kinneret to Kinneret Chaya (meaning "Kinneret Lives" in Hebrew). In her own words, "Kinneret died that night in the flames, but Kinneret Chaya was born."

She is just one of the thousands of Israelis - both Jews and Arabs - injured by Palestinian suicide bombers who were sent out on their deadly missions by either the Islamist Hamas movement or the Fatah faction headed by "moderate" Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his predecessor Yasser Arafat. The number of Israelis killed in terror attacks has been greatly reduced in recent years after the government built a security fence to make it harder for bombers to get through.

Today Kinneret's skin still bears the scars of burns over 85% of her body. She spends many hours in a heavy pressure suit and face mask to prevent the scarring from getting worse. She cannot go out in the day because the sun has become her enemy. But Kinneret struggled back to life, through countless operations and long sessions of physiotherapy, learning to accept her disfigured body and to smile in spite of her scarred face. And then in November, even though the doctors said she had only a very slim chance of a successful pregnancy, the beautiful former teenage ballerina, who got married at the start of last year, gave birth to a healthy baby girl.

This story is worth reflecting on as Hillary Clinton arrives here in Israel. Barely a day goes by without Jimmy Carter and assorted European politicians calling on Mr. Obama to coerce Israel into hastily withdrawing from more land no matter the security risks. The reigning Nobel Peace Prize laureate, for instance, former Finnish Prime Minister Martti Ahtisaari, went so far as to use the prize ceremony as a soapbox to urge Mr. Obama to make pressure on Israel the principal focus of his first year in office.

Like most Israelis, Kinneret Chaya, whom I saw again last week, desperately wants peace with the Palestinians. It is my experience of covering the region as a reporter for many years that no one wants the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be peaceably resolved more than Israelis do.

But Israelis are also very aware of the dangers of naively handing over territory to terrorists, as was done during the presidency of Secretary of State Clinton's husband, Bill Clinton, in the 1990s. The

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vote by Israelis in elections two weeks ago was not a vote against peace as many Western commentators claim. It was a vote for realism and security.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's likely next prime minister, has been wrongly vilified as being against a two-state solution. In fact he is open to the creation of a Palestinian state, but only if it is one that will live in peace with Israel. And for this, Mr. Netanyahu argues, you can't simply wave a magic wand at some fancy signing ceremony on the White House lawn and say "hey presto" - which is exactly what politicians tried to do at the Oslo signing ceremony in 1993.

First the Palestinians need to do the hard work of building institutions that would allow such a state to succeed - a functioning economy, the rule of law and so on. And Mr. Netanyahu is very willing to offer Israeli assistance in building such mechanisms.

Avigdor Lieberman, one of Mr. Netanyahu's possible coalition partners, who has been misleadingly described as an extreme rightist by many journalists, has been even more explicit than Mr. Netanyahu in calling for a two-state solution, including the division of Jerusalem between Israel and a future Palestinian state.

Even Shimon Peres, Israel's dovish president, now has second thoughts about unilateral Israeli concessions. Having long championed territorial withdrawals to attain peace, Mr. Peres last month acknowledged that it was a mistake for Israel to withdraw from Gaza in 2005 without first having a peaceful and democratic Palestinian party to hand that territory to.

Israel has always shown a willingness to make peace if a peace partner exists, as it did in the case of the late Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Jordan's King Hussein. Israelis are still waiting for a Palestinian Anwar Sadat.

One of Mr. Netanyahu's most difficult challenges during his first term as prime minister from 1996 to 1999 was coping with a Clinton administration that berated him for his belief that peace must be built from the bottom up through the liberalization of Palestinian society, rather than from the top down by giving land to terrorists. The question is whether President Obama and Hillary Clinton have come round to Mr. Netanyahu's way of thinking.

Kinneret Chaya is an exemplary and courageous figure. The international community owes it to her and the countless other terror victims to confront the basic realities of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. By all means, pressure Israel into making concessions that do not threaten its security -- into not expanding West Bank settlements, for instance. But Israeli concessions will never resolve the conflict in themselves. They will only work if there is corresponding pressure on the Palestinians to accept Israel's existence as a Jewish state and to make aid to the Palestinians conditional on putting an end to their inciting for the destruction of Israel.