**Speech by H.E. Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger,   
President-elect of the UN Human Rights Council for the year 2020**

Monsieur le Président,   
Excellencies,   
Colleagues,   
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing my sincere gratitude to all the members of the Human Rights Council for entrusting me with the task of serving you as the next President. Let me also thank the countries of the Western Europe and Others Group for having endorsed my candidacy.

It is – for myself as well as for my country Austria – a great honour to assume the presidency of this body which is so important for so many people.

It is, moreover, a very special privilege for me to preside over the Council during the year of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women. I will do my best to keep an eye on women’s rights and genuine gender equality.

I will take up this job with all the respect required and do my best to be everybody’s president, equally open and available to all of you – members, observers, civil society, regional and other groups - impartial and neutral and with the only objective in mind to facilitate the Council’s work in promoting and protecting human rights as the international community reaffirmed them at the World Conference on Human Rights held in my hometown Vienna in 1993: universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent, mutually reinforcing and a legitimate concern of the international community.

My country Austria learnt the importance of human rights the hard way – in the course of two world wars and a civil war in between. This experience taught us that a society which upholds human rights is actually more resilient, more sustainable and more secure.

Chers collègues,

Je suis consciente de la grande responsabilité que je serai amenée à assumer de la main du Président actuel, S.E. l’Ambassadeur Coly SECK, à savoir d’être au service du Conseil, du mieux que je pourrai, et au service de vous tous - des membres, observateurs et autres partis prenantes.

Laissez-moi saisir cette occasion pour exprimer ma gratitude et ma plus haute appréciation vis-à-vis du Président sortant. Je suis certaine de pouvoir dire au nom de vous tous que vous avez accompli, M. le Président, un travail extraordinaire en assurant la crédibilité et l’efficacité du Conseil.

Vous avez dirigé les activités du Conseil avec une combinaison unique entre un engagement imperturbable pour la cause des droits de l’homme et une habilité diplomatique remarquable visant à assurer que tous soient à bord de ce véhicule commun qu’est le Conseil.

Vous êtes souvent parvenu à faire apparaître comme naturel ce qui était, en fait, le résultat d’un travail très assidu et judicieux. Rien de tout ςa n’était facile.

Je crois également parler au nom de nous tous en remerciant non seulement le Président lui-même et le Bureau sortant, mais aussi son équipe et celle du Sécretariat et des Services de Conférence, qui ont travaillé inlassablement dans les coulisses. On ne vous voyait pas beaucoup sur le devant de la scène, mais on n’imagine pas ce qui serait arrivé sans vous.

Je tiens, qui plus est, à remercier Madame la Directrice générale, S.E. Tatiana Valovaya et son équipe de l’appui qu’ils ont bien voulu prêter au Conseil cette année et – tant que j’y suis – de bien vouloir faire de même en 2020.

Tout en sachant que l’année prochaine ne sera pas facile, je me réjouis de travailler avec vous tous sur tous les sujets qui requerront notre attention conjointe.

Let me also thank High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet, for being what she is: a courageous defendant of human rights where – as she herself puts it – it “matters the most: on the ground”. We will certainly need her guidance next year.

Mister President, dear Colleagues,

Next year marks the 100th anniversary of the League of Nations, the first international organization designed to preside over a rules-based international order. It was meant to put an end to all wars. We can only hope that its failure has taught the international community what not to do.

Today the multilateral system is facing what some call a mid-life-crisis - with the real danger that human rights might get lost in the quicksand of other issues.

We all know the debates about whether we are going through a crisis or merely a transitional period. Be that as it may. As Secretary General Guterres keeps saying: “effective multilateralism remains the world’s best hope”.

There is no meaningful alternative to striving for common solutions to common problems by dialogue - however long it may take - just to make sure solutions are not being sought elsewhere.

Multilateralism can be hard work, there are no easy wins, and compromises can be hard to sell back home as what they are: the best solution available at a particular moment in time.

But this is what the Human Rights Council is all about – finding common ground to make the system work for the challenges of our time.

2020 will also mark 75 years since the creation of the United Nations. Back then the international community came together in the common understanding that protecting the inherent dignity of every human by a set of common norms was a key to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Later on the then Secretary General Kofi Annan put it this way: “We will not enjoy security without development; we will not enjoy development without security; and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.”

What we need to be guided by is the impact the Council has on the ground - for the people who suffer, whose rights are infringed, whose freedoms are not respected or whose needs are not met – and for those who defend them - sometimes at the risk of their own lives.

There is a temptation in multilateral discussions to hide behind rituals or jargon. The Council is fortunate in that its very practical tools help to avoid this – in particular the UPR and the Special Procedures.

Nonetheless, most of us would agree that there is room for improvement, in particular against the background of increasing challenges and decreasing financial means.

That is why the working methods of the Council will in all likelihood remain on the agenda as a regular feature. We would be well advised to put this house in order ourselves here in Geneva rather than getting instructions from New York. This would also strengthen our role in the institutional dialogue we need to conduct with New York.

As the Director for Conference Services Mme Momal-Vanian explained earlier on, the UN is currently confronted with the worst liquidity crisis in recent years. This ongoing financial uncertainty – mainly caused by unpaid contributions to the regular budget – will oblige the Council to continue its efforts of making its Programme of Work fit within official UN working hours.

I therefore welcome, that the efficiency measures suggested by President Seck for next year did find consensus among the Members of the Council. However, we need to continue our discussion on efficiency next year – first of all by implementing what we decided on today and what was decided last year, but also by further reflections. Most importantly, we should be more vigilant than in the past about the outcomes the Council mandates. We all witnessed an exponential growth over the last years but less might actually be more.

Estimados colegas,

Durante las últimas semanas tuve el placer de hablar con muchos de Ustedes bilateralmente y tengo la intención de seguir haciéndolo durante las próximas semanas. Durante el próximo año, quisiera contribuir a generar más confianza entre las delegaciones, por ejemplo creando espacios para encuentros informales como un retiro del Consejo que tendrá lugar – con suerte - en la primera mitad del año.

Además, mi puerta estará siempre abierta para todos Ustedes para discutir cualquier preocupación, consejo, pregunta o comentario. Juntos, confío que tendremos suficiente energía, creatividad y comprensión mutua para evitar situaciones en que las propuestas se rechacen solo por su origen.

La confianza es también un tema importante entre las delegaciones y otros actores que participan a este Consejo, como las Instituciones Nacionales de Derechos Humanos y las ONGs. La sociedad civil desempeña un papel crucial, llamando nuestra atención sobre situaciones de preocupación y conectándonos con aquellos que luchan por sus derechos o cuyos derechos son violados.

Este Consejo debe seguir siendo una plataforma segura e inclusiva para un diálogo constructivo. Quién coopere con el Consejo y sus mecanismos debe poder confiar en que no habrá intimidación, ataques ni represalias, y quienes estén tentados de ejercer intimidación, ataques o represalias deben saber que se utilizarán plenamente los procedimientos existentes para tales casos.

In today’s world, communication is crucial. In almost 14 years of existence, the Human Rights Council has written many success stories – yet not many of them got noticed by a wider audience.

Personally I think we could do a better job in explaining to the general public what the Council is good for, how it helps real people out there in the real world. We should tell positive stories which would not have happened without the Council. I take this opportunity to appeal to all of you: help us find and disseminate these stories.

Mister President, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us not forget for one moment that this Council is the best hope for many people, in particular the victims of human rights violations and abuses, the oppressed, the poor, those suffering from conflict, crisis and terror.

What we do in this Council is never like a sprint – more like a long-distance run and – as the High Commissioner says – it is rarely about perfection, it is about progress.

Together with the Vice-Presidents, we will do all we can to make sure that the Council continues to fulfil its mandate, strengthens its impact on the ground, while getting ready to face all the new human rights issues such as climate change, new and emerging technologies or global migration.

I invite you all to join us in this effort. We will need your support and assistance, your ideas and advice. I look forward to working with you all.

I thank you for your attention.