Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Statement by Mr. Stefano Severe, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i.

Royal Cultural Center, Amman, 10 December 2018, 5 p.m.

Your Excellency the Prime Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to represent the United Nations in Jordan at this celebration of International Human Rights Day, together with millions of people around the world. I would like to congratulate the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies on the organization of this evening.

Today, 70 years ago, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Universal Declaration is the result of intense discussions and negotiations from experts of all regions of the world. The role of Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the drafting committee, is well known. Less well known is the fact that women from Denmark, Pakistan, the former Communist bloc and other countries worldwide also made crucial contributions. Translated into hundreds of languages and dialects, from Abkhaz to Zulu, the Universal Declaration set a world record, in 1999, as the most translated document in the world.

Thanks to the Declaration, the dignity of millions of people has been uplifted, untold human suffering prevented and the foundations for a more just world have been laid. It has passed from being a document of hope into a set of standards that is felt in virtually every area of international law. It has stood the test of time, the advent of dramatic new technologies and huge social, political and economic developments that its drafters could not have foreseen. Nevertheless, the Universal Declaration gives us the principles we need to govern new areas such as artificial intelligence and the digital world. It also lays out a framework of responses that can be used to counter the effects of climate change on people, if not on our planet.

Side by side with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration offers a powerful conflict prevention, development, security and social agenda.

The drafters of the Declaration wanted to prevent another war by tackling the root causes, by setting down the rights everyone on the planet could expect and demand. They also wished to spell out in no uncertain terms what cannot be done to human beings. Equality, justice and freedom as expressed in the Universal Declaration could prevent violence and sustain peace. Respect for human rights, and effective, impartial rule of law to resolve disputes are at the core of development and peace, which His Majesty the King has reiterated at various occasions.

In 30 articles, the Universal Declaration shows us the measures which will end extreme poverty, and provide food, housing, health, education, employment and opportunities for everyone. The
Sustainable Development Goals, which are the core for the close cooperation between the United Nations and Jordan, are grounded in international human rights law. The agenda offers critical opportunities to further advance the realization of human rights for all people everywhere, without discrimination.

Gender is a concept that is addressed in almost every clause of the Declaration. The document refers to “everyone,” “all” or “no one” throughout its 30 Articles. Nevertheless, women continue to be excluded from participating in both public decision-making processes and in decisions about resource distribution, family size and income usage. There is thankfully increasing awareness globally of gender-based discrimination and its adverse effect on development and on peace and security. In this regard, I congratulate the participants of the 13th class of women leaders, organized by the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, who we will certify later tonight.

The Universal Declaration establishes the equal dignity and worth of every person. It confirms that the State has a core duty to promote standards of life that enable us to exercise our dignity and equality, in larger freedom. However, the protection of human rights is not only a responsibility of governments towards their citizens. We need to stand up for our rights and those of others. We can take action in our own daily lives to uphold the rights that protect us all. The United Nations looks forward to its continuing cooperation with Jordan, moving towards a resilient and prosperous country with equal rights and opportunities for all, based on our joint values as expressed in the Universal Declaration for Human Rights.

Thank you for your attention.