**OHCHR Workshop on ESC Rights and the COVID-19 Recovery**

**High-Level Opening Segment**

**Remarks as delivered by Ambassador Michèle Taylor**

**Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland**

Thank you, Madam Chair, for convening us today. I am delighted to take part in this important discussion.

And thanks to High Commissioner Türk, for setting the stage on the challenges we face in progressively realizing economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights in our respective countries. We appreciate OHCHR’s work on these issues as part of its independent and impartial mandate.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this year, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we are reminded as we heard earlier from our distinguished HRC President and other of my colleagues, that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated, without distinction of any kind.

ESC rights are critically important and indivisible from Civil and Political rights.

In the United States, our decentralized, federalized system of government addresses ESC Rights through a combination of national, state, and local programs. In many areas, such as education, local elected councils decide how best to allocate resources for the people that they represent. In other areas, the national government provides services directly, such as support for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act, or health plans for older persons through Medicare.

Our different levels of government also reinforce one another. For example, each state administers its own Medicaid program, which provide health insurance to more than 83 million Americans who have lower incomes. These programs are mostly funded by the national government, which gives more money to poorer states. Within national standards, each state, run by elected officials, can direct funds to where they are most needed. Local control allows communities to better adjust to local conditions.

These programs, together with Social Security, have played a historic role in reducing poverty and promoting human dignity in the United States.

I mention these programs not because they are perfect. They are not. They might resemble programs in your country. Or they might be completely different. There is no “one size fits all” approach to the realization of ESC Rights. Each country has its own economic reality; its own strengths and weaknesses; its own differences at the sub-national and local level. We seek each of us to address ESC Rights in different ways. What matters is that we learn from each other, and we each continue to make progress.

How we pursue these improvements matters. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 16, which speaks to peace, justice, and strong institutions, demonstrate the importance of accountable governments that uphold democratic principles, provide for their people, and respect human rights and the rule of law.

This means that in addressing ESC Rights, we cannot simply look at the numbers, create a program, and move on. We need to apply democratic principles of consulting broadly; listening to the needs, hopes, and ideas of our people; and adjust our approach based on continuous feedback and on local conditions.

We must also protect members of minority groups and vulnerable or marginalized populations, as their needs can be overlooked, particularly in times of crisis.

This year, we also celebrate 30 years since the adoption the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. It speaks to both the need to protect members of our most vulnerable populations and to the equality of all human rights when it explicitly states that “The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community.”

To promote equity, we should collect and use disaggregated data on the enjoyment of ESC Rights among individuals such as women, children, youth, older persons, LGBTQI+ persons, members of racial and ethnic minority groups, and indigenous persons. We must listen to their voices and leave no one behind.

In leading the global effort against the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States is proud to be the leading donor in partnership with COVAX and others of COVID vaccines in the world. We have donated more than 680 million doses of COVID vaccines to more than 115 countries and economies in all regions of the world.

In doing so, the United States continued its tradition of being the world’s largest donor country, giving roughly 13 billion dollars in humanitarian aid in 2021, out of roughly 70 billion dollars in foreign assistance.

There is no “one size fits all” in our international partnerships either. The United States helps governments advance ESC Rights for their people in education, in health care, and so much more.

Development programs should be based on specific needs, and the experience of the people involved as to what works or what doesn’t work.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the ability of all governments to listen to and adapt to the changing needs of their people while advancing respect for the human rights of all.

While the severity of the pandemic required significant, decisive action by governments across the world, many governments used the pandemic as a pretext for taking repressive actions against their populations, including by stifling civic space and silencing human rights defenders. Public health measures should always be tailored to have the least possible hinderance on the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Neither public health concerns, nor economic conditions should ever be used to justify repressive government actions. States must promote and respect human rights without deprioritizing them in times of crisis. The UN Charter treats security, development, and human rights equally and does not allow for a hierarchy or an undermining of one to achieve the others.

The United States continually reassesses our public health policies and is working with stakeholders with the goal of designing and implementing strong and effective actions to support ESC rights in our country, including for the most vulnerable, and to promote these rights around the world.

We look forward to hearing ideas on how governments can better promote ESC rights in their countries, including how governments can better measure and address the needs of the full breadth of their people. I thank you.