



Virtual consultations on the organization of the resumed 43rd and 44th sessions of the Human Rights Council

8 June 2020, 10h30-13h30

On 8 June 2020, the Human Rights Council held a **second virtual consultation** to discuss the modalities of the resumed 43rd regular session and the 44th regular session of the Council.

In her opening remarks, **Ms Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger**, President of the Human Rights Council, reiterated that it was important to make these consultations as **transparent** as possible. Bureau has held a number of bilateral meetings, and noted that some of the proposals received, in addition to the comments and questions voiced by delegations during the virtual consultations on 27 May 2020, were not compatible with others. It was important to come to a **common ground**, she said. Ms Tichy-Fisslberger further referred to the **revised Concept Note** of 4 June 2020 and summarized its **main points**:

- Delegations will be able to **choose their preferred way of participation** in the work of the Council, i.e. either in person or virtually.
- All **security measures** will be implemented for those attending the debates in person (including wearing masks, keeping safe distances, contact tracing).
- Delegations not wishing or unable to participate in plenary debates in person would have the possibility of delivering their statements by **pre-recorded video-messages**.
- All **panel debates** can be held fully virtually.
- On the proposal of the Bureau, **NGOs** would be given the opportunity to participate via **video-messages** during interactive dialogues, panels and the adoptions of UPR outcomes.
- **Informal consultations and group meetings** could take place at the Palais des Nations in the Assembly Hall and Room XVIII.
- An **overflow room** would be provided for the plenary of the Council.
- The Bureau has identified the following **possible synergies**:
 - a) merging of the ID on **Ukraine** of the 43rd and the 44th session into a single ID;
 - b) merging of the High-Level ID on the **Central African Republic**;
 - c) moving the panel discussion on **human rights and the Olympic ideal** to the 47th session.
- Moving the **adoptions of UPR outcomes** scheduled for the 44th session to its 45th session, if the concerned States agree to do so.
- **No formal Side Events** will take place.
- UNOG could putting in place a **system of contact-tracing** through the information obtained by the use of the **access badges**.

Ms Tichy-Fisslberger has also informed the audience that Ms Corinne Momal-Vanian, Director of Conference Management Division, has resigned.

Mr Stijn De Medts, the Chief of Security Operations at the UNOG, ensured that the entry to the Palais is back to a new normal, including pedestrian, bicycle and car accesses. All security measures are in place to ensure safety during the Human Rights Council. Contact-tracing system would also make it possible to monitor the room capacity. **Ms Daniela Wuerz**, Change management and coordination at UNOG, informed that up to 30% of the personnel is returning to work at the Palais, in a gradual manner. A lot of measures have been put in place to ensure safety. Visitors of the Palais are required to keep a two-meter distance at all times (floor has been marked accordingly). System of ventilation was adjusted, 100% fresh air will be circulated on an increased speed.



Questions and Comments by States and Civil Society Organizations

Taking the floor during the briefing were the following States:

Burkina Faso, Uruguay, EU, China (on behalf of LMCs), Switzerland, Namibia, Singapore, Czech Republic, Russian Federation, Netherlands, India, Armenia, United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Lichtenstein, Cuba, Slovenia, Chile, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia, Monaco, Israel, Mexico, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Iran, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Syria, France, Gambia, Myanmar, Panama.

Also taking the floor were the following Non-Governmental organizations:

International Service for Human Rights with a joint statement on behalf of more than 20 NGOs.

In the ensuing discussion, the participants expressed their overall **support** to the resumption of the Human Rights Council's work. The speakers agreed that common decisions should be agreed upon, and new rules and procedures should be clear and applicable for all. A number of states came up with a proposal to include a **technical break** of a week or two between the 43rd and the 44th sessions, in order to be able to evaluate the process, the rules and modalities before the start of the 44th session. Some speakers wanted to know how the **contact tracing** will be ensured. Other states suggested holding a **training session**, so that all delegates can become familiar with the online platform prior to the beginning of the Council's work. Some delegates inquired about **budgetary implications**, yet other wanted to know how it can be ensured that there is only one person per delegation in the room. One speaker asked whether the Secretariat could already start listing the **main sponsors** of the upcoming initiatives. Can we have more rooms for **informals**, some speakers asked. A number of states wondered how the **equal participation** of all states can be ensured. Other speakers inquired about the equal participation of **NGOs**, especially those from the region. A representative of civil society insisted that meaningful, safe and inclusive **civil society participation** was essential. There should be no undue limitations to their work which could set harmful precedents and roll-back NGOs participation in the future. Some speakers asked how feasible was the exercising of **point of order**. Same question was asked in relation to the **right of reply**, and a potential second right of reply, if need be. Many speakers inquired about the modalities for the **pre-recorded video-messages**. What will the deadlines be, in which format will the videos have to be submitted? All these details will have to be clarified well in advance. Finally, some states inquired on the use of **face masks**, and whether this use was obligatory.

A **minute of silence** in memory of **George Floyd** was called for by the Ambassador of South Africa and observed.

Responses and follow-up:

In follow-up to this questions and comments, **Mr Eric Tistounet**, Chief of HRC Branch, informed that the **Helpdesk** will be available to all delegates every Wednesday. Regarding the **video messages**, they will have to be transmitted to the dedicated system at least a few hours before the meeting. On the questions related to **Point of Order**, Mr Tistounet ensured that someone will be available in Rooms XIX and XX to answer to any related questions as well as to transmit to the President that a delegation wants to exercise their right to Point of Order. He also noted that while virtual glitches can be expected, holding the panels **virtually** is still a good solution since there are no rights of reply nor points of order. Also, pursuant to Decision 19/119 of 2012, the **NGOs** will have a possibility to deliver a **video messages** in the context of Interactive Dialogues, Panels and UPR adoptions.



Mr Stijn De Medts informed that the **accreditation system** will be more detailed and allow for contact-tracing. He also ensured that any additional accreditation information will be brought in the efficient and timely manner. **Mr Vitali Rousak**, Chief of Planning and Coordination Service at UNCTAD, said that **new online platform** to be used during the Human Rights Council was similar to Zoom, but it was indeed important to learn how to use it. Regarding the possible **technical break** between the 43rd and the 44th sessions of the Council, he confirmed that it was possible, however, the Human Rights Council would then overlap with a number of other meetings at the UNOG, and the interpretation will have to be arranged well in advance. On the **use of face masks**, **Ms Daniela Wuerz** informed that their use was highly recommended (also following the most recent advise by the WHO), especially when the distance of two meters was not maintained.

Concluding Remarks

Ms Elizabeth Tichy-Fisslberger said it was important that the Human Rights Council was not only able to continue its work, but also became **a role-mode**. For this to be possible, all the stakeholders should behave responsibly, while the application of rules will be watched. Regarding the **distribution of virtual and in-person participation**, there were diverging opinions in this regard, sometimes even within the same country). The priority of the Bureau is to ensure full respect of **transparency** and treating all delegations **equally**. We will keep incorporating the ideas in the Concept Note, said Ms Tichy-Fisslberger. In what concerns the **rights of replies and the points of order**, delegations interested in potentially exercising their right can have their seat in the room guaranteed, even if the capacity of Room XIX should be enough. Regarding the **Informals**, IBP obliges to have physical meetings and the physical meetings will be possible – there are enough rooms to accommodate them. However, the virtual meetings are encouraged. The Bureau will hold an afternoon meeting on 8 June 2020 and, among other topics, it will discuss the possibility of **interruption between the 43rd and the 44th sessions**. A Joint Proposal will be provided by the Bureau later on.