

*Check against delivery*

**Committee against Torture**

**74<sup>th</sup> session**

**12 – 29 July 2022**



Opening Address by

Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria,  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Representative of the Secretary-General

Geneva, 12 July 2022

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Esteemed colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the seventy-fourth session of the United Nations Committee against Torture and to welcome you back to Geneva.

I would like to express my appreciation for the Committee's efforts to uphold the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. The role of this Committee, together with the other United Nations anti-torture mechanisms, is key in the elimination of this abhorrent practice, as well as in providing guidance to States parties on the implementation the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, through a multifaceted approach.

In today's world, your monitoring mandate and efforts to combat torture are as critical as ever. Despite its absolute prohibition in law, torture continues to be practiced in too many countries, often targeted at detainees, migrants, persons with

disabilities, human rights defenders or persons that participated in protests.

The implementation of your mandate involves various challenges, some of which have been augmented during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include the growing backlog in the consideration of State party's reports and individual communications, as well as the non- and late-reporting by many States.

Overcoming the challenges that you and other United Nations human rights treaty bodies face, has been the focus over the years of a number of proposals aimed at strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the treaty body system. The unanimous agreement reached by the Chairpersons of Human Rights Treaty Bodies at their meeting, which concluded on 3 June 2022 in New York, was a significant achievement in this respect. I welcome your Committee's engagement in the strengthening process and your contributions to the proposal endorsed by the Chairs.

The agreement of all treaty bodies to establish a predictable schedule of country reviews, with an eight-year cycle for full reviews and follow-up reviews in between, demonstrates the commitment of the treaty bodies to work together in order to further strengthen the treaty body system and facilitate efforts to attract the necessary support from Member States. Corresponding progress is still needed with respect to the harmonization of working methods to ensure their rationalization, minimize overlaps and ensure cost-effectiveness that also benefits from new digital tools.

The agreement of the Chairs incorporates and expands certain initiatives that were originally launched by your Committee, including the simplified reporting procedure. It offers, among other things, the possibility of entering a new stage of strengthening the treaty body system and addressing the challenges of chronic under-reporting by States parties or long delays in the submission of initial and periodic reports. Its execution requires ensuring that Committees harmonize working methods, effectively coordinate and reduce the overlap

of recommendations. I trust it will contribute to a more effective protection of human rights.

With a formal agreement now reached on this proposal, my Office can proceed to cost it and submit it to the General Assembly. This milestone agreement will help rationalize the system for all concerned and provide a basis for a more sustainable allocation of resources, a goal the Secretary-General has stressed in respect of the treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms in his ‘Call to Action on Human Rights’ and in his report ‘Our Common Agenda’. It is our hope that this process will yield positive results for the treaty bodies, including the Committee against Torture, so that you will have adequate support to carry out your important mandate, including to consider individual communications and to ensure that victims of torture and ill-treatment have access to justice and to full reparation. You, along with all the treaty bodies, have my Office’s full support and cooperation in making this a reality.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I would also like to mention another positive development of interest to your work. At your last session, you were briefed on the expert-led process of updating the Manual on Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, also known as “the Istanbul Protocol”. I am pleased to inform you that the 2022 edition of the Istanbul Protocol was published on 29 June by my Office, and publicly launched on the same date in an event hosted by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, in Geneva. As I pointed out during the launching event, since the publication of the first edition over two decades ago, the Istanbul Protocol has been used worldwide and routinely relied upon by international human rights mechanisms, civil society organizations and practitioners, and today continues to serve as a landmark reference in medico-legal investigations and documentation. The new edition of the Istanbul Protocol updates the original text including recent jurisprudence on torture prevention, accountability and redress.

It also offers guidance to States on the effective implementation of its international obligations and provides added guidance for judges, prosecutors and health professionals, outlining good practices on legal investigations of torture and ill-treatment.

In that connection as well, let me welcome the joint statement of the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, issued on 24 June 2022 to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, emphasizing the vital functions of health care professionals in preventing and documenting acts of torture and rehabilitating victims. Medical professionals should be able to assist victims without any undue pressure or reprisals. In fact, we all have a responsibility to prevent and combat torture, and I therefore strongly deplore instances of harassment or intimidation against those that speak out.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I wish you a productive and fruitful session.

Thank you.

