



Statement by Ibrahim Salama
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Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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1st floor conference room, Palais Wilson, Geneva

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Committee against Torture,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to your 66th session, your first for 2019.

This session comes at a time when as highlighted by the Secretary General in his opening statement to the fortieth session of the Human Rights Council, “The human rights agenda is losing ground in many parts of the globe but one should not lose hope. Yes, we see troubling trends - but we also see powerful movements for human rights and social justice.” In that regard, as reiterated by the Secretary General, “Prevention must be a priority in everything we do. Human rights are a template for this – building resilience and preventing crises. Every measure to uphold human rights helps ease tensions, deliver sustainable development and sustain peace.”

In line with this vision, in the 2019 Human Rights Annual Appeal, the High Commissioner for Human Rights commits the Office to make the shift to prevention. And human rights treaties such as the Convention against Torture play a key role in that regard since they possess inherent preventive power. Furthermore, our Office’s support to the treaty bodies such as your Committee with an emphasis on guidance for implementation of your recommendations stemming from country reviews and decisions on individual complaints helps States and the international community at large to identify, address and overcome prevention challenges.

It is therefore crucial that the treaty body system is operational and efficient, resulting in concrete outcomes in the field and for the victims.

As you know, on 28 March 2019, Samoa acceded to the Convention against Torture, bringing the number of States Parties to 166. The steady increase in the numbers of accessions and ratifications has been facilitated by the activities carried out by our field colleagues, the OHCHR Capacity Building Programme as well as partners such as the Convention Against Torture Initiative (CTI) that you will be meeting during the course of this session.

Your constant commitment to cooperation with other Anti-torture mechanisms, as exemplified by your forthcoming meeting with the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture as well as the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention is definitely a source of inspiration and a drive for joint actions to all those acting in the field of human rights, including United Nations independent human rights mechanisms.

2020 Review of the treaty body system

While our work to advance human rights is facing a range of challenges, human rights treaties remain the cornerstone of the international human rights architecture. Treaty bodies play a crucial role in making sure that States Parties uphold these standards. The 2020 Review of the treaty body system is therefore of utmost importance to ensure the sustainability and impact of treaty bodies.

One should welcome the fact that the Committee against Torture has been actively engaged in that process. You have already elaborated your position and designated two focal points. Your Chairperson has also organized and hosted together with the Danish Institute Against Torture a meeting of all treaty body focal points on the 2020 review, in Copenhagen on 26 and 27 February 2019. The meeting of the Chairs of the treaty bodies in June in New

York will be the last formal opportunity enabling inclusive discussions between treaty bodies before the Review of the treaty body system, which should take place by 9 April 2020.

The Secretariat of the meeting of the Chairs of treaty bodies stands ready to support you in this regard. A dedicated extranet page has been created, with all available information and background documents. Numerous other stakeholders are also keen to consult with you and exchange views. Your forthcoming informal meetings with States and NGOs and their focus on the 2020 Treaty Bodies Review are all the more welcome.

Let me also take this opportunity to recall that the General Assembly in its resolution 73/162 adopted in December last year, requested the Secretary-General to submit the next biennial report on the status of the treaty body system in January 2020, in advance of the Review. In terms of the timeline, the Secretary-General, with input from the Office, will need to finalize the report by September, and will be developing its contours by the end of June.

The Office has also shared a note verbale requesting input from States and other stakeholders on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/268 and on the 2020 Review more generally. The information is posted on the treaty body strengthening webpage of the Office.

The report of the Secretary-General will highlight some of the lessons learned from the implementation of resolution 68/268. It will also address some of the procedures and activities that were not adequately funded. This includes adequate resources for the timely treatment of individual complaints, but also follow-up, inquiries, and visits. We are hopeful that the outcome of this process will bring the necessary solutions to allow the system to function effectively and to make a difference, where it matters most, at the national level, for the rights holders.

At the same time, we are mindful that we are operating in a challenging environment and we need to deploy all our creativity and resourcefulness to overcome these and other obstacles, and I trust that we can count on your support.

Chairperson, members of the Committee,

My colleagues and I look forward to working with you, and discussing other matters, which may be of interest, including in closed session. With this, let me wish you a successful and productive session. Thank you.