

Check against delivery

Committee against Torture
63rd Session



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Palais Wilson

Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the sixty-third Session of the Committee and to welcome you on behalf of the Secretary-General.

I would like to extend a special welcome to the three new members elected on 5 October 2017, at the sixteenth Meeting of States parties, Mr. Diego Rodríguez-Pinzón (Colombia), Mr. Bakhtiyar Tuzmukhamedov (Russian Federation) and Ms. Honghong Zhang (China).

We look forward to working with you and are confident that your experience and skills will contribute to enhancing the Committee's work.

Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This year, we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As highlighted by the Secretary-General in his remarks to the 37th session of the Human Rights Council on 26 February 2018, while considerable progress has been made in the past 70 years, the objectives of the Universal Declaration have not yet been matched by realities on the ground. As echoed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, today, fractures are deepening across the world, violence and conflicts are rising, and blind nationalisms are pursuing narrowly defined national interests at the expense of common good.

This is the reason why now, in the spirit of the Secretary-General's Human Rights up Front initiative to strengthen prevention of situations leading to serious violations of human rights, we must all highlight that defending and promoting human rights should be at the core of all United Nations efforts.

In that context, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has a central role to play including in the fight against torture and other ill-treatment. The OHCHR Organizational Management plan for 2018-2021 places great emphasis on national implementation, in line with recommendations of human rights mechanisms. "Increasing implementation of the international human rights mechanisms' outcomes" is therefore a key pillar of the Plan. Through the recommendations made, the human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies such as your Committee, provide the basis for engagement with States and national actors. This is an opportunity for OHCHR to support States in implementing the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, in cooperation with United Nations Country Teams and other partners. An operational approach is now required to support the implementation of these recommendations with greater outreach and partnerships. Continued technical cooperation projects are necessary to support States in this process, as well as reinforcing the link and synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals.

An important lesson to be drawn from many country emergency situations is that the work of the human rights mechanisms can provide indicators for early warning of human rights violations that may lead to violence and conflict, and thereby complement the Secretary-General's focus on prevention. We hope that the work of those mechanisms, including this Committee, will continue to gain prominence including in this important area and in advancing the rule of law in general.

Distinguished members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, we are facing challenging times on many fronts. Operationally and financially, as you were informed through the letters from the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner, the General Assembly, during its 72nd session held at the end of 2017, took decisions, which have serious implications for the Office and the work of the treaty bodies. Amongst these decisions, taken by the Member States of the United Nations, the following have direct implications on the resources allocated to the treaty bodies:

- to reduce the resources for travel of experts by 25 per cent;
- to reduce the resources for the travel of staff by 10 per cent; and
- to approve only five positions of the 11 requested posts which, following the expiration of three posts in 2017, led to a net gain of only two temporary positions instead of the eleven positions requested by the Secretary-General.

Further to a thorough assessment of the available human resources of the Office, following the General Assembly decision, it was found that some additional meeting time can only be implemented during 2018 with respect to the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is due to the fact that additional meeting time is inextricably linked to the additional reporting reviews and additional individual complaints, in order to reduce the current backlog, and not to other activities. Your own meeting time, at present, is not affected by the General Assembly decision.

We are aware of the insufficient resources provided to your important work on individual complaints under article 22 of the Convention for which you have a backlog. The Office is looking at ways and means to address this situation through the appropriate budgetary process, which - as you know – requires Member States

approval. Despite the limited resources, the Committee, with the support of the Secretariat, has however managed to deliver on the target of taking final decisions on around 64 individual complaints a year. The Committee's recent adoption of the General Comment No. 4 on article 3 of the Convention should facilitate the adoption of a rigorous jurisprudence on the principle of non-refoulement, which remains a prevailing subject of the individual complaints received.

From a practical perspective, some activities may not be supported by the secretariat to the extent that they were previously. We will address this situation in the forthcoming second report that the Secretary-General will present to the General Assembly under resolution 68/268. Needless to say that we remain committed to provide all treaty bodies with the highest quality of support, and if the staffing situation were to improve in the future – which we sincerely hope and shall work towards - we will review and re-evaluate the extent of our support to you.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of our colleagues and thank them for their commitment and professionalism. I know you value our staff and their contribution, and we all work in support of each other with dignity and respect.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda: Declaration by the newly elected members of the Committee

I would like to proceed with item 2 of your provisional agenda contained in document CAT/C/63/1 which provides that the new members of the Committee will make a solemn declaration, as envisaged under rule 14 of the Committee's rules of procedure.

Therefore, I would like to invite Mr. Diego Rodríguez-Pinzón (Colombia), Mr. Bakhtiyar Tuzmukhamedov (Russian Federation) and Ms. Zhang Honghong (China) to make the solemn declaration set out in paragraph two of the annotations to the agenda.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda: Election of the officers of the Committee

Now, I would like to proceed with Item 3 of the provisional agenda: in accordance with article 18, paragraph 1 of the Convention and rules 16 and 17 of the rules of procedure, the Committee shall elect from among its members a chairperson, three vice-chairpersons and a rapporteur. The officers of the Committee shall be elected for a term of two years. Under rule 58 of the rules of procedure, elections shall be held by secret ballot, unless the Committee decides otherwise in the case of an election to fill a place for which there is only one candidate.

To conclude, Chairperson, Members, my colleagues and I are here to provide further information as you may require. I would like to thank you for your tireless efforts as Members of this Committee, and wish you a fruitful and effective session as you work towards the full realization of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
