# *Check against delivery*

Committee on Enforced Disappearances

Twentieth Session

Opening online session – 12 April 2021

****

Opening address by

Ibrahim Salama,

Chief, Human Rights Treaties Branch

Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division (OHCHR)

Representative of the Secretary-General

Interprefy videoconference

Monday, 12 April 2021, 12:30

*Dear Chair,*

*Distinguished Members of the Committee,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen*,

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations it is a pleasure to open the twentieth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, which is taking place online.

Allow me to start by welcoming Mr. Matar Diop to the Committee. Mr. Diop joined the Committee last October to replace Mr. Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Coulibaly, who had to resign following his nomination as first President of the Supreme Court of Senegal. I congratulate Mr. Coulibaly for his new functions, and wish Mr. Diop a warm welcome.

*Distinguished Chair*

One year ago, I opened the 18th session of the Committee. It was then the first ever session of a UN treaty body to be held fully online. You were the first ones to take this step despite very challenging circumstances: online interpretation was not available, and you had to adapt your working methods on the spot to carry out your functions.

Over the year, you have done commendable work, often at personal hardship, to accompany States, victims, civil society actors and National Human Rights Institutions in their fight to eradicate and prevent enforced disappearances. And you have achieved exemplary results.

You have continued your regular work and in addition held several commemorations of the 10th anniversary of the Convention and adopted joint guidelines with the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances on enforced disappearances in the context of COVID-19. You have met on-line with partners such as the African Commission and the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking to discuss areas of collaboration.

You have continued your work on Urgent Actions. Since your last session, you have registered 44 new requests for Urgent Actions, reaching a total number of 1,013 registered Urgent Actions since the Committee initiated its mandate in 2012. These figures show the confidence entrusted to the Committee by victims and the importance of the continuity of your work.

I would like to commend you in particular for your decision to continue doing constructive dialogues with States remotely, while in-person meetings are not possible due to the pandemic. Challenging as this is, your efforts are helping to ensure that the Committee continues to provide its invaluable protection and advice, in spite of the pandemic.

Indeed, I want to highlight publicly that your many achievements over the last year have been possible thanks to your genuine commitment and dedication under very difficult circumstances. Remote work means undue working hours for many of you. It also means adapting to new modalities of interaction that are very demanding. We at OHCHR share this burden with you and are committed to providing our full support to your efforts.

*Distinguished Chair*,

Allow me also to commend you and the Committee for your efforts to promote universal ratification of the Convention. Universal ratification is urgent as the figures of victims of enforced disappearances continue growing.

Your activities have included a campaign in social media last December, and a joint webinar with the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and the International Coalition for the Prevention of Enforced Disappearances on 3 March. This event was very rich and counted the participation of more than 250 people from all regions of the world.

I hope that we can build on this momentum with further activities that will lead to a significant increase in ratifications in the near future.

*Distinguished Members of the Committee,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen*,

In addition to the context related to the COVID 19 pandemic, treaty bodies have had to face the prevailing financial and liquidity crisis of the UN. Back in February, you received an update from the Deputy High Commissioner concerning a number of issues including the deliberations of the General Assembly in December related to the regular budget. Regrettably, the General Assembly did not approve the requested staff resources to support the increased workload of treaty bodies, mainly related to individual communications and urgent actions. I wish to reassure you that OHCHR continues to do its utmost to ensure adequate support for your work and actively look for solutions.

The Secretary-General reasserted this commitment in his last opening statement to the Human Rights Council. He stated that the “*financial crisis has impacted our ability to fully implement our mandates and affected our support to the treaty body mechanisms*.” He appealed “*to all Member States to ensure that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the treaty body mechanisms and other critical human rights activities have the necessary resources to carry on this mandate and to fulfil our shared promise to protect and advance human rights*.”

*Distinguished Members,*

You have a busy agenda ahead of you, made all the more challenging by the fact that you are working in different time zones. I extend my best wishes to all of you for a successful and productive online session and reassure you of my full support and that of my colleagues.

Thank you.

**OATH OF OFFICE**

I would now like to turn to Mr. Simon Walker, Chief of Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Section, to proceed with inviting Mr. Matar Diop to make his solemn declaration in accordance with item one of the Provisional Agenda and Annotations.

Thank you.

*Mr. Walker, takes the floor*

I move to item one of the provisional agenda the *“Solemn declaration by the newly nominated members of the Committee in accordance with article 26(5) of the Convention.”*

May I now call on the distinguished new member of the Committee to pronounce his solemn oath of office in accordance with rule 11 of the rules of procedure:

*[Mr. Matar Diop will have the text of rule 11 in E/F/S]*

Monsieur Diop, you have the floor (…)

Thank you very much. I wish you the best of luck in the discharge of your important duties.