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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

68th Session, 28 September – 16 October 2020

Opening address by

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Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division (OHCHR)

Representative of the Secretary-General

68th Session

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

(Taking place online due to COVID-19)

Interprefy videoconference

Monday, 28 September 2020, 16:00 hrs (Geneva time)

Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this **first virtual Session** of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and to meet with you for the first time in my new capacity as Director of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Division. While I recently joined this Division, I am familiar with the work of treaty bodies. Prior to this position, I was the Chief of the Africa Branch of OHCHR, and before that held different positions in the Office, in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Haiti and in the Regional Office in Dakar. There and in the field at large, I have seen the value and impact of the work of treaty bodies.

Mr. Chairperson,

This is a very different setting from that on 17 February 2020 when you met at the opening of the 67th Session in Palais Wilson. Our lives have changed profoundly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and so has our way of working. In these very challenging circumstances, the holding of this Session is remarkable, in particular in light of the time difference - up to fifteen hours - between you. The efforts and flexibility you are demonstrating in these exceptional circumstances to uphold your mandate are commendable.

I would also like to acknowledge the very important work you have been doing since the last Session to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures introduced to counter it, both in your individual capacities at the national level, as well as virtually as members of this Committee. The [Statement adopted by this Committee on COVID-19 and economic, social and cultural rights](https://www.bing.com/search?q=propelled+to+the+fore&src=IE-SearchBox&FORM=IESR4A) in early April 2020 was extremely timely, relevant and used widely. Our Office also referred to it extensively in its work at the national level.

The important mandate and work of this Committee seems to have been propelled to the fore, as the world is grappling with the deep inequalities and structural injustices exposed by the pandemic, and its deep socio-economic impact. This is not news to you: for years, you have highlighted these very issues consistently in the course of your deliberations. The [Statement adopted last year, on the pledge to leave no one behind in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](https://undocs.org/E/C.12/2019/1) is a case in point.

This Committee has also repeatedly stressed the importance of international cooperation, including in the scientific field such as the response to pandemics and related treatments and vaccines. You have so eloquently addressed this in your last [general comment no. 25 related to science](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fGC%2f25&Lang=en). This is an issue at the core of global discussions today.

Continuing your work today is all the more important and OHCHR is working hard with other relevant UN departments to find innovative solutions to enable your activities despite the circumstances. My colleagues and I look forward to hearing your views on how to ensure the best possible conditions conducive to the work of the treaty bodies, including for their important engagement with stakeholders, at a time when we cannot afford to “pause” as so much is at stake.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to focus briefly on the **2020 Review,** as that process will contribute to defining parameters of your work in the coming years. We have recently shared with you the **report of the co-facilitators** to the President of the 74th session of the General Assembly *on the process of the consideration of the state of the UN human rights treaty body system*.

We are encouraged by the recognition in the report of the important role of the treaty bodies in this process, as well as the need for sustained and regular budget resources to support your work, including on individual communications. In that regard, I would like to acknowledge the exceptional commitment you have demonstrated to this very aspect of your mandate with the limited resources available. I understand that **the working group on communications** has already been meeting during last week. We hope that the 2020 Review will yield much needed resources for its work.

We are also encouraged by the importance given in the report to other matters you have already embraced, including **a predictable review calendar and the simplified reporting procedure**, the modalities of which I understand you will be discussing during the current Session. My colleagues and I look forward to your deliberations.

Monsieur le Président, cher(e)s experts du Comité,

A ce stade, permettez-moi de souhaiter la bienvenue à M. Ludovic Hennebel qui a été élu lors des élections ad hoc du 21 juillet 2020 pour occuper le siège laissé vacant par M. Olivier De Schutter. Je voudrais également féliciter les membres du Comité qui ont été réélus pour un nouveau mandat, à compter du 1er janvier 2021, ainsi que les Membres nouvellement élus qui rejoindront le Comité et dont le mandat commencera à la même date (1er janvier 2021). Mes collègues et moi serions heureux de travailler avec vous tous dans la poursuite de votre noble et exaltante tâche.

Je voudrais également exprimer ma gratitude à M. Olivier De Schutter pour la contribution exceptionnelle qu’il a apportée en tant que membre (rapporteur du comité) aux travaux du Comité au cours de son mandat. Son engagement a la cause des droits de l’homme, continue a se faire sentir dans son nouveau mandat de rapporteur spécial sur l’extrême pauvreté et les droits de l’homme. Le rapport publié ce mois-ci sur une approche de la protection sociale fondée sur les droits dans la reprise économique post-COVID-19 en est une illustration.

Je voudrais également exprimer ma profonde gratitude aux membres du Comité qui termineront leur mandat à la fin de l’année, M. Chen, M. Kedzia (Dzidek) et Mme Liebenberg (Sandy). Bien que n’ayant pas eu le privilège de travailler avec vous, je sais que vous avez apporté une contribution significative aux travaux du Comité au fil des ans, et vous allez beaucoup nous manqué.

Maintenant, avant de passer au premier point de l’ordre du jour, j’invite le distingué nouveau membre du Comité à prononcer la déclaration solennelle conformément à l’article 13 du règlement intérieur [le nouveau membre disposera du texte de l’article 13]

Monsieur Ludovic HENNEBEL, vous avez la parole;

Merci, je vous souhaite bonne chance dans l’accomplissement de vos importantes fonctions.

Chairperson, dear Members,

In concluding, let me thank you all once again and wish you a very successful session. I look forward to meeting you in-person, hopefully in the very near future.

Thank you.

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