

ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL FOR THE 16TH CYCLE (2022)

6 December 2021, 15h00 – 18h00

The session chaired by H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan, President of the Human Rights Council.

Ms. Kira Kruglikova, Director, Division of Conference Management, United Nations Office at Geneva – **on financial situation of the conference services.**

Business continuity for meetings at UNOG: 10 conference rooms that support multilingual remote participation are available. ZOOM is fully approved. Interpretify platform is also used at UNOG. Constraints: COVID measures; Strategic Heritage Plan (SHP) room closures; high demand for conference rooms; AV equipment supply delays; limited staff for implementation.

Conference room closures due to SHP renovations: Assembly Hall closed through May 2022. AC Building (Rooms III, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, XV and New Press Room) to re-open in March 2022. Concordia to re-open in February 2022. AB Building (Rooms X, XI, XII and XIV) to re-open in June 2022. **E building will be closed from October 2022 to October 2024. Reduced conference room availability due to SHP**, especially in 2023 and 2024. Until end 2024, UNOG will only be able to effectively accommodate meetings with interpretation included in the official calendar of meetings approved by the General Assembly. Some conference facilities in Geneva, such as CICG, are fully booked until 2026. **Adding extra weeks to sessions or scheduling special sessions will continue to be problematic.**

Remote participation has no mandate; it is used now for business continuity. Once business continuity is done, the UN will return to fully in-person meetings. If remote participation is desired (there is no global effort yet), Member States need to give a mandate. This would trigger full evaluation of technical, legal and financial parameters. Bodies may address remote participation individually in the absence of a global approach, and some bodies have expressed interest in this.

Costs of remote participation: for UNOG, it is more expensive to support remote participation. A two-hour meeting with 50 remote participants costs additional 1,100 USD in technical and organizational support alone. Costs increase with the number of participants and the duration of the meeting. The Council can meet “as required” and the three-hour duration of multilingual meetings with unlimited remote participation can be maintained, if funding and freelance interpreters remain available.

2021 Budget Situation: UNOG Division of Administration provides audiovisual and IT support. UNOG is now tasked with additional technical support for remote participation without budgetary provisions. Costs to Division of Administration are on average 4 times higher than in-person meetings. UNOG is facing additional budget cuts in 2022 to contractual services by additional 5%.

HRC meetings: the target of maximum 130 meetings per year was suggested to the Council in 2016. 139 HRC meetings were held in 2021. In 2021, a total of 13 HRC lunchtime meetings were provided. These meetings are an inefficient use of interpretation resources, as the team assigned to lunchtime meeting cannot be assigned to any other meeting that day. This is especially problematic in view of the shortage of freelance interpreters. No commitment can be made at this time to secure the servicing of lunchtime meetings in 2022, nor the extension of the session in the current financial climate. HRC secretariat and DCM will be discussing a preliminary draft programme soon. Given the SHP closure of building E, it is essential to take action promptly to **ensure the Council can meet properly in 2023 and beyond.** Possible solutions, including adjustments to working methods, should be investigated and may require additional funding.

H.E. Mr. Yuri Borissov STERK (Vice-President, Ambassador of Bulgaria) – **on consultations and activities related to Voluntary rationalization of initiatives on behalf of co-facilitators (Bulgaria, Togo, Uruguay).**

During 2021, the group and co-facilitators conducted extensive consultations. A number of resolutions continued to be bi-annualised or tri-annualised. More attention was given to the outcomes of the

resolutions and to the similar resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. Reduced amount of Panel Debate discussions. The updated **Voluntary Yearly Calendar** of thematic resolutions was circulated to all delegations by letter of the President dated 1 October 2021 and published on Extranet. The co-facilitators proposed a new section in the Voluntary Calendar dedicated to resolutions with no specific frequency or one-time initiatives. The **further steps may include**: information on the PBIs, information on the frequency of resolutions with a possible link to a voting record or explanation of vote, improved transparency and cooperation between Core Groups working on similar initiatives, consulting with OHCHR and mandate holders in view of identifying possible duplication risks, developing an interactive database of all adopted resolutions with a search engine, announcing informal consultations and sharing the zero draft as early as possible, creating a dedicated webpage with all the relevant information.

H.E. Mr. Paul BEKKERS (Vice-President, Permanent Representative of Netherlands) – on consultations on strengthening and optimization of the UPR on behalf of co-facilitators (Somalia, Indonesia, Netherlands)

On 17 November 2021, the co-facilitators conducted informal consultations for states and civil society, including on financial and time-constraints of the UPR, and the implementation of UPR recommendations. A non-paper was circulated by the co-facilitators, covering a broad range of issues, including efficiency. **The consultations explored** the 3.5-hour duration of the UPR reviews, the use of virtual modalities, automatization of the UPR through the General Debate under Item 6 and technical assistance to States under review. Support for return of 3.5-hour meetings. Delegations underlined the importance of in-person participation, but most delegations expressed support for the preservation of virtual modalities for the 4th cycle. The summary of the meeting will be posted on Extranet.

H.E. Mr. Umej Singh BHATIA (Vice-President, Permanent Representative of Singapore) – on efforts to address challenges faced by delegations of small island developing states and the LDCs and the implementation of the use of modern technology on behalf of the focal points (Estonia, Singapore)

In 2021, the focal points reached out three times to all delegations to **solicit feedback on the use of virtual modalities**. The focal points also interacted with the beneficiaries of the SIDS and LDCs Trust Fund that attended HRC48. The focal points worked with the UN Library to organize a pilot workshop in February for the use of WebEx for informal consultations. In terms of feedback, delegations have been generally positive about the use of virtual modalities in 2021. The use of virtual modalities is likely to last for a while, and can be useful outside the pandemic, too. Submitting pre-recorded video-statements is an example of a good practice. Discussing of sensitive topics can be more challenging due to the lack of in-person interactions.

H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan (Fiji), President of the 15th Cycle of the Human Rights Council

President's statement ([A/HRC/PRST/OS/15/1](#)) "Efficiency of the Human Rights Council (HRC)":

"Recognizing the additional challenges for the efficient conduct of the Human Rights Council's work, including the restrictions imposed to combat the spread of COVID-19, the ongoing effects of the United Nations liquidity crisis and the impact of the renovation of the Palais des Nations pursuant to the Strategic Heritage Plan,

Decides to extend the measures contained in President's statement PRST OS/13/1 for one additional year, and requests the President of the HRC to organize an informal stocktaking meeting to assess the impact of their implementation after its 51st session and before the organizational session to be held in December 2022.

No PBIs. Adopted by consensus. No general comments.

H.E. Ms. Keva Lorraine BAIN (Vice-President, Permanent Representative of Bahamas), a Chair of the Task Force of Accessibility for persons with disabilities to present an oral report of the Task Force "Equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities and their right to access to justice".

Accessibility is non-negotiable, accessibility measures should not only be protected but enhanced. The Task Force continues to update and circulate guidelines explaining how to include captions in video messaging.

Today, the Task Force debuts the use of automatic captioning technology on ZOOM. All participants can choose “auto-generated subtitles” (so far, only available in English). Ten fully accessible panels were held in 2021, with international sign interpretation and captioning. The ID with SR on the rights of persons with disabilities was also fully accessible. The Task Force continued to work on the objectives outlined in the **Accessibility Plan**: UNOG has conducted briefings on accessibility for persons with disabilities to key staff, work is ongoing to ensure that the documents are uploaded in an accessible format. The Council adopted 10 resolutions mandating fully-accessible activities. The Task Force continued to advocate for the inclusion of resources for accessibility from the regular budget of the UN. Appealed to everyone to join the Group of Friends of the Task Force, established in 2019.

H.E. Ms. Margarida Rosa da Silva IZATA (Permanent Representative of Angola) on her activities as a Gender Focal Point of the Human Rights Council in 2021

As of 2021, and in line with zero tolerance policy of Human Rights Council, **no case of sexual or gender based harassment** has been brought to attention. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the President and Ms. Izata were not able to meet with other institutions to further develop the work already under way on achieving gender equality in the UN system. Reminded of the importance of **ensuring gender balance at national, regional and international levels**, including through nomination of women for the mandates were women are underrepresented and for the mandates that have never been held by women. Referred to the recent report by the Advisory Committee A/HRC/47/51 “*Current levels of representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms: ensuring gender balance*”. Ms. Izata has met with the Advisory Committee for a constructive discussion. The lack of **gender parity** in international bodies also impacts the right of access to equal opportunities in employment recognised under international law. Human Rights Council should pave the way and lead the campaign for gender parity.

H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan (Fiji), President of the 15th Cycle of the Human Rights Council:

In 2021, the gender parity was not only reached but **surpassed among its the Special Procedures** mandate holders, with 51% of mandate holders being women.

The **theme** of the Council’s annual half-day panel discussion with heads of governing bodies and secretariats of UN agencies on human rights mainstreaming, to be held in February 2022, will be “*The contribution of universal participation to the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Trust Fund to support the participation of the least-developed countries and small-island developing states in the work of the Human Rights Council*”.

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President of the new 16th cycle (2022): H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Argentina – *nominated by Paraguay on behalf of the GRULAC. Appointed by acclamation.*

H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas (Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Argentina, President of the Human Rights Council, 16th cycle):

Virtual hybrid multilateral diplomacy is on its way and will continue. A particular responsibility to assume the post because of the impact the UN system and the promotion and protection of human rights has had in Argentina. The **mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo** came to UN Geneva at the end of the 70s to condemn the enforced disappearances and promoted the establishment of the first thematic procedure of the then Commission for Human Rights. These mothers and grandmothers returned to Geneva 30 years later, and were also will the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as adopted. A solid bridge has been built between the tragic past and protection of human rights in the future.

2022 will be a year with **particular challenges for the Council**:

- Need to think about the **responsibility of this Council**, bearing in mind the historical outlook. Need to protect those who, for a long time, have been forgotten or stripped of their rights. There are many issues that are relatively young, e.g. climate change, discrimination on the basis of sexual identity, business and human rights, human rights in the digital era, rights of persons with disabilities, rights of the elderly, among others.
- The second challenge is the **politicization** of the Council. Human rights must not be used a political tool, as it happened during the Cold War.
- Collective work must be done, to **return in-person to the work in Council**, as soon as the health restrictions allow. The remote meetings should be used as an exception.

Proposed actions to be carried out in 2022: (1) a stable platform can be established for further **dialogue to explore common ground and differences** in the human rights sector. (2) Need to become more familiar with different roles that the **civil society** can play. The bridge needs to be built between the States and the NGOs. (3) need for a systemic reflection to strengthen the Council, help it to **prevent conflicts and re-build** the social and constitutional fabric after conflict situations. (4) need to **strengthen cooperation** throughout.

New members of the Bureau (1 January – 31 December 2022):

- **H.E. Mr. Tamim BAIYOU**, Permanent Representative of **Libya** (African Group)
- **H.E. Ms. Katharina STASCH**, Permanent Representative of **Germany** to the UNOG (WEOG)
- **H.E. Mr. Ulugbek LAPASOV**, Permanent Representative of **Uzbekistan** (Asia-Pacific Group). Also appointed as a Rapporteur.
- The Eastern European Group has not yet come to consensus and requested more time.*

* *Representative of Serbia: the Group has only one candidature – that of the Ambassador of Armenia. However, due to objection of one country, the consensus has not been reached so far. The negotiations are still ongoing.*

Statements by Delegations:

Representatives of **Brazil, India, Nepal, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Peru, Venezuela, Philippines, European Union, Uruguay, Mexico, Libya, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Switzerland, Pakistan, Cuba, United Kingdom, and Chile** took the floor. Delegations expressed their words of thanks to H.E. Ms. Khan and congratulations to H.E. Mr. Villegas and the newly elected members of the Bureau. A number of states expressed support to the Presidential Statement adopted by consensus.

Several **civil society organizations** also took the floor, including *International Lesbian and Gay Association, International Service for Human Right, Action Canada for Population and Developments, CIVICUS, and International Humanist and Ethical Union*. They brought up the negative impact of the removal of the General Debates from the June session, the need to maintain the possibility for the NGOs to engage remotely even after easing the COVID-19 measures, the need to consult the civil society when discussing the HRC efficiency measures, as well as expressed concern about the cases of reprisals.

H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan (Fiji), President of the 15th Cycle of the Human Rights Council:

Concluding Remarks: congratulated the new President and the Bureau. *“If there is a lesson for us to take away, let it be resilience.”* Flexibility and adaptability of this Council helped to make it more resilient.

Link to this meeting on [UN WebTV](#).

Coming up:

12 January 2022: Next organizational session of the Human Rights Council.

14 December 2021, 10 am: High Commissioner’s oral update on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

14 December 2021, 3 pm: High Commissioner’s oral update on the situation of human rights in Nicaragua

15 December 2021, 10 am: High Commissioner’s presentation of OHCHR periodic report on the situation of human rights in Ukraine