**Statement by H.E. Dr. Anwar Mohammed Gargash**

**Minister of State for Foreign Affairs**

**to the High Level Segment of the 34th session of the**

**United Nations Human Rights Council**

**Geneva, 28 February 2017**

**Mr. President, High Commissioner, Distinguished Delegates:**

I am pleased on behalf of the United Arab Emirates to extend to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your assumption of the Presidency of the Human Rights Council. I am confident that you will successfully lead the Council this year in carrying out its important mandate.

I am also grateful to your predecessor Ambassador Choi Kyonglim for his tireless efforts in promoting and protecting human rights.

**Mr. President,**

It is a great privilege for me to participate on behalf of the United Arab Emirates in this high level segment of the Human Rights Council.

The UAE remains deeply committed to promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have so far undergone two reviews of our human rights record under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. Since the adoption of our second human rights report in March 2014, we have achieved

considerable progress in implementing the recommendations we have accepted.

We look forward to our third review, which is scheduled to take place in January-February 2018. We see the Universal Periodic Review as a valuable opportunity to reflect on our human rights record in a consultative process.

**Mr. President,**

We are proud of the progress we have made to promote and protect human rights in the UAE and in our region. In many ways, we are setting a new course and a new vision for the Middle East. While respectful of our culture and tradition, we are taking a future-oriented approach that empowers women, embraces diversity, and engages young people. We are deeply committed to promoting tolerance and acceptance – in religion, gender, nationality, and ability.

In the Middle East, these ideas are certainly not universally accepted. Instead, we are all too familiar with extremism, aggression, and interventionism. These forces defy and undermine basic human rights. They are at the root of instability and violence in the Middle East and must be rejected and challenged.

**Mr. President**,

 I will call your attention specifically to some of the most troubling human rights challenges in our region. But first, allow me to describe the important progress we in the UAE are making to advance human rights at home.

I will start with women’s rights. Women in the UAE have long been recognized as equal partners in national development**. S**pecialized institutions for women, such as the General Women’s Union have helped to develop a comprehensive strategies to broaden inclusiveness and promote women’s advancement across all areas of our society.

We have made impressive progress. The UAE has been among the highest ranked countries in the Arab world on gender equality, every year, according to an annual index issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In the World Economic Forum’s 2016 Global Gender Gap Report, the UAE is ranked highest in the world in terms of gender equality in literacy rates, and participation in secondary and tertiary education. Seventy-seven percent of UAE women go on to higher education from secondary school, and more than seventy percent of Emiratis in federal higher education institutions are women.

Furthermore, Emirati women constitute 66 percent of the national UAE labor force. About a third of Emirati women hold senior-level positions, and 15 percent of women work in highly skilled technical fields. Women make up more than a third of all federal ministers.

The UAE plays a prominent role on the international level as well. We are serving a second consecutive term as a member of the Executive Board of UN Women. And in October last year, UN Women opened a liaison office in Abu Dhabi. This initiative will expand partnerships with Gulf and Arab institutions and enhance collaboration to advance gender equality and the empowerment

 of women and girls in our region. This is particularly important since women’s rights are under fierce attack in many places in the region.

**Mr. President,**

**The UAE has also continued its efforts toward the promotion of children's rights**. A new federal law will help ensure that every child in the UAE, whether a citizen or a resident, has the right to be safe, educated, and protected from neglect and abuse.

This focus extends beyond childhood to young people. Arab youth, in particular, should have continued access to education, to employment opportunities, and to self-determination. We note that Arab youth have continuously voted for the UAE as the country of choice to live and work.

In fact, our growing economy and openness have attracted millions of workers to the UAE from around the world and we are **deeply committed to safeguarding the rights of all workers in our country.**

We are grateful to the large international workforce that has helped to enable our development. We recognize the importance of remittances from the UAE as a major source of income for millions of families worldwide. In 2015 alone, more than $30 billion flowed from the UAE back to workers’ home countries with the largest shares to India, Pakistan, Philippines and Bangladesh.

We continue to expand and strengthen workers' rights and protections with new laws, executive actions and more intensive enforcement.

Our recent focus has been on promoting transparency in the contractual relationship between employers and workers.

The UAE enacted far-reaching reforms to its Labour Law last year and is continuing a campaign to educate workers about the labour reforms, and their rights.

The UAE is also working closely with originating countries to add protections against labour exploitation. With these international partners, we have established service centers in workers’ home countries to facilitate work visas and to confirm job offers and conditions of employment.

**Mr. President,**

 The UAE also has made significant progress against human trafficking, a major priority of the United Nations. The UAE National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking has implemented an integrated national strategy to combat this horrific violation of basic human rights. Most recently, the Committee created a fund for victims of human trafficking, human trafficking while leading efforts at improving legal protections and enforcement. All these efforts are outlined in detail in the UAE's annual report on combatting human trafficking.

**Mr. President,**

The UAE also believes that a sustainable future is also a basic human right. To this end, we have been a leader in supporting the UN’s sustainable development goals and addressing climate change. We were one of the first in the region to ratify the Paris Agreement on climate change last year. To accelerate low-carbon growth and to achieve a sustainable energy mix, the UAE itself has adopted national clean energy targets of 27 percent by 2021 and 50 percent by 2050.

**Mr. President,**

**In many areas and over time, the UAE has made enormous strides at advancing human right. This progress stands out in a region beleaguered by the troubling rise of extremism, aggression and interventionism. These dangerous forces are the greatest threat and obstacle to the advancement of universal human rights. They seek to impose hateful ideologies and narrow-minded beliefs on other people and nations.**

**One dangerous example is Daesh.** Itstwisted ideology represents a particular danger to our open society and all other like-minded people. It rejects every notion of tolerance and acceptance – it subjugates women, it promotes religious hatred, it demonizes the “other.” It preys especially on the most vulnerable, notably young people.

The UAE has been at the forefront of the fight against Daesh. Together with our partners in the Global Coalition, we are on the frontlines confronting its hateful legacy. Beyond the battlefield,

we are also leading in the fight for hearts and minds. The UAE co-founded and now hosts Hedayah, the first-ever International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. We operate the Sawab Center, a joint initiative with the US that focuses on countering Daesh propaganda and recruitment online. The UAE also supports moderate religious voices through initiatives such as the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, and the Muslim Council of Elders.

We are deeply concerned by the increasing acts of discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia in other parts of the world. We are prepared to work together to adopt swift and effective measures to combat these acts. The UAE attaches great importance to United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 on “Combating Intolerance, Negative Stereotyping and Stigmatization of, and Discrimination, Incitement to Violence and Violence Against, Persons Based on Religion or Belief.” And in this context, I would like to acknowledge the valuable work of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation Group in Geneva, and to commend their efforts to set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure the effective implementation of this resolution.

**Mr. President,**

This is still a very difficult time for our region. We see the dangers of extremist and terrorist groups increasing, and political solutions to the various crises in the region remain elusive. The atrocities and human rights abuses committed by Daesh and other extremist organizations are well documented, and paint a grim picture of the Middle East.

We seem to be trapped in a cycle of conflict and human suffering. The refugee crisis places an extreme burden on Syria’s neighbours and Europe, and represents a serious challenge to some countries' domestic stability. Nearly 15 million displaced Iraqis and Syrians face adversity, away from their homes and livelihoods.

Nearly 4.9 million Syrians are refugees. Since the onset of the crisis, the Syrian community in the UAE has welcomed over one hundred thousand people fleeing the violence. Last year, the UAE pledged to take in 15,000 more Syrians in need of assistance.

 The UAE has also contributed over USD 700 million in humanitarian support of the Syrian people since the beginning of the conflict.

Let me focus particular attention today on Yemen, another human rights and humanitarian crisis. Here, an already fragile state has been shattered by a three-way assault of aggression, interventionism and extremism.

Security and stability collapsed in the face of aggression after the Houthis and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh defied the political process and violently overthrew the legitimate Yemeni government. Yemeni’s basic rights have been violated with thousands detained, tortured and killed. The Houthis have blocked and limited the supplies of humanitarian aid worsening the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Iranian interventionism has enabled and empowered the illegal and violent Houthi-Saleh takeover. Iran is directly arming and supporting the insurgents with increasingly sophisticated weapons,

including ballistic missiles and armed drones. The Houthis have also launched thousands of these missiles and rockets into neighboring Saudi Arabia resulting in more destruction and death.

This Iranian interference prolongs and deepens the Yemen conflict, creating conditions that allow Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and more recently, Daesh, more space to operate. Working closely with local Yemeni resistance forces, last year the UAE helped to liberate large parts of Eastern Yemen from oppressive AQAP control.

As a member of a broader Arab Coalition, the UAE is helping in Yemen to restore the legitimate, UN-recognized government, to systematically eliminate terrorist cells, and to provide extensive humanitarian assistance to the Yemeni people.

**Mr. President,**

We reiterate our call for all Yemeni parties to seriously commit to the political process and strongly support the important work of the UN toward this end. We also ask for the strong enforcement of UN Security Resolutions barring Iranian support and weapons supplies for the Houthis.

At the same time, the UAE will do all it can to ease the suffering of the Yemeni people. Since April 2015, the UAE has provided over USD 1.6 billion in direct humanitarian aid to Yemen. Despite the Houthis' repeated attempts to disrupt these efforts, the UAE will continue to take extensive measures to open liberated areas to humanitarian assistance and to provide public security. We applaud the work of and welcome expanded cooperation with the

UN and other international aid organizations in these critical efforts.

Following the liberation of Aden in July 2015, the Coalition and humanitarian actors have been able to use the city’s port to meet urgent needs of people in Aden and throughout Yemen. In Aden, the Coalition has restored electricity and water, renovated over 150 schools, rendered hospitals functional, maintained security by recruiting, training and equipping local police and security forces, and implemented numerous other projects to assist the local population. We undertook similar efforts in Mukalla and Eastern Yemen and are planning an intensive surge of humanitarian assistance into areas along the Red Sea as soon as these areas are liberated.

**Mr. President,**

 The Yemen tragedy must end. It is a humanitarian and human rights disaster. The people of Yemen, like people everywhere, should be able to live free from fear and suffering. We must confront the extremism, aggression and interventionism that give root to conflict and instability.

Bringing peace and stability to Yemen, Syria, Iraq and other troubled splaces in the region must continue to be the critical focus for the UN and world community. The UAE is a committed partner in this important work.

**Mr. President,**

We are proud of our progress in advancing human rights. We know we have much more to do at home and in the region but we are also committed to lead by example. In a region where dark forces risk setting the cause of human rights back, we will continue to push forward. Openness, tolerance, and respect are more powerful ideas. They enable and empower people.

We all must work toward advancing the fundamental ideals and values of human rights recognized by responsible nations, enlightened leaders and hopeful people. In the UAE, this is our commitment and our work both at home and in the world.