

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 57th SESSION

### Panel discussion on promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities

11 September 2024

**Mr Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, delivered an introductory remark considering the main scope of the panel discussion: an opportunity to re-commit – urgently, concretely and operationally – to the implementation and fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights. He reported that since 2020, around 5 billion people globally have become poorer. This is a huge human rights failure and a crisis of solidarity. Education, healthcare, decent work, social security, freedom from hunger, and the enjoyment of science and culture are the essential building blocks of just, equal, peaceful societies.

Realization of economic, social and cultural rights strengthens the fabric of our societies. Their denial feeds discrimination, deepens inequality, increases vulnerability and fuels conflict. Investment in human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, is crucial as a matter of law – and also as the basis for good governance and sound planning. And yet, the alarming surge in global public debt – compounded by a grossly unequal international financial architecture – is diverting essential resources away from the people and places that truly need them.

He mentioned legal and policy analysis to anchor national efforts in international standards, including the social security policy in **Cambodia**, the accountability for violations of economic, social and cultural rights and for corruption in **Honduras**, as well as the collaborations with domestic workers in **Ethiopia**, and with civil society in the **Syrian Arab Republic**. To provide more tailored technical assistance, the OHCHR Office will undertake regional consultations on economic, social, and cultural rights, starting with Governments and other stakeholders in Latin America, Africa, and Europe.

In conclusion, reminding that economic, social and cultural rights will not be possible without the full realization of civil and political rights, he affirmed that requires a range of approaches, commitment, proper investment, and above all concrete action, including combatting corruption to safeguard vital resources.

**H.E. Mr. Chen Xu, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland**, shared experiences and practices following the resolution A/HRC/RES/54/22 (adopted by consensus during the HRC54). Human rights are not abstract concepts that are out of reach, but visible and tangible interests, which are reflected in housing, education, work, freedom from violence, and fear.

He further listed China's major reform measures in terms of economic, social, and cultural rights and eliminating inequality, including a law to provide a more inclusive and friendly environment for the disabled to participate equally in social life and realize their life dreams.

In conclusion, he shared with the Council suggestions in order to ensure the enjoyment of socio-economic and cultural rights equally, for all, a necessary foundation for the realization of all human rights, and for maintaining peace and stability, promoting sustainable development, and responding to global challenges.

**Ms. Maria Lúcia Amaral, Ombudsperson (Provedor de Justiça) of Portugal**, provided insights from the perspective of a National Human Rights Institution, drawing on the experience of the Portuguese Ombudsman to highlight challenges, best practices, and how we can strengthen our collective efforts

in realizing these rights for all. These rights are more than mere principles without effective value. They are foundational to human dignity, equality, and justice, and represent the tangible realization of the principles of non-discrimination and equality. Inequality in access to healthcare, education, housing, and employment exacerbates poverty and exclusion, which means injustice.

From the Portuguese Ombudsman's experience, ensuring equitable access to social services - especially for vulnerable groups, such as older persons, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities - has been a key priority. The Portuguese Ombudsman has adopted a proactive approach to address systemic inequalities and ensure the fulfilment of social rights through several concrete initiatives in areas such as social security and pensions, housing, healthcare and education, where public services face new challenges in a context of limited resources.

To conclude, one way to address challenges is to ensure that the promotion and protection of social rights are embedded in public policies through a human rights-based approach to budgeting and resource allocation. The promotion and protection of social rights are critical in addressing inequalities and ensuring that no one is left behind.

**Ms. Magdalena Sepúlveda Camona, Executive Director of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR)**, affirmed that in recent years human rights monitoring bodies, including this Council, have started to denounce how high levels of inequality undermine human rights. Economic, social, and cultural rights impose on States an extensive array of obligations to address inequalities, such as adopting social protection systems, progressive taxation, and ensuring quality public services such as education and health, and strictly regulating the role of private actors when providing such services to ensure affordability, quality and access to all without discrimination. Addressing gender equality has also been taken at the centre of the discussion about ESCR enjoyment. Development in the last decades has also made evident that ensuring the enjoyment of other human rights, such as civil and political rights, is essential to address inequalities.

Moreover, human rights monitoring bodies have also made evident that the enjoyment of ESC rights is also inextricably linked to climate change. The negative impacts disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in developing countries that historically contaminated proportionally less. No effort to promote ESC rights, to ensure equality, including gender and racial equality, can be addressed without clearly observing the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels and towards a decarbonized economy.

She concluded by saying that considering this positive development, more could be done to build and maintain the institutional capacity to work on these rights, including increasing the allocation of resources within the Office to these rights, particularly at the national level. In this vein, she stressed the importance of enhancing the possibility of technical cooperation with States.

**Mr. Mohamed Ezzeldin Abdel-Moneim, Member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, shared three key points: the current situation of economic, social and cultural rights; what are the causes, who is responsible for that situation; and how to address it, and what to do with regard to the situation. He analyzed the current situation of the right to housing, the right to health, and the right to food, in particular.

In conclusion, in providing structural solutions to the main causes and problems, he recalled important documents: **Article 6 paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Article 2, paragraph 1 of the Covenant; and Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

## Interactive dialogue

46 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries attached particular importance to the full and equal enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by all.** They shared national policies and reforms in order to address the **increased discrimination and marginalization of vulnerable groups such as women, migrants, indigenous groups, people of African descent, and people with disabilities.** As **Luxembourg** affirmed, the promotion, respect and fulfillment of all human rights for all human beings must guide Governments in the design of policies that work for people and the planet. The full realization of economic, social and cultural rights goes hand in hand with the full realization of civil and political rights. Social protection, political emancipation, fundamental freedom, and the protection of the planet are the responsibilities of states. In this spirit, **the government of Honduras** has promoted structural reforms and specific public policies based on human beings and the planet to try to reduce inequalities, to try to eradicate public/private corruption and allow for appropriate investment.

**Russian Federation** remained disappointed that certain actors prefer to sideline economic, social and cultural rights as well as the right to development while these are crucial for ensuring that individuals realize their full potential and are not left behind. The situation worsens with the obsession of certain groups of countries to impose UCMs in order to punish sovereign states pursuing independent paths of development. **Agreed by Belarus**, UCMs are an illegal instrument of foreign policy and represent the right of the strong in the modern era. The OHCHR has the necessary authority and responsibility to pay due attention to the negative impact on the economic, social, and cultural rights of UCMs, creating a favourable environment for all countries for the exercise of their right to development. As added by **Cuba**, unfortunately, the capacity of many developing countries to guarantee the enjoyment of these rights is affected by the widening gap and exponential inequality between the opulent north and the global south which seems condemned to poverty. This is exacerbated by the imposition of UCMs and the failure to meet funding for development obligations including official development aid.

**UNESCO** stated that inequalities are deepening globally and are being compounded by major trends such as persistent poverty, climate change, digital transformation, armed conflicts and demographic shifts including migration and displacement. Upholding cultural rights is also crucial for development.

**NGOs** reporting data and figures concerning inequalities, poverty, access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for marginalized communities, remained concerned with the growing challenges facing States' capacities to promote the economic and social rights of citizens, following increased rates of irregular migration resulting from conflicts. Governments must take proactive steps to ensure that national and international economic policies, labour laws, and social protection systems are inclusive of LGBTI individuals. The inability of states to adequately address the climate crisis has disproportionately impacted the lives and livelihoods of marginalized communities and continues to entrench and exacerbate poverty and inequality.

### Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (46 country delegations):

*European Union, Luxembourg (on behalf of a group of countries), Russian Federation (on behalf of a group of countries), Switzerland, Honduras, Portugal, Sri Lanka, Azerbaijan, Nepal, Jamaica, Morocco, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Malawi, Belarus, United Republic of Tanzania, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Viet Nam, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Cuba, Thailand, Vanuatu, Benin, Chile, Brazil, Oman, China, Algeria, Egypt, Russian Federation, Cyprus, Malaysia, Mozambique, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Bahrain, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Kenya, Iraq, Armenia, Maldives, Mexico.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

AKAHATÁ Equipo de Trabajo en Sexualidad y Géneros Asociación Civil, Beijing NGO Association for International Exchanges, ILGA World, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Centre Europe - tiers monde, Amnesty International, Global Action on Aging, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Partners For Transparency, Association MIMAN, Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan (RSKS India).

International Organization: UNESCO.

To watch the full meeting refer to [UN Web TV](#).