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Committee against Torture

80th session

8 – 26 July 2024



Opening Address by

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Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Representative of the Secretary General

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Dear Members of the Committee,

Colleagues

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am pleased to open the 80th session of the Committee against Torture and welcome you back to the Palais Wilson.

At the outset, I would like to welcome the joint statement of the Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, published on the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June 2024, calling for accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims of torture. The statement highlights that despite progress, the promise of the international prohibition of torture has yet to be fulfilled, as many regulatory and practical obstacles and impediments continue to hamper effective investigations into the crime of torture.

As the statement underlines, efforts to strengthen accountability must support victims seeking justice. These include prosecuting and punishing the perpetrators of such acts and taking measures to prevent torture. Victims also need strong support for recovery and rehabilitation. You have also stressed the importance of legal action taken by civil society, which is crucial in the fight against impunity. The Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will continue to support your efforts in this regard, working to ensure that international commitments are translated into tangible action and effective measures on the ground.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The commemorations of the [40th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) are in full swing. The activities are an excellent example of a cooperative approach as they have mobilized not only members of this committee and our office, but also other anti-torture mechanisms and partners. Events organized so far include, among others, a workshop and a [public event on torture and mental health](#) led by the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and the [side-event](#) ‘Good practices in preventing torture’ on the OPCAT Special Fund as a strategic implementation tool, held in the margins of the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, both in March. In April, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA), jointly with the OHCHR and FIACAT, held [three workshops](#) to reinforce the capacities of the authorities and civil society organizations to prevent and combating torture and ill-treatment.

In addition, the Office has engaged in several new initiatives to mark the anniversary. On 25 and 26 June, our field office in Tunis, in collaboration with the national preventive mechanism of Tunisia and civil society, convened a [roundtable](#) – attended by one of your vice-chairs, Mr. Rouwane, – to create a framework for exchanges between national and international actors involved in the fight against torture. An [art competition](#) was also held, inviting young artists to reflect on themes of human dignity and justice.

The Office has also engaged in a communication campaign surrounding the 40th anniversary and the 26th of June commemoration, developing a visual identity for the communications around the anniversary, collaborating on social media initiatives with the United against Torture Consortium, and publishing an [in-depth story](#) on the case of a survivor of torture, which included an interview of the Chair of your committee. As you know, the anniversary activities will culminate in a high-level anniversary event in the context of your next session on 14 November.

Distinguished experts,

OHCHR continues to actively support efforts to strengthen the treaty body system, which was also the key topic at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Treaty Body Chairpersons, completed in New York ten

days ago. As your Chair will no doubt brief you in more detail, the Chairpersons had important meetings with Secretary General and other seniors UN officials, engaged with civil society and had a comprehensive exchange with Member States. The Chairs made important progress in terms of aligning working methods, and they advocated together for enlarged support for the implementation of the treaty body strengthening process. At a well-attended meeting with Member States, the Chairs called for resources to implement the predictable review schedule and other key strengthening proposals.

We are confident that the conclusions adopted at the 36th annual meeting of Chairpersons will enhance the coordination among treaty bodies and improve the effectiveness of the entire treaty body system. We are also hopeful that the Chairs' decisive engagement with Member States will have a positive impact on the preparations of a biennial General Assembly Resolution on the treaty body system, due to be adopted later this year, and thereby facilitate our common efforts to ensure an impactful, efficient, coherent, and sustainable treaty body system.

Dear Experts,

We appreciate your continued commitment to pursuing your instrumental role despite the challenging circumstances. In addition to

the usual resource constraints, this year the UN Secretariat's liquidity crisis has further hampered the planning and implementation of your work, a point that the Chairs communicated forcefully during their meetings with Member States and other interlocutors in New York. Let me assure you that we are doing our utmost to ensure that this committee and other treaty bodies can implement their imperative mandates, including by highlighting the direct impact that resource limitations have on human rights protection on the ground. In this respect, we are pleased to inform you that, despite continuing resource challenges, we have been able to secure funds for the organisation of all your plenary sessions this year, including the third session that will take place in October-November.

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

To conclude, I would like to reiterate our strong commitment to support the Committee against Torture as you pursue your critical mandate during and beyond this anniversary year of the Convention against Torture. I wish you a successful session.

Thank you.