



**Fourth session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law:
“Strengthening democracies to build back better: challenges and opportunities”**

Room XIX, Palais des Nations, and online (Zoom and [UN Webcast](#))

PROGRAMME OF WORK

(as of 23 November 2022)

Thursday, 24 November 2022

10:00 - 10:30 Opening of the session:

- President of the Human Rights Council, **H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva (by video message);
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Mr. Volker Türk** (by video message);
- Chair of the Fourth session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, **H.E. Ms. Patricia A. Hermanns**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Bahamas to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva.

10:30 - 13:00 Panel 1. Learning through adversity: mapping pandemic-related democratic erosion

The panel will look at the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on human rights, gender equality, the rule of law and democratic processes and institutions around the world. It will focus on pandemic-related challenges to human rights, in particular the right to freedom of expression and access to information, both online and offline, the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the right to participate in public affairs. It will also consider the ways in which the pandemic and emergency responses thereto affected the human rights of women, exacerbating gender-based inequalities, including the ability of women to participate in public affairs.

Panellists:

- **Mr. Thomas E. Garrett**, Secretary General, Community of Democracies:
“Democratic erosion and taking concerted action to strengthen democracy resilience - how to advance and protect democratic freedoms, strengthen democratic institutions, and expand political participation”.
- **Ms. Beata Balogová**, Editor-in-chief of SME, a major daily and news outlet in Slovakia, former Vice-Chair of the executive board of the International Press Institute:
“Effect of COVID-19 responses on free, independent, and pluralistic media – the cornerstone of democratic societies”.
- **Ms. Raissa Belintani**, Coordinator of the Strengthening Democratic Space Programme at Conectas Human Rights:
“Impact of the pandemic and emergency responses thereto on women, in particular, on the right to participate in public affairs and in public decision-making”.
- **Mr. Clement Nyaletsossi Voule**, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association:
“Impact of the pandemic on the freedoms of peaceful assembly and of association, both online and offline”.

Discussion

13:00 - 15:00 **Lunch break and side events**

15:00 – 16:00 **Focused discussion 1. State of democracy worldwide in the post-pandemic context**

- **Mr. Staffan Ingemar Lindberg**, Professor of the Department of Political Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Founding Director of the V-Dem Institute (University of Gothenburg), Principle Investigator of the V-Dem Project (Varieties of Democracy).

Discussion

16:00 – 18:00 **Panel 2. Building blocks of building back: developing stronger institutions and fostering trust in government**

Discussions will be focused on specific tools aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, specifically on stronger parliamentary and judiciary oversight, including in terms of diversity and representation; increased access to justice and legal remedies, including online; the recognition of informal justice mechanisms compliant with the rule of law; fostering respect for the principle of separation of powers and the importance of an independent judiciary. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic will be used to explore ways to increase public trust and confidence in the public sector, and thereby enhance the legitimacy and public ownership of State decisions.

Panellists:

- **Mr. Charles Fombad**, Professor of Comparative Constitutional Law, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria; Director of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa:
“Post-pandemic Africa: How can we build stronger institutions and foster trust in governments”.
- **Mr. Chris Thornhill**, Professor of Law, University of Manchester: *“Executive power and the role of international human rights law in post-pandemic democratic recovery”.*
- **Ms. Claudia Escobar Mejía**, Guatemalan lawyer and former judge; Distinguished visiting professor at George Mason University in the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC); Executive Director of the organization Be Just: *“Empowering judges and fostering reliable judicial institutions”.*
- **Ms. Hon. Dyah Roro Esti Widya Putri**, member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia:
“Strengthening parliamentary oversight, including in terms of diversity and representation”.

Discussion

Friday, 25 November 2022

10:00 - 12:00 **Panel 3. All in this together: social cohesion and community-led resilience and response systems**

The United Nations comprehensive response to COVID-19 includes promoting social cohesion and investing in community-led resilience and response systems as a key step for an effective response for transformative and sustainable recovery. This panel will focus on specific tools and measures aimed at strengthening social cohesion and inclusion to contribute to peaceful and just societies and to leave no one behind. Discussions will cover the importance of meaningful social dialogue and increased levels of political engagement, the role of a vibrant civil society, a free media and an engaged academia in an effective recovery. Panellists will discuss the relevance of the renewed social contract in order to tackle the widening socioeconomic disparities resulting from the pandemic, which distort economic justice and threaten social and political stability.

Panellists:

- **Ms. Julia Leininger**, Head of the Department “Transformation of political (dis-)order“ at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS); member of the advisory board of International IDEA; board member of the Foundation for Peace and Development:
“Building social cohesion through social protection and democratic institutions”.

- **Ms. Tatjana Vlašić**, Deputy Ombudswoman of Croatia:
“The role of a vibrant civil society in responding to crises: Civic space in all its diversity as a key element in building trust, amplifying the voices of those not heard and for developing social cohesion”.
- **Mr. Charles Kajoloweka**, Executive Director of Youth and Society:
“Beyond elections: The role of youth in shaping the tools of political accountability”.
- **Mr. Mohamad Mansour**, Deputy Director of ABAAD - Resource Center for Gender Equality:
“Gender-inclusive citizenship and the importance of social dialogue for recovering better and enhancing resilience to future shocks”.

Discussion

12:00 - 13:00 Focused discussion 2. Implementation of recommendations of the Forum’s previous sessions

- **Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake**, United Nations Secretary General’s Youth Envoy (by video message)
- **Mr. Rogier Huizenga**, Human Rights Programme Manager, Inter-Parliamentary Union
- **Mr. Mark Cassayre**, Permanent Observer of the International Development Law Organization to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva

Discussion

13:00 - 15:00 Lunch break and side events

15:00 - 17:30 Panel 4. Strengthening safeguards against future crises: inspiring examples to drive change

This panel discussion will focus on specific tools, best practices and new initiatives that are aimed at strengthening democratic safeguards, while improving preparedness for future crises. Participants will assess the benefits and the risks for democracies of accelerated digital transformation and discuss best practices that are compliant with international human rights standards. The discussion will also cover the ways to enhance social protection systems in order to strengthen the resilience of societies against future shocks.

Panellists:

- **Mr. Rodrigo Uprimny Yepes**, Professor Emeritus at the National University of Colombia; member and senior researcher at the Center of Studies Dejusticia; member of the International Commission of Jurists; member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (by video message):
“Strengthening the protection of economic, social and cultural rights and the rule of law as a way to tackle the widening socio-economic disparities and authoritarian attitudes resulting from the pandemic”.
- **Ms. Claudia Chwalisz**, Founder and CEO of DemocracyNext; former Innovative Citizen Participation Lead at OECD:
“Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions”.
- **Ms. Nighat Dad**, founder of the Digital Rights Foundation, member of the Information and Democracy Commission; member of the Oversight Board of Meta:
“Accelerated digital transformation as a seismic shift that will shape the 21st century: recognize the benefits and the risks for democracies”.
- **Ms. Courtenay Howe**, Senior Advocacy Advisor at STOPAIDS and Project Manager at the Platform for ACT-A Civil Society and Community Representatives:
“Promotion of human rights principles in the forthcoming WHO pandemic treaty: Civil society demands, expectations and limitations”.

Discussion

17:30 - 18:00 Closing of the session:

- Concluding remarks by the Chair of the Fourth session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.