



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 47th SESSION

Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the annual report of the High Commissioner (21-22 June 2021): Summary of the Debate¹

Presentation of the report by the High Commissioner

Presenting her annual report², the UN High Commissioner Ms. Michelle Bachelet updated the Council on the **analysis, relevant developments and priorities of her Office** in all geographic regions.

As **Cambodia's** poverty has doubled during the pandemic, a new Country Team Human Rights Strategy will ensure support for rights-based development and pandemic-recovery work. OHCHR's Surge Initiative played a key role in upgrading the economic expertise of its field teams. In **Guinea**, due to this technical and financial support, the field presence was able to undertake an assessment of the impact of the mining sector on human rights. Across **ten countries in West and Central Africa**, OHCHR partnered with UNICEF and UN Women to set up surveys on the specific impacts of the pandemic on **women and girls**. Together with UNEP and UNDP, OHCHR is leading interagency efforts to advance the human right to a **healthy environment**, which included capacity-building training for environmental human rights defenders **in the Pacific**. Combatting inequalities and promoting rights to social protection is vital to weathering the crisis. It is equally important that the entire UN Country Team work with the international financial institutions. For example, in **Lebanon**, a UN Country Team Position to the IMF was prepared which proposed reform proposals through a strong human rights lens.

Ms. Bachelet reminded that in her global update to the Council during its 46th session she had outlined aspects of the human rights situation in a number of countries. She re-affirmed her readiness to respond to any queries in follow-up to her February statement during the interactive dialogue. She also addressed a few recent issues of significant concern in **in the following countries**:

- **Afghanistan**: civilian casualties increased by 41% compared to the same period last year. The role of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission must be protected.
- **Belarus**: situation is deteriorating. The Government discontinued the presence of OHCHR Senior Human Rights Adviser in Minsk. OHCHR's examination, pursuant to Resolution 46/20, is underway.
- **China**: the High Commissioner continues to discuss with China modalities for a visit to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and hopes this can be achieved this year.
- **Colombia**: nationwide protests have been ongoing since 28 April, with allegations of deaths in the context of the protests and sexual violence being recorded.
- **Tigray region of Ethiopia**: **Eritrean** soldiers may still be operating in Tigray. The humanitarian situation is dire, an estimated 350,000 people are threatened by famine. The joint investigation with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in Tigray is underway, the work is expected to conclude in August, and the findings will be made public.
- **Haiti**: the police did not intervene during a number of recent clashes between criminal groups in Port-au-Prince, which led to at least 50 deaths and the displacement of more than 13,000 people.
- **Mexico**: at least 91 politicians and members of political parties were killed during the electoral period since September 2020. The recent judgment of the Supreme Court of Mexico accepting urgent action recommendations of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances as legally binding is commendable.
- **Mozambique**: in the North, serious human rights violations are committed by State security forces, supported by private security companies. Almost 800,000 people have been forced to flee their homes by the violence, and face growing food insecurity. The President of Mozambique has recently welcomed the opportunity to strengthen engagement with the OHCHR.

¹ This is a short summary. For the Geneva Centre's full notes on all speakers' statements, please [click here](#).

² [A/HRC/47/54](#): Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



- **Russia:** the authorities should end the arbitrary practice of labelling ordinary individuals, journalists, and NGOs as “extremists”, “foreign agents” or “undesirable organizations”.
- **Sri Lanka:** further Government measures perceived as targeting Muslims continue, and so does the harassment of Tamils. The High Commissioner will update the Council at the September session on progress in implementing the new accountability mandate.
- **Philippines:** OHCHR is close to finalising the UN Joint Programme on human rights with the Government of the Philippines.
- The High Commissioner also referred to the recent non-democratic and unconstitutional changes in government in **Chad** and **Mali**.

Interactive Dialogue: Statements by States and Non-Governmental Organizations

Thematic issues:

A number of countries, including Cameroon, on behalf of the African Group, Ecuador, Portugal, Syria, Iran, Turkey and Tunisia spoke about the need to avoid **vaccine nationalism**. Bangladesh said that OHCHR should play an active role to ensure **migrants'** equal right to vaccines.

On behalf of the Benelux, Netherlands condemned all forms of intimidation and **reprisals** against civil society actors. Switzerland, Japan, Austria and Latvia also spoke of freedom expression and the media, and the need to ensure the safe work of human rights defenders, civil society and journalists.

The need for the Council and its mechanisms to adhere to the **principles of universality, impartiality and objectivity**, and to avoid selectivity, politicization and double standards in order to preserve its credibility was addressed by at a large number of delegations, including Egypt, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, and Belarus, on behalf of a group of countries.

A number of delegations, including African Group, and Costa Rica also brought the pressing issue of **racism and racial discrimination**. Republic of Korea specifically spoke of the spikes in violence and discrimination against **Asians**. Kuwait and Turkey expressed concern about the spread of “**Islamophobia**”, hate speech, discrimination and violence. Human Rights Watch urged the Council to put in place a mechanism that would investigate racism in **law enforcement**.

Uruguay, on behalf of a group of Latin American and Caribbean countries, spoke on the importance of technical assistance and integration of human rights components in the **Peace Missions**.

Estonia stressed the importance of promotion and protection of human rights as a crucial tool for conflict **prevention and early warning**.

A number of countries, including Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Burundi spoke against imposing **unilateral coercive measures**.

On the question of **death penalty**, Egypt said there were no international consensus on its application.

Marshall Islands urged the Council to establish a new special procedure on **climate change and human rights**. This call was echoed by the Human Rights Watch, and in the joint statement by the Center for International Environmental Law.

Amnesty International called for the Council to establish a mechanism for monitoring and verification of **pushbacks of migrants**.

A number of countries have also expressed their deep commitment to advocate for **gender equality** and women empowerment **children's rights** and rights of **people with disabilities**.

The African Group called the High Commissioner to address the **debt crisis** and related issues. The call was joined by Syria.

Japan spoke about the need to promote and protect **human rights in business** activities, including in supply chains.

Kuwait said they could not accept principles that contradict the values their culture and the teachings of **Islamic** religion. Indonesia underlined the respect for socio-cultural and historical context.

Portugal and Costa Rica said they fully supported the international recognition of the **human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**.

Australia expressed its concern over the practice of politically motivated arbitrary arrests, detention, and sentencing of **foreign nationals**.

Finland and Moldova referred to the role of **human rights in the digital age and Internet**.



Support to and Cooperation with the OHCHR:

A number of countries welcomed the **OHCHR's** tireless efforts and the important work of the **Special Procedures**, and commended the safe and effective work of the **Council** and the **Treaty Bodies** during the pandemic.

NGO Network on UN Treaty Bodies insisted that it was critical to stem the growing backlog and avoid delays in the activities of the **treaty bodies**.

Several countries spoke about the importance of continued OHCHR **technical assistance** and **capacity building** support, including Sierra Leone, Moldova, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, South Africa. Furthermore, Iraq, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, Thailand and Azerbaijan spoke positively of their cooperation with OHCHR field Offices, and Mauritania welcomed the support provided by OHCHR to the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

Namibia and Mexico also thanked for the support provided by the OHCHR in the **preparation of national reports for the UPR** and the **treaty bodies**.

However, Namibia asked the Office to publish all mandated reports in a **timely manner**.

Chile expressed concern about the **budgetary restrictions**, directly affecting the OHCHR work on the ground. To support OHCHR, Germany has increased its **voluntary contribution** to 11.5 million USD, 50% un-earmarked. India has made a voluntary contribution of USD 400,000 to UN Trust Funds, with a hope that this will ensure effective participation from SIDS and LDCs in the Council. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have also increased its unearmarked voluntary contribution to OHCHR's budget, while Qatar has pledged to provide support to the High Commissioner for the period from 2021 to 2023.

At the same time, Sri Lanka said the references to the country situation made by the High Commissioner were based on **inaccurate and misleading** information. Belarus and Russian Federation spoke of inadmissibility of using **disrespectful terminology** in relation to UN member states.

National situations (addressed by the countries concerned)

Afghanistan said that, for its people, the foundational right was the Right to Peace, and urged OHCHR to stress the necessity of protection of human rights values in the peace process.

Colombia said that the protests were not related to peace accords and have been predominantly peaceful. Any complaint of excessive force is being duly investigated and will be sanctioned.

Burkina Faso expressed concerns about the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in the country.

Malta, as a frontline state, said it continued to face several challenges in the area of migration.

Mozambique addressed the humanitarian situation in its Northern Province of Cabo Delgado.

Fiji ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Sudan declared its agreement to accede to the CAT, the CED, and the CEDAW.

National efforts were also addressed by **Slovenia, Viet Nam, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Japan, India, Maldives, Morocco, Lao PDR, Botswana, Nigeria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Cambodia, Bolivia** and **Mali**.

Multilateral efforts:

Several countries, including **Portugal** and **Italy**, spoke of their multilateral efforts. **Qatar** announced they intended to host the 5th UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries on 23-27 January 2022.

Mauritius congratulated the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund for having virtually organised the Seminar for Africa,

co-hosted by Mauritius and Burkina Faso, and called for organisations, including WTO and WHO, not to work in silos.

Albania announced that advancing human rights standards will be its priority during its membership to the UNSC in 2022-2023

Country and regional human rights situations:

Costa Rica, on behalf of 59 states, raised the issue of the persistent impunity for human rights violations since April 2018 in **Nicaragua**. European Union said that international human rights bodies must be

authorised to return to the country. Concerns about the human rights situation in Nicaragua and arrests of political figures of the opposition were also



expressed by Spain, Switzerland, France, Czech Republic, Mexico.

Netherlands, on behalf of 24 states, spoke on human rights situation in **Iraq** and the need to ensure rights of peaceful assembly, freedom of association, and freedom of expression.

The United Kingdom, on behalf of the Core Group on **Sri Lanka**, regretted the lack of progress on accountability in the country and shared some further concerning developments.

Haiti, on behalf of 32 states, expressed their support for the full sovereignty of Morocco over its **Saharian provinces**. Timor-Leste, on behalf of Geneva support group for Western Sahara, said that the resumed armed conflict in the Non Self-Governing Territory of **Western Sahara** brought serious violations of human rights. Algeria said the right to self-determination of the Saharawi people must be protected and the decolonization process must be finalized. Namibia called on the OHCHR to resume its technical missions. American Association of Jurists, on behalf of a group of 295 organisations, regretted the persistent silence observed by the OHCHR in relation to the situation prevailing in Western Sahara, and called upon UN High Commissioner to publicly condemn serious violations in Western Sahara.

A number of countries, including Germany, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Austria, United Kingdom, Sweden as well as the European Union, brought up the systematic crackdown on fundamental freedoms, political opposition, human rights defenders, independent civil society and media in **Russian Federation**. Germany also referred to the freedoms of people in the illegally annexed Crimea and occupied parts of eastern Ukraine. Ukraine said that no progress has been made in enforcing Russia to comply with its obligations.

The continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in **Belarus** was frequently addressed, including by the European Union, France, Czech Republic, Malta, United States, Belgium, United Kingdom, Denmark, and Sweden.

Politically motivated sentencing of the Russian opposition politician **Alexei Navalny** was also addressed on several occasions, as well as the detention of the Belarusian journalist **Raman Pratasevich**, with Greece saying that the state hijack of the Athens-Vilnius flight indicated the complete disregard for human rights and international law.

Canada, on behalf of a cross-regional group of more than 40 countries, expressed their grave concern about the human rights situation in the **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**, including arbitrary detentions; widespread surveillance of Uyghurs; reports of torture, forced sterilization, SGBV, forced separation of children, and forced labour. The group urged China to allow immediate, meaningful and unfettered access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the High Commissioner. This call was supported in the statements delivered by the European Union, France, Australia, Luxembourg, United States, Austria, United Kingdom, and Sweden, with the latter saying that its citizen Gui Minhai must be released, as well as Turkey, that said it respected China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but called for more transparency. The Group also expressed their deep concern about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in **Hong Kong** under the National Security Law and about the human rights situation in **Tibet**; the concern which was also shared by a number of Western states and NGOs. International Service for Human Rights said the victims and communities urgently needed increased resources and innovative responses from the High Commissioner, OHCHR, and the United Nations as a whole; a call that was echoed by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

At the same time, Belarus, on behalf of a group of countries, insisted that Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet related issues are China's internal affairs. This was echoed by the DPRK, Ecuador, Maldives, Venezuela, Lao PDR, Jordan, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, Tanzania, Vanuatu, Eritrea and Zimbabwe, with the latter also saying that the living standards of all ethnic groups in Tibet have been greatly improved. Furthermore, an Uyghur scholar speaking on behalf of China testified about the development and progress of Xinjiang's human rights cause.

The European Union said that in **Cameroon** grave human rights violations and abuses committed by both state and non-state actors continued, especially in the North-West, South-West and the Far North regions.

European Union, expressed their concern about the humanitarian situation in **Ethiopia** which continued to deteriorate since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Tigray. A number of countries expressed their support for the joint investigation of OHCHR and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and called for **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea** to cease violations of human rights and international humanitarian law,.



These concerns were shared by Germany, Switzerland, United States, Austria, Ireland, United Kingdom, Denmark, Mexico, Sweden, and Iceland. NGOs East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and Human Rights Watch asked the Council to adopt a resolution that would ensure international scrutiny of this human rights crisis.

Ethiopia said that the country was embracing a new democratic dispensation, as evidenced by the just concluded election. The Federal Police and the Office of the Attorney General were conducting a credible investigation into alleged violations. The Government ensured the smooth operation of the joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the OHCHR.

Eritrea said the report of the High Commissioner lacked verifiable information from credible sources. The allegations that the Eritrean Defence Forces continued to commit crimes in Tigray were untrue and unsubstantiated; the part of the report relating to the Law Enforcement operation in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia was one-sided.

European Union, brought up the deterioration of human rights situation in **Myanmar** since the military coup, and called for an inclusive dialogue of all relevant stakeholders, with the key role of ASEAN. France, Australia, Czech Republic, Malta, Norway, Austria, Belgium and Denmark joined the call.

The situation in **Lebanon**, following, the explosion in Beirut, was addressed by the European Union and France.

European Union brought up the human rights situation in **Saudi Arabia** where the number of death penalties increased in 2021.

European Union also spoke on human rights situation in **Turkey**. Greece and Iceland regretted the decision of Turkey to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Luxembourg rose a concern about democratic retreat and civic space in **Cambodia**.

United Kingdom said that following the coup in **Mali**, the conditions set out by ECOWAS should be fulfilled.

Germany said that in **DPRK**, the suffering of the people at the hands of a merciless regime continued, while in **Venezuela** people deserved their country to embark on a credible path to a democratic future.

Additionally, Germany spoke about the continuous harassment of the human rights defenders in **Egypt**, the call which was echoed by Sweden.

On **Libya**, Greece said that the presence and actions of foreign forces, fighters and mercenaries and the

disregard for basic principles of international law hindered efforts to build stability.

Switzerland brought attention to **Afghanistan's** increasingly unstable security situation, and the situation of Hazara minorities. NGO Women's International League for Peace and Freedom said there was a five-fold increase in killings of human rights defenders in Afghanistan in 2020 compared to 2019.

Switzerland also expressed its concern over the excessive use of force during the demonstrations in **Colombia**. Franciscans International, in their statement on behalf of more than 300 organisations, urged the High Commissioner, through her Office in Colombia, to prepare a report on the human rights violations committed during the protests.

Belgium called on the authorities to guarantee the right to peaceful assembly in **Uganda, Algeria, Nicaragua, Colombia**, in both post- and pre-electoral context.

Morocco said massive violations continued in **Algeria**.

On **Philippines**, Amnesty International called onto the Council to launch its own comprehensive investigation, following the official call of the Prosecutor of the ICC to open an investigation into suspected crimes against humanity.

A number of countries, including France, Kuwait, Malta, Mexico, Tunisia, Sweden, expressed their concern over the situation in the **Middle East**. Many agreed that only the two-state solution would allow a lasting response to the aspirations of the **Palestinians** and **Israelis**. Denmark and Turkey welcomed the establishment of the Commission on Inquiry. Algeria invited the High Commissioner to publish the updated database of companies involved in activities related to the Israeli occupation settlements. State of Palestine expressed its disappointment that the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, was not addressed during the High Commissioner's speech.

Turkey raised a country situation of **Syria**, where people continued to face multiple crises.

France said that in **Central African Republic**, the independent expert must enjoy all the security essential to the implementation of his mandate.



DPRK said **Japan** had committed unprecedented crimes against humanity such as forced abduction of Koreans and forced sexual slavery. In its turn, Japan stated that the issue of abductions by **DPRK** was a top priority of the Government.

Armenia said it was regrettable that the OHCHR did not succeed in visiting **Nagorno-Karabakh** and called for Azerbaijan to allow access in the region and repatriate the Prisoners of War. Azerbaijan called upon the High Commissioner to urge **Armenia** to immediately hand over maps of minefields.

Pakistan said the human rights situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir has further deteriorated and requested the High Commissioner to ensure the report on the **Jammu and Kashmir** as an exercise of the prevention mandate.

Georgia spoke about the grave human rights violations in the regions of **Abkhazia and Tskhinvali** and reiterated the urgent need for access of the OHCHR to both regions.

Switzerland expressed concern over the arrests of human rights defenders and journalists in **Bangladesh, Iraq and Iran**. Similar concern was raised by Austria, who spoke of targeting and arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists in **Belarus, Turkey, Iran and Egypt**. Sweden, said that intimidation of journalists in **Philippines** and harassment of human rights defenders in **Iran and Saudi Arabia** must end.

Switzerland expressed concern about the excessive use of force in the Jau prison in **Bahrain**.

China delivered **three joint statements**, saying that some countries were using human rights as a means to interfere in the internal affairs of others; reminding that the High Commissioner and OHCHR should carry their duties respecting the **sovereignty and the territorial integrity** of states; and States should practice true multilateralism and enhanced cooperation instead of creating divisions and confrontation. China also addressed the human rights situation in **Canada**, including the violations of rights of indigenous peoples.

Some other states, including Iran and DPRK, also addressed human rights situation in **Western countries**, such as deep-rooted racism and police brutality.

United States welcomed the High Commissioner's work on **18 country situations**.

A speaker from the **United Nations Development Programme** spoke of the OHCHR and UNDP joint and fruitful collaboration, and said that the UNDP's new Strategic Plan supported a rights-based, green and inclusive recovery.

17 joints statements were delivered, while more than 100 countries spoke in their national capacity, as well as 10 speakers from the civil society and one representative of the UN Agency.

In her Concluding Remarks, Ms. Michelle Bachelet said that the OHCHR strove to base its work on **verified facts** and that the **access to the countries** was essential to be able to verify the allegations. The **independence of Special Procedures** should be supported. The states that have concerns about the implementation of the Code of Conduct by the mandate holders can address them to Coordination Committee. There is a **shortfall in resources** to support Special Procedures and the prospect for 2022 remains concerning. Without adequate resources, the **treaty bodies** are also falling behind in their work. The **individual complaint procedure** can last up to six years in most Committees. A **digital case management system** would be crucial to facilitate the submission of documentation, including petitions. OHCHR's work on **business and human rights** will focus on accountability and remedy. On order to **protect human rights defenders**, there is a need to invest in a specific mechanisms. The High Commissioner also addressed the OHCHR work in specific countries and regions, including: **Western Sahara** and the Tindouf camps (remote monitoring), the **Occupied Palestinian Territories** (OHCHR is ready to provide the necessary support to the Commission of Inquiry); **China** (the discussions have resumed regarding the visit); and **Sri Lanka** (High Commissioner's recent report to the Human Rights Council provides a number of recommendations to the government).

Contact: Maryna Yazianok at myazianok@gchragd.org