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Human Rights Committee

123rd Session



Opening statement by

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Human Rights Treaties Branch

Representative of the Secretary General

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Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I would like to welcome you to the one hundred and twenty-third session of the Human Rights Committee.

I would like to start by congratulating the members who were re-elected at the 36th Meeting of States Parties to ICCPR, which took place on 14 June 2018 in New York, namely Mr. Yadh Ben Achour, Mr. Duncan Muhumuza Laki and Ms. Photini Pazartzis.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Human rights and those speaking up for the implementation of these rights are increasingly under attack in today's world. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, in his last global update to the 38th session of the Human Rights Council on 18 June 2018, conveyed his serious concerns about the status of human rights and made a strong call for enhanced UN action. The High Commissioner stressed that “... *as the attack on the multilateral system and its rules, including most especially international human rights law, intensifies, so too will the risk increase of further mischief on a grander scale. The UN's collective voice must therefore be principled and strong...*”. In this context, your principled and strong work to protect and promote the rights enshrined in the Covenant is more crucial and timely than ever.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

As you will know, the thirtieth annual meeting of the Chairpersons of the treaty bodies took place in New York from 28 May to 1 June 2018. The meeting focused on the alignment of working methods and other areas of implementation of Resolution 68/268 as well the preparations for the 2020 review of the treaty body system. The Chairpersons agreed to make several of their meetings public, which were also webcast for the first time to increase transparency and accessibility of their work.

The Chairs met with Member States, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the Victims' Rights Advocate for the UN, the Vice-Chair of GANHRI, and NGOs. The meeting with Member States was well attended and there was a discussion about further harmonisation, the issue of late and non-reporting, engagement with civil society and reprisals, geographical and gender balance of the treaty body membership as well as multilingualism. The long-standing issue of lack of sufficient resources for your work was also raised during many of these meetings. The resource situation will also be addressed separately in discussions you will be having in the coming weeks.

One of the outcomes of the Chairs' meeting was the agreement of the Chairs to propose the appointment of focal points in each treaty body to develop a common "treaty body based" position ahead of the 2020 review. They also agreed to explore further alignment of the simplified reporting procedure at the meeting next year. In this regard, the findings of your current study to assess and evaluate the procedure "in terms of its practicability, effectiveness and capacity to improve the examination of the human rights situation in the State parties" will certainly provide a substantial contribution to that process. Furthermore, the Chairs endorsed possible elements for a common aligned procedure for follow-up

to concluding observations, decisions and views. The views of this Committee were taken into account during these discussions, and I hope that you will find the resulting elements satisfactory

The Chairs also had a meeting with the Secretary-General, who expressed his strong support for treaty bodies. His next report on treaty body strengthening will be an opportunity to raise various challenges faced by treaty bodies, including in terms of resources.

The report of the Chairs' meeting will shortly be circulated to all members, and we will be available for any questions you may have in this regard during your session.

Distinguished Committee members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to your programme for this session. The Committee will examine the implementation of the Covenant in six States parties, including three initial reports from different regions, and review a considerable number of individual communications under your Optional Protocol. You will also continue the second reading of your draft general comment on the right to life as well as the revision of your Rules of Procedure, and as usual, you will have numerous meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders. My colleagues and I look forward to supporting your work as best we can, while also exploring options for increased support.

Turning to other issues, I would also like on this occasion to refer to the recent resignation of the Chair of the Committee, Mr. Yuji Iwasawa following his election as a Judge at the International Court of Justice on 22 June 2018. I had the pleasure of working with Mr. Iwasawa at the recent meeting of Chairpersons in New York, and we all benefitted from his experience and wisdom. Mr. Iwasawa will certainly make a significant contribution in his new role bringing with him 12 years of experience and jurisprudence of the Human Rights Committee. I would also like to pay tribute to the work of Vice-Chair Ms Ivana Jelic, who will be leaving the Committee in the coming weeks to take up her functions as a Judge at the European Court of Human Rights, and, certainly will also be bringing her extensive experience – including from this Committee – with her. I wish them both the best in their future roles.

With this, I extend my best wishes to all of you for a successful and productive session and turn to the next item which is the election of the Chair, in accordance with rule 22 of the Rules of Procedure.
