United Nations, Human Rights Council, side event

Opening statement by Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, on the occasion of the side-event organised by the Interdepartmental Center on Human Rights and the Rights of Peoples (Italy) dedicated to the "Italian Yearbook of Human Rights 2011"

Geneva, 26 June 2012

Distinguished Professor Antonio Papisca,

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is my great pleasure to address this presentation of the "Italian Yearbook of Human Rights 2011" published by the Interdepartmental Center on Human Rights of the University of Padua with the participation of Professor Papisca, who has contributed so much to advancing human rights, firstly by creating a PhD program on human rights in the University of Padua in 1988, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the UDHR, and later on, in 1997, by establishing the European Master Degree in Human Rights in Venice – a program which todays brings together the efforts and knowledge of 41 Universities - from Leuven to Lisbon to Lund, to mention a few – a program which is being also replicated in other regions of the world and effectively is mainstreaming human rights in various professional categories.

Since 1982, the Interdepartmental Center demonstrated its high-level academic dedication to human rights, hereby fully responding to the preamble of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights which calls to promote, "by teaching and education", the respect for the rights and freedoms recognised in the Declaration. The establishment of the UNESCO chair "Human Rights, Democracy and Peace" in 1999, held by Professor Antonio Papisca, represented the consecration of such vocation. I wish to congratulate the Interdepartmental Center for its consistent efforts in promoting a culture of human rights in Italy, Europe and throughout the world.

As part of this noble cause, the publication of the "Italian Yearbook of Human Rights 2011" is of great interest to my office and for all persons concerned by human rights issues. Presenting a comprehensive overview of the Italy's obligations under international human rights law, this Yearbook constitutes a very useful tool to understand the efforts and challenges to set up or strengthen the national human rights protection system. I am grateful to Professor Papisca for taking his commitment to advancing human rights to such a comprehensive, national, level reflecting the strong engagement by Italian Academic institutions and civil society in this field.

One of the elements mentioned in the Yearbook is the absence of a National Human Rights Institution, in line with the Paris Principles. In his introduction, Professor Papisca underlines the numerous recommendations stemming from UN human rights treaty bodies and Italy's UPR in 2010 referring to the need to establish such an institution. I would like to add my voice and call for the early setting up in Italy of a Paris Principles compliant National Human Rights Institution after appropriate consultations with all relevant stakeholders.

Indeed, an independent and effective National Human Rights Institution is a central pillar of the national human rights protection system with key functions, including the one of overseeing the efforts at implementation of a country's commitments and obligations arising from international or regional human rights instruments and domestic laws. It is also "a first port of call" at the national level for those who may be most vulnerable and in need of human rights protection.

Thank you for your attention.