***Delegation from Represented by***

**The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia University of Heidelberg**

***Position Paper for the Human Rights Council (HRC)***

**Human dignity, tolerance and peace** – as a multi-ethnic nation, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia) desires to demonstrate its devotion to the key values that lie at the core of the idea of Human Rights. Macedonia stresses the importance of the following issues: I. Protecting and Promoting Human Rights to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism; II. Contribution to Firearms Regulation to the Protection of Human Rights; III. Human Rights Violations and Abuses Against Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar.

**I. Protecting and Promoting Human Rights to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism**

Macedonia, made up of various ethnic and religious communities, occupies a key geostrategic location since it is situated on the central geopolitical axis of the Balkan Peninsula. Furthermore, Macedonia is a key traffic artery in south-east Europe and a pivotal communication spot. Consequently, Macedonia is a region of potential vulnerability. **Nationally**, Macedonia takes on a whole-of-society approach involving local communities to enhance interfaith and intercultural understanding as well as to promote social cohesion. Macedonia also highly appreciates security-oriented measures to prevent the international flow of terrorist fighters outlined in Security Council Resolution 2178. Moreover, Macedonia takes comprehensive counterterrorism provisions concerning its law enforcement such as expanding its criminal code with the *law of money laundering and terrorist finance*. Macedonia notes with deep concern that these measures do not efficiently address the diverse and numerous conditions conducive to the spread of extremism in all forms. **Regionally**, Macedonia participated actively in the *Foreign Terrorist Fighters roundtable for Balkan countries*. **Globally,** Macedonia appreciates the measures proposed in the *“UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy Review”*, stressed in General Assembly Resolution 70/291 (2015), in respect to developing counter-strategies. Macedonia reaffirms the importance of a strategy that effectively addresses conditions conducive to the spread of extremism and creates an environment in which individuals are not longer vulnerable to radicalization. Hence, Macedonia suggests the creation of an Inter-body department consisting of governmental ministries and employees from various institutions focused on the direct promotion of human rights by exchanging information with local communities, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations. Moreover, this national department should realize recommendations highlighted by reports of other departments of Member States. Thus, Member States can share knowledge and experience through coordinating departments. Macedonia firmly believes in a holistic approach with all relevant stakeholders. The information sharing between all actors and Member States, especially those in the region, shall help to consult the matrix of activities countering violent extremism and to eliminate further duplications and overlapping in countering terrorism activities through a cost-effective concept that builds upon priorities identified together with Member States. Furthermore, Macedonia suggests the creation of the *Commission on Human Rights Watch on Terrorist Prevention* (CHRWTP) in order to supervise the departments. In the **short term**, the department can facilitate operational information sharing on preventing measures and, more importantly, finding a counterterrorism strategy while protecting human rights. Strategic partners active in the region, e.g. the Member States of the Balkan area, are invited to fund the department-network. In addition, there is a great advantage for the donor community in the region as well as funding from the private sector. The network would also develop best practices and set up numerous legal and operational standards. The engagement with local communities and CSOs with the purpose of collecting and disseminating information on **tolerance** can prevent. In addition, the local communities need to empower youth through education and intensive dialogues about their individual concerns in order to prevent recruitment from extremist organizations in the **medium-term**. The department would be responsible on the prevention side with the purpose to dissuade individuals from joining extremist groups. The potential contribution of media and new communication tools can also be exploited to create a broader understanding. In the **long-term**, the promotion on a regional level respects human rights to counter narratives which incites acts of violent extremism.

**II. Contribution of Firearms Regulation to the Protection of Human Rights**

Especially due to the Balkan wars, firearms still circulate within and around Macedonia. Acts of violence caused by firearms surrounded the inter-ethnic conflicts of the 1990s and led to further firearms misuse. Recently, international attention has been drawn to Macedonia, mainly because of the 2001 conflict, which occurred between ethnic Albanian rebels and the Macedonian police forces. Consequently, Macedonia continues to struggle with the regulation of the presumably 500.000 illegal weapons, which still remain within its borders; many of these weapons came from other regional wars. Since Macedonia strongly supports the implementation of the “Arms Trade Treaty” (ATT), Macedonia ratified its firearms legislation by incorporating international, as well as regional, agreement into their national regulation. **Regionally**, Macedonia faces the issue of a network of smuggling routes permitting smugglers unauthorized entry into the state. The border management is currently undergoing a reform with new technology to counter gun trafficking. **Nationally**, Macedonia keeps standards in accordance with international legislation, such as the *“Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate to Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects”* (PoA). Furthermore, Macedonia takes on a multi-stakeholder approach involving civil society agencies, consistent with international human rights law and their constitutional frameworks, in order to ensure that civilian acquisition and use of firearms are effectively regulated with the aim of enhancing the protection of human rights, in particular the right to life and security. **Internationally**, Macedonia acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the UN Office for Disarmaments Affair (UNODA) in the *“Framework for Context-Aware Scalable Authorization”* (CASA) in order to achieve the positive effects of International Arms Control Standards (ISACS) implementation, which were noted by the Security Council resolution 2220 (2015). Ultimately, some progress towards an improved security environment needs to be made. Despite some success with recent gun collection efforts, a disarmament campaign is inevitable. Hence, good governance is the long-term key to enhance stability; otherwise **short-term** efforts are likely to fail. Macedonia proposes a ban of internet-based purchases of firearms and ammunition with the aim of a better surveillance since online-purchases are often difficult to control. Macedonia also recommends to reform current legislation and to enforce existing laws including harsher penalties for holding illegal weapons if any disarmament issues are to bear fruit. In order to correct any discrepancies in the **medium-term** between national and international laws concerning export and import, Macedonia calls for a stricter export licensing process, including criteria for control measures that conform to international standards, such as the marking of newly produced firearms, improved record keeping and stricter controls on companies that are issued a license. Macedonia suggests making spot checks concerning manufacturers, also in the Balkan region since it affects every border. This will turn the attention to manufacturers who are already noted in international criminal lists. Therefore, Macedonia highly urges for a framework, the *“Balkan Standards for Gun Control to Protect Human Rights”* (BSGCPHR), highlighting these measures for the Balkan Member States which are facing similar issues. Since local agencies have had only limited access engaging the government on this topic, there is a need for active involvement by the media and an awareness campaign, including educational and reintegration programs, aimed at changing general behavior and values regarding firearms in society as well as combating the disappointment and lack of faith of civilians in the public security system in the **long-term**.

**III. Human Rights Violations and Abuses Against Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar**

Macedonia believes that an agreement as a compromise between warring parties could pave the way for Myanmar to progress. Thus, Macedonia condemns a minority group being made vulnerable to abuses, especially those which stem from their lack of citizenship and which result in their socioeconomic exploitation. Macedonia agrees that this persecution on ethnic grounds is quite similar to what has been described as “ethnic cleansing“. As stated by George W. Bush, Macedonia has demonstrated through its implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001 that*“its possible for people of different backgrounds to live together in peace“.* The agreement ended fighting between Macedonian security forces and ethnic Albanian insurgents and laid out a legal-political action plan for the creation of a multiethnic country. The main objective was the survival of the state through the respect of the ethnic identity of every citizen and the development of civil societies. As in Myanmar, in Macedonia there were a number of voices criticizing the international community under the presumption that it had openly sided with the Albanian party simply due to its nature as a minority. Still, Macedonia calls for negotiations - all minorities should be represented by leaders of either a political party or other institutions in order to focus on establishing a legal framework to secure ethnic equity. In the **short term**, the international community should work on more aid packages from both the public and private sectors. **Regionally**, a particular focus should be put into refugee camps. Macedonia calls for a better coordination with iNGOs working in those camps. The exchange of knowledge between iNGOs and local NGOs is utterly important due to tensions between iNGOs and parts of the Rakhine community, as oftentimes the military refuses aid groups or journalists access to camps. Local communities or organizations are familiar with this situation and hence could facilitate the contribution of aid packages undertaken by iNGOs. Before the Ohrid Agreement, there were cases of politicians who consciously articulated and at the same time manipulated widespread fears among ethnic Macedonians and hence gave the opposition to the document a symbolic character, given that amongst ethnic Macedonians the public opinion was largely hostile. Educational information sharing should also be a priority with respect to the widespread perception that international media falls for exaggerated stories of suffering, which can be seen as a betrayal, given the inter-communal tensions. Widespread poverty, however, makes it quite difficult to form leadership. Thus, it should be the task of the international community to prevent Myanmar from sliding in a radical direction that could threaten any compromise. For this not to happen, it is first necessary to provide financial support for the implementation **internationally** in the **medium-term**. Macedonia proposes a *UN Fund for Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar* (FRMOMM)to enable an environment for negotiations. Larger space should be given to minorities while acknowledging the Global 2014-24 Action Plan to end statelessness. The Agreement should set forth a list of concrete constitutional, legal reforms to be undertaken by the Myanmar Assembly in the field of decentralized local government, non-discrimination, equitable government, special parliamentary procedures for the protection of minorities - which again could be supervised by UN commissions for promotion of equal rights - and implementation measures. Macedonia highly urges that Myanmar due to its abysmal human rights record amends **nationally** the 1982 Citizenship Act.