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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Omar ZNIBER**

**President of the Human Rights Council**

At the opening of the thirty-first session

of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee

Monday, 19 February 2024, 11:30 a.m.

Palais des Nations, Salle XX

Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Advisory Committee,

Mr. Mahamane Cisse-Gouro, Director of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Excellencies,

Dear participants,

It is with great pleasure that I address you today for the first time, in my capacity as President of the Human Rights Council, at the opening of the **thirty-first** session of the Advisory Committee.

It is also my pleasure to welcome the **new members of the Committee**: Mr. Joseph Gérard Angoh and Ms. Riva Ganguly Das. In addition, I would like to congratulate the re-elected members, Mr. Buhm-Suk Baek, Ms. Nadia Amal Bernoussi, Ms. Patrycja Sasnal, Ms. Jewel G. L. Major and Ms. Catherine Van de Heyning. I have no doubt that you will make valuable contributions to the work of the Advisory Committee throughout your terms.

I am also very pleased to note that, following the last elections, the representation of women in the Advisory Committee has hit an all-time high, reaching gender parity. This is an important milestone; indeed, we have come a long way, from only 3 women serving on the 18-person Committee in 2019. I hope that Member States nominating candidates to your Committee will help us preserve these hard-won gains.

Distinguished Members,

Dear participants,

As is customary, I will provide you with an **overview of the Council’s work** since you last met in August.

The Human Rights Council met for five weeks for the first time ever for a September session to consider 86 reports as well as to hold 5 panel discussions and 41 interactive dialogues, including with Ms. Costas Trascasas, the outgoing Chair of your Committee, who presented the Committee’s annual report and the two reports that had been finalised and were being submitted to the Council for its consideration, namely on **advancing racial justice and equality by uprooting systemic racism**, and on **the impact of new technologies intended for climate protection on the enjoyment of human rights**. I am pleased to note that States and NGOs engaging in the discussion with Ms. Costas Trascasas stressed the great importance of the work of the Advisory Committee as an expert mechanism and appreciated its work on both topics. In particular, some speakers highlighted how the impact of new technologies intended for climate protection on the enjoyment of human rights was a new and timely topic that could help advance a human rights-based approach to climate action. I would like to thank you for the work of your Committee on these two mandates which, no doubt, will continue to inform the Council’s discussions on these topics.

I am also looking forward to the two studies on which your Committee is currently working, namely on **the impact, opportunities and challenges of neurotechnology with regard to the promotion and protection of all human rights** and the study on **human rights implications of new and emerging technologies in the military domain**. I would like to point out that during the interactive dialogue with the Chair of your Committee, many States and NGOs expressed their support to these upcoming studies.

During its September session, the Council also held its **annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout its work and that of its mechanisms**, which focused on revisiting gender parity and its contributions to the integration of gender into the work of international human rights bodies. Your distinguished Committee member, Mr. Frans Viljoen, took part as a panellist and discussed the progress made in addressing gender balance within human rights organs and mechanisms, including since the report of your Committee on representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms submitted to the Council in 2021.

I would also like to highlight two resolutions adopted by the Council at its September session that relate to topics on which your Committee worked diligently in the past. First, the **resolution 54/18 on the right to development**, thereby the Council transmitted a draft international covenant on the right to development to the General Assembly for consideration, negotiation, and subsequent adoption. Your Committee worked on this subject a few years ago and submitted a research-based report on the importance of a legally binding instrument on the right to development to the Council in 2020. Second, the **resolution 54/9 establishing the** **Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas** to facilitate the implementation of the concerned UN Declaration. In 2012, your Committee recommended to the Council to create a new special procedure to improve the promotion and protection of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. The two studies and a draft Declaration submitted by your Committee to the Council, inter alia, laid the groundwork for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas adopted by the General Assembly in 2018.

I also note with appreciation that in September the Committee submitted **four research proposals to the Council**, namely on the rights of the child and climate change; on a human rights-based approach to addressing gendered cyberviolence; on the protection of academic freedom and free flow of research; and on protecting the rights of victims in United Nations human rights mechanisms: the right to a remedy and reparation for gross human rights violations. I wish to thank you for ensuring that the role of the Advisory Committee as the Council’s think tank is fulfilled and hope that your research proposals would translate into Council resolutions entrusting new mandates to your Committee.

With regard to the Council’s work since your August session, I would also like to refer to recent action by the Council on the **non-repatriation of funds of illicit origin**, a topic on which your Committee has worked in the past. Last week, on 13 February, a one-day intersessional expert meeting was organized pursuant to Council resolution 52/21 to address the obstacles to the repatriation of funds of illicit origin to the countries of origin and their impact on the enjoyment of human rights, to discuss challenges and best practices in that regard and to make recommendations. Your distinguished Committee member, Mr. Aldo de Campos Costa, took part as a panellist and provided an overview of the two reports of your Committee on this thematic issue and highlighted the recommendations made and the effective practices identified by the Committee towards overcoming the barriers in repatriating illicit funds.

Distinguished Members,

Dear participants,

Allow me now to turn to the upcoming **55th session of the Council**. The programme of work for the session is quite heavy, stretching over six weeks (26 February to 5 April). Over the first three days, around 100 dignitaries are expected to address the Council during its annual high-level segment. The High Commissioner will present his global update in the second week of the session. There will be 7 panel discussions, including the annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming dedicated to the theme of harnessing multilateral efforts to embed, amplify and realize the rights of persons with disabilities, with a focus on full and effective participation and inclusion in society; and Council’s debate in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Council will hold 42 interactive dialogues with the High Commissioner, his Office and designated experts, with special procedure mandate holders and investigative mechanisms, and with Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. Towards the end of the session, the Council will appoint 14 mandate holders of special procedures and expert mechanisms.

Distinguished members,

Dear participants,

Let me take this opportunity to outline some of the issues and key principles that will guide my Presidency of the Human Rights Council. As a President, I pledge to work impartially and inclusively to uphold, protect and promote all human rights.

My priorities for the year ahead include, inter alia, **putting a focus on building trust and facilitating dialogue in the Council**; **prioritising thematic issues of interest**, such as the questions of food security, the right to health, the impact of climate change and the impact of new technologies (including artificial intelligence and the ‘digital divide’) on the enjoyment of human rights; strengthening the **efficiency of the work of the Council**; making the Council’s work more widely known; and **engaging in frank dialogue with civil society**.

In order to pursue these priorities, I appointed a number of Co-facilitators and Focal Points to carry out consultations on important issues affecting the Council’s work. In particular, in view of the current and past work of your Committee on new technologies, you would be interested to know that I appointed H.E. Mr. Marc BICHLER of Luxembourg; H.E. Mr. Seong deok YUN of the Republic of Korea; and H.E. Mr. Muhammadou M.O. KAH of Gambia to facilitate discussions and dialogue on new technologies, artificial intelligence and the digital divide with the view to defining challenges and opportunities from a human rights perspective.

Distinguished Members,

Dear participants,

As we collectively amplify our efforts to give a **greater visibility** to your work and enable your Committee to fulfil its role as the think-tank of the Council, I look forward to your discussions throughout this session and to meeting you later this week, in a more informal setting, together with members of the HRC Bureau, and the regional and political group coordinators.

The Council relies on your **independent expertise and guidance** on many issues, including new and emerging ones, which your Committee rightly brings to the Council’s attention in a timely manner.

Let me conclude my remarks here by renewing my **appreciation** for the work of your Committee towards our common goal, which is of positive impact on the life of rights holders on the ground.

It was a pleasure to address you today and I wish you a fruitful session.

Thank you.

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