

Committee on the Rights of the Child
83rd Session, 20 January – 7 February 2020



Opening Address by
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Palais Wilson, Ground Floor Conference Room
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*Mr. Chair,
Distinguished members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is an honour for me to open the eighty-third session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Allow me first of all to wish each of you a happy and productive New Year.

On 20 November 2019, the Convention has celebrated its **30th anniversary** with many events around the world involving hundreds of thousands of children. A number of States have renewed their commitment to the full implementation of the Convention here in Geneva and in New York. 70 children from all regions of the world came to Geneva to celebrate and discuss different issues of concern for them. It was a joyous celebration for many children all around the world. However, millions more children were not able to celebrate due to poverty and exclusion, violence, discrimination, armed conflicts and climate change, among others. As Josephine, one of the child human rights defenders who participated in the 30th anniversary event in Geneva, said, “what must be accomplished in the years to come is the implementation of the Convention...as there is still a lot of work to be done”. More has to be done in order to avoid that children are always the ones most left behind!

2020 will be another active year for this Committee. The **extraordinary outreach session in Samoa** during the first week of March will represent a step forward in the common aspiration to get Treaty Bodies closer to their relevant rights holders, as highlighted by the Chairs of the treaty bodies in their 31st meeting last year. Holding this extraordinary session of the Committee in the Pacific region will permit broader engagement of the State parties, civil society and national human rights institutions of the region, as well as UN agencies and other stakeholders, especially children. We are extremely grateful to the Pacific Community’s Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) for making this session a reality and for the enthusiastic and valuable support of the Government of Samoa and the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office in Samoa, together with the OHCHR and UNICEF regional offices in the Pacific.

The third **report of the Secretary-General** on the status of the treaty body system should be published shortly and we will share it with you as soon as it is available. This report reiterates the challenges that are well-known to you in relation to providing sufficient regular budget funding for all the mandated activities of the treaty bodies, in particular the required staff. Another challenge identified is the increase in the number of mandated activities, and the fact that the budget has not kept pace with that increase. As you know, linear growth of the treaty body system cannot be sustained and therefore innovative solutions need to be identified, such as coordinating State party reviews to reduce unnecessary duplication, upgrading current systems through use of technology (such as putting in place a case management system for individual communications to streamline that enormous workload), and further simplifying the reporting process. The Secretary-General's report also presents the proposals on the treaty body review that have been made up to now, including the Chairs' vision, with the aim of encouraging a review which although intergovernmental in nature, ensures that it is transparent and inclusive for all stakeholders.

Mr. Chair,

OHCHR stands ready to support the **2020 review** through its Geneva and New York offices, including by providing technical advice and facilitating the related dialogue between different stakeholders. We also encourage further alignment of working methods and practices of the treaty bodies, for example, in the context of scheduling reviews and in the preparation of lists of issues or lists of issues prior to reporting. The 2020 review will also provide an opportunity to reaffirm the crucial role of the Capacity Building programme in supporting engagement with treaty bodies.

Unfortunately, the **regular budget** recently adopted by the General Assembly for 2020 did not correct the shortfall in resources to support the human rights mechanisms. Both resources for the travel of mandate holders to implement their mandates, including participation of treaty body members in their scheduled sessions, and staffing resources to support the preparation of documentation for the treaty bodies' review, are inadequate for the full implementation of their mandates.

As we are all aware, these official mandates should be fully funded from the regular budget of the United Nations, as the responsibility of the Member States who established them. And as we have seen in the past two years, without the requisite resources, the treaty bodies are again falling behind in their work, with consequences that are dire for many of those who have turned to them for

assistance. This was precisely what the treaty body strengthening process, culminating in General Assembly resolution 68/268, sought to avoid – yet the sustainability of those gains are clearly under threat as the process envisaged to ensure the continued viability of the treaty bodies is not being respected.

We are seeking voluntary contributions from member States to pilot innovative ideas, including those proposed by the Chairs in their vision statement from last year. Your extraordinary outreach session in Samoa will represent a significant step in this regard to which we shall be looking for lessons learned and hopefully which we can build on with external support for other outreach activities. However, relying on voluntary contributions to support treaty bodies, whilst it can provide short-term relief, is not a viable option in the long term. I trust that the 2020 intergovernmental review will look at this situation carefully, and result in a fully resourced and sustainable system going forward.

Despite the continuing financial difficulties, we plan to organize the same number of sessions as in 2019, with the additional extraordinary one for this Committee, while hoping that cash-flow problems will not reappear and hamper these plans in the course of the year.

There is also some good news. The webcasting of treaty body sessions has been placed on a more solid foundation with the allocation of regular budget resources for this purpose. Up until now webcasting has been supported by voluntary contributions with unclear prospects for its continuance.

The General Assembly also supported the principle of multilingualism by re-allocating an additional working language for the work of the treaty bodies. The implications of this decision for your work need however to be discussed further in light of the actual resources provided.

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished members,

Please allow me to mention some developments regarding the rights of the child at the intergovernmental level. The **annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming** will take place on 26 February, during the high-level segment of the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council. The panel will focus on the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular mainstreaming child rights in the UN system, and will feature senior representatives of UN entities.

The **annual one-day discussion on children's rights**, which this year focuses on the rights of the child through a healthy environment, has been postponed to the 44th session of the Human Rights Council in June. OHCHR has prepared a report to guide the panel discussion, which was initially to take place in March. The dialogues with the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and on Children and Armed Conflict have also been moved to the June session on an exceptional basis. OHCHR will soon start preparing inputs on child rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ahead of the High-Level Political Forum, to be titled "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development."

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 41/13, OHCHR will organize a full-day intersessional seminar on challenges and opportunities for **youth** in the field of human rights in the first semester of 2020, with participation and involvement of youth-led and youth-focused organizations. OHCHR looks forward to working jointly with the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the development and implementation of all these activities.

*Mr. Chair,
Distinguished members,*

This will again be a particularly busy session. In addition to the review of States parties and individual cases under the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, there will be the twelfth informal meeting with States on 6 February, your biennial meeting with UNICEF, and meetings with other mechanisms such as the Secretary-General's Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy. Additionally, you will continue your work on the next general comment on children's rights in the digital environment, the organization of your next Day of General Discussion on alternative care, and the work of the joint working group between CRC and CRPD in order to harmonize procedures.

My colleagues and I wish you well in the successful accomplishment of your important work. I thank you for your attention.