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Human Rights Committee
124th Session, 8 October – 2 November 2018



Opening Address by
Mr. Ibrahim Salama
Chief
Human Rights Treaties Branch

Palais Wilson, Ground Floor Conference Room

Monday 8 October 2018, 10.00 a.m.

Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to open your **one hundred and twenty-fourth session**. In doing so, I convey the greetings of the **new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet**, who succeeded Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein on 1 September 2018. In her first address to 39th session of the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner recognized the centrality of your work. While acknowledging that we are passing through a time of many setbacks for human rights, she emphasised that “The Covenants, the seven other core human rights treaties, and the recommendations of all UN human rights bodies and experts, are fundamental contributions to the work of preventing, mitigating and ending human rights violations – including the inequalities and discriminations which torment so many of our fellow human beings.” The High Commissioner looks forward to meeting you later in the session.

Change is also inevitable here in the Committee. Four distinguished members will be **taking leave of the Committee after this session: Ms. Cleveland, Mr. de Frouville, Mr. Politi and Ms. Waterval**. You will be missed. Your individual and joint contribution to the Committee’s work have been outstanding and we have all been privileged to have worked with you. On behalf of OHCHR, I wish you well and I have no doubt that you will remain committed to the cause of advancing human rights and that your paths will continue to cross with those of your colleagues of the Committee and with us in OHCHR.

Allow me also to congratulate and warmly welcome **Mr. Zimmermann** following the by-election which took place on 28 August 2018. He comes with a wealth of knowledge and experience and I wish him success and professional satisfaction in his new position.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The Office has begun to implement its **Office Management Plan for 2018-2021** which includes support to the implementation of the work of the mechanisms and increasing implementation of their outcomes, which includes all the treaty bodies and certainly your work.

OHCHR has also committed to focus on prevention, on civic space, and on expanding the global constituency for human rights. We will also explore emerging human rights concerns such as digital space, corruption, inequality and people's displacement and movement, among others.

In the area of civic space, OHCHR is committed to enhancing participation in public life by rights holders and to protecting civic space and those standing for human rights. Your Covenant sets out the rights necessary for upholding those commitments, including the rights to freedoms of expression and of association, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to effective remedies. Civil society actors play an important role in your work, their reports can provide early warning to impending crises, could help better understand the underlying causes for rights' violations, and could provide insights for possible solutions. We highly value your engagement with civil society, who contribute at various stages of your work, from information-collection to information on implementation and follow-up, and encourage you to continue to discuss ways in which civil society actors can further engage with and contribute to your work.

I would also like to draw your attention to the **Secretary-General's report to the Human Rights Council on the cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights (A/HRC/39/41)**. The report highlights recent developments within the UN system and beyond to address intimidation and reprisals against those seeking to cooperate or having cooperated with the UN. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, as the senior official leading the efforts of the United Nations in this area, for the first time held this September an inter-active dialogue at the Human Rights Council, underlying the particular attention devoted to this alarming issue.

Reflecting the general concern of the treaty bodies on the issue of reprisals, most Committees, like this one, have adopted the San José Guidelines against Intimidation or Reprisals, and have appointed Rapporteurs or focal points on Reprisals, and are addressing allegations when received. A common approach across UN human rights bodies and experts to this issue should certainly prove more effective for counteracting the damaging effect of reprisals also on your work and, more broadly, on the promotion and protection of human rights, including those enshrined in your Covenant. To that end, we look forward to increased coordination with other focal points/rapporteurs on reprisals from other treaty bodies, as well as your cooperation with other human rights mechanisms and the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. I understand that the Office is planning a retreat in Geneva of focal points/ rapporteurs of the treaty bodies on reprisals for which more details will be available shortly.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

As you know, the **thirtieth annual meeting of the Chairs of the treaty bodies** took place in New York from 28th May to 1st June 2018. The report of the Chairs meeting is now available in all the official UN languages on-line.

One of the outcomes of the Chairs' meeting was the agreement of the Chairs to propose the appointment of focal points in each treaty body to develop a common "treaty body based" position ahead of the 2020 review. This Committee has already made good progress on that discussion and has adopted a Committee's position.

The Chairs meeting also focused on the alignment of working methods and other areas of implementation of Resolution 68/268. They Chairs agreed to explore **further alignment of the simplified reporting procedure** at the meeting next year. The study prepared by your Working Group will be a useful tool towards that discussion. Our Office along with the Geneva Academy, with the financial support of Germany shall hold a workshop in November to see how this relatively new procedure can be aligned across all treaty bodies that use it, and how we will be able to support you in this endeavour.

Furthermore, the Chairs endorsed possible elements for **a common aligned procedure for follow-up to concluding observations, decisions and views**. I look forward to discussions in this Committee at your current session.

The Secretary-General's report on the status of the treaty body system, together with the 24 statistical annexes, is now available on the website of the Office. The report highlights that the adjustments to the meeting time allocated to Committees has not been matched by the allocation of sufficient staff resources

corresponding to the workload of treaty bodies for reviewing reports and especially as it relates to individual communications. It also highlights that other mandated activities of treaty bodies, such as urgent actions, inquiries, follow-up and in situ visits are far more labour intensive than what was originally anticipated. Therefore the staff of the Office have difficulty to keep up with the proper completion of this work. I would like to acknowledge the efforts made by members of this Committee, especially you Chair, in appealing to States to provide increased human resources to support your work, in particular with regard to work on individual communications. We look forward to addressing these challenges with all of you soonest, as well as in the longer term, more sustainably, in connection with 2020 review and beyond.

Let me now turn to your agenda for this session. I am aware that you have a busy session ahead of you. The Committee will examine the implementation of the Covenant in six States parties and review a number of individual communications under your Optional Protocol. It will also continue **the second reading of your draft general comment on the right to life**. States parties as well as numerous other stakeholders that have extensively engaged with the Committee over the last three years, including by submitting their comments to your draft, are indeed eagerly looking forward to its final adoption. This only demonstrates the interest and the appreciation that the international community has for your extremely valuable role.

With this, I extend my best wishes to all of you for a successful and productive 124th session. Thank you.
