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High-level Thematic Debate – UN @70 – Human Rights at the centre of the global agenda

13 July 2016

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Thank you Mr President.

The centrality of human rights to the work of the United Nations is not a new concept.

In 1945 in adopting the Charter, Member States placed human rights at the centre of the UN, linking the universal application of rights to the achievement of peace and security and development.

Three years later in adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Member States pledged to promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Yet we are far from the universal application of human rights.

We must place human rights at the centre of all new efforts if we are to achieve the UN's goals.

We must promote and implement a human rights-based approach that guarantees equality before the law and non-discrimination for all people across the range of social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights.

What does a human rights-based approach mean? It means that we must put people at the centre of our efforts.

The 2030 Agenda reinforces the need to integrate human rights into global and national development policies. The Agenda strives to leave no one behind and has equality and non-discrimination at its core.

Human rights need to be placed at the centre of all UN discussions, including the Security Council. A focus on human rights will strengthen the

Council's ability to prevent conflict and to protect civilians in conflict situations. This is all the more important in the face of the shocking human rights abuses that we see in so many conflict situations, including by non-state actors such as Daesh.

To achieve universal application, human rights need to be implemented across the UN system. We strongly support the Human Rights Upfront Initiative and its goal of ensuring that the UN system takes early action to prevent and respond to large-scale violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.

Finally, we cannot achieve the universal application of human rights without the strong participation of a broad range of actors, including civil society and national human rights institutions. We consider that resistance to civil society participation calls into question commitments made to protect the universal application of human rights.

Engagement by civil society and national human rights institutions in UN processes, including the Human Rights Council, is key to connecting the reality on the ground with the work we do here in the United Nations.