

Check against delivery

**Committee against Torture**

**75<sup>th</sup> session**

**31 October – 25 November 2022**



Opening Address by

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Representative of the Secretary General

Geneva, 31 October 2022

Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Esteemed colleagues,

It is an honour for me to open the seventy-fifth session of the Committee against Torture on behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General. I am also pleased to convey the greetings of the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, who took up his functions on 17 October 2022. The High Commissioner is committed to providing strong support for and cooperation with treaty bodies. This was the key message he conveyed at his first meeting with the treaty body chairs just few days after assuming his duties.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

During your last session, the former High Commissioner referred to some of the work the Office is engaging with regard to the treaty body strengthening process. In that connection, I am pleased to share with you that the Secretary-General's fourth biennial report on the status of the treaty body system to the 77<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly was published on 30 August 2022 ([A/77/279](#) and [annexes](#)). The report includes the [conclusions of the 34<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Chairs of the UN human rights treaty bodies](#), as well as information on the Chairs'

proposal for a new predictable schedule of country reviews. It also contains preliminary calculations of the assessed meeting time for 2024. This report and its current consideration by the Member States are critical elements in the treaty body strengthening process. In particular, it will be important that the implementation of the predictable schedule is sustained by adequate financing of the treaty body system in a forward-looking manner. The Secretary-General has stressed this need in his [‘Call to Action on Human Rights’](#) and in his report [‘Our Common Agenda’](#). Therefore, the active support of Member States in the consideration of the resourcing requirements of the treaty body system by the General Assembly will be critical to the future success of these efforts. This is the message that both our office and the Chairs of treaty bodies have been stressing in their interaction with Member States in New York during the present GA session. We count on everyone of you to also bring this message to the States and stakeholders that you interact with.

In parallel, OHCHR has already initiated some actions to implement the needed changes to strengthen the treaty body system. Firstly, a task force has been set up to put forward options to operationalize the predictable schedule and corresponding costing, in coordination with the relevant UN departments. Secondly, the implementation of the predictable schedule will require concrete measures to align treaty bodies’ working

methods. To that end, an assessment of working methods is being developed by the OHCHR for the Committees' consideration. It is based on the mapping of working methods and recommendations already endorsed by the Chairs of the treaty bodies at their successive meetings. It aims to identify more meaningful, sustained and harmonized working methods, avoid unnecessary duplication and achieve cost-saving effectiveness. With regard to the ongoing 'digital uplift' process, thanks to voluntary contributions by two States, a modern case management system for individual complaints and urgent actions is being developed, as part of the Office-wide multi-year digital transformation project. Although this tool will not resolve the chronic under-staffing of the OHCHR Petitions and Urgent Actions Section, it will go a long way towards rationalizing current working methods and increasing transparency and efficiency in case management.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Everyone, especially victims of human rights violations, has the right to have unhindered access to and communicate with the UN human rights treaty bodies, without fear of intimidation or reprisals. Civil society organizations and victims bring crucial information and testimonies to the Committees. They provide treaty body experts with contextual information on patterns and trends of human rights violations. However,

the latest annual report of the Secretary General on the subject of intimidation and reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations shows once again the scope of the issue, and the extent to which people are persecuted for raising human rights concerns with the Organization, including human rights treaty bodies ([A/HRC/51/47](#)). According to this report, surveillance of individuals and groups who cooperate with the UN continues to be reported in all regions with growing evidence of online surveillance and cyberattacks. Other concerning trends include self-censorship and the use of restrictive legislation that prevents and punishes cooperation with the UN, resulting in some cases in people being sentenced for long prison terms or placed under house arrest. As in previous years, the report shows that intimidation and reprisals disproportionately affect certain populations and groups, including representatives of indigenous peoples and minorities, as well as people who suffer discrimination based on age, gender, or sexual orientation.

Unfortunately, this Committee is not an exception, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend you for your efforts to address these concerns whenever they arise, in addition to the Committee's transparent responses to allegations of reprisals in the context of the individual complaints procedure I appreciate your diligent approach in dealing with cases of intimidation and reprisals brought to your knowledge prior, during or after country reviews. Particularly, I compliment the

Committee for its continued evaluation of these situations affecting stakeholders and the preventive measures regularly taken in this regard.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I am pleased to draw your attention to a positive development of interest to your work. During its 51<sup>st</sup> session, held from 12 September to 7 October 2022, the Human Rights Council adopted, without a vote, a resolution further encouraging States to establish or strengthen national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRFs) ([A/HRC/RES/51/33](#)). As you may know, these mechanisms are Government structures in charge of coordinating the preparation of reports to, and engaging with, international and regional human rights mechanisms, including UN treaty bodies, and to facilitate the tracking of national follow-up of human rights treaty law obligations and the recommendations emanating from those mechanisms at the national level. The Human Rights Council requested the OHCHR to continue supporting exchanges between these mechanisms, including through a virtual knowledge hub to share good practices. This resolution takes action on some key recommendations of the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([A/HRC/50/64](#)), which captured the key findings of the five regional consultations held in November-December 2021. Of particular interest to you, the report

recommends that “[a]ll international human rights mechanisms promote national mechanisms as key human rights structures at the national level, including by recommending, where relevant, the establishment and strengthening of national mechanisms in their outcomes (...)”. I therefore encourage the Committee to explore this possibility in the context of its monitoring activities, especially during the consideration of State party’s initial and periodic reports.

Distingué(e)s membres du Comité,

Un autre développement important au cours des derniers mois a été la publication du rapport mandaté par la résolution 47/21 du Conseil des droits de l'homme sur la promotion et la protection des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales des Africains et des personnes d'ascendance africaine face au recours excessif à la force et aux autres violations des droits de l'homme dont se rendent coupables des membres des forces de l'ordre ([A/HRC/51/53](#)). Le rapport contient des informations sur les faits nouveaux et les initiatives prises par les États et d'autres entités pour s'attaquer aux manifestations de racisme systémique à l'encontre des Africains et des personnes d'ascendance africaine, notamment dans le domaine de l'action policière et pour faire progresser la lutte contre l'impunité et l'accès des victimes aux réparations.

Le 3 octobre 2022, le rapport a été présenté au Conseil des droits de l'homme, parallèlement au premier rapport du Mécanisme international d'experts indépendants chargé de promouvoir la justice et l'égalité raciales dans le contexte du maintien de l'ordre ([A/HRC/51/55](#)). Le Mécanisme d'experts examine en particulier la question de la collecte, de la publication et de l'analyse de données ventilées par race ou origine ethnique portant sur les interactions des personnes d'ascendance africaine avec les forces de l'ordre et le système de justice pénale, question qu'il juge essentielle pour orienter et évaluer les mesures visant à lutter contre le racisme systémique dans les domaines du maintien de l'ordre et de la justice pénale.

Ces deux rapports pourraient être une excellente ressource pour le Comité dans ses travaux sur la question de l'usage excessif de la force, y compris la violence à caractère raciste.

Distingués membres du Comité,

Les semaines à venir seront, encore une fois, extrêmement chargées pour vous, et je voudrais ici saluer vos efforts pour lutter contre la torture en procédant à l'examen des rapports des États parties et des communications individuelles et en menant des enquêtes. Je voudrais aussi saluer votre engagement et l'approche pragmatique que vous avez adoptée pour assurer un dialogue continu avec les États parties et les



autres parties prenantes, notamment en répondant à une demande de participation à distance par le biais de réunions virtuelles. Je voudrais également souligner l'importance de votre prochain échange avec le Sous-comité pour la prévention de la torture. Ce n'est que par la coopération entre les organes de traités et entre tous les mécanismes des droits de l'homme que nous pouvons maximiser notre impact sur le terrain.

Distingués membres du Comité,

Permettez-moi de conclure en vous assurant du plein soutien du Secrétariat à vos activités. Je souhaite plein succès à vos travaux.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.

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