

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 56th SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty

02-03 July 2024

Mr. Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, presented to the Human Rights Council his annual report, by calling to think about tools to combat poverty without depending on economic growth, as measured by the increase of GDP. The traditional approach to eradicating poverty has relied on a sequence divided into three steps: first, to grow the economy, increasing the total output; second, to tax corporations and individuals; third, to use the revenue collected to finance public services, public investments, and social protection. This approach to combating poverty remains crucial, and it is especially important to defend it today. However, this approach is now facing limitations, and an urgent reset is required.

The reality however is that economic growth today is not inclusive, but instead highly exclusive.

In conclusion, he underlined that the report explains that new metrics of progress, while necessary and welcome, are not sufficient. The international community needs more: it needs a roadmap to transform the economy in order to deliver on well-being and the realization of human rights, rather than simply on wealth creation. New indicators will mean little until they lead to change in the current trajectory, in which we invest in the wrong things, simply to respond to the purchasing power of the richest, rather than meeting the needs of people living in poverty.

Further, he proposed two thematic areas of discussion. First, with the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, he presented a study on the criminalization of homelessness and poverty. This highlights a growing body of evidence showing that men, women, and children living in homelessness and poverty are increasingly facing criminal penalties, fines, and sanctions for activities such as sleeping, washing, cooking, eating, begging, and working on the street. These laws will not solve homelessness or poverty; they are in direct violation of international human rights and must be urgently repealed.

The way to combat homelessness is to ensure access to housing. It is not to make it a criminal offense to be too poor to be able to pay rent. Criminalizing people who are living in homelessness does not reduce the number of people in street situations. Instead, it pushes them further into poverty. These laws therefore result in a double punishment: people are punished first when they are pushed into homelessness and again when they are sanctioned, especially since such punishment may be registered in criminal records and make access to employment or housing even more difficult. Resources should be reallocated from law enforcement to address the root causes of poverty and homelessness, and under no circumstance should prison sentences be imposed on those who cannot afford to pay fines.

Concerning the country visit to Bangladesh, the SR was particularly moved by the situation of the Rohingya refugees, about 950,000 of whom now live in 33 camps in Cox's Bazar after having fled genocidal attacks in Myanmar in 2017. Their situation is extremely worrisome, as they depend entirely on humanitarian support and have no livelihood opportunities. Poverty and extreme poverty, as well as multidimensional poverty, have significantly declined in recent years in Bangladesh.

He focused his visit on the ready-made garment sector, which accounts for 82% of Bangladesh's export revenues and employs more than 4 million workers. The country should move away from a development model that is based on achieving cost-competitiveness in the global competition at the expense of workers' rights, and on exporting workers sending back remittances. Instead, it should adopt a development model supported by increasing domestic demand and better living standards for the local population.

Concerning the country's visit to Ecuador, the SR reported that the security situation has seriously deteriorated, and the government considers itself at war with the narco traficcants. Poverty results in insecurity: the lack of job opportunities makes young people an easy recruit for the criminal gangs, and makes crime, including the smuggling of goods across borders, a desirable option for many. Insecurity, in turn, impacts the ability of the country to fight poverty.

Bangladesh (concerned country) affirmed that its tireless efforts, pragmatic policy interventions, and forward-looking investments have transformed Bangladesh from a lower middle-income country to a middle-income country. It reported the expansion of the social safety net coverage to ensure the social and financial security of destitute women, widows, elderly persons with disabilities, and vulnerable sections of society. Despite contributing less than 0.47% of global emissions, Bangladesh is one of the most climatically vulnerable countries in the world. Floods, cyclones, droughts, sea level rise, salinity intrusion, and other natural disasters have become recurring challenges that have been negatively impacting our efforts toward poverty reduction.

Furthermore, it affirmed its measures in protecting and providing humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya despite serious multifaceted ramifications on the economy, environment, and security. However, robust international cooperation is vital for addressing extreme poverty.

Ecuador (concerned country) stressed that although the COVID-19 pandemic reduced national resources to combat poverty and inequalities, in 2022 it managed to reduce poverty thanks to various initiatives in order to return to pre-pandemic levels. The country is facing challenges in its fight against poverty, inequality, and insecurity. It is also facing the brutal action of organized crime groups which has demanded enormous resources from the state and has undermined the budget allocated to public programs. Peace and security are essential for development and social progress.

To consolidate human capital and counteract the persistence of poverty, the government provided human development bonds and other direct monetary aid to families vulnerable to child malnutrition, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The law for equal pay between men and women which with other regulations and programs promotes the economic and social development of women and other minorities.

Interactive dialogue

68 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue, all of which shared national measures and policies to eradicate poverty, create jobs, support enterprises, and improve health systems and services. In addition, they reaffirmed their commitments to undertaking holistic efforts to eradicate poverty and address inequality through the implementation of various programs aiming at increasing the income of the poor, strengthening the quality of education and skills training, and improving access to essential services including health, housing, job opportunities access to financing as well as basic services such as infrastructure, digital connectivity, water and electricity. In this vein, **Estonia** affirmed that a human rights-based approach is key. There is a need to expand our toolbox in the fight against poverty in order to reduce inequality and ensure social inclusion. Quality education is crucial to reducing poverty and inequalities and to counteract child labor or early child marriage.

Venezuela argued that the imposition of a unilateral course of measures against countries is a deliberate attack on the right of the prevalent exacerbating extreme poverty and inequalities in affected countries. **The Russian Federation** affirmed that economic growth does not always lead to the eradication of poverty and the creation of well-being for all but on the contrary, sometimes contributes to the exacerbation of the social gap. The economic growth is fueled by the incessant plundering of the resources of the global south within the framework of the post-colonial model of domination. It affirmed that many economic players in the pursuit of maximum profits, will resist such a transformation. **China** underlined that the per capita disposable income of its people has increased in pace with economic growth, equal access to basic public services has been improved and the fruits

of development have been translated into high quality of life. While pursuing its development, China is also actively promoting common development. **Cuba** affirmed that eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions including extreme poverty is the greatest challenge that humankind faces. Its elimination is a necessary prerequisite to attain sustainable development. The eradication of poverty is indispensable for the full attainment of all human rights, particularly the right to food, education, health, employment, to social security as well as all other economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. **Zambia** expressed concern with the widening global economic inequalities which require a human rights approach that focuses on empowering the most vulnerable groups and goes beyond increasing GDP. The increasing GDP is not sustainable to ensure sustainability, to change the equitable and sustainable societies that are resistant to climate change, affirmed **the EU**. The international community needs a solid economy based on solidarity, promoting social and territorial cohesion, stimulating the climate transition, and fighting against inequality.

UN Women reported that today, 1 in every 10 women lives in extreme poverty. Welcomed the Special Rapporteur's calls to use alternative dimensions of well-being to measure progress and to explore gender-based inequalities, vulnerability, risk, and other forms of deprivations. It agreed with the SR about broadening our view and identifying metrics that can better capture progress consistent with the ambitions of the SDGs, incorporating the value of unpaid care and domestic work into systems of national accounts and GDP. **UNICEF** stressed the importance of going beyond monetary approaches to poverty. To address child poverty and combat inequality exacerbated by the climate crisis, it called on States to guarantee families the right to living wages and family-friendly policies, including child benefits, paid parental leave, and affordable, accessible childcare, to ensure children's development, particularly in their pivotal early years, and build inclusive social protection systems that reach all children, regardless of their gender, disability, migration, or other status.

The situation in Gaza is the international community's responsibility, it has been underlined by several **Arab countries**. **The Sovereign Order of Malta** affirmed that an economy driven mainly by the maximization of profits cannot fulfill the rights of those in poverty. The Summit of the Future will focus on the realization on human rights and the fight against inequalities rather than on a sole increase of production and consumption.

FAO considering the right to food and the right to an adequate standard of living are human rights for all, called to address the structural root causes and vulnerabilities that foster generational cycles of poverty and hunger. Intersecting this discrimination means that many women, indigenous people and peasants constituting much of the global agricultural labor force do not have access to land and livestock ownership, equal pay, participation in decision making and access to credit and financial services. **Brazil and UN-Habitat**, focusing on the criminalization of homelessness and poverty, noted the importance of extending respect and protections to slum and informal settlement dwellers who also experience the manifestation of extreme poverty in relation to adequate housing.

As civil society organizations promoting the centrality of human dignity in every socio-economic sphere, **APG23** found relevant the proposed shift from a money-centric to a people-centered approach to poverty and its eradication, with the concrete experience and struggle of persons in poverty finally at the core. Indeed, **NGOs** reaffirmed the need to realise the right to development. Extreme poverty is an affront to human dignity, a barrier to realizing basic human rights. **Edmund Rice International** highlighting that GDP growth is not a precondition for the realization of human rights or for combatting social inequality, demonstrated that without an adequate supply of housing, there is no reduction or prevention of homelessness. **Make Mother Matter** highlighted the gendered dimension of the problem.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (68 country delegations):

Tanzania, Venezuela (on behalf of Friends of the Charter), Estonia (on behalf of a Group of countries), EU, Egypt (on behalf of Arab States), Chile (on behalf of GRULAC), Venezuela (on behalf of Like-Minded Countries), Belgium (on behalf of Albania, Chile, France, Morocco, Peru, Philippines, Romania), Gambia (on behalf of the African Group), Peru, Lesotho, Chile, Honduras, Kuwait, Morocco, Costa Rica, Armenia, State of Palestine, Ethiopia, Nigeria, France, Egypt, Djibouti, Iraq, Algeria, United States of America, Colombia, Russian Federation, Viet Nam, Georgia, Malaysia, Sovereign Order of Malta, China, Tunisia, Brazil, Senegal, Holy See, Togo, Cuba, Paraguay, Bangladesh, Yemen, Oman, Romania, Kenya, Venezuela, South Africa, Zambia, Luxembourg, Burkina Faso, Marshall Island, Bolivia, Namibia, India, Gambia, Iran, Indonesia, Vanuatu.

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

Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Centre Europe - tiers monde, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) Asociación Civil, China Ethnic Minorities' Association for External Exchanges, China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS), Edmund Rice International Limited, FIAN International e.V., International Movement ATD Fourth World, Make Mothers Matter, Sikh Human Rights Group.

International Organizations: UN Women, UNICEF, FAO, UN-habitat.

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