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## **Statement by Ms. Suzanne Jabbour**

## **Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT)**

## **UNGA79**

## **October 25, 2024**

Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be with you today to present the 17th Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.

It has been my privilege to serve on the SPT for 14 years, a period that has allowed me to contribute to its growth and witness firsthand the evolving complexities of torture prevention across the world. This year, unlike any, we convene under the shadow of an unprecedented global political context, marked by challenges to human rights that emphasize the urgency of strengthening multilateral cooperation and reinforcing the international human rights framework.

In 2023, the landscape within which the SPT operated had already begun to be significantly shaped by conflict and economic instability. Yet, our commitment to the prevention of torture remained resolute, further reinforced at a time when it was most needed. Throughout this year, the Subcommittee expanded its reach within the framework of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, with the accession of Côte d’Ivoire and Slovakia, increasing the number of States Parties to 94. These efforts are not merely numerical achievements; they are critical endorsements of a universal principle—the absolute prohibition of torture; they are direct calls for accountability and concrete action that have fortified the foundation upon which the Subcommittee stands.

While the SPT has undergone significant organizational changes, including those resulting from the member elections held yesterday at the 10th Meeting of States Parties to the OPCAT, our working methods remain centered around visits, which are at the core of our mandate to prevent torture and ill-treatment. In 2023, we conducted eight official visits to the Philippines, Georgia, Guatemala, the State of Palestine, Croatia, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, and South Africa. During these missions, we identified recurring issues and advocated for reforms, including the implementation of fundamental legal safeguards, the establishment of independent national preventive mechanisms, and actions to reduce prison overcrowding.

In 2024, the Subcommittee has already conducted visits to Gabon, Albania, Honduras, Mongolia, Greece, and Nigeria and plans to extend its efforts finally to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bolivia by the end of the year.

During the visits in 2023, the SPT conducted more than 1,100 individual or collective interviews with more than 3,500 persons – for the most part detainees, but also with officials, law enforcement personnel, and medical staff. These firsthand accounts, with observations made to more than 170 places of deprivation of liberty gave us contextualized insights into the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty as well as their living conditions in places of detention, insights that are informed by the particular cultural, socio-economic, and institutional contexts of each country we visit. This approach provides us with the unique opportunity and space to advise the authorities on how best to address the specific challenges and nuanced realities faced by each country, with the support of the NPMs and other actors, as necessary. The SPT’s recommendations, informed by fieldwork, adapted to the national context, and subject to targeted follow-up, are a real added value of the SPT’s particular mandate and methodology.

We are also pleased to announce the publication of the SPT’s 1st General Comment on Article 4 of the OPCAT, adopted during our June session, and which will provide much-needed clarity to ensure comprehensive access for monitoring bodies, including NPMs, to places of deprivation of liberty, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of these places and their conditions.

Despite these efforts, the SPT faces notable operational challenges, primarily due to resource constraints that have hindered our ability to conduct the number of visits we deem necessary. The ongoing liquidity crisis at the United Nations has further impeded our capacity and effectiveness, as we are sure it is affecting all Human Rights Treaty Bodies.Indeed, it is for this reason that I am addressing you online today, a necessary concession we have had to make to ensure we can continue our essential work despite these financial limitations. These challenges underscore the necessity of a sustainable solution to ensure the fulfillment of our mandate.

The treaty body strengthening process has made notable progress in addressing these financial challenges, advancing unified conclusions to create a more efficient, coherent, and sustainable system. At our 36th Chairs meeting in June, we Chairs, as representatives of our respective committees, aligned our working methods, including simplified reporting and a predictable eight-year review schedule, while maintaining the specificities of each committee to respect their distinct mandates.During this meeting, we also began a review of the Addis Ababa Guidelines on the independence and impartiality of treaty body members, reflecting on lessons learned across our respective bodies. The independence we uphold also rests on a credible nomination and election process led by States Parties, one that benefits from being transparent, inclusive, and visible.

The expected adoption of the upcoming General Assembly resolution this December to endorse the strengthening process will be a foundational step toward securing the resources and structural support needed for all human rights treaty bodies to operate effectively. What has been long requested by States since 2014—a streamlined, well-coordinated, and adequately funded treaty body system—now has a genuine opportunity to be realized. It is now incumbent upon States to rise to this moment and affirm their commitment by ensuring the adoption of this resolution. Regaining trust in the international human rights system depends on it.

The groundwork has been meticulously laid, and the instruments to safeguard human rights have been successfully developed. But will States have the resolve to wield these tools, turning commitments into actions that drive lasting change? This upcoming resolution transcends mere procedure—it embodies the principles that unite us in our collective determination to uphold standards of justice that should not be seen as aspirations, but as the baseline for any functioning society. The world stands at a crossroads, observing our choices. Let us advance with clarity of purpose, acting not just as custodians of a mandate, but as guardians of the inherent dignity of the most vulnerable individuals.

As I conclude my remarks, I conclude my tenure, addressing you one last time as Chairperson of the SPT, I feel compelled to make a confession—a final appeal in our collective fight to prevent torture. We have failed to eradicate this abhorrent violation of human rights. Although we have made progress, it is clear that much remains to be done, and our efforts without the political will of States will not suffice.

Our efforts under the Treaty Body strengthening process have been a promise unfulfilled without an equal commitment from States. What remains is our resolve. Our determination to press forward, to engage, to advocate, and to remind the world that the fight against torture is a measure of our shared humanity. My final appeal to this assembly is this: The world is watching. History will not measure us by intentions or rhetoric, but by the actions we take to confront the challenges we face. Let us not fail in this fundamental duty.

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