

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

Interactive Dialogue on the OHCHR report on economic, social, and cultural rights, and COVID-19 recovery

15 September 2023

In his opening statement, **Mr Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, informed the Council about the report on economic, social, and cultural rights, and COVID-19 recovery. In adopting the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Member States expressed their firm conviction that the basic necessities of life, education, health, decent work, social security, an adequate standard of living, freedom from hunger, and enjoyment of science and culture – were not services or commodities, but human rights to be enjoyed by all. Last year, the United Nations General Assembly finally recognized a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right. The **COVID-19 pandemic** has exposed deep inequalities within and between countries, as well as decades of underinvestment in systems and services essential to upholding economic, social, and cultural rights. It had also shown what was possible when States invested in these systems. Yet instead of learning lessons from the pandemic, these rights were still seen as optional extras, not binding obligations. Mr. Türk said that globally, **public spending** on economic, social, and cultural rights is insufficient. Human rights economies measure success, not by the size of the gross domestic product, but by the well-being of all people. Putting people and the planet first is fundamental to broader social and economic well-being.

The report before the Council outlined the High Commissioner's priorities for the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights, and underscored the urgent need for action. The Office would support States to meet their economic, social, and cultural rights obligations; reinforce States' efforts to address the root causes of inequalities, and prioritize those most affected by entrenched discrimination; mobilize efforts across society, from national human rights institutions and civil society, businesses and parliaments; work with international institutions to integrate economic, social and cultural rights into their policies; and help States harness the power of data to increase understanding, address gaps and develop targeted socioeconomic policies.

To address inequalities and realize economic, social, and cultural rights, Mr. Türk stressed the need of further resources, including technical assistance, enhancing capacity, and providing legislative support to broaden fiscal space, tackle inequality, and alleviate poverty.

Interactive dialogue

60 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries** reiterated their commitments and support to the work of the OHCHR in promoting and protecting economic, social, and cultural rights, and its role as a valuable contributor to development efforts. They, welcoming the Office's vision, affirmed that the global rise of economic and social inequalities and insufficient advancement in the realization of ESCRs are hindering the progress of the 2030 Agenda. Action on economic, social, and cultural rights indeed needs to be amplified when striving for an inclusive, sustainable, and better future for all. **Australia and Bahrein** added that leaving no one behind is not an empty slogan; it is the responsibility of Governments and international institutions to integrate economic, social, and cultural rights into their policies and practices. **The EU, Spain, and Finland** reported that no country is able to tackle global crises alone. A recent demonstration was the COVID-19 pandemic which not only provoked disastrous physical and health damages but also had a profound socio-economic impact and continues to create significant challenges to the realization of all human rights, notably ESCRs, with a disproportionate impact on women, girls, and persons in vulnerable situations. **Tunisia** suggested that the most important lessons learned from this crisis are to establish the close interrelationship between human rights and to confirm that the enjoyment of

civil and political rights cannot be achieved in isolation from the enjoyment of the rest of the economic, social and cultural rights.

Russian Federation focused on the fact that these rights were impacted also by external pressures, such as unilateral coercive measures, capital inflow, the interference of sovereign States in the affairs of others, and many others, all of which had a negative impact on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, and the Office should pay attention to this. The huge global gap in inequalities needed to be bridged, and unilateral coercive measures only served as a barrier to this, another speaker said. **Jordan** reported the great resilience of the national healthcare system during the pandemic and the increment of investment to strengthen this sector, the increment of investment in the field of education. It also reported that it seeks to preserve and enhance its rich heritage, and to introduce the world to its national identity in the fields of language, literature, arts, heritage, customs, and traditions.

For the **UN WOMEN**, the pandemic compounded the economic impacts on women and girls globally, further increasing unpaid care work and endangering their already precarious social and economic security. It also reported that today 1 in 10 women globally are living in extreme poverty while 1 in 4 are affected by food insecurity. Addressing the root causes of inequalities requires tackling entrenched structural and systematic discrimination. As such, comprehensive and gender-responsive approaches must be mainstreamed into all policies and programs. **UNESCO** estimated that the pandemic caused the loss of over 10 million jobs in the cultural sector by 2020 alone. It has also developed policy measures to sustain national recovery strategies, notably providing direct support to cultural professionals, targeting their social benefits and regulatory obligations, and compensating for the loss of their income, while investing in skills development.

NGOs shared concerns presented by the High Commission, in particular in relation to the right to life, health care, and education. It is time to end the inequalities. They also documented and reported how international financial institutions are failing to support economies rooted in human rights. It should encompass the meaningful human rights scrutiny of all the international financial institutions, their policies and practices, and accountability measures for violating human rights standards including through reparations. The predictable consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic had a specific and disproportionate impact along gender, race, and class lines.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (60 country delegations):

Honduras, Finland (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries), EU, Cote d'Ivoire, China (on behalf of a core group of the Resolution), Indonesia, Portugal, Bahrain, Egypt, Germany, Costa Rica, United States, Jordan, France, Kuwait, Georgia, Chile, Lesotho, Iraq, Malawi, Malaysia, Armenia, Thailand, Luxembourg, Zimbabwe, Romania, Russian Federation, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Cameroon, Bangladesh, Maldives, Peru, Namibia, Australia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Panama, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of Lao, Algeria, Cuba, Togo, Venezuela, Senegal, Mauritius, Spain, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Uganda, India, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Bahamas, Kenya, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, Bolivia.

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

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Action Canada for Population and Development, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL), Make Mothers Matter, Human Rights Watch, iuventum e.V., Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Asociacion HazteOir.org, Geledés - Instituto da Mulher Negra, India Water Foundation.

International organizations (3): UN Women, UNPF, UNESCO.

To watch the full meeting refer to the UN WEB TV: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).