Madame President, distinguished colleagues and delegates,

It is with great pleasure that I participate in the High Level Segment of this Council in a moment when the human rights situation in the world is undergoing a great transformation.

I fully subscribe to the High Commissioner’s expression: in 2011 human rights went viral, with populations standing up and demanding their rights, not only civil and political, but also economic, social and cultural. Even if its epicenter was, and is, Northern Africa and Middle East there were developments all over the world. Our peoples have spoken firmly and bravely.

We greatly value the work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office, as well as the action of the special procedures and treaty bodies, even more so in these challenging times.

Their activity is carried out in an extremely committed and competent manner and (I underscore this point) in strict independence.

Madame President,

This Council, many times accused of paralysis in protecting and promoting human rights, has proven during these exceptional times that it was up to the challenge. It reacted swiftly and adequately to events. It proved that the tools at our disposal are sufficient when there is no lack of political will.

One special session on the situation in Libya and three special sessions on Syria, as well as meaningful deliberations during the ordinary sessions have accomplished an almost permanent monitoring of very serious human rights situations.

This Council was an important factor in combating violations and seeking accountability.

We are very much encouraged by the evolution in so many Arab countries. We are confident that they will meet their peoples’ aspirations for a democratic society where human rights are promoted and protected. We call on them to spare no effort in protecting the Human Rights of all their citizens.

As a country that underwent a successful democratic transition in the 1974 Portugal has some expertise and sensitivity to support transitional countries that are going through processes.

Madame President,

Sadly, not all the crises we have faced in these 12 months have been overcome.
I refer primarily to the situation in Syria, where, like the first report of the Commission of Inquiry created by this Council stated clearly, massive human rights violations that amount to crimes against Humanity are occurring. Its second report, recently disclosed, confirms the seriousness of the situation. We strongly support its work, carried out in difficult conditions, given the lack of cooperation from the Syrian authorities. The creation of a Special Rapporteur for Syria was also a very positive development.

It is our duty to stop this carnage. Portugal, as a UN Security Council member has been actively involved in finding a way to support the Arab League and the Group of Friends of Syria in their efforts to put an end to violence. We will continue our efforts until we stop violence and find an inclusive and sustainable political solution.

Referring to the Middle East, I recall that Palestine issue, and Palestinian rights, remain central. Dialogue to sustainable peace it’s critical.

My country is also worried about the dire Human Rights situations in Iran and DPRK and regrets the lack of improvements witnessed in the last year. We are co-sponsoring the draft resolutions on these two countries presented to this Council.

Madame President,

I would now like to refer briefly to our action as members of the Security Council in the field of Human Rights. In our view, Human Rights are at the core of peace and security. Situations of serious and widespread Human Rights violations are an ideal breeding ground for conflict. During conflicts civilians must be specially protected given the threats they face. International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law must be respected.

Post conflict and peace building are key moments for the creation of legal and institutional frameworks that promote and protect human rights, hence eradicating a main factor for the renewal of conflict. Therefore we have been arguing for the inclusion of Human Rights elements in the mandates of the missions.

During our Presidency of the Security Council, last November, Portugal’s President chaired the debate on the protection of civilians, showing the importance our country gives to this theme. And on the February 7th we have organised an Arria formula meeting of the Security Council on the Human Rights components of the UN Missions with the presence of the UN High Commissioner.

Madame President,

The legacy of our long tradition of openness and contact with other cultures places Portugal in a privileged vantage point to understand other people’s perspectives and aspirations. This experience of global interaction has also guided our policy towards the Human rights international agenda. Profoundly aware of the equality of all humankind, Portugal strives for the highest possible degree of enjoyment of human Rights by all, without distinction of any kind.
We were in the frontline of the negotiation of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. I am pleased to announce that my country will be in a position to ratify this Protocol, which is on the verge of entry into force.

We will also be presenting to this session of the Human Rights Council our traditional resolution on the realization of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It will have an omnibus nature, summing up where we stand at this particular juncture in the realization of these rights. We believe it is a timely exercise at a time when the economic crisis affecting many of our societies is reducing resources and putting pressure on public services.

It is therefore particularly important to restate the importance of the realization of such basic rights as the right to food, right to work, right to health, right to water and sanitation and right to education, among others. It will also call for a reflexion on the gender perspective in the realization of Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Following up on our commitment to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in the June session we will table our resolution on the Right to Education.

Having finished the first round of the Universal Periodic Review, we consider this exercise was proven extremely useful, allowing for a truly universal peer review of the human rights situation in every country. Now begins a critical second phase when we focus on the implementation by all our countries of the recommendations made to us. Portugal underwent its examination in December 2009 and accepted 86 out of 89 recommendations. We went immediately to work on their implementation. You can find a synthesis of our efforts in the mid term implementation report that is being distributed to you

Madame President,

We believe that our action in the Human Rights field justifies our membership of this body and have decided to present our candidature for the period 2015-2017.

Portugal has been committed to the Human Rights Council since its inception but has never been a member.

A fair rotation of the membership of this body, regardless of each countries’ dimension, is essential to a more representative and inclusive international community. This rotation will contribute to strengthen the scope for action of the Human Rights Council

We firmly believe in the relevance of the Human Rights Council. We are convinced that Portugal’s bridge building capacity and ability to participate actively in constructive dialogue, can be of particular use in the work of this Council.

Thank you