



## Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee) United Nations General Assembly, 75<sup>th</sup> Session

### Overview of Thematic and Country Discussions



*Photo: UN WebTV (8 October 2020)*



## Summary of Interactive Dialogues

5 October 2020 – Opening, Organizational matters, General Debate .....	3
6 October 2020 – Presentation by the President of the General Assembly and General Debate .....	4
7-8 October 2020 – General Debate on Social development.....	4
9 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogue on the Advancement of women’s rights and on the Rights of children .....	5
12 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogue on the Rights of children and the Rights of indigenous peoples .....	8
13 October 2020 – Presentation of reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights .....	10
14 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights.....	12
15 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Torture, International Solidarity, Countering terrorism and Independence of judges and lawyers.....	13
16 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Right to development and Unilateral coercive measures .....	16
19 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Human rights defenders, Peaceful assembly and association, Democratic and equitable international order, Enforced or involuntary disappearances .....	18
20 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Rights of migrants and Freedom of religion and belief.....	21
21 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Internally displaced persons, Education, Safe drinking water and sanitation and the Right to housing .....	23
22 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Persons with disabilities, Cultural rights and Persons with albinism .....	26
23 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Freedom of opinion and expression, Foreign debt, as well as on Myanmar and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea .....	28
26 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Iran, Burundi, Eritrea, Belarus, Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Somalia .....	32
27 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Truth, justice, reparation, Transnational corporations, Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and Safe and healthy environment.....	36
28 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Trafficking in persons and Contemporary forms of slavery ...	40
29 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Right to privacy, Physical and mental health, and Sexual orientation and gender identity .....	42
30 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Human Rights Council report and Durban Declaration and Programme of Action .....	44
2 November 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia (also in the context of Emerging digital technologies), People of African descent, Use of mercenaries, Right to self-determination, and Complementary standards .....	46
3 November 2020 – Interactive Dialogues with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees .....	50
Main References and Sources used in preparation of this Report.....	51



## 5 October 2020 – Opening, Organizational matters, General Debate

Ms **Katalin Bogyay**<sup>1</sup> (Hungary), Chairperson of the Third Committee

The Third Committee elected two Vice-Chairs: Ms **Ahlem Sara Charikhi** (Algeria) and Mr **Khaled Mohammed Al Manzlawiy** (Saudi Arabia), who joined Vice-Chair Ms **Pilar Eugenio** (Algeria) and Rapporteur Ms **Myriam Oehri** (Liechtenstein). The Bureau has worked closely with delegates to find common ground on new working modalities, remote and virtual options.

**Topics discussed during the Opening session** (through the lens of the COVID-19):

- the rights of women (including gender equality, and domestic violence),
- the rights of children,
- the rights of people belonging to vulnerable communities:
  - o lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities,
  - o indigenous peoples,
  - o the elderly, persons with disabilities,
  - o migrants, refugees and people in conflict.
- progress in combating homophobia, racism and racial discrimination, hate crimes and xenophobia,
- negative impact of unilateral coercive measures.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Japan, Philippines, Namibia, Canada, Azerbaijan, Mexico, Slovakia, France, Slovenia, Liechtenstein, Czech Republic, Israel, Tunisia, Finland, Australia, Peru, Cuba, Lebanon, Honduras, Estonia, Malta, Belgium, Chile, Afghanistan, Colombia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Russian Federation, Philippines, Chile, Namibia, Mexico, Ghana, Slovakia, Tunisia, Liechtenstein, France, Czech Republic, Israel, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Argentina, Egypt, Bangladesh, Poland, Trinidad and Tobago, Sweden, India, Viet Nam and the United Kingdom.

**On behalf of Regional Groups or Groups of Countries:** Russian Federation (also speaking for Venezuela, Cuba, Iran and Syria), Egypt (African Group), Malaysia (Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)), Bahamas (Caribbean Community (CARICOM)), Mozambique (Southern African Development Community (SADC)), European Union, China (on behalf of 23 States), Nepal (LGBTI Core Group), Ghana (Group of 77), Azerbaijan (Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)).

**Rights of Reply:** Syria, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Ukraine, Canada, Japan.

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [first meeting](#); [second meeting](#).*

<sup>1</sup> Third Committee is the only Committee to have elected a woman as Chair (remarked by the President of the General Assembly on 6 October 2020).



## 6 October 2020 – Presentation by the President of the General Assembly and General Debate

Mr **Volkan Bozkir** (Turkey), the President of the General Assembly

Beyond a global health crisis, COVID-19 created an **economic** and **humanitarian** emergency, pushing those least able to adapt into even more vulnerable positions. The number of people **facing a hunger crisis** in countries affected by conflict is predicted to double to **270 million** “if assistance is not provided”.

The **children** are affected by disruptions to health, nutrition and education. If disruptions to food and health are not tackled, food insecurity could lead to **6,000 daily deaths** in the next six months.

The pandemic has compounded pre-existing gaps in the prevention of **gender-based violence**. There is the need for evidence-based solutions and more resources to tackle the problem.

**Internally displaced persons and refugees**, who live in crowded camps and asylum shelters, have less access to services. The “**racist stereotyping**” unfortunately accompanies the pandemic. Making societies more equitable and resilient will help address challenges posed by COVID-19.

**Speaking in the general debate:** China, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Zambia, Switzerland, Iceland, Holy See, El Salvador, Rwanda, Singapore, Costa Rica, Bhutan, Croatia, Ethiopia, Romania, Cambodia, Cameroon, Madagascar, Qatar, Nigeria, Uruguay.

**On behalf of Regional Groups or Groups of Countries:** Germany (speaking for a cross-regional group of 39 countries), Pakistan (speaking for 54 countries), Cuba (speaking for 45 countries), Kuwait (speaking for several countries), Mexico (speaking for the Group of Friends of Indigenous Peoples).

**Rights of Reply:** Turkey, Syria, Cyprus.

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV; [third meeting](#).*

## 7-8 October 2020 – General Debate on Social development

During the General Debate, Countries expressed their positions on the human rights-related dynamics fuelling regional and international tensions, and brought up a range of topics related to the effect of measures to contain the virus on human rights:

- **30 million people in Latin America** have newly entered into **poverty**.
- COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated **entrenched inequalities**.
- Need for **universal distribution of a vaccine**, once available, at affordable prices.
- Efforts to address and recover from the pandemic must consider the **rights** of women, children, the elderly, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and other **vulnerable communities**. National efforts should focus on improving living conditions for vulnerable groups.
- The rights of **women and girls**, particularly amid reports **domestic violence** cases have risen sharply.
- The world’s **lack of preparedness for COVID-19**, a challenge that has exacerbated inequalities between and within countries, raising human rights concerns.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Eritrea, Cabo Verde, Italy, Haiti, New Zealand, United States of America (United States), Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Oman, Ukraine, Indonesia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, Iran, Georgia, DPRK, United Arab Emirates, Germany, Monaco, Malawi, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Albania, Bulgaria, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Paraguay, Chad, Austria, Brazil, Syria, Burundi, North Macedonia, Thailand, Ecuador, Ireland, Kuwait, Republic of Korea, Guatemala, San Marino, United Republic of Tanzania (Tanzania), Andorra, Senegal, Jamaica, Nepal, Botswana, Fiji, Maldives, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Montenegro, Kenya, Bolivia, Libya, Côte d’Ivoire, Solomon Islands, Portugal, Kyrgyzstan, Yemen, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Zimbabwe, Serbia, Bahamas, Panama, Brunei, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Libya, Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Morocco

**On behalf of Regional Groups or Groups of Countries:** Nicaragua (on behalf of the Central American Integration System), Chile (on behalf of the Group of Friends of Older Persons)

**Points of Order:** Syria, Iran, Cuba

**Rights of Reply:** Syria, India, Armenia, Cuba, Japan, Venezuela, China, Pakistan, DPRK, Azerbaijan

**Permanent Observers:** League of Arab States, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV:  
7 October 2020: [fourth meeting](#); [fifth meeting](#).  
8 October: [sixth meeting](#); [virtual informal](#).*



## 9 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogue on the Advancement of women’s rights and on the Rights of children

Ms **Elizabeth Broderick** (United States), Chair of the Human Rights Council Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women and girls

The Working Group has conducted **18 country visits** to date. It has also studied such issues as domestic workers’ rights and gender-based violence. States should ensure a **gender-sensitive and intersectional approach** to their national COVID-19 responses and recoveries.

The adverse impact of the pandemic on women’s work cannot be overemphasized against the backdrop of **pre-existing precariousness**, characterized by systemic inequality, accelerated globalization and the feminization of poverty.

The world of work starts with women’s human rights, and the **redistribution of power and resources**.

Around the world, overall progress towards gender equality remains “too slow and too uneven” with a backlash against gender equality. Forces are working to **reverse gains made in women’s human rights**, by entrenching stereotypes around gender roles and curtailing women’s control over their own bodies.

Women’s **voices are largely absent** from policy responses to COVID-19.

Around the globe, many women still live with the **threat of criminal punishment for sexual conduct**. Meanwhile, the practice of **child marriage** is increasing due to COVID-19, and access to reproductive rights is being rolled back. These issues must be a **top political priority**, civil society must be given the space needed to combat that backlash.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Algeria, Mexico, United Kingdom, Australia, France, South Africa, Malta, Saudi Arabia.  
**On behalf of Regional Groups or Groups of Countries:** European Union

Ms **Dubravka Šimonović** (Croatia), Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

**Report presented:** [A/75/144](#) – “*Intersection between the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the pandemic of gender-based violence against women, with a focus on domestic violence and the “peace in the home” initiative*” (fifth and final report of the current mandate holder).

**Gender-blind restrictive measures** to tackle the pandemic must not exacerbate gaps in prevention of gender-based and domestic violence. States should take modified measures to **secure women’s peace and safety at home**, including **e-helplines** and the **use of hotels as shelters**.

In her report, Ms Šimonović identified **some major challenges** resulting from the pandemic, such as access to services for women has been widely impacted; the collection of data — including on femicide and other critical issues — has been curtailed. Women must be integrated into decision-making processes and especially **COVID-19 response policies**. There is a need for the increased harmonization of national laws with international standards and the prioritization of issues related to gender-based violence and discrimination at the United Nations.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, Morocco, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Argentina, Sweden, Malta, Italy, Qatar, Slovakia, Cuba, France, Namibia, Colombia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Russian Federation, Ireland, Brazil, New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, Georgia, Slovenia, Belgium, Algeria, Afghanistan, United States, European Union.

Ms **Diene Keita** (Guinea), Deputy Executive Director (Programme), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

**Report presented:** [A/75/264](#) – *Secretary-General’s report on “Intensifying efforts to end obstetric fistula within a decade”*.

**Obstetric fistula** is a childbirth-related injury that leaves women incontinent and in pain for years. The illness is completely **preventable** by providing skilled birth attendants and family planning services, but its continued occurrence represents a stark **failure of health systems to deliver for women**.





**Governments** should work on prevention and treatment strategies, awareness raising, financial support, research, data collection, and upholding the rights of women and girls, especially those who become mothers at a young age.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Senegal (on behalf of the African Union), European Union.

Ms **Asa Regner** (Sweden), Deputy Executive Director, Normative Support, United Nations System Coordination and Programme Results, UN-Women

Amid COVID-19, a “**shadow pandemic**” of **gender-based violence** is threatening women around the globe.

UN-Women together with the UNDP created a **COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker**, which has recorded 992 gender-sensitive measures across 164 countries.

COVID-19 has weakened States’ ability to tackle instances of gender-based violence and made it more difficult for women to leave or report their abusers. **80% of countries** have recently **introduced new laws or services** aimed at preventing gender-based violence, providing psychosocial support, raising awareness and strengthening social protection measures.

UN-Women is tasked with developing a **plan for the 146 countries** that “answered the appeal of the Secretary-General” to include gender-based violence as a priority issue in their COVID-19 responses. It held a **side event** during the General Assembly’s high-level week on violence against women during COVID-19, and will now study “what works” in an effort to elaborate specific methods and strategies.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, Spain, Iran, Afghanistan, European Union, Japan, Mexico, Ethiopia.

Ms **Hilary Gbedemah** (Ghana), Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

**Report presented:** [A/75/38](#) – *Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 73<sup>rd</sup> session (1–19 July 2019), 74<sup>th</sup> session (21 October–8 November 2019), 75<sup>th</sup> session (10–28 February 2020).*

**Maternal mortality** rates have fallen dramatically. More than **150 countries** have enacted **legislation** aimed at promoting **gender equality** and empowering women. **Human rights defenders** face new attacks.

The Committee is also advancing efforts to link the achievements of the **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development to the Convention’s **legally binding norms**. **Among other topics**, the Committee is undertaking assessments related to human trafficking, female genital mutilation, the abduction of women and girls, forced marriage and the shrinking space for women in activism.

It has adopted several new **Guidance notes** on the rights of women in the specific context of **COVID-19**, including one calling for reasonable accommodation to **online access**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Pakistan, Russian Federation, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom, Morocco, France, Afghanistan, European Union.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#).

Ms **Virginia Gamba** (Argentina), Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict

**Report presented:** [A/75/203](#) – *Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict*

2019 had witnessed an alarming rise in grave violations of children’s rights, including a **400% increase** in cases of **denial of humanitarian access to children**, along with **persistent violence**, and **attacks against schools and hospitals**.

**Positive developments:** the efforts to hold parties of conflict to account had led to a record number of **27,000 children being released**.

Ms Gamba expressed concern about the downsizing of missions and the limiting of resources. There is a need to ensure **adequate staffing and budgeting**, which is critical to the fulfillment of her mandate.



**Speaking in the general debate:** Germany, Mexico, Turkey, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Colombia, Morocco, Belgium, Italy, Qatar, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, France, Afghanistan, United Arab Emirates, Slovenia, Azerbaijan, Argentina, Estonia, Malta, United Kingdom, Syria, European Union.

Ms **Najat Maalla M'jid** (Morocco), Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children

**Report presented:** [A/75/149](#) – *Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.*

**Country visits** implemented: China, Indonesia, Maldives, Mozambique, Oman. **Planned visits** to Jordan, Iceland, Vanuatu and Senegal postponed due to the pandemic. School closures and the disruption of child protection services amplify the **risks faced by children**. **Financial instability** drives up child poverty, child marriage, and recruitment into gangs and armed groups.

**Upcoming:** a new report detailing the many ways that the pandemic has impacted children, featuring the responses of 30,000 children from 130 countries.

Even before the pandemic, countries were largely not on track to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals** indicators related to the **rights of children**. **Family violence against children**, like other types of domestic violence, has been on the rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is also a critical **nexus** between violence against children and violence against women, which are linked to such issues as job loss and isolation, as well as the serious and potentially long-term effects on children's **mental health**, which must be addressed in the context of Governments' universal health coverage schemes and form a core part of their COVID-19 response plans.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Japan, Portugal, European Union, Morocco, Russian Federation, Austria, Qatar, Belgium, Slovenia, Costa Rica, Mexico.



## 12 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogue on the Rights of children and the Rights of indigenous peoples

Mr **Luis Ernesto Pedernera Reyna** (Uruguay), Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Concern over the **slow ratification** of the three **Optional Protocols** to the Convention on the Rights of the Child: over the last year, **no States ratified or acceded** to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, or the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The Committee's [48<sup>th</sup> extraordinary session in Samoa](#) (2 to 6 March 2020) was “a historical moment”, which provided children with a lead role in shaping the agenda.

The Committee's **draft General Comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment** shows the need to clarify how this rapidly evolving environment affects the full range of children's rights, and to identify measures that promote and protect children's rights in the digital environment. The online format facilitates access to education, however the digital environment holds both potential and risks. Children's exposure to “the screen” — and the impact of this behaviour on mental and physical health, advertising, cyberattacks or online harassment — represents a real challenge that must be studied and addressed.

As the COVID-19 crisis has unfolded, children's access to food, water, health care, life-saving vaccinations and education has deteriorated, which in turn, has increased their exposure to violence and exploitation, as reflected by the growing incidence of child labour, female genital mutilation and child marriage. **All children in all countries are affected** — physically, emotionally, psychologically — sometimes with a lifelong impact.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Spain, Belgium, Slovakia, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, Hungary, Switzerland, Syria, Israel, Mexico, Japan, Algeria.

Ms **Mama Fatima Singhateh** (Gambia), Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other sexual abuse material

**Report presented:** [A/75/210](#) – *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).*

The surge in violence against children and **new forms of sexual exploitation and abuse**, both offline and online, has been reported during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Due to the lockdown and travel restrictions brought on by the pandemic, children are spending more time online, hence the need to **tackle online child sexual exploitation** and abuse. Ms Singhateh's **first thematic report** to the Human Rights Council will address the long-term effects of COVID-19. Ms Singhateh plans to integrate a gender perspective throughout her work by exploring the **gender dimension** of the sale and sexual exploitation of children. Access to justice, reparations and rehabilitation of child victims is an important aspect in addressing this scourge.

**Country visits** are of utter importance. Need for a **child protection mechanism**, especially for **forced birth registrations**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, Israel, United States, India, European Union, Morocco, Mexico, Philippines.

Ms **Charlotte Petri Gornitzka** (Sweden), Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund

**Reports presented:** [A/75/262](#) – “Issue of child, early and forced marriage”; [A/75/286](#) – “Follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children”; [A/75/307](#) – “Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child”.

Ms Petri Gornitzka introduced **three reports of the Secretary-General**. She cited important strides made in **advancing children's rights** in recent decades — including through national legislation and the broader participation of children themselves in decision-making — and also said that **climate change** and **environmental degradation, humanitarian crises** and now **COVID-19** were posing new and serious challenges.





Countries must build **child protection systems** that are inclusive of **migrant, refugee** and other marginalized children, and work to develop a safe and **inclusive digital agenda** that places children at the centre of digital policy. She also cited the Secretary-General's call for a universal recognition of children's rights to a **clean, sustainable environment**.

Reported instances of **child, early and forced marriage** have been **decreasing** in recent years as a result of new legislation, increased awareness-raising and community sensitization programmes. However, it is still estimated that **12 million girls per year endure child marriage**, and new reports are emerging of a spike in child marriage as a result of the pandemic's economic impact.

The world's most disadvantaged children still suffer from serious rights violations, with **150 million children** that are estimated to live in **high conflict zones** and more than **42 million** are likely to be **pushed into extreme poverty** as a result of COVID-19. This could be among the pandemic's most lasting consequences for society as a whole.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Mexico, Italy, Luxembourg, Morocco, Poland and Azerbaijan, European Union.

Mr **José Francisco Calí Tzay** (Maya Kaqchikel from Guatemala), Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples

**Report presented:** [A/75/185](#) – *on the impact of the coronavirus disease on the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples, including increased health risks, as well as the sources of resilience of indigenous peoples, State and indigenous responses to the pandemic and the adverse and disproportionate impact of confinement and emergency measures observed on indigenous peoples (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).*

Indigenous people feel particularly forgotten and left behind, and are **especially vulnerable** to COVID-19, largely due to inadequate access to health care, escalating numbers of evictions from their lands, and high rates of poverty. **Response efforts** must be collaborative; in most countries, indigenous communities have only been included in COVID-19 policy responses at a late stage in their development. In a possible **second wave of COVID-19**. Governments should closely study the lessons learned during the first wave, ensuring better communication with indigenous leaders and fully recognizing the value of traditional knowledge. More **funding** is needed to foster the meaningful participation of indigenous peoples in meetings at the international level. A wider range of countries — especially those in Asia and Africa — should accept **country visit** proposals.

Mr Calí Tzay has already received **more than 150 responses** from Member States to questions he posed about measures taken to contain the pandemic and protect populations. Indigenous communities must guide policy development hand-in-hand with Governments, and **traditional knowledge** should be employed. They must be granted **free, prior and informed consent** before any measures are taken that may impact their lives. The recognition of **indigenous people's land rights** is also essential to their survival "and to the survival of us all".

Mr Calí Tzay pledged to continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on indigenous communities, while also tackling such issues as **conservation** and **climate change**; indigenous peoples' human rights; the impact of **forced and bonded labour**; and the realization of indigenous peoples' rights in **urban areas**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Canada, Denmark, India, Brazil, Mexico, Iran, Chile, Russian Federation, Venezuela, Colombia, China, Algeria, European Union.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 13 October 2020 – Presentation of reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms **Ana María Menéndez** (Spain), Senior Advisor on Policy to the Secretary-General

**Report presented:** [A/75/314](#) – “*Disability inclusion in the United Nations system*”, Report of the Secretary-General.

Ms Menéndez discussed the **main themes** of the Secretary-General’s report **Disability inclusion** in the United Nations system, which outlines the United Nations disability inclusion strategy, as well as advances achieved across the system since it was **launched in 2019**. Many entities are working together towards disability inclusion. The report highlights challenges and opportunities in achieving disability inclusion, notably in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She pointed to the Secretary-General’s [policy brief](#) “**A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19**” was endorsed by many States. A working group was formed which involves civil society representatives.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Armenia, New Zealand.

Mr **Craig Mokhiber**, Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Mr Mokhiber presented **10 reports** of the **Secretary-General** and the **High Commissioner** for Human Rights, among them:

- the Secretary-General’s report on the issue of **child, early and forced marriage** ([A/75/262](#)), which recommends **revising legislation** that encourages the practice;
- the Secretary-General’s report on **missing persons** ([A/75/306](#)) addresses the **applicable international legal framework**, detailing the high number of **missing children**, as well as the impact on children whose family members have gone missing. It **recommends** prevention, preparedness and early action;
- the Secretary-General’s report on the question of human rights in the **administration of justice** ([A/75/327](#)) focuses on the rights of **persons with disabilities** in such matters, underlining the importance of **access to justice** or the **right to a fair trial**;
- the Secretary-General’s report covering the **moratorium on the use of the death penalty** ([A/75/309](#)) which outlines **developments towards the abolition** of that practice and the establishment of **moratoria on executions**, and welcomes **progress made** towards universal abolition, in the context of different legal systems, cultures and religious backgrounds;
- the Secretary-General’s report on the **role of the Ombudsman, mediator and other national human rights institutions** in the promotion and protection of human rights ([A/75/224](#));
- the Secretary-General’s report on **combating intolerance** ([A/75/369](#));
- the Secretary-General’s reports focused on **country-specific human rights situations** in:
  - o the **Democratic People’s Republic of Korea** ([A/75/271](#)),
  - o Islamic Republic of **Iran** ([A/75/287](#)),
  - o **Myanmar** ([A/75/288](#)),
  - o the Autonomous Republic of **Crimea** and the city of **Sevastopol, Ukraine** ([A/75/334](#)).

**Speaking in the general debate:** United States (*reprisals towards human rights defenders*), Armenia (*missing persons*), Ethiopia (*child marriage*), Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Syria.

Mr **Ahmad Amin** Fathalla (Egypt), Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee

**Report presented:** [A/75/40](#) – *Report of the Human Rights Committee 126<sup>th</sup> session (1–26 July 2019), 127<sup>th</sup> session (14 October–8 November 2019), 128<sup>th</sup> session (2–27 March 2020)*

Mr Fathalla presented the Committee’s **annual report**, detailing the body’s work between July 2019 and March 2020. Among the **issues discussed** were the reviews conducted by the Committee, measures to simplify and increase the predictability of the reporting procedure, assistance provided by the OHCHR to States in building their capacity to implement treaty obligations and the effects of COVID-19 on the Committee’s work. The



Committee's ability to address the growing backlog of registered cases will continue to be seriously compromised without a significant increase in support from the Secretariat, which can impact the Committee's credibility in providing timely remedies to victims of human rights violations.

Subsequent **follow-ups** should look into actions taken by the State in response to recommendations. Human Rights Council reports must reflect whether their **recommendations** have been acted on or not. "We are independent experts elected by States Parties to the Covenant," Mr Fathalla stressed, adding: "We are not judges; just mechanisms to assist you in implementing your obligations." Mr Fathalla also noted that the Covenant was adopted 60 years ago, and must be updated with new developments, such as the **inclusion of climate change** and the **environment to the right to life** enshrined in Article 6, for example.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Egypt, European Union, Russian Federation, Mexico, Iran.

**Mr Renato Zerbini Ribeiro Leão** (Brazil), Chairperson of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

In 2020, the Committee considered State Party reports during the 67<sup>th</sup> session. The reviews scheduled for the ongoing 68<sup>th</sup> session have been **postponed** due to the COVID-19 situation. The Committee continues to work on communications, the adoption of lists of issues and lists of issues prior to reporting, and on General Comments, including **relating to land**. Regarding the submission of State Party reports, the Committee continues to face a general situation of **non- and late reporting**, with numerous States being more than 10 years late. Mr Ribeiro Leão called on States Parties to **ratify the Optional Protocol** to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and ensure the realization of these fundamental freedoms. The **General Comment on science** and economic, social and cultural rights was adopted by the Committee in March 2020.

Any action taken in **response to the pandemic** must be done on the basis of scientific methods. States must cooperate with each other and make adequate resources available to health care, and mount a coordinated, broad response to the health crisis, which takes into account the most marginalized people.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Portugal, European Union, Russian Federation

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)*



## 14 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms **Michelle Bachelet** (Chile), United Nations [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

**Report presented:** [A/75/36](#) – *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Aside from weakening vital medical systems, damaging the global economy and slowing development gains, the COVID-19 pandemic has also caused “profound, multi-faceted blows” to fundamental freedoms worldwide, curbing vital civil liberties.

Ms Bachelet presenting the OHCHR **report**, outlined efforts carried out between 1 January and 30 June 2020, across 87 field presences and 12 United Nations peace operations. COVID-19 has led to restrictions on political and civil rights, the freedom of expression and of the media, however, **human rights-based policy** remained profoundly useful. Ms Bachelet called for **sanctions** to be eased to enable medical systems to limit contagion, noting that humanitarian exemptions should be given broad and practical effect, with prompt, flexible authorization for essential medical equipment and supplies. Better international cooperation must be ensured, especially in relation to sharing the benefits of scientific and technological progress, including **access to a vaccine** as a global public good. OHCHR has implemented new **remote monitoring and information management systems** via smartphones, ensuring greater visibility of the pandemic’s impact on vulnerable communities. For example, in **Colombia**, OHCHR teams played a key role in disseminating information through indigenous-led radio stations, with significant participation by women.

Regarding the **right to development**, there was an urgent importance of advancing economic, cultural and social rights, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. **Systemic inequalities** — when unaddressed — remain the root cause of harms. In September 2019, OHCHR launched a “surge initiative” to strengthen human rights-based approaches to **economic policies**. OHCHR was the first to resume meetings after they were brought to a halt by the pandemic, and has reached 200 decisions on **individual complaints** online since March, and continues to integrate human rights into United Nations operations in conflict and humanitarian settings. Additionally, it has stepped up work in the context of **electoral processes**, notably as part of broader early warning and prevention efforts by the United Nations, including in Bolivia, Guyana and Guinea.

Regarding the **budgetary issues affecting the treaty body** review, Ms Bachelet said States should adjust their resources formula to meet the predictable review calendar. A dedicated **online platform** should be fully funded on the regular budget, covering case management, complaint procedure, and compensation of work online by treaty body experts. Measures should be taken to modernize technology in countries that lack connectivity. However, some mandates, including work on the **prevention of torture**, cannot take place online.

A guidance note on civic space will soon be launched to ensure that **civil society** is included in United Nations work. OHCHR is following the situation in Xinjiang and Hong Kong closely and has expressed its concerns bilaterally and publicly. There is a need to monitor the implications of the national security law in Hong Kong and the special administrative regions of **China**, said Ms Bachelet, adding that she hopes to visit Xinjiang. A **cross-regional caucus** is addressing a breach between New York and Geneva. **OHCHR’s immediate priorities** are focused on better response and recovery, and address the needs of groups with intersecting forms of vulnerability. **Disaggregated data** is needed to ensure policies are not leaving people behind.

**Issues brought up during the discussion:** *budgetary limitations, unilateral coercive sanctions, multilateralism, COVID-19 responses, concerns about the unfolding human rights situations in Xinjiang and Belarus, unilateral coercive sanctions, among others*

**Speaking in the general debate:** Venezuela, Russian Federation, Germany, Germany, Canada, United Kingdom, China, Lithuania, Belarus, Chile, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Ireland, Philippines, Mexico, Greece, Indonesia, Canada, Cuba, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Syria, United States, Latvia, Chile, Italy, Afghanistan, Argentina, Pakistan, India, Portugal, Morocco, Qatar, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Algeria, Iran, Republic of Korea, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Georgia, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Poland, Eritrea, Costa Rica, Myanmar, Japan, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Egypt, Mali, European Union.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)



15 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Torture, International Solidarity, Countering terrorism and Independence of judges and lawyers.

Mr **Jens Modvig** (Denmark), Chair of the Committee against Torture

**Report presented:** [A/75/44](#) – *Report of the Committee against Torture 67<sup>th</sup> session (22 July–9 August 2019), 68<sup>th</sup> session (11 November–6 December 2019)*

The Committee has faced serious **obstacles** to its **online work**: time differences between the locations of members; needs for a secure and well-functioning online platform, connectivity for all Committee members and other entities, and proper interpretation in all working languages at all times. These issues **have not been fully resolved** despite the efforts of the Secretariat and bearing in mind the liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations. The Committee is **prolonging its Bureau** until the next in-person session to enable proper consultations and elections. It allowed its three new members – Mr Huawen Liu (China), Mr Erdogan Iscan (Turkey) and Ms Ilvija Puce (Latvia) – to make their **solemn declarations in writing** and then post them on the Committee webpage, enabling them to fully participate in the Committee’s work.

To protect people cooperating with the Committee from **reprisals**, it has issued detailed **guidelines**, endorsed the Guidelines against Intimidation or Reprisals (“San Jose Guidelines”), appointed a rapporteur for reprisals, and created a **public webpage** on related Committee activities. To address the **challenges** common to most treaty bodies – notably a backlog of individual complaints, non-reporting and late reporting by many States, the harmonization of work methods and the implications of COVID-19 – the Committee has participated in the Treaty Bodies Chairpersons Meetings, the 2020 treaty body review process, and the newly created **Treaty Bodies Working Group on COVID-19**.

Mr Modvig welcomed that many components of the **Chairperson’s position paper** were included in the co-facilitator’s report to the General Assembly President, such as a fixed calendar, reviews in the regions, additional meeting time and necessary financial and human resources. 105 State Parties have accepted **the simplified reporting procedure**, which Mr Modvig considers as a great success.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Mexico, Russian Federation, Chile.

Mr **Malcolm Evans** (United Kingdom), Chair of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture

**Report presented:** [CAT/C/69/3](#) – *Thirteenth annual report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*

**No visits** have taken place since last year, because of the **failure of the United Nations to provide the funds** necessary to permit the Subcommittee to carry out its Convention mandate. Parties and signatory States are collectively responsible for this situation. While COVID-19-related travel restrictions pose problems, they do not entirely account for the Subcommittee’s inability to visit places of detention over the past year, since the funding crisis led to the cancellation of the visits already in the last quarter of 2019. The work of better understanding the realities facing those in detention and offering practical advice on preventing mistreatment is “just impossible” to do from afar. The Subcommittee has considered drawing upon local office support, but the main problem is that the Subcommittee is **unable to visit detainees** and speak with them in confidence.

Most States have imposed “draconian measures” restricting access to detainees during the **COVID-19** pandemic. While some States reduced their detained populations, some States did nothing, and others even “manipulated early release schemes” to release those convicted of serious human rights violations. Mr Evans expressed regret that the 2020 review of the treaty body system **has not engaged** with the **Subcommittee’s needs** and expressed hope that it will not be “left behind” in the strengthening process.

The Subcommittee does not dictate what States should put in place in terms of the establishment of the **national preventive mechanisms**, but rather offers advice, but some States overthink what is necessary.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Denmark, Switzerland, European Union, Brazil.





**Mr Nils Melzer** (Switzerland), Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

**Report presented:** [A/75/179](#) – “*Biopsychosocial factors conducive to torture and ill-treatment*” (interim report).

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on torture is **overwhelmed with requests for urgent interventions**. Mr Melzer’s latest report, explores the phenomenon of torture and ill-treatment from the perspective of **neurobiology and social psychology**. Mr Melzer’s analysis suggests that persistent **complacency around torture** and ill-treatment is due to generic neurobiological and psychosocial factors that have shaped human decision-making throughout history, not because of generalized malicious intent or a lack of expertise, resources or normative consensus.

**COVID-19**-related travel restrictions have not allowed Mr Melzer to carry out country missions or official travel since the presentation of his last report to the Human Rights Council in March. However, reports suggest that the pandemic has led to a sharp **deterioration in conditions of detention** in many parts of the world, with detainees unable to protect themselves due to overcrowded cells, inadequate access to masks, sterilizing agents and medical care. “We have also received numerous reports of lethal force, torture and other forms of ill-treatment being used to **enforce lockdown measures**,” said Mr Melzer, reiterating that any measures to address the pandemic must comply with international human rights standards, and never exceed what is necessary and proportionate to achieve a lawful purpose.

The **lack of actual practical engagement** obstructs resolution of these cases. Mr Melzer’s country visits request States to engage in a **prompt and independent investigation**, as required by the Convention, but States’ responses are often not living up to the set-up standards. Having excellent mechanisms is not enough, **compliance, transparency and accountability** in judicial authority should be ensured.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Switzerland, European Union, Morocco, United Kingdom, Lebanon, United States, Russian Federation, Denmark, Czech Republic, France.

**Mr Obiora C. Okafor** (Canada), Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity

**Report presented:** [A/75/180](#) – “*The link between certain forms of contemporary populism and the enjoyment or lack thereof of human rights-based international solidarity*”.

Mr Okafor warned against **populism**, recalling its role in catalysing the events that culminated in the Second World War. In order to understand why certain forms of populism - especially negative ones - have been on the rise in recent years, it is necessary to factor in the fact that, for some decades now, the world has experienced the massive acceleration of **economic and financial globalization**. Today’s globalized economic system has created an **unequal distribution of wealth** and income within States. Worsening **inequality** has, in turn, exacerbated the already existing, often racially motivated, populism. Mr Okafor expressed concern over the **rise of reactionary populism** which is rooted domestically and represents a threat to human rights-based international solidarity. This behaviour manifests itself in troubling ways, including in the **defunding** of and **withdrawal from** multilateral organizations. Countries governed by populist leaders tend to focus excessively on their national audience and its well-being, as illustrated by the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. Only **common international action** and solidarity will enable humanity to pull through the challenges that it currently faces.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Russian Federation, Venezuela, Cuba, China, Azerbaijan.

**Ms Fionnuala Ní Aoláin** (Ireland), Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

The interface between the protection of human rights and security has never been more obviously interdependent than today. Ms Ní Aoláin outlined work done under her mandate during the past year, including the presentation of a report to the Human Rights Council in March on a **visit to Kazakhstan**, which



highlighted positive steps made in **returning women and children** associated with **foreign fighters** to the country. She expressed concern about the **misuse of ill-defined counter-terrorism standards** in various contexts, leading to the marginalization of established legal norms, including those in the 1949 Geneva Conventions, as well as the right to self-determination. In fragile conflict and post-conflict settings, a lack of understanding about the **obligations of international humanitarian law** by many actors - including UN entities - is weakening human rights protections. A worrying **securitizing trend** sidesteps complex questions of lawfulness under international humanitarian law, by reflexively **defining as terrorism non-violent acts**, as well as acts of violence by non-State armed groups in non-international armed conflict. Ms Ní Aoláin addressed the negative impact of counter-terrorism regulation in contexts relating to the **prosecution of genocide and war crimes**, due to the outright denial of international humanitarian law applicability by States in favour of counter-terrorism regulation. “However unpopular”, **repatriation** remains the only international law-compliant means to deliver on the obligations of States to women and children. She also stressed that she remained “unrelentingly appalled” by the **treatment of children** in camps such as Al-Hol and Roj.

Ms Ní Aoláin further noted the importance of **providing adequate funding** to human rights bodies, which are “chronically” underfunded. She called for a **civil society unit** within the Office of Counter-Terrorism. Studies are needed on the issue of **self-determination**, as well as the concerning framing of “**soft laws**” put forth by global counter-terrorism fora. In order to frame responsive policies, including to **right-wing extremism**, it is crucial to listen and engage with the grievances of affected communities, to learn about what propels them to perpetrate violence.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Pakistan, Syria, Mexico, Russian Federation, United States, Switzerland, Ireland, United Kingdom, Qatar, Netherlands, Indonesia, Ethiopia.

Mr **Diego García-Sayán** (Peru), Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

**Report presented:** [A/75/172](#) – “*Disciplinary proceedings against judges for alleged misconduct in the exercise of their functions*”.

Judicial independence can be attacked in a number of ways. Political powers can openly intervene to **control** the judicial system, and **influence** can be exercised to divert justice. But judicial independence can also be affected through means such as the **management of the budget**. In several countries, some categories of judges, especially those who deal with cases of corruption, organized crime or serious human rights violations, are subject to **systematic criminalization, threats and discriminatory treatment** with respect to their professional opportunities. The Special Rapporteur’s **report** analyzes instances in which **disciplinary proceedings** are initiated against judges and magistrates, instead of ensuring their **immunity and immobility** in order to enable them to undertake their duties.

A recent good example of measures taken by **Uzbekistan’s executive branch** to make the judiciary more **autonomous**, in line with recommendations proposed by the Special Rapporteur, **following a visit** to the country.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, Iran, Russian Federation, United States, Turkey, Chile, Peru, Liechtenstein, Mexico.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 16 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Right to development and Unilateral coercive measures

Mr **Zamir Akram** (Pakistan), Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development

The Working Group was **unable to meet** as scheduled in May because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is due to meet in November. In 2019, the Working Group was tasked with developing a **draft legally binding instrument** on the right to development. The Working Group has put together a new “**drafting group**” comprising five internationally recognized, diverse experts. The group received **input** from Member States in response to a detailed questionnaire they received, seeking their views on various elements of the right to development. The group’s initial draft was reviewed by a set of representatives from all geographical regions, and a second iteration was developed. That **draft convention**, which contains a preambular section, as well as 36 articles divided into five parts, is now available on the OHCHR website. Among other things, it contains a series of definitions, including of the draft principles to be covered by the convention and of the responsibilities of duty-bearers, and focuses more on laying down rights and general obligations, than on details that may be subsequently elaborated by a future Conference of States Parties.

The Working Group might begin its **consideration** of the draft instrument at its November session. All views and voiced will be considered, after which a draft convention will be sent to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly for their approval and adoption.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Venezuela, Cuba, Malaysia, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Azerbaijan.

Mr **Saad Alfaragi** (Egypt), Special Rapporteur on the right to development

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/45/15](#) – “*International dimensions of financing for development policies and practices from the perspective of the right to development*”.

Mr Alfaragi’s latest report explores **5 key areas**: the incorporation of participation, consent and information access into the practices of development finance institutions and multilateral development banks; issues pertaining to domestic and international resource mobilization, including illicit financial and public-private partnership; and fostering international cooperation through intergovernmental dialogues on financing for development and tax cooperation, held by the United Nations. Further, the report surveys international and **multilateral responses** to the global **economic impact of COVID-19**, enumerating steps taken by the IMF and the World Bank, and touching on concerns about their scale and effectiveness. There is an **urgent need** for financing in **developing countries**, in particular **African countries**, which lack the fiscal space for an adequate health and financial response.

Good measures taken by some multilateral development banks, should align with the **2030 Agenda** and the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda** of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Public development banks should deliver policies that ensure harmonization with **gender equality**, direct their resources towards **productive sectors** at national and global levels, improve social and human rights safeguards, and **promote stability** by playing a counter-cyclical role. An **inclusive intergovernmental United Nations tax body** should be established, with resources to address illicit financial flows in order to foster domestic resource mobilization.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Cuba, Syria, Russian Federation, European Union, Cameroon (on behalf of the African Group), Malaysia, Venezuela, Iran, China, Algeria, Ethiopia.

Ms **Alena Douhan** (Belarus), Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights

**Report presented:** [A/75/209](#) – “*Negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights in the coronavirus disease pandemic*” (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).

Ms Douhan’s **report** focuses on the impact of unilateral sanctions on the enjoyment of human rights in the course of the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Ms Douhan, since taking up her post earlier this year, has stood committed



to the goal of **minimizing the impact of unilateral sanctions**, which might hamper the delivery of, and access to, **medical equipment** needed to combat the pandemic. The calls on the fact that **humanitarian exemptions** do not work have had little impact and many countries still refuse to lift their sanctions. The **United States** has even enlarged its unilateral measures, including by attempting to accuse China of causing COVID-19 and expanding its Caesar Act.

Ms Douhan described the **challenges** faced by countries such as **Cuba, Syria** and **Iran** as a result of sanctions, including scant resources, limited medical equipment and few testing supplies. Companies and banks around the globe refuse to deal with sanctioned countries, fearing the secondary impact of sanctions, which in turn impedes their ability to combat the pandemic and protect their populations. **Women, children, refugees** and migrants remain the most affected. **Humanitarian exemptions** to sanctions must not be administered based on a “permission” standard, but should instead place the burden of proof on States that seek to block aid.

People living in countries targeted by sanctions are often not aware of the conditions affecting them, therefore, her mandate requires a significant amount of **awareness-raising**. The **United Nations** should be used as a “platform for dialogue and negotiation” between sanctioning and sanctioned countries, with full respect for the provisions of international law.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Zimbabwe, Syria, Venezuela, Russian Federation, Cuba, Iran, Belarus, Malaysia, Azerbaijan, Nicaragua, China.

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)*



19 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Human rights defenders, Peaceful assembly and association, Democratic and equitable international order, Enforced or involuntary disappearances

Ms **Mary Lawlor** (Ireland), Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

**Report presented:** [A/75/165](#) – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (*First report submitted by the current mandate holder*).

Working peacefully to **build humane and just societies** is in the lifeblood of human right defenders. “Despite great personal risk, they continue to work non-violently for the rights of others every single day. Often, they do not know when they get up in the morning if they will still be alive that night,” said Ms Lawlor. The **COVID-19** pandemic has been used across the world as an excuse to **attack defenders**. Many of them, including medics, have been targeted for telling the truth about the virus. On every continent, defenders are **killed** in the hundreds for their **peaceful human rights work**. “These murders are not random acts of violence and are not inevitable,” said Ms Lawlor. Governments must have a main obligation to **intervene**, yet often ignore death threats and fail to protect their people. Her **upcoming report** to the Human Rights Council in March 2021 will focus on the **most marginalized defenders**: women defenders; those working to safeguard the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons; defenders who are themselves children; and advocates with disabilities.

It is wrong for States to attack those who cooperate with the United Nations. Such attempts undermine the entire human rights system. Ms Lawlor called for more effective **protection at the national level**. States should have relevant public policies in place, and demonstrate political commitment to the work of human rights defenders. **Women defenders** have suffered tremendously, including online. Ms Lawlor also reiterated her **commitment to cooperate** with Governments, welcoming recent engagement with **Bahrain, Iran and Burundi**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Liechtenstein, Spain, United Kingdom, Slovenia, China.

Mr **Clément Nyaletsossi Voule** (Togo), Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

**Report presented:** [A/75/184](#): “*Celebrating women in activism and civil society: the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association by women and girls.*”

**Women’s contributions to international peace and development** should be recognized, and their rights to equality and non-discrimination should be protected. Action is needed in protection **women’s movements**, which are on the front line fighting against **COVID-19** and working at the grass-roots level to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Mr Nyaletsossi Voule’s latest report addresses actions communities can take to end **sexual violence** against women during **protests**. It is also important to help women **form associations** and **participate in labour movements**. Violence against women on the **Internet** in many ways stigmatizes women. States and technology companies have the responsibility to act, while the donor community can create a system that allows grass-roots women’s movements to access **funding**.

The mandate of Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association is celebrating its **tenth anniversary**. The mandate has helped create a solid **legal framework** and focused attention on the importance of this fundamental freedom. Despite progress, the tendency to **restrict civil protests is increasing** amid threats, digital attacks, harassment and assassinations. States should recognize peoples’ democratic right to peacefully protest. **Women and girls** face obstacles and **reprisals** in their families, communities, in the digital space and during protests. Referring to **COVID-19**, Mr Nyaletsossi Voule said in April 2020 he launched a set of [10 guiding principles and indications](#). They give States and other key stakeholders recommendations to ensure their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic do not infringe upon the rights to peaceful assembly and association. The guidelines are based on the premise that **civil society** organizations should be seen as strategic partners to fight the pandemic and help countries mitigate, adapt and transform the devastating and long-term socioeconomic effects of this crisis.





**Speaking in the general debate:** Russian Federation, United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Mexico, Estonia (on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries).

Mr **Livingstone Sewanyana** (Uganda), Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/45/28](#)<sup>2</sup> *“Interplay between the economic policies and safeguards of international financial institutions and good governance at the local level”*

All international financial institutions have adopted **environmental and social safeguards** that address **stakeholder engagement**, however, at the project level, stakeholder engagement remains a regular problem in many countries. While several institutions have disclosure policies regarding access to information for the projects they fund, Mr Sewanyana expressed concern over **issues pertaining to confidentiality** whereby — under the pretext of protecting “business-sensitive” information — client interests reportedly prevail over the right to **access information for affected communities**. Critics of development projects funded by these institutions are increasingly the subject of egregious acts of **reprisal**, ranging from intimidation to judicial harassment to killings. These acts occur against the backdrop of a global closing of **civil society space**. **International financial institutions** play a key role in pushing local authorities to **investigate** acts of reprisal and bring the perpetrators to justice. **Human rights impact assessments** need to be undertaken by both lending and borrowing States, and similarly by international financial institutions prior to granting loans with conditionalities.

From the perspective of the **East-West global divide**, **multilateralism** and unity are necessary tools for overcoming poverty and unemployment. It is especially important for countries in Eastern and Western regions to work together during the pandemic, while countries should not **withdraw** from international institutions. Mr Sewanyana also strongly criticized the use of **unilateral coercive measures**, pointing to their devastating impact on citizens in target countries and their role in exacerbating human suffering.

**Speaking in the general debate:** China, Russian Federation, Venezuela, Azerbaijan (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Cuba, Colombia, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Ukraine.

Mr **Mohammed Ayat** (Morocco), Chair of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances

**Report presented:** [A/75/56](#) *on the Committee’s 17<sup>th</sup> session (30 September–11 October 2019) and its 18<sup>th</sup> session (4 May (online) and 7 September 2020)*

A campaign was launched in 2018 to **double the number of ratifications** of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. This goal remains **elusive**. While **Oman** ratified the Convention in June 2019, only **63 of the 193** United Nations Member States have **ratified** the treaty. Mr Ayat underscored the importance of **universal ratification**, stressing that tens of millions of disappearances continue to be perpetrated throughout the world and expressing concern that the number of those committed **daily will soon reach 1,000**. Currently, cooperation with States does **not allow for locating** disappeared persons in 28 of these cases. He recalled that **only 23 of 63 States** Parties recognize the Committee’s competence to receive **individual communications**, noting that **Mexico** became the latest on 6 October 2020. Noting that the Committee examined the **initial reports** of **Bolivia** and **Slovakia**, he said the pandemic unfortunately forced it to **postpone** consideration of reports by Mongolia and Switzerland.

The Committee attempts to create space in which it can engage in dialogue, issuing a great deal of supplementary information and opting for a flexible procedure. Committee members take utmost care to ensure that this procedure does not burden States and are fully committed to their work. Mr Ayat encouraged

<sup>2</sup> Report to the Human Rights Council, also referred to the General Assembly by the Secretariat (see Note [A/75/206](#))



States to **help raise the number of ratifications** and **bolster recognition** of the Committee's authority, adding that **66 States have accepted recommendations** regarding ratifications of the Convention.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Argentina, Iraq, India, Pakistan, Japan.

Mr **Tae-Ung Baik** (Republic of Korea), Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/45/13](#) – *activities of and communications and cases examined by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances from 23 May 2019 to 15 May 2020.*

The Working Group is celebrating its **fortieth anniversary** this year. The pandemic has generated **new contexts of enforced disappearances** and the Working Group has published [eight key guidelines on COVID-19](#) with the Committee on Enforced Disappearances. The guidelines make it clear that “enforced disappearances should remain strictly prohibited in all circumstances,” and that “search and investigation cannot be discontinued.” In its latest **annual report** submitted in September, the Working Group highlighted the **transmission of 699 new cases** of enforced disappearance to **26 States**, including 105 cases transmitted under the **urgent action** procedure. Yet, these figures do not fully represent the magnitude of enforced disappearances. There is an increasing number of reported cases allegedly perpetrated by **non-State actors** that exercise effective control or quasi-governmental functions in certain territories. Some States continue to justify **abductions on foreign soil**, under the pretext of combating terrorism. However, no circumstances whatsoever, including public emergency, may be invoked to justify enforced disappearance. Mr Naik reiterated the call for all States to **ratify** the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

The Working Group's mandate is to help **minimize the suffering** of victims and families and to **urge compliance** by Governments. The **pandemic** is creating greater difficulty as quarantines are being used to carry out forced disappearances. It is important for States to **investigate** and share information with the families.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Pakistan, United States, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, Syria.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 20 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Rights of migrants and Freedom of religion and belief

Mr **Can Ünver** (Turkey), Chair of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

**Report presented:** [A/75/48](#) on the Committee's 31<sup>st</sup> session (2–11 September 2019)

Tightened border restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to the **stranding of thousands of migrants** around the world, including in the Americas, Africa, Asia or at sea or on European shores. Search and rescue operations should continue. Screening and quarantine measures at points of entry must not imply **mandatory detention**, and must adhere to principles of non-discrimination, non-stigmatization, medical confidentiality and human dignity. Recalling a [Joint Guidance note](#) released in May 2020 with Felipe González Morales, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Mr Ünver urged States to “**include migrants** and their families in **economic recovery** policies, taking into account the need for the recovery of remittance flows.” States can consider a **temporary suspension of deportations** or enforced returns in light of the pandemic. A significant number of migrants had been **deported** by various countries, which may expose them and their families to dangerous conditions in transit or in their country of origin. There should be no place to **xenophobic speeches** and expressions which associated the disease with people, including migrants, based on their ethnicity or nationality.

The Committee has established a Working Group for the implementation, review, and follow up to the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**. What is urgently needed is the **implementation** of the provisions of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and more **ratifications**.

According to the United Nations Secretariat, some **positive action** has been taken to address an unfolding situation in the **Horn of Africa**, where stranded migrants have been placed in detention without adequate access to health care. Regarding the **rights of the arbitrarily detained**, Mr Ünver said it has taken a great deal of time and effort for an **initial draft** to be prepared. It will shortly be made public to enhance discussion on it, once comments have been received from United Nations bodies and civil society.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Hungary, Colombia, Turkey, Mexico, Syria.

Mr **Felipe González Morales** (Spain), Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

**Report presented:** [A/75/183](#) – “Ending immigration detention of children and providing adequate care and reception for them”.

Every day, migrant children are detained on the basis of their or their parents' migration status. According to the [United Nations Global Study on Deprivation of Liberty of Children](#), at least **330,000 children are detained** for migration-related reasons every year. Such actions are never in the best interests of the child. Detention damages children's physical, developmental, emotional and psychological health, depriving them of their fundamental rights and their childhood.

There have been **efforts** in many countries to **prohibit, restrict and reduce** the use of immigration detention of children. In **South and Central America**, and **sub-Saharan Africa**, children are not held in detention for migration-related reasons. Member States should end child immigration and detention and provide adequate **alternative care and reception** for all migrant children and their families. **Domestic law** should establish an explicit prohibition of immigration detention of all migrant children under the age of 18, strengthen national child protection and welfare systems and provide resources for the development and implementation of adequate care and reception arrangements.

A focus should be placed on **children's integration** into societies, including through community-based solutions and training of State officials. Measures that do not include detention are completely feasible.



There is a need for a shift in the treatment of migrant children, from a security-based approach to a **human-rights based** one, as child migrant detention clearly flouts international law. **Regularization** is a mechanism that can be used to uphold migrant rights and guarantee access to public services. Child detention cannot be used as a means of deterring migration.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Mexico, European Union, Russian Federation, Luxembourg, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Philippines, El Salvador, Turkey, Bangladesh, Greece, Hungary, Switzerland, Lebanon, Eritrea, Iran, Ethiopia, China.

Mr **Ahmed Shaheed** (Maldives), Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

**Report presented:** [A/75/385](#) – “*Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance*”.

Five years into the implementation of the **Sustainable Development Goals**, patterns of **discrimination** in all countries continue to undermine the pursuit to fulfil them. **COVID-19** has exacerbated systemic discrimination and violations of fundamental human rights. Mr Shaheed’s latest report identifies the ways in which **discriminatory laws and State practices** lead people to become more vulnerable by virtue of their perceived or actual religious or belief identity. Left unchecked, these **inequalities** will undermine progress and reverse gains made towards realizing the Goals. The inequalities need to be addressed through **inclusion** and **combatting discrimination**. **Specific indicators** need to be employed that would highlight the legal, institutional or cultural status of affected populations. **Civil society** can assist in collecting and publishing data disaggregated on the basis of religion or belief.

The **report** presents facts in a non-confrontational, balanced fashion, covering nearly all countries and people of all faith groups. **Intersections** are important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while human rights and development are interrelated. Challenges such as **COVID-19** can quickly lead to **scapegoating minorities**, pointing to the rise in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or anti-Christian and anti-Hindu tendencies.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Egypt, Russian Federation, India, Denmark, United States, Pakistan, Romania, Hungary, Netherlands, Greece, Austria, Malta, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Albania, Cuba, United Kingdom, Poland, Israel, Morocco, Iran, China, Canada, Armenia, European Union

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)



## 21 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Internally displaced persons, Education, Safe drinking water and sanitation and the Right to housing

Ms **Cecilia Jimenez-Damary** (Philippines), Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

**Report presented:** [A/75/207](#) – “*Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change*”.

Human mobility linked to the adverse effects of climate change, including displacement, is **expected to increase significantly** in the coming years. Displacement has an extensive impact on the **enjoyment of human rights** — notably on free movement, housing, food, water, sanitation, health care and education, as well as on cultural and religious rights. The aim of Ms Jimenez-Damary’s latest report is to raise awareness around the “**less dramatic**” effects of climate change that, in the long run, have tremendous effects on people’s lives. The **slow-onset** adverse effects of climate change can turn into a disaster. Often, movement is not entirely voluntary or forced, but rather falls somewhere on a continuum between the two. Movement can be an effective **adaptation strategy** and prevent arbitrary displacement. Slow-onset processes, in turn, can compound **other displacement drivers**, such as violence and armed conflict. **Communities in small island States** and **Arctic ecosystems** are more exposed to slow-onset events and therefore at **higher risk** of disaster displacement. **COVID-19** also has exacerbated people’s vulnerability to disasters in hazard-prone zones and their risk of displacement. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are at heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19 owing to limited access to health care, water, sanitation, food and adequate housing.

A comprehensive **human rights-based approach** to the protection of IDPs should be taken. Ms Jimenez-Damary stressed the essential role of collaboration, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and participation by IDPs in such efforts. **Indigenous peoples** too possess traditional knowledge that all can learn from. States should support the growing consensus around humanitarian-oriented approaches to peace. Ms Jimenez-Damary also provides advice and recommendation to the members of the **High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, European Union, Mexico, Myanmar, Mali, Armenia, Russian Federation, Norway, United States, Georgia, Ethiopia, Switzerland, Spain.

Ms **Koumbou Boly Barry** (Senegal), Special Rapporteur on the right to education

**Report presented:** [A/75/178](#) – “*Interrelations between the right to education and the rights to water and sanitation, including hygiene and menstrual health and hygiene*”.

The issues presented in the report have taken on new urgency, as **COVID-19** impacts educational institutions around the world. In too many situations, the right to water and sanitation is **not fulfilled** in educational institutions, hampering the **freedom to learn**. **570 million children lack** access to basic drinking water at school, **620 million** lack access to basic sanitation facilities and **900 million** lack access to handwashing services. States should **disseminate the guidelines** outlined in her report that apply to water access, toilets, hygiene, menstrual health and hygiene, waste disposal, food preparation and storage, as well as stakeholder accountability. Menstrual health and hygiene plays a crucial role in the ability of **girls and young women** to attend school.

A report on the **impact of COVID-19 on education** was presented to the Human Rights Council and outlined the inequalities within educational systems that have been made visible by the pandemic. **Northern countries** were able to rebuild using a **remote education system**, but countries in the **global South** were unable to do likewise. **250 million young people** do not have access to education — poor people, refugees, nomads, migrants, families in rural areas and people living with disabilities, among them. The pandemic offers an opportunity to build an education paradigm that is **student-focused**. Education has a crucial role to play in





**resolving conflicts**, as it opens the door for discussion. In education, each community should be able to learn in its **own language**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Czech Republic, Bangladesh, Morocco, European Union, Iran, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Hungary, Qatar, France, United States, Syria, Lebanon, Malaysia, Croatia, Austria.

Mr **Olivier De Schutter** (Belgium), Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

**Report presented:** [A/75/181](#) – “The “just transition” in the economic recovery: eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries”.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **between 150 million and 175 million** more people will fall into extreme poverty. Most of them are **workers in the informal sector** or in precarious employment conditions; most of them are **women**. A strong recovery is necessary, and up to \$12 trillion has already been injected into the global economy, primarily by wealthy countries. An acute ongoing **ecological crisis** preceded the pandemic, and **rethinking the current development model** is the only solution to the complex equation facing the world today: how to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities, while at the same time remaining within planetary boundaries. Mr De Schutter outlined **two approaches**: first, to foreground **environmental sustainability** and **social justice** in economic recovery efforts, with a view to reducing inequalities; second, investing in measures that provide a “**triple dividend**”, by reducing the ecological footprint, creating jobs for less qualified people, and ensuring affordable access to essential goods and services to low-income households.

The report also calls for financing an economic recovery that fosters a **reduction in poverty** and **inequalities** through **progressive taxation schemes** and combating tax avoidance, particularly by transnational corporations. These concerns must be considered while making choices in the coming months, as they will have a decisive impact on the next 10 to 15 years, due to the level of investments being made.

Mr De Schutter, responding to China, said he shared their concerns about the disproportionate impact suffered by **ethnic minorities** and **people living in poverty**, who lack sanitation access, live in crowded dwellings, and have manual jobs that cannot be done remotely. **Ecological transition** should be framed in positive terms, while people living in poverty must be involved in shaping the response, so they do not feel like “victims of decisions”. On concerns about the high **cost of green technology**, Mr De Schutter said that the delay in shifting to greener energy is attributable to the \$120 billion spent annually to subsidize fossil energies. In response to the concerns about **tax avoidance** by transnational corporations, he said the tenth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in June 2021 will be a good opportunity to address the issue. The **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development** is working to reach consensus among 137 countries in order to ensure digital companies pay income tax where they make their profits, a move that could generate up to €165 billion in revenue; unfortunately, certain Governments are causing delays in reaching an agreement. Mr De Schutter also said he will cooperate with the **Alliance for Poverty Eradication**, to help bring a(Brazil)bout greater coherence in global governance, and said he looked forward to upcoming visits to **Kyrgyzstan** and **Nepal**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Luxembourg, France, Malaysia, European Union, Mexico, Syria, China, Morocco, Ireland, Eritrea

Mr **Léo Heller** (Brazil), Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

**Report presented:** [A/75/208](#) – “Human rights and the privatization of water and sanitation services”.

**Human rights** and the **privatization of water and sanitation services** are the two activities that traditionally had been undertaken by Governments. However, since the 1980s, privatization has started to expand. The question has been around whether human rights concerns are neutral or agnostic regarding the type of water and sanitation provided. According to this narrative, what matters are the **outcomes of service provision**, and therefore, the human rights framework does not require States to adopt any particular type or delivery model.



Mr Heller's latest **report** challenges this narrative, exploring the **risks** that are specific to privatization and identifying necessary safeguards.

The report looks at **three factors**: profit maximization, the natural monopoly of services and power imbalances. **Potential risks** include not maximizing the use of available resources, unaffordable services, the deterioration of services, the neglect of sustainability and limited accountability. The report highlights **experiences** from around the globe and provides **guidelines** to address and mitigate those risks. States delegating water supply to private entities have to rely on a third party to meet their legal obligation to achieve human rights. The report **does not call for an end to privatization** but calls on States to **establish measures** to limit any impact on human rights.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Brazil, Syria, Russian Federation, Egypt, European Union, Ethiopia, Germany, Spain.

Mr **Balakrishnan Rajagopal** (United States), Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living

**Report presented:** [A/75/148](#) – “COVID-19 and the right to adequate housing: impacts and the way forward” (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).

More than **3.9 billion people** were ordered to stay at home at the peak of the pandemic. However, **more than 1.8 billion people** do not have decent habitation or live in informal settlements where physical distancing is difficult or impossible. Millions **risk losing their home** due to the economic impact of the pandemic. In this context, lacking access to adequate housing is also a health issue — even a life and death issue.

Mr Rajagopal touched on various “**bleak**” **aspects of COVID-19**, including: its unequal distribution, which reflects existing inequalities; an expected spike in evictions, homelessness and mortality, as temporary mitigation measures wind down; and evictions proceeding unimpeded — or even accelerating. States should **halt all eviction proceedings**, house people experiencing homelessness in hotels or vacant housing, and consider rent caps and subsidies for tenants and small landlords. To ensure that those who are **systemically discriminated** against are included in recovery measures, **data disaggregated** by race, gender, caste, religion and gender identity must be collected and publicly shared. **Low-income countries** should receive adequate development financing to ensure they can recover from the economic contraction.

The pandemic has led to a semi-permanent reconfiguration of the **boundary between work and housing**, which are no longer separate. **Decongesting prisons** is a short-term recommendation which is backed by scientific evidence. States must focus on links between the **Sustainable Development Goals** and the framework for achieving adequate housing. More cooperation and **solidarity** is needed among States, given the enormous economic impact of the pandemic.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Russian Federation, Algeria, Mexico.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 22 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Persons with disabilities, Cultural rights and Persons with albinism

Mr **Danlami Basharu** (Nigeria), Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Report presented:** [A/75/55](#) (to be issued).

Persons with disabilities are among the **hardest hit by COVID-19**, largely due to pre-existing circumstances of structural discrimination and exclusion, which increase their vulnerability. The pandemic has highlighted the risks to those in institutions. The subjection of persons with disabilities to **institutionalization** constitutes discrimination on the basis of disability and is incompatible with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Mr Basharu touched on **work done by the Committee** during the pandemic, including a noteworthy case that called for the transformation of the **education system** to make it **inclusive of children with disabilities**, and making public its **inquiry report** into alleged grave or systematic violations by the State party concerned of the rights of persons with disabilities to equal recognition before the law. Mr Basharu commented on the **draft General Comment** on the **right to work and employment for persons with disabilities**. Countries can provide **free data** to enable persons with disabilities to carry out virtual meetings. There must be more **consultation** with persons with disabilities before deciding to adopt policies.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United States, Afghanistan, Republic of Korea, Algeria, Hungary, European Union, Morocco, Colombia, Mexico, United Kingdom.

Mr **Gerard Quinn** (Sweden), Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

**Report presented:** [A/75/186](#) – “Disability-inclusive international cooperation”.

The voice of persons with disabilities to be included in the **collective response to COVID-19**. The pandemic is having a **severe impact on the rights and inclusion** of persons with disabilities, who themselves are among those most affected by the virus. In some countries, evidence suggest that the **majority of COVID-19 deaths** have been [among] persons with disabilities, especially the elderly, said Mr Quinn. Many find themselves in situations of heightened risk, including in **segregated institutions**. Many have been disadvantaged by **Government responses** to the pandemic, cut off from support and services, or dropped out of school or lost their jobs. Some have become **homeless** and millions risk falling into poverty or extreme **poverty**. The long-term **mental health impact** of COVID-19 can be devastating. Disability-inclusive international cooperation involves the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in **decision-making**. States should consider adopting targets for disability-specific **funding** and guidelines on **inclusive budgeting**.

Mr Quinn expressed his intention to integrate the disability perspective into **collective challenges**, such as armed conflict, climate change, peace processes and COVID-19. While COVID-19 has revealed deep structural inequalities, it is also giving rise to **new phenomena**, such as pandemic-triggered homelessness. Noting that there are at least 16 conflicts ongoing in the world, Mr Quinn expressed deep concern over their impact on persons with disabilities and reiterated his intention to maintain the conversation on this issue, both in the mandate and the Security Council, citing the 2019 **Security Council resolution on the protection of civilians with disabilities** during armed conflict.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Hungary, United Kingdom, Philippines, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Guatemala, Spain, Korea, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Qatar, Poland, United States, Georgia, Finland, Ireland, Algeria, Malta, Bangladesh, China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Ms **Karima Bennoune** (Algeria/United States), Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

**Report presented:** [A/75/298](#) – “Climate change, culture and cultural rights”.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the **climate emergency** is the leading global threat to cultural rights. These freedoms could be simply wiped out in many cases, and “we may lose centuries of human cultural achievement,” said Ms Bennoune, a reality that has not been sufficiently acknowledged in climate change



initiatives. It is a matter of international legal obligation to do so. A **complete mapping** of cultural rights **damage** and the development of strategies for responding to it is needed. Ms Bennoune described her mission to the **Maldives**, where she visited a centuries-old cemetery containing the graves of those involved in bringing Islam to the country. Locals fear that because of the sea-level rise, the site will be gone in 10 years.

While the climate emergency threatens all human cultures, the impact hits specific peoples and places disproportionately, notably **small island developing States**, the **Sahel** and the **Arctic**. Climate change-induced destruction of cultural heritage has particularly significant effects on **indigenous peoples**, for whom connections to land and ecosystems play such an important role. **International cooperation** and **funding** are needed, and so is local empowerment.

“We are facing the reality that some **small island nations** may disappear in the coming decades, losing their culture and identity. We may face wiping out entire ways of life she stressed”, said Ms Bennoune. She also drew attention to **positive examples**, such as in Cuba, where the traditional knowledge is involved in the use of pile dwellings during floods; codification of the right to a healthy environment **in national laws**, bringing together **policymakers** in the fields of culture and the environment and viewing climate change through a human rights perspective. It is also important to take a **gender-based approach**, as culture can sometimes be an obstacle for women. For example, women in some places do not learn to swim, and therefore are more at risk during natural disasters. “If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught anything, it should have taught that waiting to respond to risk until it has manifested a very dangerous, sometimes deadly, approach”, said Ms Bennoune.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Russian Federation, United States, China, European Union, Greece, Cuba, Algeria.

Ms **Ikponwosa Ero** (Nigeria), Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism

**Report presented:** [A/75/170](#) – “*Guidance to Member States on measures and best practices to ensure the protection of the rights of persons with albinism worldwide*”.

Persons with albinism are an “underrepresented group”. While racism and racial discrimination are at the forefront of human rights debates, these issues are often confined to dialogues in the United States and Europe — and rarely addressed in Asia, Africa and South America, where **persons with albinism face racial discrimination** on a daily basis. Among the reasons why persons with albinism are underrepresented is due to their numbers: they are a **minority quantitatively speaking**. This fact is juxtaposed with the hypervisibility of albinism. In addition, persons with albinism are underrepresented due to **culturally instituted myths** and **erroneous beliefs**, often so strong that they become a structural barrier to participation. They also lead to normalized **stigmatization** and **extreme forms of discrimination**, including attacks, ritual killings, abandonment and trafficking, crimes that have been reported in the hundreds. Persons with albinism often have a visual impairment, leading to **intersecting discrimination** — based on colour and disability — with cases that have been reported in Africa, as well as in India, Pakistan, Japan, Turkey, Brazil, Mexico and Colombia. During the pandemic, they have been stigmatized as “**carriers of the coronavirus**,” banished from villages in India, Ghana and Kenya, and prevented from using sanitation stations in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe. There is a need for **action plans** with time-bound measures to protect persons with albinism, and **specific budgets** to ensure their implementation by Government agencies and civil society representatives.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Ghana, European Union, Namibia, Malawi, Brazil, Israel.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 23 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Freedom of opinion and expression, Foreign debt, as well as on Myanmar and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

Ms **Irene Khan** (Bangladesh), Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

**Report presented:** [A/75/261](#) – “Academic freedom” (report by former Special Rapporteur, Mr David Kaye).

Ms Khan recalled a recent horrific incident in which a **teacher in France** was decapitated on the street for what he had taught in classroom, calling a chilling reminder of the violence surrounding free expression and a tragic example of the kind of risks academics face when they seek to push the boundaries of knowledge, debate and discourse. **Academic freedom** is protected by a wide range of human rights, notably freedom of opinion and expression. It includes individual human rights as well as the obligation to respect the autonomy of academic institutions so they can carry out their functions **without political interference**. In many countries academics face social harassment, retaliation, repression, imprisonment and sometimes even death for the issues they pursue, the ideas they explore, the questions they raise and the methodologies they bring to bear on public policy. The autonomy of academic institutions is also being undermined by Governments. **Censorship** kills scholarship. Attacks on academic freedom corrode the pillars of democratic life, scientific progress and human development. The **report** recommends that States **revise laws** and ensure the **autonomy** of academic institutions. The United Nations human rights system should include considerations of academic freedom when reviewing States’ compliance with human rights norms, while academic institutions should stand up for the rights of all members of their communities. The report places the responsibility both on States and the institutions themselves to maintain high standards of **autonomy through transparency**. Governments send a strong message when they attack the autonomy of public institutions. On **national security concerns** in the context of academic freedom, Ms Khan underscored the importance of addressing the issue very narrowly due to the restrictions demanded by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and also because the stifling of debate cripples democratic society.

As a newly appointed Special Rapporteur, Ms Khan will focus on **four thematic areas**: human rights and sustainable development, media freedom and safety of journalists, a gender lens on freedom of opinion and expression, and digital technology.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Netherlands, Austria, United States, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, Syria, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, Egypt, Lithuania (on behalf of the Nordic countries), Turkey, France, Poland, Canada, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, China, European Union.

Ms **Yuefen Li** (China), Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.

**Report presented:** [A/75/164](#) – “Addressing, from a human rights perspective, the debt-related problems of developing countries caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic” (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).

Many **developing countries** entered the COVID-19 pandemic with high public and private debt levels. That made it hard for Governments to address the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, or to slow the spread of the coronavirus due to **limited fiscal space** and foreign reserves. Normally, poor countries can reduce their debt burden when the global economy is benign and commodity prices stable. However, the global economy now is in a **deep recession**, generating fears of a worldwide systemic debt crisis, with more sovereign and private defaults to come. Ms Li recommended a “**debt standstill**”, including extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, as well as more international cooperation to prepare for a robust, sustained and inclusive global economic recovery. Governments must also focus on ensuring **human rights** and **fighting inequality** as they respond to the pandemic, particularly in their allocation of financial resources.





The pandemic has caused **supply and demand side shocks**, since countries' earning potential and gross domestic product (GDP) both have been reduced, leading to an **economic recession**. For **small island developing States**, some 70% of revenue depends on **tourism**, a sector that has nearly ground to a halt. Under international law, debt servicing is **secondary** to this type of life-or-death problem. International support and multilateralism are urgently needed. **Unilateral coercive actions** are detrimental to the common fight against COVID-19.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Antigua and Barbuda (on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) ), Russian Federation, Cuba, Argentina, China, Ethiopia.

Mr **Fernand De Varennes** (Canada), Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

**Report presented:** [A/75/211](#) – “Effective promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities”.

The **absence of clarity** on the scope and significance of the **four recognized categories of minorities** in United Nations instruments (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic) has been a stumbling block for the full and effective realization of their human rights. It has been used to **restrict** those who can claim human rights protection as members of a minority. The **report** contains a comprehensive framework that aims to **end such gaps and ambiguities**, and makes clear that a minority's existence does not depend on a State's approval. A **linguistic minority**, for example, exists objectively regardless of constitutional or legal status, and a **religious or belief minority** includes a wide range of religious, non-religious, non-theistic and other beliefs, including animists, atheists and agnostics, among others. Moreover, categories of national and ethnic minorities referred to in United Nations instruments, while closely related, are **not synonymous**. The former includes categories of individuals on the basis of origin, descent, or culture, and therefore includes **nomadic and caste-based groups**. The study also emphasizes the importance of the **free self-identification** of individuals in all these categories. **Statelessness** is first and foremost a minority issue, given that more than three quarters of the world's more than 10 million recognized stateless are persons belonging to minorities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees campaign to **eradicate statelessness** by 2024 risks **failing** “abysmally”, warned Mr De Varennes, “since global statelessness may in fact be increasing significantly by millions in the near future, contributing to a potential humanitarian crisis and destabilizing situation.” He also expressed great concern over reports in **Assam, India**, that legislation, regulations and policies in that state and other parts of the country are likely to exclude mainly members of Muslim and Bengali minorities from citizenship. The spectre of **violence and hatred** is “skyrocketing” since the onset of the **COVID-19** pandemic, with many social media attacks targeted towards persons belonging to **minority groups**, including Romas, Dalits, Jews and Asians. This issue will be the priority of Mr De Varennes's mandate, including through a release of a **practical guideline** on the scourge of **hate speech** affecting minorities, following regional consultations and the Forum on Minority Issues.

In 2021, Mr De Varennes will also prepare **guidelines** for States and stakeholders on **human rights in education in minority languages**. **Conflict prevention** will be another theme of his work in 2021, as it is increasingly clear that the rights of oppressed minorities must be upheld to achieve peace, security and justice. **2022** marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and will be a good time to evaluate how to improve respect for the rights of minorities.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Hungary, Mexico, Austria, India, Pakistan, Russian Federation, United States, China, European Union.

Ms **Christine Schraner Burgener** (Switzerland), Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar

**Report presented:** [A/75/295](#) – “The role of the Secretary-General and his good offices in support of democratic consolidation in Myanmar, including towards a more inclusive society”.



The upcoming November elections in Myanmar will take place under challenging circumstances that have been exacerbated by the **COVID-19** crisis, which has particularly affected **Yangon**, Myanmar's biggest city, and the conflict-affected **Rakhine State**. The **democratic transition** requires full civilian control over governance, however, significant **military influence** continues in both the legislature and the administration. The Myanmar armed forces, Tatmadaw, have resisted constitutional reforms aimed at addressing this issue. Greater action is needed to address the underlying causes of **communal and ethnic violence**. Festering issues underpinning the tensions will continue to threaten Myanmar's reform process and the region if the Government does not take a more **decisive stance** against incitement and **discrimination**. An already challenging operating environment for **refugee returns** is further **aggravated** by the intensifying conflict between Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army, renewed activities by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, COVID-19 and electioneering. Despite continued appeals for a cessation of hostilities, the fighting rages on and has affected the northern parts of Rakhine State. Rohingya refugees and internally displaced persons cite the lack of safety, effective citizenship pathways and freedom of movement and the inability to return to their places of origin as **major impediments** to their repatriation. Free movement, access to livelihood opportunities and basic services are still restricted for Rohingya and other displaced communities confined in camps in Rakhine State and other ethnic areas. Concerns have already emerged about the **disenfranchisement of communities** across Myanmar, highlighting the urgent need to address the questions of statelessness and citizenship.

Progress had been made on several **quick-impact projects**, notably a Burmese curriculum introduced in Cox's Bazar – but these initiatives ended due to the pandemic. If the conflict is brought to a halt, the Secretary-General's office will work with Myanmar to implement the **recommendations of the Kofi Annan Advisory Commission** – chiefly, tackling the citizen laws and enabling the Rohingya to access health, education, and freedom of movement. On **accountability**, Ms Schraner Burgener reiterated the Secretary-General's call for Myanmar to cooperate with existing independent investigative bodies. Moreover, one big issue remains: the Government's ability to **change the Constitution**, which can hinder the democratization of the country.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Myanmar, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Malaysia, Bangladesh, United Kingdom, Liechtenstein, European Union, Russian Federation, Denmark, United States, Philippines, Czech Republic, Thailand, Switzerland, Indonesia

**Mr Thomas H. Andrews** (United States), *Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*

**Report presented:** [A/75/335](#) – *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).*

The situation of human rights in Myanmar is grave. The Government has taken some **positive steps**, including its engagement with the International Court of Justice and public condemnation of hate speech, while Parliament has demonstrated its willingness to investigate human rights issues. The Government also is working to address escalating rates of COVID-19 and rebuild its health care system. Mr Andrews noted that he has received reports about the **indiscriminate shelling** of villages and non-military targets in Rakhine State, said jet fighters, naval vessels and ground troops have been involved, and there has been systematic burning of homes and villages of suspected Arakan Army sympathizers. The allegations of the **targeting of innocent villagers**, including children, must be immediately and thoroughly **investigated**. As of September, nearly **90,000 civilians** had been displaced in Rakhine and Chin States due to clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army. While commending the Government for aspiring to laudable **election standards**, Mr Andrews said it is already clear that the elections will fail to meet them, as an election cannot reflect the will of the people when the right to vote – is denied based on race, ethnicity or religion. Election officials should consider measures to accommodate voters living in war-torn areas. The Union Election Commission announced that for security reasons, **elections will be cancelled** in several areas, including a majority of the townships in Rakhine State. In addition, pandemic-related restrictions on candidates and the media have created significant hardships for voters seeking to make informed decisions. One of the few remaining sources of information is the “mVoter2020” app, which identifies candidates by characteristics including, regrettably, their race and



religion. Mr Andrews also received reports about a coordinated campaign to **arrest students** for engaging in peaceful protests that are critical of the military or Government with dozens of students have reportedly been charged, or are facing arrest, for enjoying these basic rights.

**Citizenship rights** and **freedom of movement** are critical for resolving the Rohingya crisis. Free association, free expression and a free press are the “lifeblood” of a **free and fair election** – and these rights are being denied to people in Myanmar in various ways. When a new Government takes office, the laws that obstruct these rights must be re-examined and overturned so that peaceful assembly and a free press can be established.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Myanmar, Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Canada, United Kingdom, Thailand, Turkey, Bangladesh, European Union, Belarus, Cambodia, Luxembourg, Norway, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Viet Nam, Malaysia, Czech Republic, China, Malta, United States.

Mr **Tomás Ojea Quintana** (Argentina), Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

**Report presented:** [A/75/388](#) – “Recent developments in the human rights situation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the context of the threat of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak and of progress made towards peace, security and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula”.

There is **no improvement** in the protection and accountability for serious human rights violations in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. **No cases of COVID-19** have been officially confirmed and authorities continue to prevent an outbreak, a success made possible in part by a 7.4% increase in the health budget. The scale of the pandemic is still unknown, and the limited capacities of health facilities are a concern. The **humanitarian situation** is dire; the prolonged border shutdown with China since January has resulted in a drastic **decline in trade and commercial activities**, affecting the overall economy and people’s livelihoods. In August and September, the country was hit hard by a series of **natural disasters**, which damaged infrastructure, houses and crops. The Government should to immediately review policies, such as the use of live ammunition as a way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by restricting people from entering the country, as appears to have been the case with an official from the Republic of Korea who was recently killed by security forces. The **State-controlled labour system** applies to all citizens from the age of 17, when students graduate from high school, all men are obliged to provide **military service** for 13 years and women for 8 years. A system for mobilizing young people through “**shock brigades**”, unpaid paramilitary labour brigades primarily deployed to construction sites, including power plants, is in place. After completing school or military service, every citizen is assigned to a workplace by the State. Continuation of the State-assigned employment system is of great concern in relation to the right to work, which in some instances may constitute **forced labour**, according to international human rights standards. Authorities must address these cases of **enforced disappearances** and provide accurate information to the families of victims about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives.

“The reality is they are isolating themselves,” said Mr Ojea Quintana, adding that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is planning to reject humanitarian assistance from the international community and instead call for advancing progress in the country under the **right to development**. He urged the **Security Council** to demonstrate more coherence when working to facilitate human rights, development, denuclearization and humanitarian assistance. **Sanctions** are detrimental and discussions about lifting them must not be avoided.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, Norway, Venezuela, Cuba, China, Russian Federation, Nicaragua, Iran, Syria, Belarus, Japan, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Germany, Viet Nam, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, United States, European Union.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 26 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Iran, Burundi, Eritrea, Belarus, Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Somalia

Mr **Javaid Rehman** (United Kingdom/Pakistan), Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

**Report presented:** [A/75/213](#) – “*Observations concerning patterns, trends and progress made in the protection of human rights*”.

Systematic violations of human rights and impunity continue to occur in Iran. These conclusions are drawn from an **investigation** into violent Government **crackdown** against November 2019 and January 2020 **protests**, involving the use of torture against demonstrators, harassment of victims calling for justice and a lack of accountability for those responsible. “The excessive and lethal force used by security forces against the nationwide protests amounted to the **worst incident of State violence** in Iran in decades,” stressed Mr Rehman. This blatant disregard for Iran’s obligation to protect the right to life and the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly led to more than **300 verified deaths**, including women and children. The actual death toll is likely higher. **No investigation** consistent with international standards has been conducted to hold perpetrators to account. The victims’ families have called for justice yet instead faced intimidation and arrest by the authorities. “Equally disturbing are consistent reports from detained protesters of how they were **tortured** into forced confessions, including accounts of physical beatings, sexual assaults, solitary confinement and detention of relatives,” said Mr Rehman, pointing also to the many **forcibly disappeared**. Some protesters, such as Amirhossein Moradi, Mohammad Rajabi and Saeed Tamjidi, have been **sentenced to death** based on torture-induced confessions and after unfair trials, while Navid Afkari faced arbitrary execution on 12 September 2020 over his involvement in August 2018 protests.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Iran (*country concerned*), Syria, United States, Norway, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Pakistan, Switzerland, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Nicaragua, Cuba, China, Burundi, Venezuela, Belarus, Eritrea, European Union.

Mr **Doudou Diène** (Senegal), Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/452/32](#)<sup>3</sup> – *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi*

The **report** is based on **300 statements** from victims and witnesses of human rights violations in Burundi **since 2019**. While the **2020 electoral process** did not see mass violence, violations were committed, including execution, arbitrary arrests and detentions. The Government relied on national intelligence agents, police and local administrators to **weaken the political opposition** party whose most active members were arrested, detained, tortured and killed, in some cases. **Hate speech** with an ethnic component was tolerated, the press was muzzled, and the population closely controlled during the electoral process. The Commission also completed an analysis of **sexual violence against men**, which occurs primarily during detention and is organized or at least tolerated by senior intelligence officials. The Commission completed an analysis of **violations against children**, which have a compounding and lasting effect. **Economic malfeasance** underpins Burundi’s economy, with poor governance, illegal acquisition of equity, customs fraud and illicit wealth gained by officials. The new Government should take credible measures to **improve the situation** there, by freeing human rights defenders and journalists, guaranteeing the freedom of press, civil opponents and ending the omnipresence and impunity of the Imbonerakure.

The decision by the Human Rights Council to **renew the Commission’s mandate** was exceptional and demonstrates the international interest in the human rights situation in Burundi. The country is in a region where **violations have a long history** extending back to the colonial period, after which politicians instrumentalized human rights violations. In that historical context, the question is around whether the change

<sup>3</sup> Report to the Human Rights Council, also referred to the General Assembly by the Secretariat (see Note [A/75/270](#))





of Government will lead to a qualitative change in the situation on the ground. **No international organizations** have been authorized to return to the country.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Burundi (*country concerned*), Cameroon, China, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Venezuela, Germany, Namibia, Eritrea, Netherlands, Gabon, European Union.

Ms **Daniela Kravetz** (Chile), Special Rapporteur on human rights conditions in Eritrea

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/452/23](#)<sup>4</sup> – *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*

It has been **two years since the peace agreement** with Ethiopia and the lifting of United Nations sanctions on Eritrea. While Eritrea has since **strengthened its cooperation** with neighbouring countries, its increased regional engagement has **not translated into reforms**. There has been **no progress** on the issue of **political prisoners**, with numerous cases of individuals still remaining in Eritrean prisons, with no prospect of release, including Dawit Isaak, a Swedish-Eritrean journalist who has been held for more than 19 years, without charge or trial. Eritrea continues to severely **restrict civil liberties**. Independent human rights defenders and independent journalists cannot work freely in the country. Authorities also impose **restrictions on religious communities**. Despite advances, such as the release of a large group of Muslim men in August, Eritrea has yet to ensure full respect for the rights to **peaceful assembly and association**. The Government remains **unwilling to cooperate** with the Special Rapporteur's mandate and has refused to meet with Ms Kravetz over the past year. Eritrea has also not made progress in its cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Addressing Eritrea's concerns about an **unfair and politicized mandate**, Ms Kravetz said "I have no political agenda whatsoever and no interest in a specific political outcome in the region." Rather, her only intention is to **raise issues before the Human Rights Council**. She pointed to Eritrea's refusal to cooperate and expressed disappointment over its **lack of commentary on the situation of political prisoners**. Ms Kravetz also underscored the need for **more opportunities for young people**, as well as efforts to take down the barriers to **religious rights**. There is also need to improve access to **justice for women**, as well as **access to land**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Eritrea (*country concerned*), Venezuela, Cameroon, United Kingdom, European Union, Greece, Iran, Germany, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Belarus, Burundi, China, Sudan.

Ms **Anaïs Marin** (France), Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus

**Report presented:** [A/75/173](#) – *"Administration of justice, in particular juvenile justice, and the judicial harassment of human rights defenders, journalists and other members of civil society in Belarus"*.

For almost three decades, Belarus has failed to ensure the **independence of its judiciary**, implying that the rule of law remains unguaranteed, and human rights, unprotected. That is evidenced in the procedures for **appointment, tenure and removal of judges**. In stark contradiction with the principle of separation of powers, in Belarus the President retains absolute discretion to appoint or remove judges, and to prosecute or dismiss a judge without triggering any disciplinary proceedings. The **excessive control of the executive branch** also extends to prosecutors and manifests itself in prosecutions being undertaken, or prevented from being launched, for political reasons. Prosecutors can extend detention periods without a judicial control, while Belarusian legislation significantly limits the **independence of lawyers**, whose licensing and activities are tightly controlled. That often leaves human rights defenders without a lawyer to defend them in court.

Ms Marin's latest **report** also raises concerns about the legislative framework pertaining to **juvenile offenders**, especially children convicted for **non-violent drug offences**. Prison terms are disproportionately long; health care standards for juveniles in detention are low. While **protests following the 9 August election** remained

<sup>4</sup> Report to the Human Rights Council, also referred to the General Assembly by the Secretariat (see Note [A/75/260](#))





largely **peaceful** to date, they have been violently **repressed** by anti-riot police and unidentified individuals who lawlessly **abduct** people in the streets. Hundreds were reportedly beaten, intimidated, tortured or ill-treated while in detention. Belarus must promptly **stop repressing** its own people. Dissenting voices should not be silenced, but instead be listened to, because their main claim is, after all, that rule of law be respected.

Ms Marin rejected **accusations of manipulation**, pointing out that she is an independent researcher with 12 years of experience on the topic of Belarus. The most important **dialogue** should happen between the Government and civil society, including political opposition. Immediate steps should include the **release of all arbitrary detainees** including prominent opposition leaders. The **separation of powers** must be respected, while the executive must stop interfering with the justice system. Regarding the situation of **juvenile detainees** in the context of the **COVID-19** pandemic, there are no physical distance provisions, most of the trials have been held behind closed doors, visits have been restricted, access to water is limited, and no masks or gloves are provided to prisoners. The international community must continue to monitor the situation in Belarus and support **civil society organizations** which remain resilient, constructive and non-violent.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Belarus (*country concerned*), European Union, Lithuania, Canada, Azerbaijan, Cuba, Russian Federation, Estonia, Egypt, Ireland, Poland, United Kingdom, Iran, Syria, Philippines, Latvia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Czech Republic, China, Nicaragua, Kazakhstan, Eritrea, United States, Austria, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Venezuela, Switzerland, Tajikistan.

Mr **Michael Lynk** (Canada), Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967

Mr Lynk said he has received **no cooperation from Israel**, the occupying Power, in the conduct of his mandate. Since his first appointment in May 2016, Israel has never granted permission for him to travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territory or replied to any of his many communications. **COVID-19** has widened the existing **inequalities** inherent in the occupation, straining the already overstretched health care systems serving the Palestinians. Palestinians in the West Bank's Area C — which is under Israel's full security and civil control — and in occupied East Jerusalem face innumerable barriers to **accessing decent health care**. In Gaza, there is a lack of ventilators and hospital beds to address COVID-19. Israel must end its **air, sea and land blockade** of the area — a siege that “amounts to collective punishment, a prohibited activity under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention”.

**International accountability** is the missing key needed to address the 53-year blockade, yet the United Nations and other authoritative international institutions have rarely taken steps to hold Israel accountable through effective counter-measures and sanctions. The Fourth Geneva Convention applies in full, and Israel is required to uphold all its related obligations. Mr Lynk stressed that “the acquisition of territory by force or war is inadmissible” and that “the creation and expansion of the Israeli settlements is a serious violation of the absolute prohibition under international law”, he pointed to Israel's **refusal to accept any of these principles**. At least six Security Council resolutions since 1979 state that these measures have “no legal validity” and are a “flagrant violation of international law”. Yet, Israel has taken no steps to satisfy its obligations. Among other things, Mr Lynk called for a complete **prohibition on the import** of all goods and services originating from Israel's settlements into the international marketplace.

Mr Lynk said his recommendations are often drawn from the Security Council's recommendations on **Namibia**, a conflict that has many striking similarities with Palestine. Similar to what the Council stated about conditions in Namibia, he considers Israel's presence in the Palestinian territory to be illegal. Mr Lynk further called on all corporate enterprises regulated by the international community to **cease any trade relationships** with Israeli settlements. To **improve ground conditions**, there should be firm **opposition to Israel's demolition of homes** and properties in the West Bank built by the European Union, non-governmental organizations or international institutions. Mr Lynk called for an end to the Gaza blockade and enactment of international **accountability measures**.



**Speaking in the general debate:** State of Palestine, Ireland, Azerbaijan, Senegal, Turkey, Russian Federation, Cuba, United Kingdom, Norway, Iran, Ireland, Malaysia, Syria, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Venezuela, Qatar, Malta, China, European Union.

Ms **Isha Dyfan** (Sierra Leone), Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/45/52](#)<sup>5</sup> – *Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).*

The **ongoing armed conflict**, frequent terrorist attacks, and chronic humanitarian crises continue to take an unacceptable **toll on civilians** in Somalia. The conflict has also resulted in **grave violations against children** and in **conflict-related sexual violence** against women and girls, especially in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees and in host communities, rarely generating any accountability. The **COVID-19** pandemic and **desert locust** infestation have placed an additional burden on Somalia's already fragile infrastructure and institutions. The country has made strides in advancing its human rights agenda through the **adoption of legal policy frameworks** to protect and promote the rights of its people. However, there are clear **signs of regression and pushback**, on the legislative front, especially in the areas of women and children's rights. As Somalia gears up for **parliamentary and presidential elections**, the Somali authorities should strengthen protection of the democratic space by guaranteeing the rights to freedom of expression and opinion and creating a safe and enabling environment where **journalists** can operate independently. The appointment of a **Special Prosecutor** to investigate and follow up on the killings of journalists to bring to justice those who organized, planned and carried out the killings, is a positive step in that direction.

Ms Dyfan expressed regret that the one-person-one-vote model did not take place, but pointed out that the **electoral law was passed**, which will have a bearing on the next election. The changes that have taken place in terms of a **30% quota for women** will be implemented, with the support by the civil society. It is important to ensure the participation of **youth** and **minorities**. In the face of **COVID-19**, the education rates of girls have dropped.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, United States, United Kingdom, Djibouti.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)

<sup>5</sup> Report to the Human Rights Council, also referred to the General Assembly by the Secretariat (see Note [A/75/239](#))



27 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Truth, justice, reparation, Transnational corporations, Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and Safe and healthy environment

Mr **Fabian Salvioli** (Argentina), Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

**Report presented:** [A/75/174](#) – “Aspects of adopting a gender perspective”.

Mr Salvioli’s latest **report** focuses on the need for a **gender perspective** in the design and implementation of national transitional justice strategies and mechanisms, including the processes of truth-seeking, accountability, reparation, guarantees of non-repetition and memorialization. Such an approach is needed to provide a comprehensive response to **women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons** who are victims of serious human rights violations, in order to ensure their participation in such processes. The report outlines **recommendations to Governments** for the implementation of gender-responsive transitional justice mechanisms. In order to **guarantee non-recurrence**, States must modify discriminatory legal provisions, improve representation by gender, develop training programmes for their officials, and revise manuals and educational materials to move away from structures that reproduce patriarchal patterns. **Memorialization** processes also must fully include a gender perspective. Women, girls, LGBT persons and victims of gender-based violence should **participate effectively** in the design and implementation of transitional justice programmes. Mr Salvioli said there were several ways in which **civil society** could be involved, drawing attention to the **positive practices** of Colombia’s transitional justice process, and important contributions of civil society in Brazil. To overcome **impunity**, providing capacity training for justice officials is essential.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Argentina, United States, China, Switzerland.

Ms **Anita Ramasastry** (United States), Chair of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises

**Report presented:** [A/75/212](#) – “Business, human rights and conflict-affected regions: towards heightened action”.

Ms Ramasastry underscored the need for **heightened due diligence** from businesses operating in **conflict-affected contexts**, to ensure their activities do not fuel tension and violence. It is well documented that the worst forms of business-related human rights abuses tend to take place in conflict-affected areas. The Working Group launched a **project in 2018** to shed light on **practical steps** that States and businesses can take to prevent and address such abuses in these settings, through input and consultations with States, civil society organizations, business representatives and experts all over the world. The report outlines **measures** that can be taken to avoid stimulating or exacerbating conflict or negatively impacting peacebuilding, including proposed triggers and indicators that should lead to heightened action by States, business, and by the United Nations. The report also examines **specific challenges** posed by post-conflict reconstruction, including access to remedy and transitional justice. It flags **three areas** for the General Assembly’s attention:

- the need for United Nations bodies to develop a strategy on business, peace and security, with support from States;
- a better understanding of how businesspeople and companies should participate and be held accountable as part of a transitional justice process; and
- a multi-stakeholder initiative to set out guidance and standards for the responsible provision of cyberservices in conflict-affected areas.

Ms Ramasastry welcomed the “tremendous support” for the UN **Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights** and said the Working Group will ensure they are part of any engagement in peace and reconstruction efforts. An elaboration on how businesses can **conduct due diligence** has been recently posted on the Working Group’s website. Businesses can use their leverage in contributing to peacebuilding, in addition to acting as



an economic engine. There is a crucial need for a multi-stakeholder initiative to develop standards in dealing with the issue of **hate speech**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Russian Federation, European Union, Luxembourg, Spain, Qatar, United States, Japan, Switzerland, China, Ireland.

Ms **Agnès Callamard** (France), Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

**Report presented:** [A/75/384](#) – “*Mass graves, highlighting the multitude of sites of mass killings and unlawful deaths across history and the world*”.

Dozens of **mass graves** were found in 2020 alone — one containing the remains of an estimated **30,000 people** — and yet there is **no single, coherent human rights framework** for the treatment of these graves. The current approach, tied to the standards governing enforced disappearances and forensic investigations, is too narrow. The **report** sets out a comprehensive, normative account of all rights and obligations, and stresses that the treatment of the sites of mass graves must be rooted in the **principle of non-discrimination**. “Those marginalized or persecuted in life are also those who are at greatest risk of never being identified in death,” said Ms Callamard. A **rights-based process** demands listening, debating and assessing the diverse claims over mass graves, with families playing a central role. States must support the **development of standards** for the respectful, lawful management of mass graves, and to subject the same to a regularized process of international mapping and recognition.

Ms Callamard also reiterated her commitment to focus on **mass killings** committed by non-State actors, including Al-Qaida. There are several **civil society initiatives** seeking to develop standards that non-State actors can endorse, she said, emphasizing that the main step is to first **recognize human rights obligations** and then take action to **hold perpetrators to account** for their international law violations. International pressure must be brought to bear on **Venezuela** and the **Philippines**, where mass killings are currently taking place. Accountability for the killing of **Jamal Khashoggi** has not been delivered, said Ms Callamard, also drawing attention to the failure to prosecute the **killings of journalists or human rights defenders**. She stressed the **importance of technology**, including satellite imagery and drones, in identifying mass graves.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Russian Federation, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Sweden, Pakistan, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy, European Union.

Mr **David R. Boyd** (Canada), Special Rapporteur on the issue on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

**Report presented:** [A/75/161](#) – “*The need for urgent action to conserve, protect and restore the biosphere*”.

Failure to **conserve, protect and restore the biosphere** so will have profound consequences for the **enjoyment of the rights** to life, health, food, water, adequate standard of living and culture. Unfortunately, States have failed to **meet any of the 2010 Biodiversity Targets** of the Convention on Biodiversity and have not responded with appropriate urgency to the challenge of conserving nature. Instead, States encourage harm to the environment through **\$500 billion in subsidies** — an amount that is five times the funding provided for environmental protection. Mr Boyd described ways in which **environmental destruction impinges** on the enjoyment of human rights: damage to mangroves, for example, increases the risk of death when cyclones occur, thereby affecting the right to life. A healthy ecosystem providing a buffer against emerging infectious disease bolsters the right to enjoy good health. The report outlines **actions to protect the biosphere**, following a human rights-centred approach, such as recognizing the land rights of indigenous peoples, including collective ownership structures. The report highlights hundreds of **inspiring practices** taken by States to protect biodiversity, including the European Green Deal and the African Great Green Wall. **Accelerated action** is required to protect nature. The pandemic illustrates the terrible cost of ignoring the warnings of scientists.

The **fundamental right** of every person to live in a safe, healthy environment is recognized by 87% of Member States. However, the right to a safe and healthy environment is **not recognized by a United Nations resolution**



– States should undertake action on this as soon as possible. Every year, **air pollution** leads to 7 million premature deaths. It is critical to prevent **environmental human rights defenders** from being targeted. The rights of **indigenous people** who play the role of human rights defenders must also be recognized. Mr Boyd’s **next report** will address the **issue of water**, including its scarcity and contamination of water sources. As States focus on finding a vaccine for the coronavirus, they must also act to **prevent zoonotic disease outbreaks** and implement the WHO’s One Health strategy. Recalling the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** appeal for “rapid, systemic and transformative changes” to address the nature crisis, Mr Boyd urged States to **phase out fossil fuel**, shift to a circular economy, and to recognize the right of everyone to life in a healthy, safe environment.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Norway, Egypt, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica (on behalf of the Human Rights Council’s Core Group on Human Rights and the Environment), Malaysia, Colombia, Monaco, Ethiopia, Germany, Cambodia, Kazakhstan.

Mr **Marcos A. Orellana** (Chile), Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes

**Report presented:** [A/75/290](#) – “*Twenty-five years of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes: an analysis of its evolution, current challenges and the way forward*” (by former Special Rapporteur, Mr Baskut Tuncak).

The report follows **three priority areas**: environmental justice and racism; gaps in the global chemicals and wastes architecture; and the human rights responsibilities of business for toxic exposure. **Environmental injustice** has been the driving force behind the mandate on “toxic waste”, established by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1995, to confront the flow to the global South of waste originating in the global North. Global environmental injustice is perpetuated as wealthy countries **export highly hazardous pesticides and toxic industrial chemicals**, banned in their own countries, to poorer nations lacking the capacity to control the risks. States have a **duty to “prevent and minimize”** exposure to hazardous substances to protect against preventable diseases and disabilities. The Human Rights Council has encouraged the implementation of 15 “[Principles on the protection of workers from exposure to toxic substances](#),” developed by Mr Tuncak. Mr Orellana stressed that States continue to permit **impunity in the private sector**. While toxic exposures can be reduced in pesticides, manufacturing, extractive industries, consumer products and nuclear power and weapons, States’ failure to compel businesses to conduct **human rights due diligence** is creating more toxicity for the planet and its people. **Adequate information** on risks and safer alternatives can prevent harm, yet, this information is often not available or accessible. The systematic **denial of effective remedies** perpetuates **impunity** for human rights violations emanating from hazardous substances and wastes. The United Nations Environment Programme reported last year that the global goal to minimize the adverse impacts of chemicals and waste by 2020, as agreed in the World Summit on Sustainable Development nearly 20 years ago, would not be achieved. It is critical to inject a rights-based approach to the global post-2020 chemicals and waste framework.

**States** have the responsibility to prevent toxic exposure for every person, while **businesses** must give effect to these protections. There are more than **350,000 chemicals** on the market, and there is insufficient information on most of them. Health and safety information about toxic substances must never be confidential, said Mr Orellana, rejecting the idea that intellectual property rights can be used as an argument otherwise. **Indigenous peoples** suffer from pollution and radioactive waste generated by extractive industries on their territories – there is a need for **environmental justice** and a focus on **vulnerable groups**. Access to **information** is also crucial in securing effective remedies, as it enables society to address environmental toxic risks by anticipating adequate responses to prevent harm.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Syria.





Mr **Michael Fakhri** (Lebanon), Special Rapporteur on the right to food

**Report presented:** [A/75/219](#) – “*The right to food in the context of international trade law and policy*” (First report submitted by the current mandate holder).

The **COVID-19** pandemic is turning into a global hunger crisis. The World Trade Organization still has not resolved **food security** issues that reach back to the Doha round of trade talks in 2008 and the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009. The **Agreement on Agriculture**, which came into force as part of the WTO in 1995, has been a barrier to helping people fully realize their right to food. It did not create a free and fair international food market, and the report lays out **long-standing criticisms** of the agreement, integrating the issues of food and human rights. It provides institutions with a **map to negotiate new international agreements** and demonstrates that food producers and workers are among the most **vulnerable**. The report also outlines **three human rights principles** for food and international trade:

1. **Dignity**, which is at the core of human rights and the right to food, as people must be able to nourish their bodies.
2. **Self-sufficiency**, which allows communities the opportunity to make their own decisions, as domestic production can be mixed with trade.
3. **Solidarity**, an “economics of cooperation”, the economics that relies on organizations governed by principles of horizontal cooperation and coordination, not profit and ceaseless growth.

Mr Fakhri said he and his predecessors held the view that **economic sanctions** are cruel and unquestionably violate people’s right to food, in some cases to the extent of incarnating a crime against humanity. Turning to **farmers’ rights**, he called for the strengthening of their **right to save and sell seeds** in informal and formal markets, which, while currently recognized, is not articulated in detail. This right is important from a **food sovereignty** perspective, so they can grow diverse crops that are responsive to worsening climate change. It must be preserved, amid an international regime that instead prioritizes intellectual property rights through patenting plant genetic resources. Regarding the **COVID-19** pandemic’s impact on **food security**, Mr Fakhri underlined the need to protect **food workers**, who are “essential, though they are treated as expendable”. He called for States to ensure **land tenures** are adequately protected, noting that the wealthy and powerful are consolidating their power through **land grabs** and forcing the poor and vulnerable off their land. The role of human rights remains ambiguous at the **United Nations Food Systems Summit**; **agroecology** must be included in its agenda. States can implement tools generated by the **Committee on World Food Security**, such as voluntary guidelines on land tenure. They can also turn to treaties and policy mechanisms by the International Labour Organization to **protect** food workers.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Egypt (on behalf of the African Group), European Union, Djibouti, Cuba, Azerbaijan.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



## 28 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Trafficking in persons and Contemporary forms of slavery

Ms **Siobhán Mullally** (Ireland), Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children

**Report presented:** [A/75/169](#) – *Report of the former Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Maria Grazia Giammarinar.*

The twentieth anniversary of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (**Trafficking in Persons Protocol**), offers an occasion to reflect on the **limits** of the anti-trafficking framework it envisaged. Since the human rights provisions of this Protocol — which is attached to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, or “**Palermo Convention**” — are **not binding**, there are **gaps** in the anti-trafficking policies adopted by States. Among them is a **persistent focus on criminal justice and migration control**, which makes assistance to victims conditional on participating in criminal proceedings and tends to be discriminatory against women and girls. The **non-punishment principle** is not implemented. Many victims continue to be treated as criminals and irregular migrants, and risk detention or deportation, including to situations where there is a risk of re-trafficking. The **COVID-19** pandemic may lead to increased vulnerability of children and women to trafficking, due to higher unemployment, the feminization of poverty and supply chain disruptions. The report highlights the work of **civil society** in supporting victims, and outlines **measures** States can take to embed human rights in anti-trafficking efforts, including establishing channels for regular migration, strengthening non-discriminatory long-term victim support, banning administrative detention for children, and fully complying with the principle of non-refoulement. States must **fund** civil society organizations and tackle the causes of trafficking and exploitation. Ms Mullally said she looked forward to forthcoming **visits** to Mexico and Bangladesh in 2021.

A shift to a human-rights-centred approach to anti-trafficking can be undertaken through **expanding regular routes** to migration, as well as strengthening **social protection** and **labour rights**, which can reduce the risk of exploitation of migrants and their families. **Humanitarian visas** and **resettlement programmes** can be offered to those fleeing conflict. Ms Mullally is working closely with **other special procedures** mandate holders, including those addressing contemporary forms of slavery and the sale and sexual exploitation of children in working out ways to use digital technology to combat exploitation and impunity. **Accountability** and **combating impunity** are central to both a human-rights-centred and law enforcement response to trafficking. States may use duress- and necessity-based approaches, but the larger context is important to take into account. **Civil society** can help in the prevention of trafficking, through outreach, awareness-raising and in cooperating with early identification measures. Regarding the **identification the victims** of trafficking, Ms Mullally highlighted the importance of a **multi-agency approach** which ensures the participation of all relevant actors, from health care professionals and border guards to civil society actors.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, European Union, Greece, Israel, Colombia, El Salvador, United States, Russian Federation, Qatar, Spain, Bangladesh, United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, Bahrain, China, Saudi Arabia, Germany, El Salvador, Switzerland, Israel, Malta, European Union.

Mr **Tomoya Obokata** (Japan), Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences

**Report presented:** [A/75/166](#) – *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences (First report submitted by the current mandate holder; also includes a summary of the activities undertaken by the previous Special Rapporteur, Ms Urmila Bhoola (South Africa) ).*

Mr Obokata updated the Committee on the impact of **COVID-19** and related increase in unemployment on contemporary forms of slavery. COVID-19 risks derailing the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (decent work, economic growth) even further. There is a need for taking a survivor-centred, age- and gender-sensitive approach to assess how modern slavery affects **indigenous peoples, people on the move, persons with disabilities, older persons** and **persons living in homelessness**. **Technology** in both facilitating and fighting such practices. Mr Obokata also stressed that his aim was to shed light on the structure of **criminal**



**groups** involved in slavery and to increase understanding around the interactions between **legal and illegal economies**. COVID-19 has led to more people being pushed into the informal sector after job loss in the formal one. Mr Obokata also said he planned to assess the question of State responsibility, as well as the role of businesses and employers in the sector.

The **dark web** is facilitated by criminal entities and requires further investigation. Mr Obokata reiterated his commitment to work closely with other Special Rapporteurs so as to **avoid duplicated** efforts. He stressed the importance of **education** for all children, noting that many children are out of school due to lockdowns, and as a result, experiencing child labour and other forms of exploitation.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United States, China, European Union, Russian Federation, Iran, United Kingdom, Lichtenstein, Cuba.

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)*



## 29 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Right to privacy, Physical and mental health, and Sexual orientation and gender identity

Mr **Joseph Cannataci** (Malta), Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy

**Report presented:** [A/75/147](#) – “Preliminary evaluation of the privacy dimensions of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic”.

The **COVID-19** pandemic has highlighted the significance of privacy as a human right, said Mr Cannataci, stressing that “the fight against the virus has seen individuals’ data become a key tool for Governments, scientists and others — including corporations”. Public health emergencies have always provided a legitimate basis for the processing of data. While the “privacy-intrusive” practice of **contact tracing** can be classified as “a necessary public health measure”, Mr Cannataci expressed concern over reports of personal and health data, combined with technology, being used to exert **control over citizens**. There is sufficient guidance available for any country collecting data as part of its COVID-19 response, including the World Health Organization guidance, which enables its use to be “demonstrably lawful, necessary and proportionate in a democratic society”. The **main privacy risk** lies in the employment of non-consensual methods — such as hybrid surveillance — which can be used for other purposes. “Technology-driven contact tracing has become disturbingly close to incessant and omnipresent surveillance,” warned Mr Cannataci. “Such surveillance is not the panacea for the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Several companies are offering surveillance solutions to Governments, some of which entail “less privacy or human rights protection than others”. It is relatively cheap for Governments to buy those solutions, and Mr Cannataci cautioned against the temptation to continue their use after the pandemic.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United Kingdom, European Union, Mexico, China, Russian Federation, Malta, Qatar, Brazil, Germany.

Ms **Tlaleng Mofokeng** (South Africa), Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

**Report presented:** [A/75/163](#) – *Final report of the [former] Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Mr Dainius Pūras (Lithuania)*.

The **report** outlines **right-to-health principles**, addressing power imbalances, corruption, and the overemphasis of the biomedical paradigm. It also articulates how these factors have contributed to the spread and impact of the **COVID-19** pandemic. The report establishes that **factors** such as public health policy, leadership, structural discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities **determine the virus’ impact**, more than biological factors. Ms Mofokeng outlined her vision for her **mandate**, which will foreground the principle of **dignity** within the right to health. “As a black woman myself, I understand that people are not intrinsically vulnerable, but that these vulnerabilities are rather brought by the obstacles they face in the social, economic and political contexts they live in”, she said. Over the next three years, Ms Mofokeng plans to **focus** on the negative impact of coloniality, racism, the oppressive structures woven into the global health architecture, and on identifying the changes required to remove the barriers that make people vulnerable to right-to-health violations. As a practitioner on **sexual and reproductive health**, she will bring a gender perspective to such work. She will examine the impact of criminalization and the need for **zero discrimination** when addressing such issues as safe **abortions** and **sex work**. She will also focus on the concerning lack of **support for survivors** of gender-based violence and femicide in many countries. **Health funding** is another priority issue, said Ms Mofokeng, who plans to examine the **overreliance on philanthropy and foreign aid** in developing countries for essential health care services, particularly for reproductive and sexual health.

The **COVID-19** pandemic revealed that the world was never prepared for such a humanitarian crisis, even at its best, with many countries taking a long time to secure access to testing kits and personal protective equipment. Some countries continue to grapple with these issues, and **access to therapeutics** remains



concerning. However, “**pockets of excellence**” around the world point to opportunities to improve the global multilateral response. The pandemic cannot be eradicated without **good water and sanitation**, and it is important to preserve the right to accessing them. Ms Mofokeng expressed concern about the inadequate mental health support for **children**, as well as insufficient protections for **front-line health care workers** and essential workers. She called on Governments to remove all barriers to sharing data and intellectual property in the search for a vaccine.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Republic of Korea, China, El Salvador, Russian Federation, Qatar, Algeria, Cuba.

**Mr Victor Madrigal-Borloz (Costa Rica), Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity**

**Report presented:** [A/75/258](#) – “*Violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*”.

The response to the **COVID-19** pandemic reproduces and exacerbates the patterns of discrimination, social exclusion and violence already identified previously. While following recommendations to stay at home, LGBTI persons are forced to endure prolonged exposure to unaccepting family members, which aggravates rates of **domestic violence**, physical and emotional abuse. The reallocation of health resources has also intensified **shortages of antiretrovirals** for those living with HIV and impacted the ability of trans men and women to receive **hormonal therapy** or gender-affirming care. The pandemic has created a context conducive to increased persecution: **Hate speech** inciting violence against LGBTI persons has been on the rise, while some States have also enacted measures that intentionally target LGBTI persons under the guise of public health. Mr Madrigal-Borloz has issued a set of [guidelines](#) to ensure that measures designed to respond and recover from COVID-19 are free from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. States must ensure they support the work of **LGBTI civil society** and human rights defenders, and provide protection from violence and discrimination in the pandemic context. LGBTI persons must be represented in the design, implementation and evaluation of **COVID-19 measures**, while States must address their particular concerns in response and recovery plans.

**Data** must be collected routinely to understand how violence and discrimination manifest against LGBTI persons. **Impunity** must be eliminated at all levels when it manifests itself, since violence against LGBTI persons runs from high-level political and religious discourse and trickles down to the actions of public policymakers, justice providers and legislators. There must be **political messaging** around the importance of a life free from violence and discrimination for LGBTI persons. The propagation of hate speech by **religious or political authorities** must not be tolerated. **Trust-building** is a long-term process. Mr Madrigal-Borloz called for a world **free of criminalization for LGBTI** persons by 2030 and for a **global ban on conversion therapy**, which is cruel, inhumane and degrading, and therefore prohibited under international human rights law.

**Speaking in the general debate:** European Union, Japan, Norway, Ireland, New Zealand, Thailand, Mexico, Israel, United States, Spain, United Kingdom, France, Malta, Germany, Argentina, Belgium, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Canada, Italy, Liechtenstein.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)





## 30 October 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Human Rights Council report and Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Ms **Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger** (Austria), President of the Human Rights Council

**Report presented:** [A/75/53/Add.1](#) – *Report of the Human Rights Council: 45<sup>th</sup> session (14 September–7 October 2020)*.

The **Council** and its mechanisms nimbly tackled the challenges thrown up by the pandemic, providing up-to-date information on human rights concerns as well as guidance on addressing them, even during the lockdown. The Council was the **first United Nations body** to resume its programme of work and in-person meetings in mid-June, and was able to adopt **97 resolutions, four decisions, and two President’s statements** “against all odds” during its regular sessions in 2020. Of these, 72 were adopted **without a vote**. Ms Tichy-Fisslberger touched on two urgent debates held during the Council’s regular sessions to respond to situations on the ground:

1. Urgent debate held in June addressed the theme of **systemic racism, police brutality, and violence against peaceful protests**, and culminated in a **resolution** that requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies, with a view to accountability and redress for victims.
2. Urgent debate held in September addressed the human rights situation in **Belarus**. The ensuing **resolution** requests the High Commissioner to monitor the situation closely, in the context of the presidential election, and to present an interim oral update with recommendations to the Council by the end of 2020.

The 36<sup>th</sup> Working Group session of the **Universal Periodic Review**, slated for May, was postponed, to be held in a “hybrid format” in November. The United Nations **liquidity crisis** has led to the postponement of some activities scheduled by the Council. Ms Tichy-Fisslberger expressed hope for an improved situation in the coming months, as there had been a **15% reduction** in the Council’s meeting time this year, on top of a “considerable reduction” facilitated by previous Council presidents.

It is important for United Nations bodies in Geneva and New York to **foster dialogue**, compare notes and exchange analyses and information. Regarding the Council’s “hybrid” working methods during the pandemic, the **digitalization** of the system has enabled gains in efficiency and effectiveness, saved money on costs for conferences and travel, while its virtual meetings have facilitated participation by thousands of civil society members from around the world. The **COVID-19** pandemic has led to mandate holders **working together** far more than they have in the past. The Council **will hold a stock-taking meeting**, and reflect on lessons learned. Ms Tichy-Fisslberger called the claims of politicization “as old as the Human Rights Council”, and called for **more collaboration and dialogue** from countries who objected to the “wrong information” spread by mandate holders. “Tell us your version, your story,” she said.

**Full statement:** read [here](#).

**Speaking in the general debate:** Iceland (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries), Mexico, Ukraine, Colombia, Eritrea, Philippines, Cuba, Syria, Iran, Venezuela, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, China, Malaysia, Qatar, Croatia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Eritrea, Austria, Spain, Switzerland, Argentina, Germany, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Algeria, Myanmar, India, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Pakistan, United Kingdom, European Union, Sovereign Order of Malta.

Ms **Edna Maria Santos Roland** (Brazil), Chairperson of the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

The Group of Independent Eminent Experts had held **annual five-day sessions** in Geneva in 2018 and 2019, while the 2020 annual meeting has been **postponed** to December 2020, and will be held, most likely, in a



virtual format. Ms Roland voiced concern that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) is among the **least disseminated** United Nations programmes, and stressed that the lack of public knowledge about the real content of the Declaration constitutes a **major obstacle** towards generating political will for its effective **implementation**. Most States have not done enough to mainstream this instrument within their human rights efforts, and in many countries its true content has been distorted, she said, calling the DDPA a road map for action to address racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration must become a global undertaking. The General Assembly should reiterate its request that the **Human Rights Council** adopt a multiyear, adequately funded **outreach programme** to mobilize global public support. The Declaration is especially relevant to the current moment, and its implementation is crucial to confronting the **COVID-19** pandemic. Ms Roland expressed **regret** that no Member States wished to engage in dialogue on this subject, and encouraged them to become familiar with the reports and come up with proposals to implement the Declaration in their countries, as well as organize regional activities to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration in 2021.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Brazil.

*Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual.informal](#)*



2 November 2020 – Interactive Dialogues on Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia (also in the context of Emerging digital technologies), People of African descent, Use of mercenaries, Right to self-determination, and Complementary standards

Ms **Yanduan Li** (China), Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**Report presented:** [A/75/18](#) – *Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: 99<sup>th</sup> session (5–29 August 2019) 100<sup>th</sup> session (25 November–13 December 2019)*.

Ms Li raised concerns over the rise of racist **hate speech** and **hate crimes**, noting that racist hate speech remains frequent in particular on the Internet and social media and has been exacerbated in the context of the **COVID-19** pandemic. “Politicians and public figures have continued to deliver xenophobic expressions that have [fuelled] racist hatred and violence against national and ethnic minorities, people of African descent and indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers,” she said. **People of African descent**, in particular, have been victims of **racial profiling** and excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, which has led to death in some cases. Ms Li pointed to the impact of COVID-19 on the most **vulnerable**, stressing that the pandemic has brought to the surface **long-standing inequalities** faced by national and ethnic minorities. States must ensure that the measures taken to address COVID-19 comply fully with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

There is a need for strong **political commitment** to fight the spread of hate speech on the Internet and social media. Reporting of online hate speech is not easy, said Ms Li, equating the fight against hate speech with preserving the **right to free expression**. “Our Committee is just a **monitoring**, not an enforcement organ,” she stressed, adding that States have the obligation to implement the Convention.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Indonesia, European Union, Russian Federation, Mexico, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Syria.

Mr **Refiloe Litjubo** (Lesotho), Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

**Report presented:** [A/HRC/45/48<sup>6</sup>](#) – *“Preparations for marking the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action”*.

The **COVID-19** pandemic has disproportionately affected individuals and groups facing racial discrimination in their **access to food, water, medical care, employment and education**. The report underscores the importance of the Durban Declaration as a **comprehensive framework** for combating racism and racial discrimination at the international and national levels, but expresses concern at the **lack of public knowledge** about the content of the Declaration. This is a serious obstacle to generating **political will** for its implementation. Mr Litjubo called on Member States to **convene an event** to mark the Declaration’s twentieth anniversary during the General Assembly’s 76<sup>th</sup> session. Member States must fully **implement** the Durban Declaration as part of a **holistic agenda** to promote equality, justice, peace and the rule of law.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Russian Federation.

Mr **Chris Kwaja** (Nigeria), Chair of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination

**Report presented:** [A/75/259](#) – *“The evolving forms, trends and manifestations of mercenaries and mercenary-related activities”*.

Mercenary activities worldwide have gained ground recently, threatening human rights, the protection of civilians and international peace and security. Mercenaries and related actors **intensify and prolong conflicts**, and are reportedly involved in such crimes as **extrajudicial killings** and **recruitment of children**. There are

<sup>6</sup> Report to the Human Rights Council, also referred to the General Assembly by the Secretariat (see Note [A/75/315](#))



considerable **gaps** in understanding how these actors have adapted to contemporary conflict realities, how they are used, and the human rights risks and impacts of their activities. This is partly due to the **disconnect** between the reality on the ground and the applicable international legal framework on mercenaries. The **political connotations** often associated with the term “mercenary” **reduce discussions** to debates about whether or not an actor meets the strict international legal definition. Mr Kwaja identified **five broad categories of actors** that generate mercenary-related activities, including foreign fighters and nationals contracted into State security services, private military and security companies and their personnel, and cyber mercenaries.

Among the **key findings**, Mr Kwaja noted a rise in non-international armed conflicts and the proliferation of non-State armed actors. These developments both increase the prospective client base for private combat and make it more challenging to ascribe international legal obligations and attribute responsibility for violations. **Third parties**, particularly States, are also using mercenary personnel as a way to remotely influence armed conflicts abroad. **Other private actors** have also profited **from new technologies** such as drones and are developing **new methods of warfare**, including cyber capabilities and high-tech weapons systems. Mr Kwaja cautioned States against outsourcing activities that amount to direct participation in hostilities and to prohibit the provision of for-profit services by private individuals and companies.

The Working Group will also be looking into **cyberterrorism**, the use of **technology** and its devastating effects. The only escape route for mercenaries today is through **State protection**. Governments must be more proactive in dealing with these actions. The **United Nations Mercenary Convention** is 30 years old but still **not a legally binding** document. As the opaque nature of mercenary recruitment creates a huge challenge, Member States should **allow country visits** and **collection of evidence**. Mr Kwaja also commended the “welcome development” of all parties to the conflict in **Libya** agreeing on the departure of all mercenaries within three months.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Cuba, Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Armenia, European Union, India, Russian Federation, Turkey, Colombia.

Ms **Ilze Brands Kehris** (Latvia), Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

#### **Reports presented:**

- [A/75/363](#) – *Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent – Report of the Secretary-General: “Progress and challenges with respect to the human rights of children and young people of African descent”*.  
The report highlights how the **COVID-19** pandemic has magnified existing patterns of discrimination and provides examples of **promising practices** for realizing their rights.
- [A/75/561](#) – *“A global call for concrete action for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action”* – Report of the Secretary-General.  
The report contains **recommendations** for ending racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, highlighting the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minorities, which has laid bare the structural inequalities they face in **accessing health care** and **health testing**.
- [A/75/240](#) – *Right of peoples to self-determination – Report of the Secretary-General*  
The report provides a summary of the main developments relating to the realization of the right to self-determination within the framework of the activities of the main organs of the United Nations since the submission of the previous report.

Ms Brands Kehris welcomed delegates’ remarks on the participation of civil society, especially in efforts to **prevent reprisals**. She said the **protection of journalists** was among her priorities and called for effective ways to address social media and **online harassment**. She also advocated for the **freedom of media**. On the United



Nations budget and **liquidity crisis**, she recalled that human rights represents one of the Organization's three pillars. **Underresourcing** this pillar, which comprises only 3.7% of the overall budget, should alert everyone. "We should make sure that the support for human rights is maintained," she asserted.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Lithuania, European Union, Latvia, Algeria, India.

**Mr Taonga Mushayavanhu** (Zimbabwe), Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards

Mr Mushayavanhu detailed progress made by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards to the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**, and the work of the **legal expert consultation** during its meetings in October 2020. During that meeting, legal experts considered the issues and possible elements to be included in a **draft additional protocol** to the International Convention, namely the dissemination of **hate speech, racial cybercrime, all contemporary forms of discrimination** based on religion or belief and **preventive measures** to combat racist and xenophobic discrimination. Although there was some disagreement over terminology, the discussion will help the Committee going forward. The Committee's work is pertinent, given the "sad reality" that many people continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, said Mr Mushayavanhu, recalling the **global protests** sparked by the killing of unarmed African American **George Floyd** at the hands of police, and the acute toll that the **COVID-19** pandemic has taken on racial communities. Laws are needed to effectively **fight intolerance**. The Committee should also remain open to considering **preventive measures** that complement criminalization.

The missing link in the international community's treatment of this topic is the **political will** to engage on these issues in an open and frank manner. Member States can help the Committee's work by **engaging** with it and participating in the process and to share their views regarding the need for an additional protocol to the International Convention.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Zimbabwe, European Union.

**Ms Dominique Day** (United States), Chair of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

**Reports presented:** [A/HRC/45/44](#)<sup>7</sup> – "COVID-19, systemic racism and global protests". Country visit reports: [A/HRC/45/44/Add.1](#) (Ecuador) and [A/HRC/45/44/Add.2](#) (Peru).

Human rights remain "a dream deferred" for people of African descent, driving popular protests, uprisings and resistance. Although people of African descent disproportionately experience **COVID-19** infections, severity and mortality, law enforcement has failed to offer protection, instead targeting them violently and with impunity in enforcing COVID-restrictions. It is vitally important for States to acknowledge that people of African descent remain among the **most at-risk** and in need of protection. Failure to appreciate these risks has facilitated racial disparities in the pandemic, with **systemic racism** at the heart of these lowered expectations, worse outcomes, and normalized violations of human rights.

Ms Day welcomed **Ecuador's** recognition of **historic and structural racial discrimination** faced by people of African descent. She expressed deep concern, however, at the **activities of extractive industries**, including the lack of monitoring and sanctions by the State, given the significant **environmental harms impacting Afro-Ecuadoreans**, who comprise 40% of Ecuadoreans living in poverty but only 7% of the overall population.

Ms Day acknowledged the **historical apology** of the Government of **Peru** to Afro-Peruvians in 2009, asking forgiveness for abuses and discrimination perpetrated **since the colonial period**. Yet, **poor implementation** of the State's **antidiscrimination framework** led to a "profound denial" of access to public administration, public goods and public services. While 60% of Peruvians acknowledge racism against Afro-Peruvians, only 8% of Peruvians see themselves as perpetuating racism.

<sup>7</sup> Report to the Human Rights Council, also referred to the General Assembly by the Secretariat (see Note [A/75/275](#))





Ms Day also called on Member States to make the **Permanent Forum on People of African Descent** operational so that it can begin its important work. One way to employ the modalities of the Forum is to understand how the legacies of colonialism continue to populate the current mindset, and to confront them. It is crucial to create spaces for transnational colonial atrocities to be understood in their local contexts. As people of African descent experience **systemic racism** that transcends borders, continents, and economic development contexts, it is time to address the lasting consequences of historical injustice. Confronting racism also includes **rethinking the monuments** and the **curricula in societies**.

**Speaking in the general debate:** China, European Union, Brazil, Russian Federation.

Ms **E. Tendayi Achiume** (Zambia), Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

**Reports presented:** [A/75/329](#) – *Annual report focused on “an increase in antisemitic incidents and conspiracy theories since the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)”*; *Thematic Report focused on “racial and xenophobic discrimination, emerging digital technologies, and border and immigration enforcement”*.

Presenting her report on racial and xenophobic discrimination, emerging digital technologies, and border and immigration enforcement Ms Achiume called attention to the rise of “**digital borders**” — borders whose infrastructure and processes increasingly rely on machine learning, automated algorithmic decision-making systems, predictive analytics and related **digital technologies**. These technologies are integrated into identification documents, facial recognition systems, aerial video surveillance drones, biometric databases and many other facets of enforcement. Governments and international organizations — including United Nations humanitarian, migrant and refugee agencies — are increasingly turning to digital border infrastructure, drawn by the efficiency of technology. There are also tremendous profits for the private sector. However, Ms Achiume warned of the “**border industrial complex**”, wherein the militarization and digitalization of border and immigration enforcement end up expanding an industry that results in **gross violations against refugees, migrants, stateless persons and other related groups**. Ms Achiume also expressed concerns over the **incitement of discrimination against refugees and migrants** on social media platforms, as well as the risks of discrimination resulting from mandatory biometric data collection and mobile data extraction. **International human rights law** can help in identifying and addressing the social harms of digital technologies.

Presenting the annual report on combating the **glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and related intolerance**, Ms Achiume said **COVID-19** has exposed interlinking crises hiding in plain sight — a public health disaster, along with ethnonationalist rhetoric and politics — laying bare how dangerous intolerance, racialized and religious suspicion and fear can be to the social fabric that sustains prosperous and safe communities. With populist regimes and extremists exploiting anxieties about the pandemic, it is clear that ethnonationalism affects the very structures that are supposed to promote and protect human rights. She highlighted the urgency of pandemic responses that ensure fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination.

There is a need to apply measures taken to combat intolerance in the context of **COVID-19** to the broader scourge of racism and discrimination. Noting the imminent twentieth anniversary of the **Durban Declaration**, Ms Achiume called for increased United Nations support and resources dedicated to outreach. **Islamophobia** and the promotion of **conspiracy theories** are particularly damaging today because of the complicity of Government leaders. Greater regulation is necessary to curtail the dissemination of this type of content on social media.

**Speaking in the general debate:** United States, China, Venezuela, Morocco, United Kingdom, Mexico, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Malaysia, Cuba, Qatar, India, Algeria, Armenia, Norway, Azerbaijan (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), European Union.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal - morning session](#)  
[virtual informal - afternoon session](#)



### 3 November 2020 – Interactive Dialogues with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Mr **Filippo Grandi** (Italy), [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#)

**Report presented:** [A/75/12/Add.1](#) – *Report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: 71<sup>st</sup> session (5–9 October 2020)*.

The **COVID-19** pandemic demonstrates that challenges of such scale — much like the climate emergency, poverty, inequality and forced displacement — require **collaborative efforts** to support the most vulnerable. The magnitude of the present emergency is unlike any UNHCR has faced in seven decades of providing on-the-ground assistance. Nonetheless, the agency acted quickly, using an innovative approach to **help host countries** step up their response. As a result, “**major outbreaks have been avoided in refugee settings**”.

Many refugees live within **communities**, rather than camps, where they are additionally impacted by the “**pandemic of poverty**”. Many are **informal workers**, whose livelihoods have been thrown into disarray. This has led to **rising demands for assistance**, even in countries that have offered refugees sanctuary for decades. For example, as many as **100,000 Venezuelans** have returned after lockdowns destroyed their livelihoods in countries that hosted them. Mr Grandi expressed concern about the pandemic’s impact on **women and girls**, as illustrated by increasing reports of **gender-based violence**, adding that **refugee girls** cannot return to school without catch-up learning strategies, or water, sanitation and hygiene programmes.

Regarding the **humanitarian assistance**, Mr Grandi welcomed the prompt response by donors to funding needs specifically for the pandemic. **62% of UNHCR’s \$745 million appeal** has already been funded, and more donations will be needed in 2021. But humanitarian assistance alone is not enough. **Stronger social safety net** programmes and vaccination campaigns must be undertaken to mitigate the plight of the forcibly displaced and to relieve pressure in societies where they live. Mr Grandi welcomed the early involvement of the **World Bank** and the **African Development Bank**, which was “a core element” in the **Global Compact on Refugees**, affirmed by the General Assembly in 2018.

The **underlying causes** of displacement, including conflict, remain **unresolved**. **Conflicts** are multiplying, causing people to flee their homes, including in **Mozambique, Côte d’Ivoire, Yemen, Nicaragua** and the **central Sahel**, where a “complex” situation led to the displacement of **650,000 people** in 2020 alone. UNHCR is also deeply concerned by the escalating conflict between **Azerbaijan and Armenia**, which can displace thousands.

For the **80 million** people forced to leave home, international assistance is life-saving. States must respect the principle of **non-refoulement**. While safe, voluntary and dignified **repatriation** is the most desirable option, it is available only when peace prevails. Mr Grandi expressed disappointment at the low levels of **integration and resettlement** in third countries and hoped they would increase.

UNHCR has developed a **methodology** that it is ready to share with States interested in reconciling pandemic restrictions with channels allowing those seeking asylum to present their claims. More countries must increase their figures on **resettlement**, following Canada and Germany’s examples. Mr Grandi reiterated that the biggest contribution to the global good must be attributed to **host countries**. As many as **1,400 pledges** were made at the recently held **Global Refugee Forum**. Of these, **400** have been implemented or are in the course of being implemented. While the pandemic has inevitably caused delays, UNHCR is keeping close tabs on the rest of the pledges, which will be **publicly updated** on a dashboard. Mr Grandi also reiterated his support for **voluntary repatriation**, adding that he can work with countries of origin to foster conditions for refugees’ safe, voluntary and sustainable return, only if **lasting peace** prevails. **Refugees** must be included in pandemic response, given vaccinations, when available, and must also be included in the social safety net. This concern must be addressed by financial institutions, including the World Bank. The **Security Council** should redouble its efforts to reach consensus on humanitarian issues.

**Speaking in the general debate:** Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Georgia, Russian Federation, South Sudan, United States, Qatar, Norway, Republic of Korea, Italy, Romania, Morocco, Iran, Germany, Mali, El Salvador, Switzerland, Cameroon (on behalf of the African Group), Mexico, Iran, Canada, Ethiopia, Malaysia, China, Thailand, Mali, Afghanistan, Algeria, Venezuela.

Watch this meeting on UN WebTV: [virtual informal](#)



## Main References and Sources used in preparation of this Report

Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee) – Recordings of live sessions on UN WebTV:  
<http://webtv.un.org/search?term=third+committee&sort=date>

Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee) – Documents per agenda item  
<https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/75/documentslist.shtml>

Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee) – Press Releases:  
<https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/pr.shtml>