**Closing remarks**

I would never be able to summarize all we have heard in these 3 days of a rich dialogue on promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. I heard important messages that were echoed by several participants. All I will attempt to do to the best of my ability in the few minutes I have is to bring together the recurrent words, themes and ideas shared during this workshop under three main points.

The first point is the repeated reference to the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights. This has, of course, been part of the political discourse since the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993 but the gap has still not been totally bridged.

As we move ahead in our recovery efforts, we have to keep in mind the painful lessons we learnt during the time that COVID turned our lives upside down – that all rights are, indeed, indivisible and interdependent not only in theory but above all in practice and that, therefore, they require sound and integrated policies and well-functioning public services to carry out the obligations of States in promoting and protecting human rights.

The second point is on the theme in our conversations that was crosscutting to all the other themes: inequalities. It was interwoven with other words, for example, discrimination, vulnerable groups and participation.

The pandemic created a crisis and crises always exacerbate the negative effects on people’s lives of existing inequalities. In spite of positive measures taken by States, in reality discrimination patterns persist in various forms, some obvious and widely recognized, others more subtle but none the less disturbing. For example, confinement and working from home during the pandemic, in spite of being a positive public health related measure could not cover many groups of workers who could not work from home given the nature of their work and did not have the means to survive, unless they left their homes to work.

In the context of discrimination, the most important gaps lie in the lack of recognition by States of intersectional discrimination and the particularly negative and long lasting effects it has on women and persons belonging to vulnerable groups. There is also the ineffectiveness of measures taken to combat systemic discrimination based on deeply rooted societal prejudices. Translating the comprehensive human rights international legal framework into national legislation must remain a priority. It is time for States to renew efforts to enact comprehensive legislation that would provide the overarching legal architecture for a coherent non-discrimination framework and integrated policies to combat the root causes of discrimination.

The pandemic also deepened gender inequalities as the burden of caring for children at home and for sick or older family members fell disproportionately on women, given the still deeply embedded gender stereotypes and roles in many societies. Once again, women and girls were asked to function as the hidden welfare state in caring for children and sick or older family members which they did, like they always do. Women must, therefore, remain at the centre of recovery initiatives. The recognition of unpaid care work, the reduction of the pay gap, and fiscal and social protection policies must result in the real economic empowerment of women.

The meaningful participation of rights holders is an essential human rights standard. Particularly in times of adversity, inclusive democratic processes that reinforce substantive participation and empowerment help people deal with the consequences of powerlessness. Open, participatory and meaningful dialogue with the rights holders is not only a means to ensure their voices are heard and their rights respected, but also an important policy tool that can offer a range of practical measures to build more cohesive societies. Of course, on the other side of the coin is accountability by duty bearers at all levels which needs to be exercised in an accessible, transparent and effective manner.

The third and final point is to highlight a word that has a profound meaning and was often repeated in this room, and that is the word commitment.

From the representatives of States, we heard of commitment to the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights and the recognition that it requires political will and the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes to promote and protect these rights. We also heard the recognition that it requires commitment to resource generation and allocation at domestic level as well as from international cooperation and assistance, whether it is financial or technical or both. It also requires a change in the mindset of, and conditionalities imposed by, the International Financial Institutions which have yet to recognize that the human rights framework provides a powerful roadmap for all times but particularly during crises and in times of recovery from crises.

In the context of resources, I also echo the recognition by many delegations that the OHCHR needs increased human and financial resources to step up its work in various areas of implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. As we move forward in the recovery efforts, based on the lessons we have learnt, we have a window of opportunity to further promote and protect these rights. A well-resourced OHCHR at headquarters and as part of the UN Country Teams, would certainly contribute to maintain this window open and, hopefully, to push it wide open. From States, National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society Organizations we heard a wealth of ideas on how the OHCHR could enhance its work on economic, social and cultural rights, if it had adequate resources. We can only hope that these ideas will translate into commitments.

As we move forward in our recovery efforts, we absolutely need national contexts that are more responsive to the rights of individuals and groups and new modalities of international cooperation based on solidarity, shared responsibility, mutual respect and complementarity.

As we move forward in our recovery efforts, it is fundamental to reiterate that economic recovery will only be sustainable in the long run if it really has the realization of all human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights, at its heart.

These are the only ways we (and I underline the we, because none of us is exempted from this effort) in our different capacities, can contribute to making rights real on the ground. In the final analysis this is what really matters!

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