

**34th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva (Switzerland)**

1 March 2017

High-level segment

**Danuta Przywara
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)**

“Peace and human rights in a time of international instability and growing populism”

Mr Chairperson,

The idea that we will never again be at war with each other, as prescribed in Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations needs a true commitment to hold all States and their leaders accountable when they threaten such peace, by promoting racism, discrimination, people segregation, by drawing lines between “ourselves” and “others,” by building walls instead of building fair societies.

All of which we said “never again” to.

We, as human rights defenders, do not believe that people stand beside sufferance without compassion. People said “never again,” and their will has been a lasting peace.

Mr Chairperson,

What we witness today are times in which those holding the executive power too often believe others are to obey; times in which a judge can be referred to as a “so-called” one, when a ruling of a constitutional court is deemed “a private opinion of judges.”

In the current global discourse, facts lose out to fear, prejudice and “post-truth.”

We are living in times, when those holding power, including in countries members of this Council, believe that promoting human rights accounts to treason; believe that pursuing justice and the rule of law are attempts to overthrow governments. We as human rights defenders again face threats we had not seen anymore for so many years.

What governments around the world, so many of which are sitting in this room, now attempt is to shape the State according to their policies, rather than shaping their policies according to the State’s human rights obligations. Democratically elected governments use their majorities to violate rights of minorities, let people die at their borders, dismantle the pillars of the democracies thanks to which they came to power. All of it, justified by the will of the people.

Mr Chairperson,

The rule of law enshrined in our constitutions was supposed to protect citizens’ right against assaults from governments. Checks and balances were supposed to insulate us from the return of authoritarianism. The respect for the judiciary, its independence, and its decisions, was supposed to be an efficient mechanism for human rights protection. Human rights are the third necessary pillar for a lasting peace.

We, human rights defenders, stand for all human rights for all. Never have we stopped pressing governments to abide by their human rights obligations. And never will we tolerate that a majority believing to do good for itself can abuse, harm and restrict the rights of others in society. Otherwise we will see a meltdown of freedoms, the fastest track to conflict, violence and war.

We call upon leaders of States and the United Nations to join our efforts in uniting around the ideals of solidarity, justice and the rule of law and to uphold human rights obligations we needed so many years to build up. As long as doing politics oriented on the rule of law and human rights is possible, a global peace is possible as well.