

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 51st SESSION

### Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to development

16 September 2022

Mr. Saad Alfarargi, Special Rapporteur on the right to development, introduced his [annual thematic report](#) focusing on the **response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of the right to development at the national level**. He thanked the countries and civil society actors who provided contributions to the report, namely sharing practical examples of ways in which the right to development has been integrated into **national COVID-19 response and recovery plans and policies**, as well as inclusive and participatory practices, including from a gender perspective. Mr. Alfarargi stated that COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the largest global economic crisis in more than a century and has led to dramatic increase in **inequality within and across countries**. Impacts have been particularly severe in **emerging economies**, where over 50 percent of households were not able to sustain basic consumption for more than three months in the face of income losses. Global poverty is estimated to have increased for the **first time in a generation**, disproportionately effecting disadvantaged populations, including women, small businesses and workers who had completed only a primary education. The **disproportional impact on women** was of particular concern, women being more impacted by income and employment losses due to working in sectors more affected by lockdown and social distancing measures. There has been a marked increase in **gender-based violence** in several countries, and the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing structural barriers to accessing health care, including sexual and reproductive health care. Women have faced severe economic hardships, asset losses, food insecurity, hunger and rising poverty. Women-led businesses have faced larger declines in sales and profits. The **pace of recovery** in terms of employment has also been slower for women, contributing to a growing **global gender employment gap**. At the same time, only a fraction of the pandemic responses specifically targets gender inequalities.

Mr. Alfarargi affirmed that studies suggest the **recovery from the crisis will be uneven**, with emerging economies and the poor needing much more time to recover. He noted that the size and composition of **fiscal packages** allocated in 2020 to respond to the crisis varied significantly. Low-income countries announced packages of less than 2 percent of their GDP and focused their spending on health-related measures, leaving little fiscal space to provide livelihoods and social protection to communities most adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, as the economic crisis combined with the existing debt distress has significantly reduced the fiscal capacities of Governments worldwide, some have introduced **cuts in public sector expenditure**. Many low-income countries have also resorted to taking on **increasing levels of debt** from private lenders - loans, that have come at a high borrowing cost for developing countries. The SR had encountered situations where COVID-19 response measures did not address the needs of certain social groups and particularly referred to **children** from socially vulnerable groups unable to attend distance education as they lacked the necessary electronic equipment. The SR highlighted **persons with disabilities** being among the most affected groups, with numerous factors from pre-existing health conditions to isolation from caretakers, lack of access to health care and loss of income contributing to the situation. There was also little evidence that persons with disabilities were included in the discussions and decision-making processes when reviewing COVID-19 response and recovery plans. The SR also highlighted the impact of the pandemic on **indigenous peoples and minorities** being of concern, with lack of access to health care, employment, social assistance, education, and housing throughout the pandemic.

The SR highlighted, that the COVID-19 response and recovery plans are ultimately development plans and as such they should be in line with the right to development and the commitments Governments made when elaborating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, most importantly the promise to leave no one behind. In conclusion, he said that Governments and decision makers must avoid measures and policies that may **reinforce or exacerbate vulnerabilities** and must **empower persons**,

both individually and collectively, to decide their own development goals and their preferred methods of reaching them.

### Interactive dialogue

45 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. The speakers thanked the SR for his report and acknowledged the negative impact that the pandemic has had on all countries, hindering the achievement of the right to development. Calling for joint action by all concerned parties at all levels, many highlighted that COVID-19 responses and recovery plans and the realization of the right to development are mutually applicable and inextricably linked to the achievement of the Agenda 2030. **State of Palestine (on behalf of the Group of Arab States)** stressed the need for recovery plans to be in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda and requiring the contribution and participation of various stakeholders to achieve the economic and social advancement of states and societies. **Côte d'Ivoire (on behalf of the African Group)** stressed the need for a genuine commitment from the international community to work together to close the existing gap in terms of inequalities, for the realization of the right to development for all and welcomed the adoption by the African Union in 2022 of a Framework for a comprehensive and resilient post-COVID recovery focusing on the need to deliver robust socio-economic recovery initiatives at continental, regional and national levels and to create preconditions for building resilient societies on the African continent. **The EU** reiterated support for a human rights-based approach to sustainable development stating that they have been at the forefront of international efforts to curb the global COVID-19 pandemic and are one of the main contributors to the vaccines pillar of the ACT-Accelerator, COVAX, to which the EU has allocated over 3 billion euros. The EU has exported half of their vaccine production, and NextGenerationEU is the EUs over €800 billion temporary recovery instrument to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought by the coronavirus pandemic. **Lithuania (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries)** acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic as a major setback in implementation of the 2030 Agenda and added that nothing violates the right to development so directly and devastatingly as an outright military aggression. Lithuania further called on all governments to ensure participatory approaches that leave no one behind and to refrain from actions that put human rights at risk. **The OIC** countries have established a set of policy measures to contain the pandemic and protect the most effected segments of society and countries were assisted in reducing vulnerabilities. The OIC further highlighted effective international cooperation as a prerequisite for the realization of the right to development.

**Egypt** stated that the human rights dimension, including the right to development, was at the heart of their response and recovery plans, and the government adopted plans to mitigate the economic and social effects of the pandemic, including strengthening health care and expanding social protection networks for most vulnerable groups, including women. The Egyptian government also provided medical treatment to refugees and asylum seekers on an equal basis with Egyptians and included them in various national health initiatives. **Viet Nam** was pleased to see many good practices related to Covid-19 response and recovery plans and policies, which were similar to those carried out by the country. These have included strengthening public health capacity and social protection networks through a whole-of-society approach, promoting trust, transparency, common purpose, and accountability, and policies and solutions to support especially small and medium size enterprises. **Oman** referred to national development goals and the renewed ambition to implement the Oman 2040 vision. **The Russian Federation** largely agreed with the SR's assessment regarding the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, including its disproportionate negative impact on vulnerable groups such as the disabled, women, indigenous peoples, ethnic and national minorities, and said it had taken immediate measures to support socially vulnerable groups. **Venezuela** stated that solidarity, political will and cooperation are needed more than ever to overcome this crisis together, and reiterated the call of the General Assembly contained in its resolution entitled "Comprehensive and Coordinated Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic", in which States are strongly urged to refrain from enacting and unilaterally applying economic, financial or commercial measures

that prevent the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries. **Sierra Leone** had set up a COVID-19 Relief Fund to provide support to persons and communities seriously affected by the pandemic, while taxes on essential commodities were reduced drastically, and cash transfers were made to industries that suffered loss of revenue. **Malaysia** stated appreciation of the Special Rapporteur's acknowledgement of Malaysia's approach of inclusivity in their socio-economic development to ensure that no one is left behind, and building on these achievements, will continue to implement the post COVID-19 national recovery agenda to build economic resilience, restore the economic stability and reinvigorate economic growth in the country. **FAO** recognized the importance of investments in the agrifood sector and socio-economic recovery measures, enhancing social protection and protecting consumers' access to affordable, adequate food.

**NGOs** highlighted how the pandemic has shown social disparity, systemic human rights violations and a lack of a social safety net, aimed at protecting and supporting, in particular, those living in extreme poverty. The Covid-19 response plans should be in line with the right to development and the commitments governments have made when elaborating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)** spoke of the public health crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly disrupted healthcare services, in particular, sexual and reproductive health. Lack of access to safe abortion care was of particular concern. **Partners For Transparency** highlighted efforts made by the Egyptian government as an African example for the good practices during Covid pandemic, through a quick response with a comprehensive support plan with a financial support of 2% of GDP. The four pillars related to COVID-19 response approach were also highlighted, namely saving lives, protecting those most in need, ensuring sustainable business growth and job creation, and strengthening policies, institutions and investments to build back better. **The Sikh Human Rights Group** drew attention to transnational corporations who have production facilities in developing nations and are taking advantage of cheaper labour costs, but through creative accounting do not pay the due tax to the country. They called for setting up a support system for developing countries to help them receive their due tax, as successful implementation of the 2030 agenda relies heavily on government spending.

### Concluding Remarks

Mr. Saad Alfarargi, Special Rapporteur on the right to development reiterated the collective responsibility of all to implement the commitments made when elaborating the 2030 Agenda and the promise to leave no one behind. He reassured the Council that he will continue to promote the right to development until his last day in this role on 1 May 2023.

#### Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (45 country delegations):

*Lithuania (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries), European Union, Côte d'Ivoire (on behalf of the Group of African States), State of Palestine (on behalf of the Group of Arab States), Egypt, Sierra Leone, France, Djibouti, India, Luxembourg, Cuba, Iraq, Germany, Maldives, Mauritania, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Russian Federation, Namibia, China, Mauritius, Syrian Arab Republic, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Saudi Arabia, Bolivia, Nepal, Tanzania, Oman, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Botswana, Mozambique, Togo, Sudan, Malawi, Cambodia, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Iran, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, South Africa.*

#### NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (10):

*Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII (Joint Statement), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Beijing Guangming Charity Foundation, Make Mothers Matter, Partners For Transparency, Rencontre Africaine pour la defense des droits de l'homme, Sikh Human Rights Group, Chinese Association for International Understanding, International Muslim Women's Union, China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS)*

**International Organizations (1):** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Watch the full video recording on UN Web TV: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)