I would like to begin by thanking OHCHR for organizing this workshop and bringing all of us together at such a critical time. The world has been reeling under wave after wave of crises – from the Covid-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine.

All around us, we see the devastation of people’s lives and livelihoods caused by ever-growing cases of armed conflict, natural disasters (the latest being the devasting earthquake in Syria and Turkey) and the climate crisis related extreme weather events.

The crises have dealt a body blow to the financial health of many states increasing debt distress and shrinking fiscal space. Many countries around the world are facing a severe cost of living crisis. Prices of food and other essential items have skyrocketed, and wages have not kept up.

The impact of these crises have been recorded in the global hunger and poverty statistics and projections for growth over the next few years. I won’t get into the numbers as these have been discussed a lot by panellists who have come before me, but it is clear that the surge in food prices and the growing cost of living have further exacerbated global and domestic inequalities. This has disproportionately affected people living in poverty, women, girls and non-binary people, people with disabilities, with migrant backgrounds, refugees and people seeking asylum, older persons and people with multiple and intersecting identities.

The multiple crises have also severely diminished people’s resilience and eroded coping mechanisms. This in turn has left them vulnerable to hunger and deepening poverty and further entrenched patterns of inequality, marginalization, and discrimination.

While at first, it is easy (and possibly even lazy) to see these developments as mainly linked to ESC rights such as the rights to health, education, social security, housing and work, however, as has been highlighted in previous sessions of this workshop, this division between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights is unreal and also most unhelpful when trying to address these issues.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases where the violation of human right has led to the violations of several other rights. We have seen this happening across the artificial but thriving civil and political and economic and social divide. We are seeing this even in this most immediate context. Frustrated by the lack of essential services, the unaffordability of food and other essential items, growing unemployment and the lack of any or adequate support from the government, people have taken to the streets to demand change. These protests have taken place in high- and low-income countries alike.

However, instead of viewing these protests as an expression of people’s discontent and a manifestation of their attempts to be heard and claim their rights, time and again, states have violently cracked down on them. They have responded with excessive use of force.

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising human rights, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power.

In all regions of the world, Amnesty International has documented a wide array of undue restrictions on protest in ordinary and emergency legislation, criminalization of protesters, and the unlawful use of force to disperse protesters and to intimidate and deter others from joining these mobilizations, instead of attempting to address the root causes of many of these protests.

Similarly, there are numerous examples of ways in which armed conflicts, or the climate crisis have led to the denial of people’s economic, social and cultural rights and created situations of grave food, health and housing emergencies.

The human rights council has taken significant steps in promoting economic, social and cultural rights including the setting up of Special Procedure mandates on key ESC issues, and recognizing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. However, there remains a lot more that can be done towards achieving indivisibility of human rights.

The human rights council also remains vulnerable to criticism for polarisation, selectivity and partiality in the issues it seeks to focus on. ESC issues can still be perceived as marginal when compared to the work of the council on civil and political rights

In 2022 Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Knowledge Ecology International, and the People’s Vaccine Alliance welcomed the adoption of the resolution on access to medicines, vaccines and other health products in the context of the right to health by consensus. The organisations also noted the attempts from some states to water down the language of this resolution.

It is at times like the current, where the covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fault lines and shone the spotlight on the inequalities that exist in our society, that it is ever more urgent for states to come together. It is ever more urgent to approach these crises from an indivisibility of rights perspective and the Human Rights Council has a leadership role to play here.

The council has all the tools necessary to ensure that issues concerning ESC rights receive the same level of attention and resources as those concerning civil and political rights.

States have the primary responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil human rights obligations and the Human Rights Council through the UPR should ensure that recommendations on ESC rights are treated with equal seriousness as those around civil and political rights.

The Human Rights Council, in order to ensure that Special Procedures are duly supported, should regularly review States’ cooperation with Special Procedures and the steps States take to implement their recommendations. Amnesty has long advocated for a dedicated space within the Council agenda to discuss cooperation with the Special Procedures, including selective cooperation, and implementation of the recommendations of the recommendations. One idea to strengthen cooperation could be to ask each state visited to come up with an action plan on how to implement the recommendations but this has not been discussed much in detail. Such an action plan could then also be discussed when the HRC heard follow-up reports of mandate.

In order to ensure accountability, the Human Rights Council should encourage States that haven’t done so, to ratify the ICESCR and the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and also review incorporation of the Covenant at the national level. Today, we have a situation where states, across the north-south divide have either not ratified the covenant or where they have ratified it, they have not incorporated it into domestic law.

As states and people are grappling with the multiple and overlapping crises, the Human Rights Council could ensure that international cooperation and assistance, as highlighted earlier, is understood as an obligation on all states and not an act of charity. International cooperation and assistance that is carried out in a manner that is consistent with human rights, is key not only in the immediate aftermath of a crisis but it is also critical for recovery and building the capacities of states and peoples to cope with future crises. For example, international cooperation and assistance in terms of technical and financial support could go a long way in building robust and shock responsive social protection systems.

I would like to end by highlighting that the division between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social, and cultural rights on the other, is artificial and does not exist in people’s lived realities across the world. However, this divide exists and has become a barrier in truly addressing human rights violation. As has been noted earlier, the protection and promotion of human rights is about addressing the power imbalances, the Human Rights Council has a leadership role to play here by addressing the imbalance between the attention and resources dedicated to work on these two sets of rights.

Thank you