Mr. President of the Human Rights Council,

Mr. Secretary General,

Madam High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Her Royal Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser;

Madam Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning;

Distinguished Panellists,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is an honour for me to be here today to address the UN Human Rights Council at the opening of today’s High-Level Panel on Mainstreaming Human Rights in the post 2015 development agenda.

2. The support given to this issue, proposed by Qatar and Portugal, is proof of the importance that this Council attaches to the integration of human rights into the Post 2015 development agenda.

Mr. President,

3. Looking ahead to this development agenda, I would like to start by underscoring that Portugal’s belief that poverty eradication and the achievement of sustainable development must remain key priorities. The on-going debate on the post-2015 agenda is therefore an opportunity to increase our shared level of ambition, and to find ways
to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals are achieved for all and that their shortcomings are addressed.

4. Portugal has always been a firm supporter of the Millennium Declaration and of the Millennium Development Goals. These Goals have had the unquestionable merit of working as a consensual and objective framework, that has helped to mobilize efforts and support, both by developing countries and international development partners. Much has undoubtedly been achieved but significant challenges persist. In spite of the positive impact of the MDGs around 1.3 billion people still live in extreme poverty. Our commitment to eradicating poverty, in all forms and in all countries, irrespective of their levels of development, must be our overriding objective. Particular attention should, however, be given to the poorest and most fragile States that are facing the greatest challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In these specific cases, international support is paramount to assisting them to effectively implementing their obligations, including their human rights obligations.

5. When revisiting the Millennium Declaration, I am struck by the fact that it is also a human rights document. The same, I venture to add, cannot be said about the Millennium Development Goals. In our view, the MDGs lack a clear human rights perspective and do not take into account sufficiently international human rights standards. Mainstreaming human rights is thus a challenge but also an important opportunity that must be seized upon when defining the post-2015 development agenda.
6. When Qatar and Portugal proposed that this year’s Panel address the issue of mainstreaming Human Rights in the post 2015 Development Agenda, our hopes were that the discussion would significantly contribute to the debate on how this could be done.

7. Keeping in mind that the post-2015 framework should be universal in aspiration and coverage, applying to all of humanity, the question is how to mainstream human rights?

Mr. President,

8. One thing is certain; we cannot conceive of poverty eradication and sustainable development whilst by-passing human rights, democracy, the rule of law, good governance and transparency. We need to address the important issue of removing all barriers to equal participation in achieving sustainable development. Reducing inequalities, promoting women’s and girl’s human rights and their empowerment are critical to achieving poverty eradication and sustainable development for all in the future. On the other hand, without poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth, we will hardly succeed in promoting human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

9. Let me give you a few examples about how I see a human rights based approach to development: How can progress be made on key MDG benchmarks such as income, health, education and sanitation if there is physical insecurity and there are high levels of gender inequality? How can the MDG of universal primary education be reached if the right to education is ignored,
disrespected or selectively implemented? This does not necessarily mean creating a separate human rights goal. On the contrary, it entails mainstreaming a human rights perspective into the goals to be defined in the post 2015 development framework.

10. Since 1998, Portugal presents a yearly resolution on the right to education therefore allow me a few thoughts on this issue. Indeed, education is both a human right and an undisputed prerequisite to development. If I’m not mistaken, today there are unfortunately around 10% of children of primary school age outside the education system and, even if these percentage has narrowed, the gap between girls and boys enrolled in school still adds up to 3.6 million children. This perspective is reflected in portuguese development assistance in partner countries where education is a priority area.

11. Looking ahead to the post-2015 agenda, education must remain a top priority, we must be more ambitious and we must not forget that there are international human rights obligations on the right to education that cannot be neglected or violated.

Mr President,

12. In closing, I would like to reiterate that Portugal has high expectations for today’s panel. Much is at stake when preparing for the post-2015 development framework. We need to reflect collectively, States, Civil Society and the Private Sector, on how we want the new development agenda to shape up and be
implemented. Portugal is committed to a strong and universal post 2015 development agenda that has a clear focus on poverty reduction and on a human-rights approach, as these are simply two sides of the same coin.

Thank you.