



President of the Republic of Slovenia

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**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
at the at the Human Rights 75 high-level event
Opening Ceremony with Heads of State**

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Mr High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Yesterday I had the honour to confer the first ever Human Rights Award as the President of the Republic of Slovenia. The recipient is a long-standing human rights advocate and a director of the Slovenian Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment. I thought such an award was long overdue. We must always encourage people who make an extra effort to stand up for human rights. In these trying times, the motivation to provide a boost and protections to human rights defenders is all the more pertinent.

It so happens that the award coincides with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). I believe this is both symbolic and fitting. The Universal Declaration is a milestone in human rights history. It inspires us all to continue working to ensure that all people can gain *freedom, equality and dignity*, the very motto of today's event.

Fast-forward 75 years, and where are we today? We have come far, but not far enough. Human rights are not enjoyed equally by everyone.

Yet, excellencies, make no mistake: while we face a lot of difficulties in the field of human rights, good progress has been made too. Human rights have been and continue to be codified. Monitoring bodies, special mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review all serve to regularly check our national human rights state of play.

Thirty years ago, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action established the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was a gigantic step forward for global human rights protection. The Office then went on to conduct field operations. This all

represents enormous progress, particularly as the share for human rights from the UN budget has always been rather tight.

Your work is of great importance. You know that human rights are not mere abstract principles; they are the very foundation upon which a just and compassionate society stands. You know that human rights are not negotiable. These are not privileges to be granted selectively. You know this and I know this, but does everybody?

Regarding the challenges ahead, there are many. Europe has always looked at Palestine with unease. With a sense of failure. What we see today is painful, particularly for the European Union. The Palestinians under occupation have been denied their human rights for the past 75 years. All of us have been shocked to see the horror unfolding: the unspeakable images of Hamas terrorists attacking and killing Israeli civilians and the terrifying realisation that thousands of human beings, for a large part women and children, killed in Gaza appear not to count for more than a collateral damage. This is an attack on our humanity, and indeed, Mr High Commissioner, a human rights crisis.

Other wars are also taking place. Let us not forget Ukraine and especially the mass killings and rapes of civilians in Bucha and the other 55 armed conflicts around the world, not to mention wars where no guns are used, but our lives and ways of life are severely threatened anyway. Most of us here have recently returned from COP28, which is finishing today. I spoke there of the importance of not treating human rights and climate change separately, as is too often the case. We have begun to talk about a new generation of environment- and climate change-based human rights. The right to a clean and healthy environment, the right to water, and the right to clean air are among those newly emerging human rights. I am happy to note that the last COP did a good job in *acknowledging* the human right to a clean and healthy environment. Slovenia feels immense gratitude to all partners involved in more than a decade-long work towards the declaration of this right.

Declaring, however, is not enough. The key lies in further codification and above all the *implementation* of these rights. I salute the Office of the High Commissioner in taking the lead on that. You can always count on Slovenia's continued support, as indeed in all your efforts for the global promotion and protection of human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before closing my speech, please allow me to share a concern of mine. The UN has been instrumental for advancing women's rights. But progress is still slow and there is considerable pushback against women's rights across the board. Let us take the opportunity offered by this occasion to reflect upon it and recommit to full equality, everywhere, and not just regarding gender. This includes elderly people among us whose numbers are growing while their protection is diminishing. That is not right.

My final word of thanks and support therefore goes to all the human rights and women's rights activists around the world. It is our obligation to not let them down.

In this modern era, let our collective resolve be a beacon of hope for those who suffer in the shadows. Let us champion the cause of human rights with an unwavering determination, recognising that the true measure of our civilization lies in how we treat the most vulnerable among us.

As we forge ahead into an uncertain future, let our legacy be one of compassion, equality and justice. In the face of adversity, let us be the advocates, the defenders and the champions of human rights, ensuring that the flame of justice burns bright for generations to come.

This is our obligation.

Thank you.