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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration
and Programme of Action**

Summary of the Human Rights Council high-level panel discussion to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*

Summary

The present summary was prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 21/20, in which the Council decided to convene, on the first day of the high-level segment of its twenty-second session, a high-level panel discussion to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, with a particular focus on its implementation, as well as achievements, best practices and challenges in this regard. The panel discussion, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, was held on 25 February 2013.

* Late submission.

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I. Introduction

1. On 25 February 2013, at its twenty-second session, the Human Rights Council, pursuant to Council resolution 21/20, held a high-level panel discussion to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA), with a particular focus on its implementation, as well as achievements, best practices and challenges in this regard. In resolution 21/20, the Council also requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to liaise with relevant special procedures, States and other stakeholders, including relevant United Nations bodies and agencies, with a view to ensuring their participation in the panel discussion. The Office was also requested to prepare the present summary.

2. The panel discussion brought together people from various backgrounds with complementary perspectives on the VDPA, including high-level representatives, those present in Vienna in 1993, representatives of mechanisms or institutions mentioned or created at the World Conference, and new human rights actors. The panel provided a multi-stakeholder perspective on the VDPA, in particular its implementation since 1993 and the challenges ahead. Through an exchange of views and experience, the panel aimed to (a) emphasize the achievements of the VDPA from substantive and institutional perspectives; (b) highlight subsequent developments in terms of strengthening the human rights machinery, focusing on good stories and practices in implementation of the VDPA; (c) demonstrate the continued relevance of the VDPA and share experiences and perspectives on ways to further enhance the implementation of the VDPA; and (d) celebrate the creation and achievements of the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as a concrete illustration of implementation of the commitments and principles contained in the VDPA.

3. The meeting was chaired and moderated by the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Remigiusz A. Henczel, the Permanent Representative of Poland; and the Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, the Permanent Representative of Ecuador. The panel discussion was opened by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the State Secretary for European and International Affairs of Austria, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation and the European Union (EU) Special Representative for Human Rights. The panellists were (a) the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General for the prevention of genocide and participant in the World Conference, Mr. Adama Dieng; (b) a member of the Turkish Parliament and member of the Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Safak Pavey; (c) the former Prosecutor of United Nations international criminal law tribunals, Ms. Carla Del Ponte; (d) human rights lawyer and participant in the World Conference, Ms. Hina Jilani; (e) the Special Advisor of the *Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme du Maroc* and participant in the World Conference, Mr. Albert Sasson; and (f) the Director of the Colombian Commission of Jurists and participant in the World Conference, Mr. Gustavo Gallon.

4. In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to allow them to participate in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, this panel was made accessible to persons with disabilities. During the debate, sign language interpretation and captioning was provided and webcasted.

II. Opening statements

A. Secretary-General

5. The Secretary-General, in his opening remarks, delivered via video message, stressed that human rights and fundamental freedoms were the lifeblood of the United Nations and that the adoption of the VDPA two decades previously had advanced efforts to strengthen human rights work around the world. Important principles had been reinforced, including the universality of human rights and the duty of States to uphold them. Promoting and protecting human rights had also been confirmed as a priority United Nations objective. This had led to the decision to create the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights. In that context, the Secretary-General commended the High Commissioner and her predecessors for their indispensable contributions, underlining that whenever and wherever rights had been violated or threatened, their voice had been consistent, clear and resonant.

6. The Secretary-General recalled that Vienna was an important milestone. However, there was still a long way to go to translate principle into practice as human rights and the rule of law were but a distant dream for many people. In his view, the panel was an opportunity to reflect on commitments made over the years and ask what actions must be taken immediately to implement them fully. Only when the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family were truly respected, could we expect freedom, justice and peace, he said.

B. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

7. The High Commissioner recalled that in her opening statement to the Council on 25 February, she spoke of the many achievements of the World Conference and its contribution to the development and strengthening of the international human rights system. She also recalled that the Conference was instrumental in the creation of a High Commissioner for the promotion and protection of all human rights, and indicated that, when she participated in the Vienna Conference as a civil society representative, she could never have imagined addressing the Council as High Commissioner.

8. The High Commissioner stressed that the World Conference took place at a turning point in the twentieth century, and at a time of transformation marked by shifting paradigms and new opportunities. The Vienna Conference led to lasting achievements in human rights, and forged strong relationships among human rights activists. They learned the value of cooperation and linkages across interests and the North-South divide. Their participation created a “human rights identity” within civil society, increasing public awareness of human rights issues and the importance of promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

9. The High Commissioner recalled that the Conference also led to a new appreciation by Governments and human rights activists of gender-specific human rights violations, as well as a new appreciation by women’s rights activists of the value of international human rights. A major focus of women’s organizations in the lead-up to the Vienna Conference, and at the Conference itself, had been violence against women, an issue largely excluded from the human rights discourse because of its perceived private, non-State nature. Women’s organizations had led the call for the recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation. The recognition of the link between genocide and crimes of sexual violence in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court owed much to the Vienna Conference.

10. The High Commissioner underlined that the importance of listening to the experience of those directly affected by human rights violations was also recognized during

the Vienna Conference. Women, girls, boys, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, representatives of minorities and migrants testified about their experience, and their concerns were reflected in the Declaration and Programme of Action. The World Conference on Human Rights provided a venue where human rights challenges could be identified and solutions put forward. However, much remained to be done.

11. The High Commissioner highlighted the importance of the participation of civil society for the work of the United Nations, and noted that the VDPA recognized the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the promotion of human rights at national, regional and international levels and in the implementation of human rights instruments. The United Nations could not attain its lofty objectives without the participation of those it was supposed to serve. She insisted that it was only by listening to their concerns that we could ensure that our action was grounded in the real lives of real people. In that context, she recalled that a major challenge faced by the Council, and the United Nations as a whole, was the fact that sometimes members of civil society were victims of reprisals or intimidation for bringing their concerns to our forums. She encouraged all participants to continue their endeavours to address these unacceptable practices.

C. State Secretary for European and International Affairs of Austria

12. The State Secretary for European and International Affairs of Austria, Mr. Reinhold Lopatka, stated that in June 1993 more than 7,000 participants, from 171 Governments and more than 800 NGOs gathered in Vienna for the largest conference on human rights with the goal of drafting a common platform for the protection and promotion of human rights, which was achieved through the adoption of the VDPA.

13. Mr. Lopatka highlighted the fact that the panel discussion was a unique opportunity to take stock and to analyse the achievements of the Vienna Conference, to identify human rights challenges, and to strengthen the institutions and mechanisms for improving the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. He identified three major achievements of the Conference: (a) the establishment and outstanding performance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; (b) the continued expansion of the United Nations treaty body system; and (c) the growth of the number and impact of the special rapporteurs and other special procedures. However, he recognized that, despite this progress, victims of violations continued to call for justice and compensation, and the resources for the protection of human rights remained insufficient. For example, whilst the protection of human rights constituted the third pillar of the United Nations, it received less than 3 per cent of the United Nations budget.

14. Mr. Lopatka posed the following questions: (a) How can the High Commissioner and her Office be strengthened? (b) How can the necessary resources be mobilized? (c) What is the role of other actors such as national human rights institutions, NGOs and civil society? (d) How can it be ensured that justice for victims of human rights violations prevails at national and international levels? In closing, Mr. Lopatka announced that the Austrian Government was organizing a high-level expert conference in Vienna from 27 to 28 June to assess developments over the previous twenty years and formulate commitments in the struggle to improve the human rights of all persons.

D. Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation

15. The Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Mr. Gennady Gatilo, stated that the results of the Vienna Conference defined an era. He added that the Vienna documents enshrined standards that we all needed to strive to achieve, and that it was not by chance that the VDPA was a distinct item on the agenda of the Human Rights Council.

16. Mr. Gatilov stated that the strengthening of international cooperation in human rights was a key factor for the realization of the aims of the United Nations, and the reason why the Russian Federation was one of the countries which supported the idea of this panel discussion. He recalled that the significance of the Vienna documents for the development of human rights concepts could not be overestimated as for the first time in history, all categories of human rights were declared equal, there was true recognition of the principle of the universality of human rights and that it was the duty of all States to respect and implement them. He stated that it was important to bring into action the ethical and moral component of human rights standards and norms, and recalled that human rights belonged to each and everyone of us as they derived from human dignity and worth.

17. Mr. Gatilov concluded by expressing the hope that the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Conference would give a new impetus for the more active implementation by States of the provisions of the VDPA. He stated that the important principles of the VDPA were that of cooperation, constructive work and mutual cooperation as an incentive for States to develop interaction with human rights control mechanisms, and that joint work by all States was the most effective method to protect human rights worldwide. He also stated that dialogue and exchange of good practices needed to be used to enhance the potential of the Council to be a forum for such dialogue.

E. EU Special Representative for Human Rights

18. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis, recalled that the basic power of human rights resided in their universal nature, and that the VDPA underlined that the promotion and protection of human rights was a legitimate concern of the international community. He gave Europe as the example of a continent where two world conflicts originated and where the world's largest genocide was perpetrated. He reaffirmed the clear notion that the universality of human rights starts at home though a candid acknowledgment of every State's human rights challenges and willingness to tackle them through a wealth of mechanisms at the national level such as national human rights institutions and equality bodies, internal scrutiny by the European Commission through the Charter of Fundamental Rights, external scrutiny by the Council of Europe and the Court of Human Rights, and by United Nations mechanisms such as the universal periodic review and treaty bodies.

19. Mr. Lambrinidis acknowledged the pivotal role of civil society in the monitoring and implementation of human rights, and the major commitments of the EU to protect civil society, as their role was to push Governments into the better protection of human rights. Whilst he recognized that Vienna stated with clarity that cultural, religious, and other differences needed to be taken into account, this should not water down the universal human rights agreed upon by all. He stated that human rights were the universal language of the powerless against the cultural relativism of the powerful.

20. In concluding, Mr. Lambrinidis reaffirmed the conviction that the universality of human rights as an obligation flowed from the human dignity of every individual, and gave assurances that the EU would work hand-in-hand with everyone to promote the universality of human rights for a better world.

III. Statements of panellists

A. Special Advisor of the Secretary-General for the prevention of genocide and participant in the World Conference

21. The Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, highlighted the fact that the Vienna Declaration represented a building block of contemporary human rights from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Firstly, by reiterating that the promotion and protection of human rights was a matter of priority for the international community, it reaffirmed the principle of the universality of human rights. Second, it represented a global commitment to the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights at the national, regional and international levels. He emphasized, in particular, paragraph 28 of the Declaration that states that “the World Conference on Human Rights expresses its dismay at massive violations of human rights especially in the form of genocide, ethnic cleansing and systematic rape of women in war situations, creating mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons. While strongly condemning such abhorrent practices it reiterates the call that perpetrators of such crimes be punished and such practices immediately stopped.”

22. Mr. Dieng referred to the Rwanda and Bosnia genocides and stressed that the establishment of international tribunals, as well as the creation of ad hoc and national courts to prosecute those responsible for international crimes and massive human rights violations, represented important steps in the fight against impunity. The creation of the International Criminal Court was a further vital step in the global search for justice.

23. Mr. Dieng mentioned the establishment of the position of the Special Adviser on the prevention of genocide as an important commitment by the international community towards the prevention of genocide and related atrocities. However, he made clear that many challenges remained in light of the tremendous price paid in terms of human lives lost when atrocity crimes occur. He said that millions of lives had been lost in the previous twenty years and referred to several country situations.

24. Mr. Dieng concluded by calling again for the Vienna Declaration to be used as a guide for our work for human rights. He considered the concept of the responsibility to protect agreed by the 2005 World Summit to be a natural development of the 1993 World Conference. He called for the commitment to the responsibility to protect to be renewed and said that despite the complexity and difficulty of that task, we had to do our best to keep the promise of “never again”.

B. Member of the Turkish Parliament and member of the Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities

25. Member of the Turkish Parliament and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ms. Safak Pavey, identified herself as a member of the 1990s generation and thanked all those involved in Vienna in 1993 for the path they opened for future generations, including children, women, disabled people and minorities. She recalled that, while at that time the divisions seemed almost impossible to overcome, the agreement on the VDPA was a major achievement. She stressed that the VDPA played a very important role in making “discrimination” unacceptable and shameful at the level of States. In the previous twenty years, developments and changes within the international community had strengthened multilateral human rights actors and procedures. Human rights were accepted as less controversial in foreign policy agendas, with civil society becoming increasingly significant in the political landscape.

26. She stressed that human rights still provoked political controversy and still too many serious human rights violations were inadequately addressed by the international community. In her view, a much stronger challenge than changing laws was the resistance of traditions. In her opinion, it was not the States that needed to reach immediate consensus, it was cultures and traditions. She referred to the phenomenon of acid attacks against women following rejection of proposals of marriage, resisting sexual abuse or family disputes. Despite laws and severe penalties, the number of victims had remained the same or increased. Referring to the recruitment of child soldiers, the sale of child brides by their families, she affirmed that we struggled against a “deep culture” which saw this as acceptable. We were battling with the prejudices, discrimination and hate crimes of the past. Our duty was to remove these burdens from the shoulders of future generations. In her view, there was no need for more legal development on the normative side, but the focus should be on the implementation through education and accountability.

C. Former Prosecutor of the United Nations international criminal law tribunals

27. The former Prosecutor of International Criminal Tribunals, Ms. Carla Del Ponte, emphasized that the main achievement in the protection of human rights was the referral to justice of most of the political and military figures responsible for the commission of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. The creation of the ad hoc tribunals was a great success in international justice. She underlined the fact that the first generation of international criminal tribunals demonstrated clearly that impunity was no longer tolerated by the international community, following the Vienna Declaration. She referred in particular to the role of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in holding those responsible for ethnic cleansing to account. She said that ethnic cleaning was a crime against humanity and was perhaps the most extreme form of human rights violations.

28. Ms. Del Ponte identified six challenges in delivering justice: (a) bringing senior and military leaders to justice; (b) the contribution to the development of national criminal law and humanitarian law; (c) the selection of suspects and transfer of information and cases to national prosecutors and courts; (d) the complexity of international investigations and prosecutions; (e) the protection of witnesses; and (f) State cooperation.

29. She concluded by saying that peacemaking and nation-building efforts would neither make peace nor build nations unless they included, from their inception, a justice component so as to prosecute the worst violations of international humanitarian law on all sides, to end the culture of impunity and to make it clear to everyone that no one is above the law.

D. Human rights lawyer and participant in the World Conference

30. Human rights lawyer Ms. Hina Jilani recalled that the World Conference was convened at a critical juncture in the advancement of the United Nations human rights system. The expectations from the conference remained as relevant currently as they were twenty years before. At that time, she recalled that gaps in implementation of human rights conventions troubled those engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights. It was also important for those coming from countries of the South to ensure that the essence of the universality of human rights was not lost amongst overly emphasized notions of cultural specificities. The Conference was an important opportunity for human rights activists, academics and other civil society actors to interact and to bring both consistency and rationality to human rights advocacy. She believed that was the beginning of a global

human rights movement that was finding a common direction and expanding the space for accommodating the plurality of concerns expressed.

31. Ms. Jilani mentioned the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as amongst the more significant achievements of the Conference. Its creation, and the way it developed over the previous twenty years, had undoubtedly given human rights a more prominent place within the United Nations. She praised the leadership of the various High Commissioners in that regard. She also referred to the quality of service provided to treaty bodies and special procedures mechanisms. She mentioned the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the creation of a mechanism on the situation of human rights defenders as significant steps following the Vienna Declaration.

32. Ms. Jilani noted that serious violations of human rights had not ceased. Despite progress towards democratic rule, political and economic conditions in many countries remained volatile. Little had been done by Governments to build the capacity of the State to protect. The politics of identity, greater difficulties in the management of pluralism and diversity, increasing poverty and the diminishing role of the State in providing social security still challenged the ability of human rights system to provide the means through which rights could be realized.

33. Ms. Jilani stated that the Vienna Conference was only a beginning and that more efficient coordination within the United Nations was needed. There was also a need to build on the commitments made in Vienna to strengthen the collective capacity to preserve human dignity, prevent discrimination and violence, and continue to strive for a world order with equality, justice and freedom for all.

E. Special Advisor of the *Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme du Maroc* and participant in the World Conference

34. The Special Advisor of the *Conseil National des Droits de l'homme du Maroc* (National Human Rights Council of Morocco), Mr. Albert Sasson, recalled his participation in the Vienna Conference as a member of the Moroccan delegation. He stated that, with the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the adventure of promotion and protection of human rights at the national institution level was embarked upon. At the time there was a need to define the role of national institutions as institutions independent of Government. Now, he stated, not only were there more than 60 such institutions, whose statutes were in keeping with the Paris principles, financially independent from Governments, but there was also the International Coordinating Committee to help strengthen the resources available to national human rights agencies.

35. Mr. Sasson highlighted the fact that the Vienna Conference provided the impetus, and triggered the mechanism allowing progress. Morocco for example, currently had a national human rights council which was no longer of an advisory nature, and human rights were reflected in the Moroccan Constitution.

36. Mr. Sasson stated that one of achievements of the Vienna Conference was to introduce human rights education into the teaching of all those disciplines that conveyed human rights education so that students would know what their rights and duties were. He also stated that another achievement of the Vienna Conference, which was made possible due to resources given by the European Commission, was the establishment of a national programme to promote human rights culture and mainstream human rights in public life. He concluded by stating that Vienna was not only the beginning of a process but continued to guide the future.

F. Director of the Colombian Commission of Jurists and participant in the World Conference

37. The Director of the Colombian Commission of Jurists, Mr. Gustavo Gallon, highlighted the achievements of the Vienna Conference, such as the recognition of the universal nature of all human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and now environmental rights, and the right to development. He stated that lack of development was not a justification to curtail human rights and that States had a duty to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Mr. Gallon also cited the achievements of the Conference with regard to those vulnerable segments of the population, such as indigenous peoples, women, children and persons with disabilities. In terms of armed conflict, the Vienna Conference called for a global and coordinated approach, and appealed to those States which had not to ratify the Geneva Conventions and their Optional Protocols. He added that the Conference also signalled the need to strengthen the advisory and technical cooperation services for greater cooperation and called for the periodic assessment of projects and yearly open-ended information sessions. Mr. Gallon highlighted the fact that the Conference supported the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to put the human rights architecture and framework into practice. He outlined the substantial normative and institutional progress made in Vienna, whilst recognizing the need to continue fine-tuning the universal system for the promotion and protection of human rights.

38. Mr. Gallon stated that those achievements would not have been possible without the firm and unwavering participation of civil society, which was present in Vienna with some 4,000 representatives from some 1,400 organizations.

39. Mr. Gallon outlined five areas in which progress was needed as a matter of urgency. First, effective action mechanisms at the international community level were necessary to prevent grave violations being perpetrated, such as the violations which took place in the former Yugoslavia at the same time as the Vienna Conference. Second, there was a need to ensure the promotion and protection of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. Third, there was a need to increase the human rights budget of the United Nations, and such an appeal had already been made at Vienna. Fourth, there was a need to set up an international human rights court or tribunal to overcome deficiencies in national human rights protection systems. And fifth, there was a need to overcome the conflict between security policies and human rights. Mr. Gallon concluded that there was merit in organizing a third human rights world conference in five years time, to match the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Conference and building on the legacy of the Tehran Conference, held 45 years ago.

IV. Summary of the discussion

40. Those participating in the discussion represented the following States members of the Council and observer States: Bahrain (on behalf of the Arab Group), Chile (on behalf of Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)), China (on behalf of a group of like-minded countries), Gabon (on behalf of the African Group), the Islamic Republic of Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Morocco (on behalf of the Group of Francophone States), Mozambique, Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Slovenia (on behalf of the Platform for Human Rights Education and Training, a group of seven States), the United States of America, and Uzbekistan, as well as the NGO the European Disability Forum.

41. The panellists were not provided with an opportunity to respond to the questions raised by the participants due to lack of time. The following States members of the Council and observer States did not have the opportunity to speak: Algeria, Andorra, Argentina,

Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, and Turkey. The following NGOs did not have the opportunity to speak: Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Action Canada for Population and Development in a joint statement, CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation, France Libertés: Fondation Danielle Mitterand, Indian Council of South America, and the International Service for Human Rights.

Issues raised by stakeholders

42. All participants reaffirmed the importance of the VDPA, emphasizing that it represented a landmark in the promotion and protection of human rights. Many saw it as an inspirational and forward-looking document on human rights that remained valid and up-to-date. As one delegation said, the VDPA mapped out the path we were to follow to be where we stand today.

43. Participants pointed to the various important principles enshrined in the VDPA. Delegations referred in particular to the fact that Vienna reaffirmed that all human rights were universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and that the international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. This reaffirmation contributed to ensuring that civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights were treated equally.

44. Some States underlined the fact that the Vienna document indicated that, while the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it was the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

45. Several participants stressed that, according to the VDPA, democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

46. Similarly, it was recalled that the VDPA underscored that the protection and promotion of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms was the first responsibility of Governments.

47. Several speakers emphasized the fact that Vienna also placed much emphasis on the principle of international cooperation for human rights. The VDPA states, for example, that the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms must be considered as a priority objective of the United Nations in accordance with its purposes and principles, in particular the purpose of international cooperation.

48. More generally, participants referred to equality, equity, dignity, respect, tolerance and non-discrimination as important principles reaffirmed in the VDPA and stated that these principles should guide us today. It was recalled that the VDPA states that the place of disabled persons is everywhere, and made reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the first post-Vienna treaty to address the exclusion and discrimination facing the estimated one billion persons with disabilities in the world.

49. In the view of some delegations, the VDPA reaffirmed the right to development in the promotion and protection of human rights, recognizing, *inter alia*, that lasting progress towards the implementation of the right to development required effective development policies at the national level, as well as equitable economic relations and a favourable economic environment at the international level.

50. In the opinion of a number of participants, the VDPA also represented a milestone for women's rights, in particular regarding the issue of violence against women.

51. Several States stressed that the VDPA played a pivotal role in highlighting human rights education and training as essential for the promotion and protection of human rights. In addition to calling on States to take several measures in this regard, the document called on the United Nations to support human rights education and training, and recommended the proclamation of a United Nations decade for human rights education. This decade was followed by the World Programme for Human Rights Education, currently in its second phase.

52. In terms of the human rights system, several participants referred to the creation of the post of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They expressed praise at the central role played by the High Commissioner and the work done by her Office over the previous twenty years. The work of the Office in supporting special procedures, treaty bodies, the universal periodic review, in providing technical assistance and monitoring human rights worldwide was particularly highlighted. This had contributed to the recognition of human rights as one of the three pillars of the United Nations. Some delegations insisted that the Office should receive sufficient resources from the regular budget to face the increasing number of mandates addressed to it.

53. In terms of the development of the human rights machinery, the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the universal periodic review were also mentioned.

54. Referring to the fact that the VDPA recognized the fundamental role played by regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights, some delegations mentioned various developments at the regional level in continuity of the Vienna Conference.

55. The role of national human rights institutions was also highlighted, and it was recalled the VDPA reaffirmed the important and constructive role played by national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights. In this context, it was proposed that efforts continue, including through sharing best practices, to ensure their effective and independent functioning.

56. Participants also highlighted several challenges.

57. One such challenge related to the situation of children, as it was pointed out that according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), around one third of children worldwide die every year of food-related illness and malnutrition, despite the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

58. Some States stated that, while the universality of human rights was reaffirmed, there were still difficulties and challenges in the promotion and protection of human rights, such as politicization of human rights issues, selectivity or discrimination. In their view, the full enjoyment of human rights was possible only if diverse stakeholders joined together to affirm their commitment to human rights on every aspect of life. Dialogue and cooperation, as well as positive and constructive engagement, should be the favoured approach when dealing with human rights, in particular in the context of the Human Rights Council.

59. Poverty was highlighted by some as undermining the realization of fundamental human rights. They stated that poverty alleviation should be a priority for the human rights machinery, recalling that the VDPA reiterated the centrality of attaining equality of opportunity for all.

60. Some States underlined the need to address emerging challenges and issues, such as racism, as well as racial and religious discrimination and hatred.

61. According to a number of participants, more needed to be done to entrench human rights mainstreaming. In this context, it was felt that human rights should be integrated on the post-2015 development agenda.

62. A number of speakers referred to cross-regional and international cooperation and technical assistance as key ways to promote a culture of human rights. These issues should receive the appropriate attention and resources to allow the Office to work in this area. It was recalled that international cooperation also played a crucial role in the promotion and protection of human rights. In the opinion of some, constructive cooperation, equal and mutually respectful dialogue and exchange of best practices must be the key principles of the work of the Council.
