It is a pleasure to be here in Geneva once again at the Human Rights Council.

This Council is a vital guardian of human rights. Your mechanisms give victims and human rights defenders a venue, a vehicle and a voice. Your reports draw the attention of the world to abuses in many countries and situations.

Your expanding programme is testament to the growing authority of your work over the past ten years.

The Council has shown flexibility and courage on difficult issues that other bodies have been reluctant to tackle.

I thank you all for your support and commitment.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In our connected world, the links between the three pillars of the United Nations – peace and security, development and human rights – have never been clearer or more relevant.

Long-term peace and security cannot exist without human rights for all. Sustainable development is impossible without peace and security. Human rights are the very foundation of our common humanity.

These fundamental links have led the United Nations to undertake wide-ranging advocacy and defence of human rights.

Throughout my time in office, I have emphasized the need for democratic practices, beginning with the right of people to be heard through the ballot box. Leaders earn legitimacy by listening to their people.

I have spoken up repeatedly for the rights of all people, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, disability, caste or other distinction. In many countries, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual and
intersex people are subjected to brutal and sometimes deadly violence. I commend this Council for adopting two historic resolutions on sexual orientation and gender identity. I urge you to maintain your stance on this issue.

I have highlighted the importance of justice, including through the International Criminal Court, tribunals, special courts and other bodies. The Human Rights Council’s special procedures, commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions are essential tools towards ending impunity. But we must do much more to ensure there is consistent follow-up.

I have advocated for gender equality and women’s empowerment, including through my UNiTE campaign to end violence against women. There must be accountability for the horrific abuses of women’s rights that are a feature of violent extremism, from Iraq to Syria and Nigeria.

The agreement last December between Japan and the Republic of Korea on the so-called ‘comfort women’ subjected to tremendous suffering during the Second World War highlights the need to address the pain of the victims, no matter how many years have passed. I hope the faithful implementation of the agreement, guided by the recommendations of UN Human Rights mechanisms, will help such wounds to be healed.

One of my priorities has been to bring the three pillars of the United Nations together, and to use human rights as a compass.

The Human Rights Up Front initiative aims to achieve this by recognizing the value of identifying rights violations as early warning signs of crises to come.

Human Rights Up Front is about changing how the United Nations thinks and acts on the prevention and protection responsibilities of the Charter.

At this time of multiple conflicts and skyrocketing humanitarian need, we must do more to prevent crises and protect people. This will be one of the main calls to action at the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul on May 23 and 24 – an opportunity to come together with solutions and partnerships to uphold human dignity and our common humanity.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a major step forward for human rights.

The Agenda reminds us that human rights include the right to development, and that society is only as strong as its weakest member. The integrated, indivisible and universal nature of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is deeply rooted in universal human rights.

The 2030 Agenda’s promise to leave no-one behind means dismantling the structural injustice that holds back women, minorities, indigenous people, and so many millions of others.

Its commitment to “reach those who are farthest behind” means we must start by supporting the most vulnerable people: the victims of inequality and injustice.

Many of these are people trapped in situations of conflict. Around the world, States and non-State actors are failing to uphold the principles and laws that safeguard civilians.
Goal 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies as the basis of a safer, more prosperous world. Maintaining strong and inclusive institutions, fighting corruption and adhering to the rule of law are crucial.

Those farthest behind include millions of people who are affected by climate change, which is having the greatest impact on the poor and dispossessed. The solutions for these people, embodied in the 2030 Agenda, lie in rights-based approaches.

Many of those farthest behind are migrants, refugees, displaced and stateless people. Building higher walls and creating stricter asylum regimes does nothing to address the reasons for mass movements of people, which are often rooted in festering development and governance challenges.

The 2030 Agenda commits Member States to welcome the positive contribution of migrants and ensure that migration takes place with full respect for human rights. We need a more positive narrative on the role of migrants and refugees.

And finally, many of those farthest behind are subjected to systematic, deadly denial of their rights.

In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, systematic and widespread human rights violations have been vividly documented by the Commission of Inquiry and highlighted by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in a briefing to the Security Council last December.

In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations system must continue to work with the Governments of all States that routinely deny human rights, to address these challenges.

Now that the 2030 Agenda has brought human rights to the core of our development work, the UN system must consider how your expertise will feed into reviews of progress on the SDGs.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Last week, I visited some of the front lines of armed conflict and humanitarian need. The people I met across an arc of crisis in Africa were just some of the millions around the world who live in highly fragile circumstances in need of humanitarian assistance.

As I travelled into these vulnerable communities, I saw a stream of faces. Some were smiling, others looked worried and distraught. Some were weathered from a lifetime of struggle; others were fresh with the glow of youth that shines even through hardship.

Some of these faces brought back echoes of my own family – and my own experience as a child fleeing war. I felt a kinship with those people, both personally, and from my 10 years as Secretary-General, speaking up for the vulnerable.

What I saw most of all in the faces of these people was their yearning.

They hope and expect the United Nations to help ease their suffering and help them build a better future.

I am always humbled by the task of meeting those dreams and expectations.
But I also have hope – thanks to an inspiring new development Agenda, the enduring power of human rights and the best of the human spirit.

I look forward, in the months ahead, to continuing our shared human rights journey towards peace, justice and dignity for all.

Thank you.