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Seventy-fifth session

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## Third Committee

### Summary record of the 3rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 6 October 2020, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Bogyay ..... (Hungary)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Statement by the President of the General Assembly**

1. **Mr. Bozkır** (Turkey), President of the General Assembly, said that the Third Committee should be applauded for electing a woman as Chair for the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the only Main Committee to do so. As he had noted at the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, more women leaders were needed.

2. The seventy-fifth session would undoubtedly be affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, not least on account of the limitations on in-person meetings. It was fortunate that some meetings could be held in person, as the benefits of face-to-face diplomacy could not be taken for granted. He congratulated the Bureau for proceeding with a hybrid working model that included in-person meetings.

3. The pandemic had presented a challenge unlike any other in the 75-year history of the United Nations. The consequences of the pandemic were most pronounced in relation to the matters on the Committee's agenda, such as the realization of gender equality and the advancement of the humanitarian agenda with a focus on the most vulnerable. Lockdown measures had led to increased domestic violence, compounding pre-existing gaps in the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic abuse. COVID-19 national responses plans must ensure the allocation of additional resources and the adoption of evidence-based measures to address violence against women and girls.

4. COVID-19 had exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and threatened to push those furthest behind into even more vulnerable positions. The global hunger crisis was deepening, with the number of acutely food-insecure people in countries affected by conflicts, natural disasters or economic crises predicted to rise from 149 million prior to the onset of the pandemic to 270 million, unless assistance was urgently provided. Recent estimates also suggested that COVID-19-related disruptions to essential health and nutrition services could result in up to 6,000 daily deaths of children from preventable causes in the coming six months. Children's education was also at risk, given the challenges of remote learning for children in places with poor Internet connectivity.

5. Displaced communities, including refugees and internally displaced persons, were another vulnerable group acutely affected by COVID-19. Crowded living conditions in refugee camps and asylum centres made those communities more susceptible to contracting the virus, while the reallocation of resources had adversely

affected their access to necessary health services. The risk of the pandemic causing further displacement must also be taken into account in the collective commitment to contain COVID-19.

6. While COVID-19 was necessarily the top priority, existing human rights challenges must not be forgotten. Promoting good governance, respecting the rule of law and preventing human rights violations would support the response to the pandemic by making societies more equitable and resilient. The Committee was at the forefront of developing human rights-centred solutions to common challenges. The Committee's work during the current session would also be crucial in terms of addressing the increase in racist discourse, hatred, stigmatization, stereotyping and misinformation that had unfortunately accompanied the pandemic.

7. Solidarity and unity should underpin the Committee's discussions during the seventy-fifth session. The Committee members should stand by their principles, strive for consensus and seek compromises in their deliberations. He was confident that the rights and well-being of the people served by the United Nations would be placed front and centre in the work of the Committee, and that durable solutions would be sought to address current and future challenges.

### **General debate** (*continued*)

8. **Mr. de la Fuente Ramirez** (Mexico), speaking also on behalf of Argentina, Australia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, Guatemala, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Paraguay, Peru and Spain (the Group of Friends of Indigenous Peoples), said that the COVID-19 pandemic was posing serious risks to indigenous peoples in both urban and rural areas across the world. Equality, non-discrimination and inclusion must guide responses to COVID-19, and indigenous peoples should take part in their design, implementation and evaluation. States must work together with indigenous peoples to ensure adequate access to health care, medicines, vaccines and medical equipment. The recognition of the role of extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good was a vital step. States and international organizations must provide indigenous peoples with adequate, accessible and reliable information in a culturally appropriate manner, including through the use of indigenous languages. Measures must be taken to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence, especially against indigenous women and girls.

9. The 2020 sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples had been postponed owing to the pandemic, while indigenous peoples' organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council had seen their access restricted. In the context of the pandemic, it had not been possible to conduct all consultations with representatives and institutions of indigenous peoples in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/321. Indigenous peoples' organizations had therefore requested the Assembly, with the full support of the Group, to postpone to the seventy-sixth session its consideration of possible further measures to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples in meetings of relevant United Nations bodies on issues affecting them.

10. Advancing the rights of indigenous peoples also entailed the protection of indigenous human rights defenders. The work of the Committee would be crucial in ensuring adequate preparations for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, which would commence in 2022. Languages were disappearing around the world at an alarming rate, and urgent action must be taken to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages.

11. **Mr. Heusgen** (Germany), speaking also on behalf of Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Marshall Islands, Monaco, Nauru, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, said that China must respect human rights, in particular the rights of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet. The existence of a large network of so-called "political re-education" camps in Xinjiang was of grave concern. According to credible reports, over 1 million people had been arbitrarily detained in those camps, and the number of reports of gross human rights violations had been increasing. Severe restrictions were placed on the freedoms of religion or belief, movement, association and expression and on Uighur culture. Widespread surveillance disproportionately targeted Uighurs and other minorities.

12. A number of provisions of the Hong Kong National Security Act did not conform to the international legal obligations of China. The provisions that allowed certain cases to be transferred for prosecution to the Chinese mainland were of deep concern. The relevant authorities must guarantee the rights protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Joint Declaration of

the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong, including the freedoms of speech and assembly, and freedom of the press.

13. China should allow immediate and unfettered access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant special procedure mandate holders, and urgently implement the eight recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination related to Xinjiang. In view of the concerns regarding the human rights situation in Xinjiang, all countries must respect the principle of non-refoulement. China must also uphold autonomy, rights and freedoms in Hong Kong and respect the independence of the Hong Kong judiciary.

14. **Mr. Akram** (Pakistan), speaking also on behalf of Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, China, the Comoros, the Congo, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Dominica, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, the Gambia, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, the Niger, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Yemen and Zimbabwe, said that non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States was an important principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and a basic norm of international relations. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was an inalienable part of China, and its affairs were the internal affairs of China, warranting no interference by foreign forces. Those countries supported the implementation by China of its one country, two systems policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The enactment by China of the Hong Kong National Security Act was a legitimate measure to ensure that Hong Kong enjoyed long-term prosperity and stability. The legitimate rights and freedoms of Hong Kong residents could be better exercised in a safe environment.

15. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba), speaking also on behalf of Angola, Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, China, the Comoros, the Congo, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Dominica, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran (Islamic

Republic of), Iraq, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Yemen and Zimbabwe, said that human rights should be promoted and protected through constructive dialogue and cooperation, and the politicization of human rights issues and double standards should be firmly opposed. The Government of China pursued a people-centred philosophy in advancing economic and social sustainable development and promoting and protecting human rights. It had commendably adopted a series of measures, in accordance with the law, in response to threats of terrorism and extremism to safeguard the human rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Not one terrorist attack had been carried out in Xinjiang in the past three years. The Government of China had maintained openness and transparency by inviting more than 1,000 diplomats and officials of international organizations, journalists and religious persons to visit Xinjiang. It had also invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the two sides were in contact on the matter. It was imperative to respect the facts with respect to Xinjiang and to avoid unfounded allegations against China and interference based on political motivation and bias.

16. **Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait), speaking also on behalf of Oman and Qatar, said that the countries were fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, in line with international law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the principle of the sovereign equality of States. Such action was rendered all the more urgent by the proliferation of armed conflicts, persecution, terrorism, and religious and other forms of intolerance. The Organization must address human rights issues in an objective, constructive, transparent, non-selective and non-politicized manner, respectful of the sovereignty of States and refraining from interference in their internal affairs.

17. All States had the fundamental right to achieve development; to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and disease; and to combat terrorism and protect their people. The global scourge of terrorism knew no colour, religion or race and must be fought; however, counter-terrorism measures did not absolve parties of their responsibilities under the Charter, international law and the relevant human rights instruments. Those obligations included compliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

18. The three countries urged Member States and regional groups to favour dialogue and the exchange of views when discussing human-rights-related issues in order to achieve optimal results and address the root causes of differences of opinion. Lastly, in pursuit of greater understanding of human rights, the local conditions of any given country should be evaluated in a manner respectful of cultural and religious diversity, and frameworks for constructive international cooperation on human rights should be reinforced.

19. **Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) said that China categorically rejected the rhetoric and behaviour of a number of countries, namely, the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom, which were regrettably bent on politicizing human rights issues and spreading disinformation. They also discredited China and interfered in its internal affairs. The achievements of China in the development of human rights were widely recognized. China had adopted effective measures, with unwavering support from all Chinese people, to combat terrorism, safeguard national security and promote economic and social development. Developing countries had the right to defend their sovereignty, achieve development and safeguard their security.

20. The United States could not cover up its poor human rights record by making accusations against China. More than 200,000 Americans had lost their lives to COVID-19. The Government of the United States ought to be treating the sick and saving lives, rather than spreading its political virus and causing trouble across the world. The Committee should discuss the systemic racial discrimination and violence in the United States judicial and law enforcement system and adopt a draft resolution on the issue. The United States should stop committing war crimes and fulfil its international human rights obligations in good faith. The United States had withdrawn from the Human Rights Council, refused to ratify human rights treaties, sanctioned the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and imposed unilateral sanctions on other countries. In disregard of factual truth and in contravention of justice, Germany, the United Kingdom and a few other countries had been doing a disservice to cooperation by applying double standards and meekly following the United States, serving as its accomplices.

21. China attached great importance to the protection and promotion of human rights with a people-centred approach. China had lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty, achieved major victories in combating COVID-19 and formed a sound legal system for human rights protection. China steadfastly safeguarded its national sovereignty, security and development interests,

whether promoting the development of regions such as Xinjiang or maintaining the prosperity and stability of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

22. **Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa) said that, to combat the negative impact of COVID-19, his Government had reprioritized funds within the current budget to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable people, including by increasing access to food relief and issuing a special COVID-19 grant to be paid for six months. Urgent measures must be adopted to reinforce social protection programmes in order to shield the most vulnerable from the health impacts of COVID-19 and the socioeconomic fallout. Special arrangements should be made to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, including refugees, asylum seekers and the homeless, who might not have access to basic goods, including food, water and health care.

23. Responses to COVID-19 must not exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Domestic violence had risen at an alarming rate worldwide and gender-based violence had continued unabated during the pandemic and the lockdowns. In September 2020, his Government had introduced three bills relating to gender-based violence, which were designed to fill the gaps that allowed perpetrators of those crimes to evade justice and to give effect to the rights of South African women and children.

24. COVID-19 had made it indisputable that racial discrimination was an ongoing human rights challenge in every country. Across regions, people of African descent, minorities, indigenous peoples, stateless persons, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Member States bore the primary responsibility to counter discrimination and hate speech, and swift action should be taken against racism in all countries. South Africa would support proposals of the Group of 77 in the context of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

25. South Africa reaffirmed its strong commitment to the One China policy and hoped that all discussions regarding Hong Kong and Xinjiang would take place with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China.

26. **Mr. Favre** (Switzerland) said that his country fully supported the call to action of the Secretary-General for human rights. All measures in the context of COVID-19 must be taken with respect for the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination. Civil society organizations, human rights defenders and journalists, who were essential in combating the

pandemic, must be able to carry out their work freely, without fear of reprisals.

27. Strengthening cooperation across the three pillars of the work of the United Nations and its prevention capacities remained priorities for Switzerland. In that regard, Switzerland welcomed the joint work plan of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Peacebuilding Support Office. Switzerland also continued to support the reforms of the Secretary-General and their implementation. Switzerland was pleased to have facilitated, together with Morocco, the process for the review of the status of the treaty body system, which had reaffirmed the need to strengthen the system's functioning. The human rights pillar should receive the necessary resources from the regular budget to fully fund all its mandates.

28. The Swiss action plan for the universal abolition of the death penalty underscored the country's goal of taking a leading role in the global abolition movement. A global moratorium would be a first step towards universal abolition.

29. The individual rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly were essential for a vibrant democracy and peaceful coexistence. With a record number of demonstrations around the world in 2019 and 2020, States must ensure respect for human rights in that context. During the pandemic, health measures should not be used as a pretext to justify undue restrictions on those rights.

30. The fundamental role played by women during the COVID-19 pandemic must be recognized. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) were being celebrated, and yet the recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights and international achievements in that area were being called into question. The anniversaries should serve as an opportunity to strengthen the commitment to achieving gender equality worldwide.

31. **Mr. Gafoor** (Singapore) said that international cooperation must be strengthened to ensure affordable, fair and equitable access to vaccines for all. To that end, countries should take a multilateral approach, not a unilateral one that would allow some countries to monopolize access to vaccines. Singapore supported a strong role for the United Nations and the World Health Organization in that regard.

32. No country or group of countries had the right to impose its views regarding human rights on other countries, and the pandemic must not be used as an

opportunity to do so. The Committee should not be used as a platform for presenting draft resolutions that imposed the views of one group of countries on other countries. In response to the presentation of such draft resolutions, his delegation would strongly reaffirm the sovereign rights of all countries to determine their legal and political systems. During the current session, Singapore would maintain its consistent approach of opposing country-specific resolutions, which were driven by political rather than human rights considerations. The practice of some Member States of issuing joint statements to target the policies of other countries and interfere in their internal affairs was divisive and counter-productive; it did not build trust or help to resolve the underlying issues. The use of unilateral coercive economic measures should be eliminated because such measures impeded the social and economic development of developing countries and hampered their response to the pandemic. Singapore had taken a consistent and principled approach against unilateral coercive measures because they undermined the multilateral process and did not help to find political solutions.

33. The approach of Singapore to social development and human rights had produced tangible benefits for its people, which was reflected in its high ranking in the United Nations Development Programme human development index. Nevertheless, the Government was constantly seeking to improve its policies and systems, attaching the greatest priority to the protection of women, children, girls and persons with disabilities. At the international level, Singapore represented the Group of Asia-Pacific States as a Vice-President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Singapore had initiated a joint statement on the need for a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19, which had been endorsed by 146 Member States.

34. **Mr. Mavroyiannis** (Cyprus) said that Turkey had been committing well-documented massive human rights violations in his country since 1974, and Cyprus would continue to draw attention to such violations until they had been redressed. One third of Greek Cypriots had been displaced as a result of the armed aggression of Turkey and continued to be denied the right to return to their places of origin and to their homes and properties. Turkey had been pursuing demographic engineering in the areas of Cyprus under its occupation, having transferred thousands of Turkish settlers there since 1974, which was a war crime under international humanitarian law. Daily violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms were suffered by enclaved Greek Cypriots and Maronites who continued to live under

occupation. Turkey was currently taking steps to settle the fenced area of Varosha in contravention of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

35. More than half of the 2,001 missing persons had yet to be found or identified and returned to their families. Cyprus reiterated its request to States to share any information they possessed in that regard. Turkey should provide the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus with relevant information and unimpeded access to all areas for excavations and exhumations. The rich cultural, archaeological and religious heritage in occupied Cyprus had been looted, vandalized and destroyed since 1974, with the fate of many historical treasures still unknown. The recent change in the status of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, one of the most significant world heritage sites, was reprehensible and indicative of the disregard of Turkey for cultural and religious values.

36. Notwithstanding the ongoing occupation, Cyprus would continue to protect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots, in line with European and international standards, and aspired to soon be able to do so in a reunited country.

37. **Ms. Theofili** (Greece) said that human rights were mainstreamed across all national policies in her country. The Government was implementing a holistic and coherent policy plan with a gender perspective in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view to building a bridge towards a new reality grounded in science-based decisions. Efforts and resources continued to be deployed to manage the unprecedented migratory and refugee crisis, which was still having a disproportionate impact on Greece, while the Government strove to host arriving migrants and asylum seekers in the most humane and decent way.

38. Despite the large number of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the relevant judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Cyprus persisted. The highly sensitive issue of missing persons was of great interest to Greece given the significant number of missing Greek citizens. The measures taken by Turkey in recent years with regard to the educational and religious rights of the enclaved persons living in the occupied part of the island had come too late. The recent plans of Turkey and Turkish Cypriots to open the fenced city of Varosha were in direct violation of Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992). Greece fully supported the efforts led by the United Nations for an agreed, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus issue, on the basis of relevant

Security Council resolutions and in full accordance with the European Union acquis.

39. Another issue of great concern was the widespread looting and destruction of the cultural and religious heritage of Cyprus in the occupied areas. Greece shared the concerns of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the European Union and others regarding the recent decision of the Government of Turkey to convert Hagia Sophia, a site of outstanding universal character and value, into a mosque.

40. The accelerated advancement of human rights globally went hand-in-hand with a gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Only by orienting common and coordinated efforts in that direction could resilient, sustainable and gender-equal democratic societies be built for future generations.

41. **Mr. Carazo** (Costa Rica) said that his country had learned three important lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic: the central importance of human health and the need to invest in and maintain universal and solidarity-based health systems; the need to protect the most vulnerable; and the urgent need to develop a multilayered response to the multiple crises facing the world, including climate change. On that basis, Costa Rica had called for a paradigm shift towards strategic global public goods, human security, gender equality, safe, orderly and regular migration, and the recognition of a healthy and ecologically balanced environment as an integral part of human rights.

42. The COVID-19 crisis had highlighted the importance of redoubling efforts towards social development, including by investing in human capital through high-quality universal education, designing robust social protection systems and comprehensively addressing technological advances for the benefit of all human beings. Those exercising their right to report, to protest or to defend their rights must be protected and supported. The protection of journalists, human rights defenders and civil society should be a priority in the response to the pandemic. Only with a diversity of voices and a commitment to solidarity and unity would it be possible to build back from the crisis.

43. The links between the Committee and the Human Rights Council should be strengthened with a view to improving working methods. The report of the Council to the General Assembly should be improved and streamlined. The practice initiated by the presidency of the seventy-fourth session of the Assembly of having an open dialogue with civil society and listening to its demands and proposals should continue.

44. **Mr. Simbyakula** (Zambia) said that his country had made notable progress in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including the enactment of the Gender Equity and Equality Act in 2015 and the development of the national child policy. Zambia was among the few countries in the region to have established fast-track courts to ensure increased access to justice for victims of gender-based violence. It had also established village-led and health facility-based one-stop centres to provide holistic support services to victims of gender-based violence.

45. His Government had continued to engage with traditional leaders in the country to reform traditions and customs that perpetuated child marriage. It had prioritized the enrolment and retention of girls in schools as a critical step in the promotion of gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. The Government's re-entry policy had helped to reduce the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage; pregnant girls were allowed to sit their examinations or take leave from their studies for a year.

46. In order to reduce poverty levels in households, his Government had continued to scale up social protection programmes. It had also continued to reduce the vulnerability associated with HIV/AIDS prevalence. The overall maternal mortality ratio had been reduced from 398 per 100,000 live births in 2014 to 278 in 2018.

47. **Ms. Tshering** (Bhutan) said that her country was most concerned by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that threatened to deepen inequalities, reverse social development and impede the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the most vulnerable. In April 2020, Bhutan had endorsed the joint statement in support of the call of the Secretary-General on gender-based violence and COVID-19. Gender-differentiated impacts and needs must continue to guide recovery strategies. Her Government was prioritizing the implementation of a contingency plan on gender and child protection, which would be built upon the outcome of an in-depth impact assessment of the pandemic on women and children.

48. Member States should draw inspiration from the United Nations Youth Strategy and endeavour to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, in the light of the severe disruptions posed by the pandemic. The Government's COVID-19 recovery plan included strategies to upskill and reskill the young labour force, with a view to stemming the exacerbated youth unemployment and



enabling young people to participate fully in the green and sustainable rebuilding of the economy.

49. Bhutan had aligned itself with the joint statement in support of the policy brief of the Secretary-General on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons. As valued members of society, older persons in Bhutan had received targeted attention during the pandemic. All those above the age of 60 years had been registered by the Ministry of Health to ensure that their needs were prioritized and enable personalized outreach. Older persons, together with medical care professionals, front-line workers and children below the age of 2 years, would be among the first to receive flu vaccines through a government-supported programme to be rolled out nationwide in the near future. Recognizing that no one was safe until everyone was safe, Bhutan had joined the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility. Once available, the COVID-19 vaccine, which remained the only way out of the current crisis, must be recognized as a global public good.

50. **Mr. Valtýsson** (Iceland) said that, amid restrictions and community lockdowns in response to the ongoing pandemic, gender-based violence and violence against children had been on the rise. The protection of children against violence had been a priority for his Government, which had long emphasized the importance of having the right services and response in place when children were believed to be victims of sexual or other serious forms of violence. Over the past three decades, Iceland had developed a child-friendly and multi-agency framework for responding to child abuse, known as the Children's House model, which had been introduced in about 20 countries.

51. Iceland was committed to defending women's human rights and their reproductive freedom and was concerned to see established international norms and standards increasingly being challenged, even the ones that had been collectively agreed upon as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Renewed attempts to overturn the discourse on bodily autonomy, comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence were of particular concern.

52. A recent study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development had shown that Iceland topped the list for social acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Three Government-sponsored bills to improve the legal framework for transgender and intersex persons were currently being introduced in Parliament. His Government was engaging with other countries on the removal of stigmatization and institutional prejudices

against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Earlier in 2020, Iceland had proudly joined the LGBTI Core Group.

53. Regarding the human rights treaty body review, Iceland had facilitated, in partnership with Indonesia and Tunisia, the drafting of General Assembly resolution [68/268](#). Much of the work in that regard had shifted to Geneva, where Iceland continued to play an active part. The continued engagement of Member States was required to support the treaty bodies in the implementation of the resolution.

54. **Mr. Šimonović** (Croatia) said that his country welcomed General Assembly resolution [74/306](#) on a comprehensive and coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic. His Government was committed to integrating a gender equality perspective at all policy levels, with a special emphasis on the prevention of the intersecting impacts of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic of violence against women and girls. Croatia joined the call of the Secretary-General for the protection of children and their rights to health, education and safety in the context of COVID-19. Given that refugees and displaced persons were among the most vulnerable during the pandemic, respect for international humanitarian law was more important than ever, and Croatia welcomed the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.

55. Advocating the abolition of the death penalty was an important part of his Government's human rights foreign policy. In 2020, Croatia had joined the Support Group of the International Commission against the Death Penalty.

56. The current global crisis had shown that a collective commitment to human rights, multilateralism and a rules-based international order was more relevant than ever. Croatia was continuing to play an active role in the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council, raising awareness of and addressing human rights violations in the places most affected by them. Preventing human rights violations, inequality and structural discrimination and curbing xenophobia and hate speech were crucial for confronting the growing number of such crimes.

57. **Ms. Arega** (Ethiopia) said that the role of the United Nations in preventing violations of human rights and ensuring their promotion was central. Relevant United Nations organs and bodies must continue their work in an objective, transparent and non-selective manner. Efforts of Member States in advancing human rights and guaranteeing a better life for their citizens should be commended and not discouraged by any politicization of human rights or interference in the



internal affairs of sovereign States. Ethiopia supported the “one country, two systems” policy of China. The issue of Hong Kong was an internal affair of the Government of China, and human rights should not be politicized in that matter. The universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights – economic, social, political and civil rights – must be emphasized, and all human rights must be treated in a fair and equal manner. It was in that context that the Committee should carry out its important work.

58. Her Government had embarked on a series of liberal political reforms and taken firm steps to institutionalize them, while upholding human rights and promoting a better standard of governance. Such a transition was not easy, but the Government was committed to fulfilling the promise of a democratic and pluralistic political order based on the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights and basic liberties.

59. It was least developed countries such as Ethiopia that were the hardest hit by the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. COVID-19 had also exacerbated existing humanitarian challenges, affecting people on the move, including refugees and migrants. Her Government was making every effort to ensure the safe and dignified return of some of the most vulnerable migrants, while conscious of the need to limit large-scale repatriation. The Government was currently engaged in constructive dialogue with countries hosting Ethiopian migrants in need of humanitarian protection and assistance. It was also committed to forging international cooperation in migration management practices that prioritized the health, well-being, and human rights of migrants.

60. **Mr. Knyazyan** (Armenia) said that his delegation supported the appeal of the Secretary-General for an immediate global ceasefire in response to COVID-19, which would play a key role in ensuring the protection of fundamental human rights for the most vulnerable people, including women, children, persons with disabilities and people affected by conflict.

61. Everyone was entitled to all rights and freedoms regardless of the international status of the country in which a person lived, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The politicization of human rights and the denial of human rights for people residing in conflict areas was unacceptable.

62. The right to life, the right to development and other fundamental rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were under threat owing to the ongoing aggression by Azerbaijan. The pre-planned large-scale military aggression unleashed by the authoritarian regime of Azerbaijan, with the full backing of Turkey, had a clear genocidal intent. The Azerbaijani armed

forces had targeted the capital, Stepanakert, and other cities and settlements in both the territory of Artsakh and Armenia. Indiscriminate and intentional strikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure, schools and hospitals, had led to the deaths of 21 people, including women and children, and the wounding of dozens. Azerbaijan was deliberately targeting journalists in the conflict zone in an attempt to prevent the flow of objective information and the documenting of the war crimes committed by its armed forces. The aggressor country and its supporters should be held accountable for gross violations of international human rights law.

63. The international community had already recognized that mercenaries and foreign terrorist fighters had been transferred from the territories of Syria currently occupied by Turkey to be used in hostilities against Artsakh. Armenia deplored the irresponsible policy of Turkey of exporting violence and instability to neighbouring regions, using terrorist organizations to commit atrocity crimes against the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh and impeding their right to self-determination.

64. The military aggression by Azerbaijan against the people of Artsakh was the culmination of a decades-long State policy of intolerance, hatred and Armenophobia. The glorification of perpetrators of hate crimes against Armenians and the systemic use of hate speech by political leaders, educational institutions and the media had been documented by international organizations, including the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. The ruling autocratic regime in Azerbaijan portrayed Armenians as the enemy in order to justify the dire human rights situation in the country. Unlike Azerbaijanis, the people of Artsakh had long embarked on democratic State-building based on respect for human rights and dignity, as demonstrated by the free, fair and competitive nationwide elections held in Nagorno-Karabakh in March 2020. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh were fully entitled to exercise their inalienable human rights, including the right to self-determination.

65. **Ms. Kocyigit Grba** (Turkey) said that the impact of COVID-19 had been amplified for women and girls owing to existing inequalities. COVID-19 response plans and recovery packages must take into account the gendered impacts of the pandemic. Her Government was committed to making the appeal of the Secretary-General on gender-based violence and COVID-19 a key part of its national response. The adverse effects of COVID-19 on the well-being, development and protection of children, in particular those in vulnerable

situations, were of deep concern. Large movements of refugees and migrants across borders created further impediments to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. As the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, Turkey would continue its efforts to ensure the resilience and well-being of the more than 1 million Syrian children who had sought refuge in the country.

66. Turkey attached great importance to the work of all human rights bodies and the concerted efforts within the United Nations and its related agencies. It was disturbed by the obstacles that prevented millions of people across the world from fully enjoying their human rights, in particular the re-emergence of extremist political currents and ideologies, especially across Europe, which gave rise to new forms of racism, such as xenophobic nationalism, antisemitic movements and Islamophobia.

67. The United Nations played an important role in addressing the concerns and expectations of the international community with regard to the treatment of Uighur Turks and other Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China. As a country with ethnic, religious and cultural ties to the Uighur Turks, Turkey had been particularly alarmed by the recently published reports of alleged human rights violations against Uighur Turks and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. While following the issue through international platforms such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Turkey would maintain constructive engagement with China at the bilateral level. Turkey expected that the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to Xinjiang would be meaningful, fully fledged and unrestricted and that China would act in a transparent manner.

68. The oppression by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories continued unabated. The people of Palestine deserved to live in freedom in their independent State within the 1967 borders. Regarding the conflict in Syria, which was in its tenth year, Turkey called for the regime to be held accountable for its crimes against humanity. Human rights violations in Myanmar continued to be a source of serious concern, and urgent steps were needed to address the plight of the Rohingyas. In Libya, the dire humanitarian situation was alarming, and the conflict and the pandemic continued to present a significant threat to life. The discovery of mass graves in Tarhunah was a grim reminder of the scale of the atrocities and human suffering and should serve as a wake-up call for all sides that had condoned or supported the aggression of Khalifa Haftar. The international community and relevant organizations must take urgent steps to

investigate the matter and hold those responsible to account.

69. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking on a point of order, said that the representative of Turkey had used the term “regime” to refer to his country, whose official name was the Syrian Arab Republic. He hoped that the Chair would inform the representative of Turkey of the need to abide by the standards of conduct and rules of procedure customarily observed in United Nations proceedings.

70. **Archbishop Caccia** (Observer for the Holy See) said that an integral vision of the human person could be grounded only in the recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. The Holy See was deeply concerned by growing pressure to reinterpret the very foundations of human rights to satisfy political and economic interests, as was particularly apparent in the refusal to recognize the inherent value and dignity of every human life at every stage. The failure to understand the nature and reality of human rights led to grave inequalities and injustices, such as ignoring children in the womb and treating the elderly and persons with disabilities as intolerable burdens on society. Just as there was no right to abortion, there was also no right to euthanasia. The death penalty was inadmissible, and the Holy See worked with determination for its abolition worldwide. Effective systems of detention had been developed, which ensured due protection of citizens without definitively depriving the guilty of the possibility of a second chance. Attempts to suppress the place of religion in public life were of particular concern. Freedom of religion was an inalienable and universal human right, not a concession or privilege to be retracted at will by the State.

71. Violence against women remained a global emergency, and violence against children, including the horrible scourge of child abuse and pornography, had dramatically increased. The COVID-19 pandemic was worsening the incidence of online sexual abuse and cyberbullying. Civil authorities should be especially attentive to children denied their fundamental rights and dignity, in particular their rights to life and education, while remembering that the first teachers and caregivers of every child were his or her mother and father, within the family, which was accurately described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the natural and fundamental group unit of society. The Holy See strongly condemned every form of racism and racial discrimination. Pope Francis had recently called racism a disease and stressed that racism and exclusion should not be tolerated in any form.

72. **Mr. Foncea** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the current unprecedented times had left young people suffering from a lack of access to education and employment. Concrete solutions were needed to ensure that everyone had access to inclusive, digitalized and innovative educational and professional processes. Gender inequality, discrimination of all forms and mistrust had deepened as a result of the spread of misinformation, hate speech and a lack of genuine human interaction.

73. **Ms. Balan** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that young people in her country had taken active steps to adapt to the current circumstances, for example donating laptops to children to enable them to continue their education, delivering groceries, raising funds for medical equipment and building face shields from scratch. In the recent local public administration elections, young people had participated as both candidates and voters. They were returning with skills and meaningful experience to rural areas.

74. **Mr. Jinga** (Romania) said that, although young people throughout the world were facing unprecedented challenges, they were more resourceful than ever, and their adaptability, mobility and technology skills were key assets. His Government had adopted comprehensive measures with the aim of equipping young people with knowledge and skills about human rights, democratic citizenship, intercultural education and the culture of peace. It was mainstreaming and engaging young people throughout its foreign policy objectives and in all multilateral formats. In its current capacity as President of the Community of Democracies, Romania had promoted the role of young people in democratic processes and decision-making.

75. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must be people-centred and gender-responsive, with full respect for human rights, in order to achieve a safer, better and more sustainable future for all. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls were essential to overcoming the current crisis and rebuilding more equal, inclusive and resilient societies for all. The principle of equal opportunities was enshrined in Romanian law and public policy, and a national agency for equal opportunities between women and men had been established to develop policies to address gender inequalities and prevent and combat domestic violence. Important progress had been made with regard to the gender pay gap in Romania, which was currently the lowest among the States members of the European Union. The empowerment of women had been instrumental in the democratization of economic,

political and social life in Romania. In the Romanian diplomatic system, there were more women diplomats than men.

76. The freedom of expression and freedom of the media must be guaranteed, while the spread of misinformation must be countered both offline and online. The lessons learned in 2020, including the paramount importance of strong human rights principles that protected core democratic values, must be used to inform life after the pandemic.

77. **Mr. Ke** (Cambodia) said that his country had made remarkable progress in socioeconomic development, contributing enormously to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, enhancing the living standards of the Cambodian people and promoting their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Cambodia was a party to eight of the nine core international human rights instruments and had fulfilled its obligations under and collaborated with various mechanisms, such as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the universal periodic review and the treaty body mechanisms. Following the successful conclusion of its third cycle of the universal periodic review in 2019, Cambodia had accepted 173 out of 198 recommendations. Cambodia had continued to advance gender equality through the empowerment of women and girls and to promote their active participation in the country's socioeconomic development.

78. Human rights must be promoted and protected with respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Politicization and double standards in human rights and interference in the domestic affairs of any Member State must be avoided. All unilateral trade, economic and financial sanctions against developing countries must be ended without any conditions amid the current pandemic. Such sanctions not only hindered development efforts, but also violated human rights and ran counter to the spirit of the Charter.

79. In Cambodia, although several hundred COVID-19 cases had been confirmed, there had been no deaths. Nevertheless, the pandemic had greatly affected the country's social and economic progress. Cambodia welcomed the recent adoption of the General Assembly resolution on COVID-19 and the establishment of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. The international community, specialized agencies of the United Nations and international financial institutions must stand in solidarity to combat the disease. Cambodia joined the call for an equitable and affordable vaccine.

80. **Ms. Banaken Elel** (Cameroon) said that, while all human rights were equal, complementary and mutually reinforcing, the COVID-19 pandemic had shown that it was possible to live without the rights to move freely, to gather or to peacefully demonstrate. Although those rights were important and Cameroon was fully committed to protecting them, the fundamental human rights were those that could not be restricted, namely, the right to life, the right to health, the right to education and the right to food. All Governments had reaffirmed the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that recognized that, in certain circumstances, certain rights and freedoms could be subject to restrictions in order to protect national security, public order and public health and morals. It was more important than ever to guarantee for every person everywhere the right to life and all directly related rights. It was time to reorder priorities and focus on the promotion and guarantee of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development.

81. No country had a perfect human rights record. In self-proclaimed feminist countries, women were still considered inferior to men and had considerably lower salaries than men. Since 1960, men and women with equal qualifications had received equal pay for equal work in Cameroon. In certain countries that advocated freedom of expression and the participation of all in public affairs, entire groups of the population were forced to take a backseat, including racial minorities, indigenous peoples and elderly persons. Cameroon promoted an inclusive society for all. In certain countries that criticized restrictions on the freedom of movement, migrants were left wandering at the border or on-board humanitarian boats that had been turned away. A welcoming country, Cameroon sheltered thousands of refugees.

82. The COVID-19 pandemic should make States realize that they needed each other in order to evaluate their human rights situations. It was only through constructive dialogue, mutual respect and sincere cooperation that a world could be created in which all individuals felt valued in their human dignity as human beings. The lessons learned from the pandemic should be built upon to give all human rights, including the right to development, equal treatment and attention.

83. **Ms. Andriamiarisoa** (Madagascar) said that her delegation welcomed the perspectives put forward in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/75/216), in particular in the context of COVID-19. With a view to reducing the impacts of the pandemic and laying the foundations for

long-term recovery, her Government had adopted a number of innovative initiatives to contain the spread of the virus. The current recovery rate was 95 per cent, while the mortality rate was 1 per cent, which was well below the global average. By utilizing research findings, traditional knowledge and local resources, Madagascar had been able to limit the number of deaths caused by COVID-19. Working with multilateral and bilateral partners, Madagascar had spared no effort to build national coverage of health services and full access to social protection and to create a modern pharmaceutical factory.

84. Madagascar remained committed to combating gender-based violence and in 2019 had adopted an Act criminalizing such behaviour. It had supported several multilateral declarations and initiatives on women and girls, including those on the right to sexual and reproductive health.

85. Madagascar reiterated its position with regard to Xinjiang and urged Member States to reject any attempt to exploit the items on the Committee's agenda for political aims. Madagascar supported China in establishing ongoing dialogue concerning Xinjiang, which should be productive and prevent unfounded accusations of a lack of respect for human rights. All States should demonstrate integrity, transparency and impartiality when considering a particular situation in the light of international law. The case of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, including the application of the new National Security Act, must be addressed with respect for the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

86. **Ms. Al-Thani** (Qatar) said that her Government had demonstrated its ability to respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis promptly and effectively, deploying a multisectoral approach anchored in the country's National Vision 2030 development plan and in its promotion and protection of human rights.

87. Qatar had provided high-quality preventive services, screenings and treatment to all citizens and residents, including migrant workers, who had received health care free of charge. Moreover, the contractual relationship between employers and workers had been regulated. In August 2020, new laws had been enacted establishing a minimum wage and facilitating the transfer of workers between employers. A social protection programme provided for 75 billion Qatari riyals in financial assistance to the private sector in order to ensure that employment remained sustainable.

88. The national response to the pandemic included measures to protect women and girls from its

repercussions. Women played a key role in and were overrepresented in the frontlines of the containment effort, especially in the health, education and volunteer sectors. Global women leaders had been called on to join the Rise for All global initiative, in a bid to foster solidarity in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

89. Empowering the young and promoting their participation in public life was a priority for her country, as evidenced by a number of relevant Government initiatives. Qatar would host a high-level meeting on comprehensive peace processes for youth in May 2021. The challenges faced by families around the world as a result of the pandemic made it imperative to increase investment in policies and programmes relating to the family. Qatar, in its capacity as facilitator of the annual resolution of the Group of 77 and China on the International Year of the Family, encouraged Member States to participate in the ongoing preparations to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024.

90. The persistent, illegitimate blockade against her country constituted a flagrant violation of international law and human rights, particularly against the backdrop of the current crisis, which could only be confronted by countries and peoples in close cooperation with one another. The negative repercussions of both the pandemic and the unjust blockade notwithstanding, Qatar remained committed to promoting and protecting human rights, including those of its citizens and residents, and participating in development and humanitarian cooperation. It had provided \$89 million in assistance to 78 countries lacking the resources to address the pandemic, in addition to its support for the United Nations, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi) and the World Health Organization.

91. **Mr. Nze** (Nigeria) said that, over the past two weeks, Heads of State and Government had debated the topic of “The future we want, the United Nations we need” and reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism, a concept that was unquestionably salient in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While developing draft resolutions to address the humanitarian, human rights and social issues before it, the Committee must choose a path of open-mindedness, solidarity and partnership, as international cooperation had never been more necessary. Of all the Main Committees, the Third Committee considered issues that had the most direct bearing on the lives of the people that it represented.

92. The pandemic had highlighted the need to pursue holistic and inclusive social development that created resilient societies and ensured access to social

protection for all, especially the most vulnerable. Inequalities, inequities and vulnerabilities within and among societies must be addressed, and the factors that predisposed persons to the most dangerous effects of COVID-19 must be countered. It was also important to work together to strengthen health-care systems and improve access, in an affordable and non-discriminatory manner, to medicines, vaccines and health technologies, in line with the political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage, adopted in 2019. It was equally important to work together to eradicate poverty. The Alliance for Poverty Eradication launched in 2020 provided a platform to share ideas in that regard. Nigeria encouraged States that had not yet joined the Alliance to do so, especially those from the global North.

93. High-quality education for all was the cornerstone of holistic development, contributing exponentially to the promotion and protection of human rights, poverty eradication, improved health outcomes, the promotion of gender equality, peaceful and resilient societies, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. His Government continued to work to ensure that children stayed in school by protecting children from attack and providing a safe environment for learning. Nigeria would host the Fourth International Conference on Safe Schools in 2021.

94. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador) said that the right of every person to health was recognized by law in El Salvador. Her Government had therefore adopted, on 11 March 2020, a series of measures to stem the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, while protecting the right to life of all citizens without distinction, with a focus on vulnerable groups. Conscious of the need to increase the coverage of health services and improve access to them, the Government had built Hospital El Salvador to care for people infected with the virus. El Salvador had supported the various calls and policy briefs of the Secretary-General and had been one of the main initiators of the joint statements on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons and on migrants. Recognizing that poverty would increase during the pandemic, the Government had given priority in its planning to groups at risk of increased marginalization, exclusion and discrimination.

95. Her Government was implementing its comprehensive early childhood policy, which would contribute to the achievement of target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. During the pandemic, young people had played vital roles in sharing high-quality content and information on social networks and the Internet and in the areas of education, production and telework. The Government had developed an

educational continuity strategy, which relied on various digital platforms, radio and television. More than 38,000 teachers from the public and private sectors had been trained in the use of the Google Classroom platform and provided with laptops as part of the first phase of the shift towards digital inclusion in education.

96. El Salvador had always advocated a comprehensive vision of international migration that focused on human rights and rejected the criminalization of migrants, regardless of their migratory status. The Government was working with various national and regional actors to address the causes of migration, striving to make migration an option, not an obligation. El Salvador reaffirmed its commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and eliminating the multiple forms of discrimination against women and girls. With the spread of COVID-19, the progress achieved under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) could be reversed. The exceptional circumstances must not be used to justify setbacks in the implementation of the commitments made under those instruments.

97. Her Government was joining forces with the United Nations system and other organizations to implement measures to respond to the needs of the population during the emergency. A vaccine should be made available and accessible and developed as a public good. Guaranteeing universal access to vaccines was a moral, political and economic imperative.

98. **Mr. Amorín** (Uruguay) said that the promotion and protection of the rights of the child was of paramount importance for his country. For many years, Uruguay had coordinated the resolution on the rights of the child on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and facilitated the negotiations with Member States. Uruguay recognized the invaluable contribution of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. States must develop and implement public policies to protect children, who constituted one of the most vulnerable groups of society. Protection of the rights of children should be taken into account in the formulation of laws and public policies.

99. Uruguay was strongly committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, his Government had adopted a range of measures to protect the most vulnerable women, including the convening of a consultative committee on violence against women, a strengthened response to gender-based violence,

awareness-raising campaigns to facilitate the reporting of threats or violence and a protocol for public and private medical services to detect possible situations of domestic violence. The number of spaces for women with children who were victims of violence had been increased in shelters, and psychosocial counselling and legal services were provided to women and girls. As part of its commitment to the gender agenda, the Government had identified four priority areas: prevention of gender-based violence against women and children; economic empowerment; the implementation of national equality policies; and participation in politics and decision-making.

100. As part of its efforts to combat gender-based violence, Uruguay had taken a leading role in the action coalition on gender-based violence of the Generation Equality forum. Tackling that scourge had taken on particular importance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had been accompanied by a rapid increase in cases of domestic violence. Protection must be ensured for vulnerable members of society who were particularly affected by the pandemic, such as women victims of domestic violence. Migrants and internally displaced persons were doubly vulnerable in the context of the pandemic. Uruguay had an open policy towards voluntary migration, based on the values of democracy, equality before the law and respect for the rights of all people regardless of their origin.

101. **Mr. Kayinamura** (Rwanda) said that the underlying philosophy behind the Rwanda Vision 2050 was to put people first and create new and better opportunities for the benefit of all Rwandans. Before COVID-19 had hit, more than 1 million people had been lifted out of poverty in Rwanda. Steps had been taken towards financial inclusion through policies that facilitated an investment-friendly environment and encouraged sustainable inclusive growth by investing in human capital and empowering women. The Government's social development goals and priorities were in line with and complemented the post-2015 development agenda.

102. COVID-19 had reversed decades of progress in poverty eradication, the advancement of women, children's rights and education. An estimated 71 million people were expected to be pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020, the first rise since 1998. Many countries had seen a surge in reports of domestic violence against children and women. The international community must unite to meet those emerging challenges. It was not the time to point fingers; rather, deliberate action was needed to recover from the pandemic.



103. Rwanda attached the highest priority to protecting children's rights. Containment measures, lockdowns, school closures and shifts to online schooling in response to COVID-19 had widened the inequalities between the connected and the unconnected, affecting millions of children around the world. Universal connectivity and closing the digital divide in schools were vital for protecting the gains for children and ensuring a better future for societies.

*Statements made in exercise of the right of reply*

104. **Ms. Inanç Örnekol** (Turkey) said that the representative of Greece had presented a selective, one-sided interpretation of history and the current state of affairs. In 1963, Turkish Cypriots had been forced out of the government institutions and legislative and judiciary bodies of Cyprus, and the atrocities committed against them were well documented. Subsequently, in 1964, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus had been deployed. Over the next 10 years, 180,000 Turkish Cypriots had been displaced and forced to live in scattered enclaves. The only occupation on the island, therefore, was the 56-year-long occupation by the Greek Cypriot administration.

105. Turkish Cypriots and the Government of Turkey had demonstrated their political will for a solution. Nevertheless, Turkish Cypriots continued to experience unacceptable isolation, which the international community should end by establishing direct economic, commercial, social and cultural relations with the Turkish Cypriots without further delay.

106. The Turkish Cypriot authorities were making every effort to facilitate the work of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus. Hundreds of Turkish Cypriots had gone missing in the period from 1963 to 1974. Attempts to exploit a humanitarian issue for political propaganda purposes undermined the excellent work of the Committee.

107. To address the cultural heritage issues, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots had established a joint technical committee, which had carried out several significant projects related to the sites on both sides of the island.

108. Hagia Sophia continued to stand with its unique architectural characteristics thanks to the determination and sustained efforts of Turkey, including in accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Neither the Convention nor its Operational Guidelines posed an impediment to any property rights of the cultural heritage sites, including the change of status. Turkey

would continue to duly and meticulously protect Hagia Sophia regardless of its status.

109. There was no change in the current state of affairs in Varosha, which lay within the borders of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and would not be opened for settlement. Any decision by the Turkish Cypriot authorities to reopen Varosha would be taken with full respect for the property rights of the owners and former inhabitants.

110. Her delegation refuted the statement by the representative of Armenia in its entirety. Turkey had strongly condemned the Armenian attacks, which constituted a clear violation of international law, had caused civilian casualties and clearly demonstrated that Armenia was the biggest obstacle to peace and stability in the region. Azerbaijan had the right to protect its people and its territorial integrity. In accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, Armenian forces must withdraw from the territories that they had illegally occupied.

111. The baseless allegations made by the Greek Cypriot administration would be answered by its Turkish Cypriot counterpart, whose voice unfortunately could not be heard in the Committee.

112. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the claim by the representative of Turkey that her country was promoting and protecting the human rights of Syrians was profoundly ironic, not to mention the farthest possible from the truth. The remarks of several delegations had attested to the criminal ideology of Turkey, whose President and current Government were key sponsors of terrorism in Syria and the broader region. Having facilitated the entry of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters into his country, Turkey continued to provide the Nusra Front and its bloodthirsty brethren with all kinds of support. Furthermore, its policies in the areas of Syria under Turkish occupation included Turkification, forced displacement, and collective punishment of civilians opposed to Turkish rule in Hasakah and dozens of neighbouring villages by cutting off their water supply deliberately and repeatedly, while the ensuing threat to their lives was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Such actions were tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law. The same murderous ideology had driven the terrorists who had cut off the water supply of millions of Damascene civilians; meanwhile, to no one's surprise, the human rights prosecutor had not lifted a finger.

113. Turkey had become a rogue regime indifferent to international norms, as evidenced by its failure to abide by the outcomes of regional meetings on Syria; its

relocation of the terrorists and mercenaries characterized as the so-called moderate opposition from Syria to Libya and Iraq, attacking the latter's sovereignty; its involvement in the suffering of refugees and its attempts to monopolize water resources in the Mediterranean. Such policies and actions endangered the security and stability of the entire region and must therefore be stopped.

114. **Ms. Michaelidou** (Cyprus) said that Turkish Cypriots had not been forced out of government institutions, but rather had unilaterally withdrawn at the behest of Turkey, which continued to use the Turkish Cypriot community as a vehicle for partition and separatism. Nothing in the Treaty of Guarantee could be construed as allowing or legitimizing the use of force by one State against another. The circumstances and conditions under which the Security Council could authorize the use of force were clearly laid out in the Charter of the United Nations. The failure to reach a settlement in the peace process was due to the insistence of Turkey on retaining the Treaty and its unfounded interpretation thereof. States responsible for wrongful acts were under an enduring obligation to cease such acts and to make full reparations for the injuries caused. The so-called "isolation" of Turkish Cypriots was nothing more than a euphemism for a separatist entity that was the fruit of aggression and had been condemned by the Security Council.

115. Turkey must provide information from its military archives regarding the fate and whereabouts of the large number of missing Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The missing persons matter was a purely humanitarian issue that should not be politicized by withholding information that could lead to much-needed closure for the families of the victims. Despite the bicomunal work to restore destroyed monuments, the damage to immovable cultural property was still extensive, while none of the thousands of articles of movable cultural property had been recovered. Any move towards reopening the fenced area of the city of Varosha or otherwise changing its special status was a violation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and would irreparably harm the peace process in Cyprus, including any attempt to permanently and irreversibly deny the lawful inhabitants of Varosha their rights, including their right of return and their property rights.

116. **Ms. Inanç Örnekol** (Turkey) said that her delegation rejected the baseless allegations of one delegation in their entirety. There were no human rights lessons to be learned from the representative of a regime that had massacred and tortured the Syrian people for more than nine years and had used chemical weapons against them on multiple occasions. Turkey would

continue to stand in full solidarity with the Syrian people, who were the victims of the war crimes of the regime.

117. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that neither the representative nor the President of Turkey had the right or authority to speak on behalf of the Syrian people, whose sole legitimate representative was the Syrian Government. As for the use of the term "regime", the delegation of Turkey was ultimately required to abide by the Charter and the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. It had been established in United Nations reports, including that of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, that tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters had arrived in the Syrian Arab Republic. They had entered Syria across the Turkish-Syrian border, aided by Turkish intelligence services.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*