Mr. President of the Human Rights Council,

Mr. High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Distinguished colleagues, Ambassadors, Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is for me a great privilege to take the floor, for the first time, on behalf of Portugal, at the High Level Segment of the Human Rights Council, a fundamental body of the United Nations.

2. I address you in Portuguese, the mother tongue of approximately 250 million people around the world, a global communication language which constitutes an important asset for the international community and that we hope will become, in the near future, an official language of the United Nations.

3. This intention is shared by the nine Member States of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, an organization whose statutes enshrine a firm commitment with human rights.

4. As we celebrate this year the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Council, I would like to reaffirm here that Portugal attaches great importance to the United Nations human rights protection system. The High Commissioner for Human Rights – to whom I address a special word to express appreciation for tirelessly and courageously conducting his mandate - , this Council, the Universal
Periodic Review Mechanism and the Treaty Bodies deserve our recognition and our firm support.

5. The multilateral system for the protection of human rights must remain strong, independent, impartial and demanding. Despite all the achievements since the approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in 1948, we are forced to recognize on a daily basis that there is still a long way ahead to guarantee the universality of the human rights.

6. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Portugal would like to reiterate its firm commitment to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This basic principle, enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution, is an unwavering cornerstone of our external policy.

7. Portugal will continue to base its actions at the Human Rights Council in the defence of human dignity and the universal realisation of all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social.

8. In pursuing such objectives, we are aware that dialogue with all other States, the relevant international instances as well as with other actors – such as civil society organizations – is the best way to obtain the universal realization of all human rights.

9. As a member of this Human Rights Council, our priorities remain unchanged. We will continue to present, every year, in the March and June sessions, our resolutions on economic social and cultural rights and on the right to education. Women rights, including the prevention and the elimination of violence against women, are also among our main concerns, as well as children’s rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. We will also continue to call for the
abolition of the death penalty, drawing on Portugal’s pioneer role in the abolition of the capital punishment.

Mr. President,

10. In this 31st session of the Council, allow me to underline, due to its urgency, the seriousness of the human rights situation in Syria and the fight against terrorism.

11. Portugal welcomes the agreement reached in Munich, which represents the effective return to a political and diplomatic resolution framework of the conflict in Syria.

12. This Council must now state, with determination, that it is not indifferent nor passive to the abject spiral of violence in Syria, the unrelenting loss of human lives, the drama of those who, because of war, are besieged, without access to essential goods, attacked in schools and hospitals, forced to flee and abandon their homes, facing an uncertain destiny and, sometimes, an hostile reception.

13. I trust that, for the first time, a consensual resolution is approved on this issue, as a proof of the unity and the firm commitment of all in this Council in condemning violations and abuses of human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated in Syria.

14. We have the irrevocable duty to fight against impunity of perpetrators of violations and abuses of human rights and of international humanitarian law, of massacres, of the unbearable and intolerable violence towards the civilian population and its most vulnerable groups. To hold accountable and to punish all
parties involved, without exception, is a minimum and indispensable condition to prepare for pacification and reconciliation in Syrian society and for the future reconstruction of the country.

15. Let us remember that the key to Syria’s future is also in her children, her youth, and in the capacity to continue to offer them a quality education in spite of the conflict.

16. My country attaches the highest importance to the right to education, a human right which ranks among the first to be violated in situations of conflict. Portugal is firmly committed to supporting a strategic turnabout to promote Higher Education in Emergency Situations.

17. The fulfilment of the right to education, including higher education, in situations of humanitarian emergency is an essential condition to guarantee a sustainable future. Future leaders and qualified human resources, indispensable to the future of nations, depend on education. For these reasons higher education cannot continue to be neglected in the provision of humanitarian aid.

18. The World Humanitarian Summit in May and the High Level Meeting of the UN General assembly about Great Movements of Refugees and Migrants in September will represent unique opportunities to test our commitment to transforming the lives of young people, in particular students, who are exposed to situations of conflict, disasters and acute vulnerability.

19. It is possible to change the course of Higher Education in Situations of Emergency, in order to give it priority in humanitarian responses and to facilitate the entry of these young people into the education system. This requires a strong commitment and bold actions.
20. Portugal has welcomed Syrian students into Portuguese universities, so as to ensure the continuity of their education, thus contributing to their future and their country’s. I call upon other states to associate themselves to the noble initiative of the Global Platform for Syrian Students. The resolution that Portugal will bring forward in June, at this Council, will reiterate the importance of respecting the right to education in situations of emergency.

Mr. President,

21. **Terrorism** has increasingly inhumane and dramatic characteristics.

22. The magnitude of the current terrorist threats demand a cross-cutting response that acts upon the causes of radicalization and violent extremism. Portugal strongly believes that this reaction must be as broad as possible and must include states, international organizations and civil society. Coordinated action against terrorism must fully respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Mr. President,

23. The adoption of the 2030 Development Agenda in September is historical in its importance. Portugal welcomes the choice of this theme for the High Level Panel on Mainstreaming of Human Rights. My country is deeply involved in implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which require the cross-cutting integration of a strong human rights dimension.
24. We also commemorate this year the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Much has been accomplished, regarding human rights. There is still, nonetheless, a long way to go to guarantee full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. I hope that this anniversary provides an opportunity for states to renew their commitment to these covenants which, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, constitute the International Charter of Human Rights.

25. I conclude by reiterating the trust that Portugal gives to the Human Rights Council. Be assured, Mr. President, Mr. High Commissioner, distinguished delegates, of Portugal active commitment to the universal realization of human rights.

Thank you.