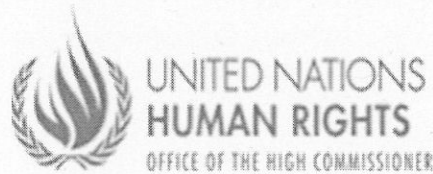


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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
59th Session, 19 September – 7 October 2016



Opening Address by
Ms Peggy Hicks, Director
Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development
Division
Representative of the Secretary-General

Palais des Nations, Room XVI
Monday, 19 September 2016, 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Colleagues and Friends,

I am very pleased to be here with you today to open the fifty-ninth session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

I wanted to take this opportunity to speak to you about the 2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Agenda will be the focus of global development efforts for the next 15 years and, I believe, there is great potential for it to advance implementation of this Covenant.

The Committee and our office have already taken steps to capitalize on this opportunity. What more can we do to create real change for those denied their economic, social and cultural rights? To ensure that what happens in Geneva doesn't stay in Geneva?

Since you last met, the High-Level Political Forum of the 2030 Agenda reviewed implementation of the SDGs by 22 States on a voluntary basis, focusing on the theme '*Leaving No One Behind*' and.

Breaking important new ground in the uncharted waters of this new body, the President of the Forum reached out to Chairs of treaty bodies requesting their input into the Forum.

Chair, you and other treaty body Chairs responded to this request through a detailed submission demonstrating the clear links between the human rights treaties and the theme of '*Leaving No One Behind*'. The President's summary report of the Forum reflected this link. The report stressed that vulnerable and under-privileged groups must be involved in implementation of the 2030 Agenda as rights-holders and recognized that dialogue with UN institutions and mechanisms would be critical for implementation of the agenda.

The theme of the HLPF next summer is "*Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world*" – also an area which links closely with your work.

In another development since you met, the Economic and Social Council examined and took note of the list of SDG indicators adopted in March by the UN Statistical Commission. This list now goes to the General Assembly for action. As we move forward in the implementation of the Agenda, it will be important to ensure that the collection and analysis of data on implementation of SDGs respects human rights principles, including: data disaggregation and collection by population group; participation; self-identification; transparency; privacy; and accountability.

Our office has been working closely on the data revolution envisaged by the 2030 Agenda. We have recently prepared a Guidance Note on a human rights-based approach to data with a view to ensuring that no one is left behind by the 2030 Agenda. I hope it will be helpful to the work of this Committee.

Chairperson,

Of the 17 Goals identified in the Agenda, many link with the Covenant: Goal One on ending poverty, Goal Two on ending hunger, Goal Five on gender equality, Goal Eight on promoting decent work and Goal 16 on peaceful societies, accountable institutions and access to justice. All are linked to the protection of economic and social rights and the Covenant.

The 2030 Agenda explicitly requires that the SDGs be implemented in a manner consistent with their obligations under international law, including human rights law. This is maybe the single most revolutionary clause in the document, for human rights. It means that the measures adopted by more than 160 states parties to the Covenant to implement the goals and targets on health, education, food, housing, water and sanitation, decent work, and other economic and social rights must conform with their obligations under the Covenant.

Human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies, offer the opportunity of promoting accountability of those responsible for implementing the agenda, and in ensuring that they do so in full conformity with human rights law. Building strong links between the

Agenda, the Covenant, the High Level Political Forum, and your monitoring work will be crucial to this, and to helping ensure the voices of the most marginalized are heard.

Earlier this month, Ibrahim Salama sent a letter to Chairs of the treaty bodies encouraging committees to examine the 2030 Agenda in the context of your mandate. Some treaty bodies are already expanding on the links between the Agenda and their treaty and I see significant potential for this Committee. The letter provides some suggestions of potential ways to move forward, taking into account the very limited resources available to you.

I encourage you to find time in your busy agenda to reflect on how best to engage with the 2030 Development Agenda – as a crucial tool for making real change, on the ground, in the protection of economic, social and cultural rights globally.

This reflection would come at a significant moment as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the two Covenants. As a member of this Committee said at the launch of the anniversary campaign last year – our pledge is to make the Covenant ever more relevant, *for the everyday lives, of everyday people*. The 2030 Agenda provides a vehicle to do so.

Chairperson,

Human rights defenders working in the field of economic, social and cultural rights are not just our partners and friends, they are an indispensable element of transformative change. Members of civil society working in the field of economic, social and cultural rights are on the ‘frontlines’, striving to promote rights and prevent violations. Sometimes, they are blocked from doing so. Sometimes they experience reprisals, and are even killed due to the action or inaction of States.

In its March 2016 session, the Human Rights Council recognized the precarious situation of these courageous and critically-important people and adopted a resolution on human rights defenders of

economic, social and cultural rights. The Council reaffirmed *the urgent need to respect, protect, promote and facilitate the work of those defending economic, social and cultural rights as a vital factor contributing towards the realization of those rights, including as they relate to environmental and land issues as well as development.*

We look to this Committee to contribute to ensuring that defenders of ESCRs have safe and enabling environments for their work.

Finally, I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the members whose terms expire at the end of this year for their contribution to the work of the Committee over the years. Your diverse expertise has enriched the work of this Committee, and I have no doubt that you will continue to contribute to the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights in the future as well.

I wish you a most successful session.

Thank you.