

and in doing so, he has set a high bar for those who follow in his footsteps.

I ask unanimous consent that the High Commissioner's remarks be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

STATEMENT BY UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ZEID RA'AD AL HUSSEIN ON THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION

MINISTER KNEISSL.

EXCELLENCIES, COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS.

Twenty five years ago, it was here, in this city of confluence and cultural connection that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was adopted—and with its crucial description of human rights as “universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related”, cut through the artificial division of civil and political rights from rights that are cultural, economic and social.

The Cold War had ended, and the first words of the preamble marked a great hope for a new era, with interdependent countries engaging in a common approach to the causes of human suffering:

“Considering that the promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community.”

It was here that the world unanimously reaffirmed that every refugee from persecution is entitled to asylum, and called for effective protection for all those who are compelled to become migrants.

It was here that States urged immediate and strong measures to combat racism, xenophobia and religious hatred, and to ensure participation by the poorest people in decision-making.

It was here in Vienna that States recommended the creation of the mandate which I am honoured to occupy: the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

But today we seem to be headed in another direction.

Backwards. To a landscape of increasingly strident, zero-sum nationalism, where the jealously guarded short-term interests of individual leaders outweigh the search for solutions to our common ills. Backwards, to an era of contempt for the rights of people who have been forced to flee their homes, because the threats they face there are more dangerous even than the perils of their voyage.

Backwards, to a time of proxy regional and global warfare—a time when military operations could deliberately target civilians and civilian sites such as hospitals, and chemical gases were openly used for military purposes.

Backwards, to an era when racists and xenophobes deliberately enflamed hatred and discrimination among the public, while carefully cloaking themselves in the guise of democracy and the rule of law.

Backwards, to an era when women were not permitted to control their own choices and their own bodies. An era when criticism was criminalised, and human rights activism brought jail—or worse.

So this anniversary could be the occasion for a polite celebration of the achievements of my Office over the past two and a half decades—and they are many. But today is not a time for soporific complacency. Human rights are sorely under pressure around the world—no longer a priority; a pariah. The legitimacy of human rights principles is attacked. The practise of human rights norms is in retreat. Here in Europe, ethno-populist parties are in the ascendant in many countries—fuelling hatred and scarring their societies with deepening divisions.

Where these parties have achieved power, they have sought to undermine the independ-

ence of the judiciary and silence many critical voices in the independent media and civil society. They have propagated distorted and false views of migrants and human rights activists. Almost everywhere, across Europe the hatred they direct at migrants has infiltrated the mainstream parties and skewed the political landscape towards greater violence and suffering.

In this country—which more than most should be aware of the dangers of ethnically divisive rhetoric, given the historical role of Karl Lueger—false and incendiary statements have been recently made which are fundamentally at odds with the Vienna Declaration.

Minister Kneissl, Excellencies,

As Viktor Frankl so often wrote, it is compassion, and contribution to the lives of others, which form the anchor of an honourable life. And the way to honour the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action is to act on it. Human rights are not just words to be nodded at sagely at anniversaries. They are meant, above all, to be put into practice, and anchored especially in the daily experiences of the poorest and most marginalised people—such as those who flee the destruction of their hopes by conflict and deprivation.

There will be no peace for any country until there is respect, and justice. There will be no sustainable prosperity unless all can benefit. Human equality and dignity are the path towards peace in the world: the path of real patriotism, building societies grounded in harmony, not divisiveness and hate.

So it is time to stand up for what the Vienna Declaration truly represents.

We need to use this anniversary to begin to mobilize a much broader community to defend human rights with our fierce, and passionate commitment. We need to make clear the vital, life-saving importance of human rights for the daily lives and global future of our fellow human beings.

Many of us do still have space to voice our concerns. We need to stand by our achievements and the advances which have been made.

We need to push back against the haters, the destroyers, the isolationists and ethno-nationalists.

We need to move forward, defiantly, to ensure that those indivisible, universal, interdependent and interrelated rights are able to build on each other to shape a world of well-being and safety.

There is no time to lose. Let this be a turning point, so that the Vienna Declaration can stand proud—not as a decaying museum piece, but as the flag-bearer for a resurgent movement to build peace and progress.

Thank you.

INDIGENOUS ACTIVISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to speak about a subject that other Senators should be aware of.

Many Members of Congress have visited the Philippines, a country with which we share a long history of strategic, economic, cultural, and other interests. We also know that, for many years, the Philippine Government has been fighting an extremist insurgency in Mindanao. The United States has been supporting the Philippine Government in that effort.

According to information I have received, on February 21, 2018, the Philippines State Prosecutor filed a legal petition to declare over 600 persons as “terrorists,” alleging that they are

members of the Communist party of the Philippines, CPP, and the New Peoples Army, NPA, two groups designated by the United States as foreign terrorist organizations. The list was published after the collapse of the peace negotiations between CPP-NPA and the Philippine Government last year.

By itself, that might not be objectionable. There are terrorists in the Philippines. The problem with this “terrorist list” is that the government is apparently using it to persecute people who have nothing to do with terrorism, but who have engaged in legitimate, peaceful dissent and protests in opposition to government policies that threaten their way of life.

The list includes a number of indigenous rights defenders who, as far as I am aware, are not at all affiliated with the CPP-NPA. These individuals are known and respected nationally and internationally for their consistent, lawful efforts to protect human rights for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in the Philippines. By criminalizing their work and including these activists on an official terrorist list, the administration of President Duterte is endangering the lives of these and other human rights defenders and community leaders. It is a misuse of the justice system to deny their rights to free expression, association, and assembly—rights we take for granted and that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The affected individuals are now subject to warrantless arrests, surveillance, and freezing of assets. Their lives and the lives of their families are in danger. Human Rights Watch has described the petition as “a virtual government hit list,” noting the “long history in the Philippines of state security forces and pro-government militias assassinating those labeled as NPA members or supporters.” In March 2018 alone, there were reportedly at least three cases of extrajudicial killings of indigenous leaders, all known for their work to organize communities for the protection of indigenous lands.

Two of the more high-profile targeted activists, Joan Carling and Victoria Tauli Corpuz, were fortunate to have been out of the country when the list was published. Carling is an indigenous activist from the Cordillera region in the Philippines. She has been working on indigenous issues at the grassroots and international levels for more than 20 years. Ms. Carling has been elected twice as the Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, AIPP, representing AIPP's 47 member-organizations in 14 countries. She was appointed by the U.N. Economic and Social Council as an indigenous expert-member of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for 2014-16.

Victoria Tauli Corpuz was appointed as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples by the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2014. She is an indigenous leader from the

Kankana-ey Igorot people of the Cordillera region in the Philippines. As an indigenous activist, she has worked for over three decades to protect indigenous rights and as an advocate for women's rights.

As a consequence of the Duterte administration's action, these women suddenly have no home to return to. They cannot risk going back to the Philippines. Still, they are fortunate compared to those targeted leaders who remain in the country. The terrorist list also includes members of indigenous communities in Mindanao who were displaced from their lands in President Duterte's antiterrorism sweep and now live precariously in evacuation camps.

Much of this reportedly has to do with powerful business interests in collusion with corrupt officials in the government. In the recent past, the Philippine Government has fast-tracked priority infrastructure development projects. Some of these projects are reportedly planned to be built on ancestral indigenous lands, despite opposition from indigenous communities and the failure to secure indigenous peoples' free, prior, and informed consent as required by Philippine law and as contained in the 2007 U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous leaders have objected to these projects, insisting that the government respect their rights and obtain their consent for projects that affect them.

The United States has long supported efforts of the Philippine Government and civil society to unlock the country's potential to achieve inclusive, sustainable economic growth. As ranking member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of State and Foreign Operations, I have supported programs to help the Philippines combat poverty, strengthen democratic institutions, enhance maritime security, and protect the rights of its people.

Criminalizing these indigenous rights defenders would reverse progress the country has made and threaten the functioning of civil society which is fundamental to any democracy. Joan Carling, Victoria Tauli Corpuz, and other indigenous leaders and activists who from all indications are guilty of nothing more than defending their territories and cultures do not belong on a "terrorist" list. Instead, the government should be defending their rights and protecting their safety and the safety of other indigenous leaders and human rights activists.

Our own government, the Departments of State and Defense and the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as international financial institutions we support, should ensure that development activities are carried out in accordance with the rights of local communities, including the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent.

We all oppose terrorism wherever it occurs, but our collective approach to

preventing terrorism has too often made the problem worse, especially when the result is the curtailment of basic freedoms. Labeling as "terrorists" political opponents or civil society activists who do not advocate or engage in violence and who, to the contrary, have been threatened and attacked for defending their rights is one example of this, and it is an increasingly common tactic of governments; yet there are few if any ways more likely to cause people to resort to violence than by misusing government power to suppress legitimate dissent. Far from stopping terrorism, adopting such abusive tactics sets back our collective efforts against terrorism.

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION AGAINST IMPUNITY IN GUATEMALA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, many of us here are familiar with the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, known as CICIG. The U.S. Congress and Republican and Democratic administrations have supported it for years, and with few exceptions, it is strongly supported by the Guatemalan people. That is because CICIG, working closely with the Office of the Attorney General, has proven what many Guatemalans thought impossible, that even the most powerful government officials who commit major crimes believing they are above the law can be brought to justice.

CICIG was created in December 2006, when the United Nations and Guatemala signed a treaty-level agreement setting up CICIG as an independent body to support the Office of the Attorney General, the National Civilian Police, and other Guatemalan Government institutions in the investigation and prosecution of particularly sensitive and difficult cases. I vividly remember that time, when impunity for even the worst crimes was a virtual certainty in Guatemala.

During more than 35 years of internal armed conflict an estimated 200,000 Guatemalans, mostly rural Mayan villagers, were murdered—the vast majority by the army. Many were rounded up and never seen or heard from again. Thanks largely to the efforts of the Guatemala Forensic Anthropology Foundation, the tortured remains of many hundreds have been found in unmarked mass graves, some on former military bases. Hardly anyone has been punished for those atrocities, and past attempts to investigate and prosecute some of the individuals responsible were stymied.

Even in the years since that dark period, almost anyone, especially those in positions of authority, got away with anything, including assassinations and robbing the public treasury. Today, few crimes involving official corruption and violations of human rights are prosecuted, and even fewer result in conviction and punishment.

But those that have been credibly investigated and brought to trial are due

to the courageous efforts of CICIG and its commissioner, Ivan Velasquez, a respected Colombian jurist, and the recently retired attorney general, Thelma Aldana, who carried on the tradition of independence and integrity established by her predecessor, Claudia Paz y Paz. These prosecutors have given hope not only to victims who long ago lost faith in Guatemala's dysfunctional justice system, but also to many members of the business community who recognize that, without an independent judiciary and confidence that the rule of law will be enforced, Guatemala will never attract the foreign investment it needs to develop.

Predictably and throughout its history, CICIG has come under attack from those who have enriched themselves at public expense and escaped justice, including for heinous crimes. Fearing prosecution, they have sought to challenge CICIG's legitimacy and impugned the character and conduct of its commissioner. Each time, CICIG has survived, thanks to the support of the international community.

Today, CICIG is once again being attacked, including by some senior officials, who have sought to exploit factual misrepresentations, including those echoed in the Guatemalan and U.S. media, about a troubling case involving members of a Russian family who entered Guatemala with fraudulent passports. This has even resulted in a portion of the funds appropriated by Congress for CICIG to be temporarily blocked from disbursement.

Without recounting the bizarre facts of that case, suffice it to say that not a shred of credible evidence has been presented to support the allegations of abuse of authority leveled at CICIG and in particular at Commissioner Velasquez. That, however, does not appear to matter to those who have long sought an excuse to replace Velasquez with someone who is susceptible to intimidation. The Bitkov case, which has all the makings of a made-for-TV tragedy, should be appropriately resolved in the Guatemalan courts. The family should be treated justly and humanely. But CICIG is not the problem.

It is important to reiterate what the Guatemalan people know: CICIG is an absolutely essential institution that has enabled the office of the attorney general to break through the wall of impunity in ways that would never have been possible without CICIG's support. It is that simple. Without CICIG, there is no reason to believe that any case involving high-ranking officials or members of organized crime networks with the ability to intimidate and bribe prosecutors and judges and threaten or assassinate witnesses will be brought to justice.

It is also a fact that CICIG is only as effective as its commissioner and that, while even those who want to rein in CICIG publicly claim to support it, they make little secret of their goal to get rid of Velasquez.