



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 46th SESSION

Opening of the Session: High-Level Segment

22 February 2021, 09h00-09h30

President of the UN Human Rights Council – H.E. Ms Nazhat Shameem Khan

The Human Rights Council 46th session is the first almost completely virtual session of the Council. Notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council continues to protect human rights and address human rights violations. In addition, despite the extraordinary restrictive measures, the inclusive participation of all relevant stakeholders in the Council, including the least developed countries, will be ensured, using digital technologies, such as, *inter alia*, using the ZOOM platform with interpretation in six languages. Such extraordinary modalities would not however serve as a precedent. All allegations of reprisals and intimidation for collaboration with the Council will be followed closely.

President of the UN General Assembly – H.E. Mr Volkan Bozkir

To combat human rights violations, a multilateral system based on solid institutions is needed. The COVID-19 pandemic has even more demonstrated that policies should be human rights centered. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, women's participation in the decision-making process should be ensured, while human rights and the rule of law should be respected.

Main topics addressed: climate crisis, right to health, gender inequality, arbitrary detention, restriction of freedoms of association and assembly.

United Nations Secretary-General – H.E. Mr António Guterres

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Human Rights Council is at the forefront in protecting human rights. The health crisis has exacerbated pre-existing social fractures, disproportionately harming vulnerable groups such as women, migrants, refugees, and indigenous people. In addition, it has denied young people access to education and affected individual civil and political rights. Worldwide, independent reporters and human rights organizations have been intimidated. While equal access to the COVID-19 vaccines is denied, citizens' personal data are at risk of manipulation, without proper protection schemes. To ensure that digital technologies will not breach human rights, a Roadmap for Digital Cooperation has thus been developed.

Main topics addressed: (1) racism, discrimination, and xenophobia (white supremacy and neo-Nazism), (2) gender inequality: equal participation of women in all sectors, (3) safeguard of minority communities against assimilation policies, (4) human rights violations in Myanmar: the military should stop the repression immediately.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – Ms Michelle Bachelet

The current health crisis has uncovered deeply rooted inequalities and widespread discrimination, while emphasizing the importance of a human rights-based approach. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on all areas of life and sectors of society, particularly on youth education, women's inequality, and religious minorities. The rights to health and social protection should be upheld, while vulnerable groups (e.g., women, and religious minorities) should continue to be protected. Instead of the use of force and the restriction of fundamental freedoms, civil participation in the policy-making process should be fostered. To achieve democracy, human rights principles should be based on public trust, which implies that governments should be fair and transparent to their citizens. To support States on their path towards democracy, a range of human rights indicators has been developed.

Main topics addressed: right to health and social protection, youth education, women's inequality, racial and religious discrimination.

Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (host country) - H.E. Mr Ignazio Cassis

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased discrimination, worldwide. While the current health crisis threatens to undermine the achievement of the Global Sustainable Goals, it has also demonstrated the relevance of individual freedoms. The COVID-19 pandemic has not just had serious impacts on health and economies, but also restricted the freedom of individual expression. All relevant stakeholders should hence cooperate to respond to today's challenges and define the outline of tomorrow's world.