

Check against delivery

**Committee against Torture**

**73<sup>rd</sup> session**

**19 April – 13 May 2022**



Opening Address by

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Human Rights Treaties Branch

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Representative of the Secretary General

Geneva, 19 April 2022

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Colleagues,

On behalf of the the Secretary-General, I declare open and welcome you to the seventy-third session of the Committee against Torture.

First of all, allow me to congratulate and warmly welcome the three new members to the Committee, all of whom come with a wealth of knowledge and experience, which will greatly contribute to the Committee's work: Mr. Todd Buchwald, who is unable to be here in person but is joining the session remotely, Ms. Naoko Maeda and Mr. Abderrazak Rouwane. I wish all the new members success and professional satisfaction in their new positions. My colleagues and I will do our utmost to ensure that you are fully supported throughout your terms.

You are joining a committee that plays a critical role in combatting torture worldwide, a human rights imperative that – as several recent events have again sadly demonstrated – is as timely as ever. Despite Covid-19 and other complicating factors, the Committee and its members have shown determination and commitment to deliver their

mandate and produce quality outputs and to uphold standards to combat torture.

In addition to its distinct own role, CAT is also a key element of the human rights treaty body system, a bedrock of the UN's human rights architecture. It is a system that continuous to facilitate concrete human rights improvements in all regions, but it also faces a range of challenges, including limited resources. Therefore, the ongoing efforts to strengthen human rights treaty bodies remain essential.

At your last session, you were briefed you on the outcome of the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the Chairs of the treaty bodies. After that meeting, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities made comprehensive proposals, in consultation with her Committee, on concrete ways to advance treaty body strengthening, building on the common vision of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies and the report of the co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly on the 2020 review. All treaty bodies, including your committee, have provided their views on these proposals and outlined their respective positions on (1) the development of a predictable review schedule; (2) the ongoing harmonization of working methods; and (3) the digital transition,

Such inclusive engagement of all treaty bodies is to be welcomed. Indeed, when meeting with the Chairs, the High Commissioner stressed that it was time for the treaty body system to come up with a consolidated and unified proposal that could be costed. This would demonstrate the commitment of all Committees to further strengthen and rationalize the treaty body system and facilitate efforts to attract the necessary support and funding from Member States.

Over the past month, the OHCHR organized a round of informal conversations on the Committees' positions on a predictable review calendar, the harmonization of working methods and digitalization needs of the treaty body system. The aim was to facilitate preparation of the forthcoming chairs' meeting by exploring commonalities between positions, and we hope the constructive discussions helped to pave the way towards a common proposal for a strengthened treaty body system, which could then be reflected in the next biennial report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly this fall.

Throughout the years, the Committee against Torture has constantly sought to improve its working methods to promote full implementation of the Convention against Torture. It has also been supportive of efforts and proposals aimed at strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system, including by harmonizing working methods across the system.

You have also introduced innovations that have spread across the treaty body system, the simplified reporting process being a case in point. You have recently introduced new ways to ensure that dialogues with (and recommendations for) States parties are focused and coordinated with other treaty bodies, while strengthening your long-standing follow-up procedures.

You therefore have important experiences to share with other treaty bodies and strong record to build on when developing and engaging in new initiatives to strengthen the human rights treaty body system.

Distinguished experts,

In addition to being a key member of the treaty body system, your committee has been constant catalyst for cooperation across different UN anti-torture mechanisms. This was demonstrated again last month when your Chair met with the Special Rapporteur, the Chair of the SPT and the Board of Trustees of the Trust Fund for the Victims of Torture. We are also pleased to witness your renewed strong cooperation with SPT, the Chair of which will exchange with you during this session.

OHCHR has also continued to engage with various initiatives that relate to combatting torture and the work of related mechanisms.

One example is the expert-led process of updating the Istanbul Protocol, which is expected to be completed by June 2022. As you well know, the Istanbul Protocol provides guidelines for the assessment of persons who allege torture and ill-treatment, for investigating cases of alleged torture and for reporting findings to investigative bodies. The Committee against Torture, among other human rights bodies, routinely refers to the Istanbul Protocol and its standards to guide the States parties on how to conduct effective torture investigations and how to gather evidence with a view of establishing redress for victims.

While the principles set forth in the original manual are still valid, there has been increasing recognition of the need to provide updates and clarifications to this important tool, building on the extensive practical experience of the past 20-plus years. The project to update the Istanbul Protocol has involved more than 180 participants from over 50 countries. Representatives of civil society organizations as well as members of this committee and other UN anti-torture bodies played a critical role in this process.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I would like to conclude by expressing our appreciation for the outgoing Bureau and other members of the Committee for the good

cooperation with the Secretariat, which has been particularly important over the recent period of transition.

I wish you all a productive session.

Thank you.

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*I would now like to facilitate the taking of the oath of office for whom this is the first in-person session*