***2Check against delivery***

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

70th Session, 27 September – 15 October 2021

Opening address by

Mr. Mahamane Cissé-Gouro

Director, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division

Representative of the Secretary-General

Monday, 27 September 2021

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Palais des Nations, Room XXIII

10:00 a.m. (Geneva time)

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, it is a pleasure to open and welcome you to the seventieth session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – including the Members participating remotely.

I would particularly like to welcome Mr. Nadir Adilov, Mr. Mohamed Amarti, Mr. Ludovic Hennebel, Mr. Yongxiang Shen and Mr. Seree Nonthasoot, the Committee Members who took up their functions in the course of 2020 and 2021, and some of who are attending their first meeting in Geneva.

While the pandemic still casts a shadow over our operations, we at OHCHR are delighted that in-person sessions have recommenced and that the Committee can continue its work in closer to normal conditions. This will be particularly important given the increasing workload you are facing – notably in the area of backlog of reports, and the growing need to ensure that human rights considerations are taken into account as we move forward to the next phases of COVID-19.

In this context, allow me once again to recognize your commitment and determination over the past year and a half, as you have continued your work and adapted your working methods to the challenges and restrictions posed by the global pandemic.

Distingués Membres du Comité,

Les travaux de ce comité et les questions qui sont au cœur de votre mandat font l'objet d'une attention particulière. En effet, la quantité impressionnante de contributions que vous avez reçues à travers les consultations en ligne du projet d'Observation générale sur la question des terres et les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels, illustre l’importante que la communauté internationale accorde à l’expertise et aux orientations de ce Comité.

Lors de son allocution d’ouverture de la 48eme session du Conseil des droits de l'homme, la Haut-Commissaire a entre autres relevé les questions qui sont au cœur des préoccupations de ce Comité à savoir le changement climatique, la pollution et la dégradation de l'environnement, qui menace sérieusement un large éventail de droits, en particulier ceux que ce Comité a pour mandat de surveiller.

Elle a également souligné le rôle important que jouent les organes conventionnels dans le traitement de ces questions cruciales du point de vue des droits de l'homme, signalant en particulier la Déclaration conjointe des organes conventionnels sur les droits de l'homme et le changement climatique, ainsi que les deux observations générales sur lesquelles ce Comité travaille actuellement, à savoir l'observation générale sur la question des terres et l'observation générale sur le développement durable. A cet égard, nous sommes disposés à soutenir votre travail, notamment en mobilisant nos collègues sur le terrain durant la phase des consultations régionales sur le projet d'observation générale sur le développement durable.

Comme vous le savez, les initiatives se multiplient pour promouvoir et protéger les droits de l’homme dans le contexte du changement climatique. Qu’a cela ne tienne, je reste convaincu que votre travail donnera un élan à l'appel à l'action sur l'environnement et contribuera à promouvoir une approche basée sur les droits dans la réponse à cette crise qui mobilise la communauté internationale.

Distinguished Members,

The 33rd annual meeting of Chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies, conducted under the leadership of the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, took place from 7 to 11 June.  It was a timely opportunity for the Chairs to discuss critical issues, and translate their vision into concrete actions in light of the major positive development, which is the report of the co-facilitators on the 2020 treaty body review.  Issues under discussion included: (1) the development of a predictable review calendar that maximizes synergies and complementarities across treaty bodies and ensures full reporting compliance, including the possibility of replacing every second review with a focused review; (2) the ongoing harmonization of working methods; and (3) the digital transition, including the use of new technological developments to increase efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the treaty body system.

These are all topics that have been considered in depth at various stages and in different settings and on which action is now expected. In follow-up to the meeting, the Chair of the CRPD and of this year’s Chairs meeting, has put on the table comprehensive proposals, in consultation with the CRPD, to be considered by all Committees during their meetings until the end of the year. OHCHR will continue to support treaty bodies in this critical endeavour for the future of the treaty body system, including by facilitating, if deemed necessary, another meeting of the Chairs, with a view to reaching a consensual way forward on the main issues at hand.

Distinguished Members,

Before concluding I would like to pay respect to the outgoing Chair of the Committee, Renato Zerbini Ribeiro Leão, whom I have had the opportunity to exchange with on several occasions. Under his leadership, the Committee has undertaken important work during these particularly trying times, ensuring critical business continuity. I would also like to thank the outgoing Bureau Members, Ms Laura Craciunean-Tatu and Mr. Michael Windfuhr, as well as former members Ms Sandra Liebenberg and Mr. Olivier De Schutter, for their constructive roles in supporting the Chair over this period.

Before giving the the floor to Simon Walker to start with the conduct of the elections for Chair of the Committee, let me conclude by wishing you all the very best for a successful and productive session.

Thank you.

\*\*\*