

**Workshop on Promoting and Protecting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights within the context of Addressing Inequalities in the Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic**

**AMBASSADOR MXOLISI NKOSI**

**6 FEBRUARY 2023**

**10:00 - 12:00**

**TEMPUS, PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA**

Thank you Chairperson,

High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

The COVID-19 pandemic stands out as one of the most devastating global humanitarian and economic crises of our time, it has led to human misery in most countries in the world.

It has had negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights such as the rights to health, education, and work.

It has impacted both developed and developing nations, and exacerbated inequalities and disparities within and among countries. The pandemic has further reversed the hard-won gains and progress towards realising the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development which, in itself, seeks to realise economic, social and cultural rights.

Our discussions today is therefore timely in the context of our efforts towards charting an equitable and fair post- pandemic recovery path.

The absence and undermining of economic, social and cultural rights is a contributing factor for underdevelopment, which breeds competition among communities for scarce resources and often manifests in violence and conflict, whose impact is felt across borders and regions.

Among the longstanding challenges made salient by the pandemic are poverty levels not seen in a generation. Accordingly, the problems of hunger; unemployment; disease; an increase in sexual and gender-based violence; and heightened racial disparities have worsened over the course of the pandemic.

In this respect, the importance of economic, social and cultural rights cannot be overstated, even in the most prosperous economies where these issues persist. The pandemic has made the realisation and enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights even more urgent. We cannot continue to treat economic, social and cultural rights as nice to haves.

Excellencies,

South Africa deeply appreciates the efforts made by the Office of the High Commissioner to strengthen economic, social and cultural rights particularly during the height of the pandemic. Notwithstanding, South Africa maintains that more could have been done is there was fair and balance funding for the rubrics of rights.

This even becomes more urgent as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration.

We need to begin to be true to the spirit of the spirit of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in their affirmation of the inextricability of all human rights: economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. The Vienna Declaration goes further and reasserts that all rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and must be treated in a fair and equal manner.

We are also encouraged that High Commissioner Volker Türk has identified the need to address this imbalance as one of the priorities for his tenure of which this workshop forms part.

Excellencies

To this end, the strengthening of the Office of the High Commission on economics, social and cultural rights remains of central importance. There is an urgent need to ensure the increase in human and financial resources allocated to economic, social and cultural rights in the Office.

In so doing, it is imperative that we are guided by a victim-centred approach in all our efforts to promote and protect human rights, ensuring that we prioritise victims, as right-bearers, over politics.

Excellencies,

Let us work together to combat the scourge of inequality that preys particularly on the vulnerable and the marginalised and build a fairer, more equitable, non-discriminatory post-COVID era.

In this regard, let us heed the call to action of the UN Secretary General, Antonió Guterres, as part of his Common Agenda “*… to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies, so as to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights*”.

South Africa assures you of its commitment to work tirelessly, together with our partners, to ensure the necessary balance of all human rights and the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights. This is particularly important if we are to address the uneven recovery that currently blights our world.

I thank you.