THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

VIDEO MESSAGE TO HIGH-LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION TO
COMMEMORATE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF
VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION
Geneva, 25 February 2013 (recorded 6 February)

Your Excellency Mr. Remigiusz Henczel, President of the Human Rights Council,
Your Excellency Mr. Reinhold Lopatka, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Austria,
Your Excellency Mr. Gennady Gatilov, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian
Federation,
Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Distinguished panellists,

I am pleased to greet you on this important commemoration.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the lifeblood of the United Nations.

Since the Organization was founded, Member States and civil society partners have
worked to build a body of human rights instruments that can uphold the principles of the
UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Two decades ago, the adoption of the landmark Vienna Declaration and Programme of
Action advanced our efforts to strengthen human rights work around the world.

Important principles were reinforced, including the universality of human rights and the
duty of States to uphold them.

Promoting and protecting rights was also confirmed as a priority United Nations
objective.

This led to the crucial decision to create the post of High Commissioner for Human
Rights.

I commend the High Commissioner and her predecessors for their indispensable
contributions.

Whenever and wherever rights have been violated or threatened, their voice has been
consistent, clear and resonant, speaking out for dignity and accountability.

Vienna was an important milestone.
But we still have a long way to go to translate principle into practice.

In too many places, for too many people, human rights and the rule of law are but a distant dream.

This panel is an opportunity to reflect on commitments made over the years and to ask what actions we must take—now—to implement them fully.

Only when the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family are truly respected, can we expect freedom, justice and peace in this world.

I wish you a productive discussion.