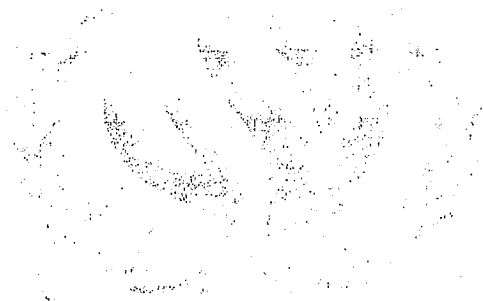


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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

45th Session, Geneva, 1 – 19 November 2010

Palais Wilson, Ground Floor



Opening address by

Navanethem Pillay

High Commissioner for Human Rights

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 45th session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

At the outset, allow me to highlight some important new developments of interest to the Committee that have taken place since your last session and also note upcoming events which relate to your work.

This year's High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) was a milestone. I am pleased that the Chairpersons of the treaty bodies for the first time issued a joint statement urging Member States to recognize the centrality of human rights standards and their implementation in attaining the MDGs. The Outcome Document of the summit reflects such considerations.

The theme of your day of general discussion, namely the right to sexual and reproductive health, is consonant with the MDGs objectives, particularly MDG 5, that is, improving maternal health. My Office has recently released a study on this subject which was also a focus of my advocacy at the summit. As I stated on that and numerous other occasions, to curb maternal mortality women must have access to sexual and reproductive health care and quality health care in general, as well as equal access to education and economic opportunities. This Committee's further guidance to enhance such access is crucial.

In general, my Office has made the pursuit of economic, social and cultural rights high one of its six thematic priorities for the next biennium.

Together with our field-based colleagues, we carry out numerous activities to promote awareness of economic, social and cultural rights, including advocacy for the early ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We also work in cooperation with UN partners on issues of particular interest to your Committee. One of such issues concerns the rights of older persons. I am grateful for the support of members of this Committee in that context. My office is following with interest the discussions at the General Assembly related to the draft resolution on the rights of the elderly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to turn now to the initiatives undertaken to respond to the main challenges that the treaty body system faces. I refer in particular to the meeting held at the end of September in Poznan, Poland to which all Chairpersons of treaty bodies were invited, and which benefitted from your participation, Mr. Chairperson. It was organized by University Adam Mickiewicz with the support of the Polish authorities— and allow me

to extend a special thanks to your colleague, Dzidek Kedzia, for being instrumental in leading the process. At the meeting, the participants reflected on working methods of the Committees, and discussed, among other matters, the centrality of the independence of members and the enhancement of the role of the Chairs.

In addition, the OHCHR is facilitating discussions through the organization of a series of consultations involving all treaty bodies. The meeting for your Committee is scheduled for 7 May 2011, during your 46th Session, and you will be receiving more information on this initiative in the days to come. The objective of these consultations is to provide a forum for a free exchange between all members of treaty bodies in order to identify options for the future of their work and the treaty body system as a whole. Working methods are main items on these discussions' agendas. Moreover, such consultations are meant to allow treaty body members to examine in advance issues tabled by the Inter-Committee Meeting and Meeting of Chairpersons.

I also wish to refer briefly to the 22nd meeting of the Chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies held in Brussels on 1 and 2 July 2010, the first of such meetings organized outside Geneva. The principal objective of this initiative was to bring treaty bodies closer to the implementation level, to NGOs and regional mechanisms, and raise awareness in Europe regarding treaty bodies' work in order to strengthen linkages, synergies and implementation between international and regional human rights mechanisms.

Indeed, these exchanges make the treaty body system more visible and relevant at the regional and national levels. The Chairpersons agreed that meetings in different regions can provide significant added value to their work and therefore requested OHCHR to continue this practice. We welcome this request.

Mr. Chairperson,

My Office is well aware of the needs of the various Committees and works closely with all the relevant units of the UN Office at Geneva to ensure that the highest possible level of assistance can be provided to them. Unfortunately, the demands on the conference servicing units in Geneva have increased tremendously in recent years, not least due to the explosive growth of documentation needed by the Human Rights Council, and the Committees have felt the impact.

We seek to help streamline and harmonize practices among the treaty bodies in order to promote efficiency. My colleagues will be providing additional information to you in the course of your work. We rely on your support in this process.

In this context, let me note that ECOSOC still has to decide on your Committee's request for additional meeting time. As you know, States carefully scrutinize the use of meeting time and resources with a view to streamline efforts. To this effect, we need to think collectively and find ways of working more efficiently without jeopardizing the quality of your output.

Distinguished Members of the Committee

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Cong Jun who was elected last Monday to the Committee and to express my recognition for the contributions of Mr. Daode Zhan who resigned last July.

I regret that we will lose two members of the Committee in the New Year: Ms Virginia Bonoan-Dandan and Ms Virginia Bras-Gomes. Each of you has made major contributions to the work of the Committee and will truly be missed.

Finally, I wish to announce the theme of this year's Human Rights Day (10 December), which is "*Speak Up: Stop Discrimination*". This theme dovetails with your general comment no. 20 adopted last year, which highlights how discrimination undermines the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights for a significant proportion of the world's population. Our work is indeed mutually reinforcing. I wish to assure you that my Office stands ready to continue to support you to the best of our ability.

Thank you.