*Check against delivery*

**33rd meeting of the Human rights**

**treaty bodies Chairs**



**Opening Remarks by**

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**Director**

**Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division**

**Monday, 7 June 2021, 12:30-13:00, on-line (zoom)**

Mesdames et Messieurs les Présidents,

Je souhaiterais, au nom du Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l’homme, vous souhaiter à tous et a toutes la bienvenue. J’espère que vous-mêmes, vos familles et vos proches êtes en bonne santé et en sécurité, en dépit de la persistance des défis causés par la pandémie de la COVID-19.

C’est avec grand plaisir que j’ouvre la 33e séance des présidents. Je tiens à féliciter la nouvelle Présidente du Comité des droits des personnes handicapées, Mme Rosemary Kayess, pour son élection à la présidence de la 33e réunion des Présidents et M. Can Ünver, du Comité pour la protection des droits de tous les travailleurs migrants et des membres de leur famille en tant que Vice-Président de la 33e réunion des Présidents. Je voudrais également exprimer mes sincères remerciements au Président de la 32e séance, M. Luis Ernesto Pedernera Reyna, du Comité des droits de l’enfant, pour son leadership et son engagement au cours de cette année sans précédent marquée par la pandémie de la COVID-19. Je souhaiterais enfin saisir cette occasion pour féliciter tous les nouveaux Présidents des Comités pour leur élection, à savoir Mme Gladys Acosta Vargas (CEDAW), M. Claude Heller (CAT), Mme Suzanne Jabbour (SPT), Mme Rosemary Kayess (CRPD), Mme Mikiko Otani (CRC) et Mme Fay Pazartzis (HRCttee). Je vous souhaite à tous un mandat et un leadership couronnés de succès.

Let me begin by expressing our deep respect and appreciation , , on behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for the extraordinary work you and your respective Committees have carried out throughout 2020 and 2021 and the resilience, flexibility and efficiency you have shown in delivering the Committees’ mandates to the largest extent possible, always keeping rights holders on top of your priorities. I would like to thank you for your commitment in producing high-quality work from a distance, including insightful guidance and recommendations on how to address human rights implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

I also wish to acknowledge that this task was particularly challenging on several fronts, including technical and operational ones, such as time difference constraints and internet connectivity issues in some of your countries of residence. We also acknowledge your work on-line without compensation or honorarium for the effort and time you spent on-line to discharge your important tasks. These challenges were compounded by the limited simultaneous interpretation time provided for your on-line meetings, the non-suitability of the on-line platform that was offered to you, and even more seriously the lack of full accessibility and reasonable accommodation provided for persons with disabilities.

Moving forward, I would like to reiterate that despite the extraordinary and exceptional efforts deployed by your Committees to pilot the on-line reviews of States parties, which was appreciated by States, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. It is essential that in person meetings of treaty bodies can resume as soon as possible to review State parties that have been postponed. I am aware of your principled position that *all* treaty body experts should be able to travel for treaty body sessions in person to resume. You have pointed out issues of possible discrimination, unequal treatment, and lack of representation of experts from all regions, if hybrid sessions (with some treaty body members in Geneva and others working remotely) were to be conducted. In a similar way the visits of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture should resume as soon as possible, provided the experts and staff can travel safely to and from their countries of residence; and that the principle of do not harm is respected to ensure the health and safety of all concerned.

I know that an issue of great concern to your respective Committees as well as to our Office, is how to address the immediate backlog created by the States parties’ reviews which were postponed during the pandemic.

We have reached out to the OHCHR Administration and Finance colleagues, and the Chief of Administration will brief you personally tomorrow, with respect to the budget allotment for treaty bodies. I understand that the full 2021 Regular Budget allotment has now been received. In-person sessions and in situ visits of the SPT may therefore resume, though strictly following any local travel restrictions and respecting the applicable COVID-19 protocol. We are also looking at ways of reinvesting any savings resulting from the lack of in-person meetings back into the treaty body system, including, but not limited to, the much-needed digitalisation of the petitions section to improve workflows, case management and efficiency.

Distinguished Chairs,

This 33rd meeting provides a timely and crucial opportunity to discuss your strategies following the 2020 review of the treaty body system, to which you have already contributed substantively. Needless to reiterate, on behalf of the High Commissioner, that she will continue to support the treaty body system in whichever way she can. I encourage you to seize the momentum and provide key leadership in articulating the way forward, building on your vision agreed at the 31st meeting of the Chairs, on 28 June 2019, and written contribution to the co-facilitators on the 2020 review process, agreed at the 32nd meeting of Chairs held on 30 July 2020, as well as your collected experiences from the past ‘pandemic’ year.

Your positive leadership role in this process has been acknowledged and recently reiterated by 45 States in their letter of 2 June 2021 addressed to you as Chairs. The letter is also bringing to the fore the emerging consensus on the issues that need to be further discussed and developed during this meeting. Namely, the issues of:

1. a predictable calendar with review cycles that is coherent, maximizes synergies and ensures complementarity among treaty bodies and avoids unnecessary repetition. This includes the proposal to replace every second review with a focused review to ensure that full reporting compliance is achievable;
2. introducing more rationalized, harmonized and modern working methods;
3. increasing efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the system through new technological developments.

As you consider various elements suggested by the drafting group of the Chairs, on the predictable schedule for reviews, on aligned working methods, and the digital solutions to support these processes, I urge you to consider them with a sense of urgency. I am convinced that if you adopt a thoughtful and implementable unified approach, you will make a compelling case and positively influence the future of the treaty body system. I would like to encourage you to focus your attention on the areas where further discussion is necessary to reach the largest possible agreement. Your outcome, supported by your respective committees, will provide a solid basis and a compelling case for states to act on. Your vision, if translated by you into clear, precise and actionable plans and models, can and should be supported by States, the High Commissioner, civil society and other stakeholders.

Please rest assured that the Office is doing its share of work and is ready to support you in transforming your vision into plans and costing in concrete ways. For example, we have recently finalized a funding concept proposal for the human rights mechanisms digital transformation for 2021-2023), which should facilitate the work of the mechanisms with fit-for-purpose technological platforms and benefit all human rights mechanisms, enabling efficiencies and more collaborative work streams.

Distinguished Chairs,

I would like to take this opportunity to recall the Secretary-General’s Call to Action, which provides a transformative vision for human rights and puts them in the centre to address the broad causes and impacts of all complex crises, and to building sustainable, safe, and peaceful societies in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and other commitments in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In his call for action, the Secretary-General emphasised the role of treaty bodies, encouraging the full use of human rights mechanisms, including the human rights treaty bodies and pledging to support Member States and other stakeholders in making better use of the reports of the treaty bodies in national development planning, and in follow-up and reporting, including on the sustainable development goals and in the preparation and consideration of voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

Your expected outcome from this decisive chairpersons meeting can accelerate the implementation by states of this categorical important statement by the Secretary-General.

Legal norms established by the human rights treaties is the universal bedrock of the protection system. It undoubtedly improved lives of millions of rights-holders and it can do more and better in this respect. The treaty bodies are and remain a priority for our Office and for the High Commissioner for Human Rights personally. Our full support to your work derives from the fact that you are the custodians and guardians of the legal norms, which forms the basis for all of our work in Geneva, New York and in the field. Even beyond OHCHR, your work should permeate all the work of the UN system to inform and alert policy makers. The future of the treaty body system and the quality of protection provided to victims who are in the centre of this system largely depends on your leadership and on transforming your vision into plans.

Finally, and most importantly, for many reasons, the time to act is now and we look forward to continue the journey with you.

I wish you a successful and productive 33rd annual meeting. Thank you for your attention.

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