

Check against delivery

**Committee against Torture**

**79th session**

**15 April – 10 May 2024**



Opening Address by

Mahamane Cisse-Gouro, Director  
Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Representative of the Secretary General

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Chers membres du Comité,

Chers collègues,

Au nom du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies, j'ai le plaisir d'ouvrir la soixante-dix-neuvième session du Comité contre la torture et vous souhaite la bienvenue.

Tout d'abord, permettez-moi de féliciter et d'accueillir chaleureusement les deux nouveaux membres du Comité qui, forts de leurs vastes connaissances et expériences, contribueront grandement aux travaux du Comité (j'ai nommé) : Jorge Contesse et Peter Vedel Kessing. Je souhaite aux nouveaux membres succès et satisfaction professionnelle dans leurs nouvelles fonctions. Mes collègues et moi-même ferons tout notre possible pour que vous soyez pleinement soutenus tout au long de votre mandat.

Le Comité joue un rôle essentiel dans la défense de l'interdiction absolue de la torture, un principe fondamental du droit international. Ce mandat primordial est plus pertinent que jamais, alors que le monde continue à faire face à une myriade de crises et de conflits. Le travail du Comité a dévoilé que de nombreux États, mais aussi des groupes armés, se sont livrés à des actes de torture et à d'autres mauvais traitements. Par le truchement de ses procédures de présentation des rapports, d'enquête et de communications individuelles, le Comité surveille l'application de

la Convention contre la torture et autres peines ou traitements cruels, inhumains ou dégradants par les États parties et donne un aperçu de la pleine mise en œuvre de ses dispositions, en particulier celles qui visent à établir et à exercer la compétence sur le crime de torture, à prévenir les actes de torture et à faciliter l'obtention de réparations pour les victimes et les survivants de la torture.

Distinguished experts,

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention against Torture. I am pleased to note that, with the recent accession of Tuvalu, we are closer to universal ratification with 174 State parties. This widely supported core human rights treaty is not only relied upon by this Committee, but also by other UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT), the Special Fund of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT Special Fund), the Special Rapporteur on Torture, and the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT). I therefore welcome the fact that the Committee and its Secretariat, together with the other UN anti-torture mechanisms, have planned a campaign to highlight achievements made since the adoption of the Convention. The campaign will also provide space for discussions regarding the state of the anti-torture movement today, with special reference to emerging issues. Events organized so far this year to

commemorate the fortieth anniversary include a workshop and public event on torture and mental health, led by the Fund for Victims of Torture, held on 20 March ; and, a side-event held on 27 March in the margins of the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, which I had the pleasure to participate in. The event, entitled “Good Practices in Preventing Torture”, highlighted the role of the OPCAT Special Fund as a strategic implementation tool. I look forward to the other activities planned throughout the year, including the high-level anniversary event on 14 November.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The informal meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, held in Madrid, from 21 to 23 February 2024, provided an opportunity to exchange views and information on several issues of common interest ahead of the 36<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Chairs in June, in particular the treaty body strengthening process and the run-up to the adoption of the biennial General Assembly resolution on the human rights treaty body system in December. In this context, the harmonization of the working methods of the treaty bodies and the modalities of a new coordination mechanism were discussed at length. I am sure that the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr. Claude Heller, will fully debrief you. Please rest assured that the Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights will continue to actively support efforts to strengthen the treaty body system.

I take this opportunity to assure you that we share your concerns about the current financial crisis of the United Nations, its consequences on the work of the human rights treaty bodies and the support the Office can provide in these circumstances. With the strong support from the High Commissioner, we have done our utmost to ensure the organization of treaty body sessions despite the heavy impact of the liquidity crisis on both staff resources and non-post expenditures. In this regard, I am pleased to confirm that resources have just been secured to enable Committees to hold their second sessions. In addition, we have been able to support this year's first country visit by the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, as planned. I hope that the third sessions can also be held, but this will depend on the forthcoming developments on the liquidity situation.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I would like to highlight some of the work relevant to your mandate, which the Office has been engaged in since your last session.

At the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council, which took place from 26 February until 5 April 2024, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément

Voule, presented a Model Protocol for law enforcement officials to promote and protect human rights in the context of peaceful protests, aimed at assisting States in meeting their human rights obligations.<sup>1</sup> The Model Protocol is part of a set of practical and technical tools to assist law enforcement officials in facilitating peaceful protests, which the Special Rapporteur developed in collaboration with OHCHR and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as requested by Human Rights Council [resolution 50/21](#). It is complemented by checklists for law enforcement officials, a principles-based guide for the human rights-compliant use of digital technologies in the context of protests, and a handbook to be developed by the end of 2024. These tools operationalize existing international human rights standards and reflect best practices and provide practical guidance on how to ensure that law enforcement decisions, strategies, and actions at all stages of protests are based on the principles of non-discrimination, precaution, and accountability, and aim to de-escalate and prevent the use of force. The Special Rapporteur has further stressed the importance of creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation with civil society and protest movements.

Also at the last session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

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<sup>1</sup> See [Practical toolkit for law enforcement officials to promote and protect human rights in the context of peaceful protests | OHCHR](#)

or punishment, Alice Jill Edwards, presented a report that provides an analysis of some of the most significant issues on prison management worldwide, including major emerging global trends, and identifies a number of good practices implemented at the national level to help effectively address them. According to the Special Rapporteur, significant challenges facing prisons are found in some form in almost every country; prisons are under pressure from too many demands, insufficient resources, and inadequate staffing, and as a result conditions are often unsafe and inhumane. In addition, the Rapporteur assessed the different needs of specific segments of prison population, including female detainees, young offenders, and indigenous peoples. The Special Rapporteur considers that, while internationally agreed standards for protection of all persons deprived of liberty exist, key gaps in those standards as well as in their implementation remain. The report formulates several concrete recommendations to contribute to the development of just and humane practices and management.<sup>2</sup>

I hope you will find these publications informative and useful in your work.

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<sup>2</sup> See doc. [A/HRC/55/52](#).

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

During this busy session, you will consider the reports of six States parties from diverse regions of the world: Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, Honduras, Liechtenstein and North Macedonia.

I would like to conclude by expressing our appreciation for the outgoing Bureau and other members of the Committee for their good cooperation with the Secretariat.

I wish you all a successful and productive session.

Thank you.