



# General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General  
22 January 2021

Original: English

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## Third Committee

### Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 8 October 2020, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Charikhi (Vice-Chair)..... (Algeria)  
*later:* Ms. Bogyay ..... (Hungary)

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General debate (*continued*)

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20-13255 (E)



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*In the absence of Ms. Bogyay (Hungary), Ms. Charikhi (Algeria), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

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

1. **Mr. Toure** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that developing countries, which had already been experiencing challenges in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, had been hardest hit by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. His delegation therefore welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolution [74/306](#) on a comprehensive and coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and supported the establishment of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator.

2. Despite the challenging economic climate, the Ivorian Government was determined to meet its international commitments, in particular regarding implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thanks to legislative and institutional reforms, social inequality had been significantly reduced, including between men and women. The social programme aimed to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities with a view to constructing a safer, more resilient and more inclusive society. The Government had adopted a national social protection strategy in 2014 that rested on four pillars: raising living standards; improving access to basic social services and investment in human capital; supporting vulnerable groups by preventing and addressing abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion; and gradually increasing social protection.

3. Initiatives undertaken in the area of women's advancement included the passing of a law on women's representation in the elected assemblies; revision of laws relating to succession, filiation, minority and marriage; and the establishment of women and development funds. The promotion and protection of children's rights was also a priority. Education between the ages of 6 and 16 years was now compulsory, which, in conjunction with the prohibition on child labour and trafficking, had brought the school enrolment rate up to 91.3 per cent. In addition, awareness-raising and suppression activities had substantially reduced the practice of genital mutilation.

4. Côte d'Ivoire had ratified the main international human rights instruments and continued to strengthen its domestic legislation. In 2014, it had adopted a law on the protection of human rights defenders, which testified to its commitment to promoting fundamental human rights. That commitment had led to two consecutive

mandates on the Human Rights Council in 2013–2015 and 2016–2018. Endorsed by the African Union, it was presenting its candidature once again for membership of the Council for the period 2021–2023.

5. *Ms. Bogyay (Hungary) took the Chair.*

6. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) said that a national commission had been established to investigate human rights violations and had submitted several reports to the Human Rights Council. His delegation called on Member States to support the commission and strengthen its capacities. However, such support had not been forthcoming from the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution [36/31](#), which had relied on inaccurate sources and shown flagrant bias in favour of the armed groups, thereby openly contravening its mandate and the accepted working methods of expert bodies. The Group made the same mistakes year after year, and it was regrettable that the Human Rights Council had decided to renew its mandate on 6 October 2020. Yemen cooperated with all United Nations expert bodies; however, that particular Group had proved to be misguided.

7. The Iranian-backed coup by the Houthi militias and their takeover of the Yemeni capital in September 2014 were the sole reason for what had become the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The Houthi militias had violated all rights and freedoms of the Yemeni people and had not spared women, children, journalists or religious minorities, including Jews and Baha'is. They had killed, tortured, displaced, violently attacked and caused the disappearance of more than 1,000 civilians, recruited more than 30,000 children, bombed civilian areas such as hospitals and schools and impeded humanitarian operations.

8. While the actions of the Houthi militias had displaced 4 million Yemeni people, his country was also hosting 276,000 refugees, which was putting pressure on its economy and compounding its difficulties. Over 1 million mines had been laid by the militias, which were killing women and children and their impact would continue to be felt for decades.

9. Yemeni women in Houthi-controlled areas were frequently subjected to the worst forms of duress, and their male relatives were arbitrarily detained or recruited, disappeared or were displaced by the violence perpetrated by the Houthis. His Government had established a national commission to strengthen the rights of women in Yemen, as the outcome of a national dialogue that had guaranteed that 30 per cent of legislative posts would be reserved for women. His

delegation called on the international community to support it.

10. Many reports on Yemen sent the wrong message and thus encouraged Houthi militias to continue to violate international law and international human rights and to undermine United Nations efforts to achieve peace. Terrorist militias could thrive only amid chaos and destruction. Most of the people detained by Houthi militias were civilians who had been abducted from their homes. On 27 September 2020 in Geneva, an agreement had been reached that a small number of those prisoners would be released in exchange for members of the armed groups; yet no tangible action had thus far been taken. The international community must send a clear message to the Houthi militias that the abductions and enforced disappearances must stop, otherwise the conflict and the associated human rights violations would continue.

11. **Mr. Cuéllar Suárez** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that the international community must respond collectively and vigorously to COVID-19, and the pandemic must not be allowed to reverse the significant progress made in key areas. His country had taken specific action to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms during the pandemic, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups. After declaring a national health emergency and imposing a lockdown, the Government had provided families with economic assistance and extended the family grant (Bono Familia) to new groups.

12. In the context of its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Bolivia had strengthened the promotion and protection of women's rights. Trafficking in persons, gender-based violence, harassment and political violence against women were punishable by law. Programmes to prevent gender-based violence had been developed, and 2020 had been declared a year to fight femicide and infanticide through greater awareness.

13. In 2019, Bolivia had presented its fifth and sixth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and its first reports on the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention and its optional protocols.

14. Bolivia had given priority to public policies aimed at improving the lives of indigenous peoples in the country by preserving their languages, identities, values and cultures. It had also increased their participation in decision-making and multilateral forums. During the lockdown, a strategy had been implemented to improve

their access to information on preventing and treating COVID-19, which took account of cultural perceptions.

15. A new national anti-drug strategy had been implemented that was based on respect for human rights, security, public health and economic development. A greater volume of drugs had been seized during the first 10 months of the strategy than during the previous 14 years.

16. Reflecting its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, Bolivia had presented its candidature for membership of the Human Rights Council for 2021–2023.

17. **Ms. Shahminan** (Brunei Darussalam), speaking in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the socioeconomic challenges presented by the pandemic would not hamper her country's efforts to promote and protect the rights of its people. Brunei Darussalam had taken steps to ensure that its health-care system remained accessible to all and had built a new virology laboratory and a national isolation centre. The pandemic had increased community engagement at all levels, with youth volunteers assisting the government efforts and individuals and non-governmental organizations coordinating the delivery of care packages. All institutions had adapted to e-learning and the Government had worked with partners to ensure that children from underprivileged families had access to learning materials and devices. An economic stimulus package had been introduced, frontline health workers and volunteers were receiving special allowances and a contact-tracing mechanism had been launched.

18. Initiatives taken by the Government to protect and promote human rights and welfare included the implementation of a centralized national welfare system based on the minimum cost of basic needs, in line with the plan of action on poverty eradication, and an employee trust fund and supplementary contributory pension scheme to ensure adequate savings for retirement. A plan of action on the well-being of children had been implemented, and a law against trafficking in persons had been enacted in 2019 to strengthen existing legislation. In addition, a social blueprint would be drafted to aid in realizing the second goal in the National Vision 2035, namely, to ensure a high quality of life in a country with a dynamic and sustainable economy.

19. Brunei Darussalam would continue to uphold its commitments under the international conventions to which it was already a party. In March 2020 it had acceded to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against

Transnational Organized Crime. In 2021, Brunei Darussalam would be chairing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and would continue to support multilateralism and engage with United Nations bodies and agencies to advance the well-being of its people and ensure that no one was left behind.

20. **Ms. Alalawat** (Bahrain) said that her country continued to perform well in terms of human development indicators and to undertake pioneering initiatives in the field of the protection and promotion of human rights. In August 2020, Bahrain had begun work on a national human rights action plan, holding a workshop with national, international and regional bodies and a wide range of stakeholders.

21. The Government had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on exchanging information concerning refugees and asylum seekers, enabling both parties to further their goal of aiding refugees in the Middle East.

22. All measures taken by Bahrain to protect the health of its citizens and residents in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic had been consistent with international human rights standards, particularly those relating to health, education, the economy and the rights of prisoners and detainees, women, children and refugees.

23. Bahraini women had actively contributed to efforts to combat the pandemic; as a result, the country had developed a model for dealing with the pandemic and managing its social and economic consequences. The Supreme Council for Women had launched initiatives to assist Bahraini women during the pandemic, including by providing financial help, and to preserve the achievements in women's advancement in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Women in Bahrain were guaranteed representation at high levels of decision-making, and the country was promoting gender equality and had reached a new level in terms of its integration of women and its provision of equal opportunities.

24. For the third year in a row, Bahrain had maintained its position in the top tier of countries in the 2020 Trafficking in Persons report issued by the United States Department of State for fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and continued to be singled out in the region for its legal and institutional structure and its readiness to enforce the law to protect victims and punish perpetrators. Its most prominent initiatives included a new national referral system for victims of trafficking in persons, the

establishment of a shelter for migrant workers, the introduction of a flexible work permit, as well as the efforts of State and private bodies to raise awareness of the issue.

25. **Mr. Ramde** (Burkina Faso) said that the pandemic had exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and directed financing away from development, which was likely to jeopardize progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the global response to COVID-19 had shown the world's ability to adapt.

26. Thanks to the policies and strategies implemented by its Government, Burkina Faso had made considerable progress in reducing social and gender-based inequalities. It had been able to significantly increase the percentage of persons with disabilities who were employed and the proportion of vulnerable children in care, and drastically reduce the number of children living on the streets. Burkina Faso had successfully mobilized national efforts to empower women, combat female genital mutilation, reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence, increase women's economic independence and improve their access to basic social services. Nevertheless, given the pandemic's disproportionate impact on women, all United Nations actors must collaborate on their common goals.

27. The security crisis in Burkina Faso since 2015 was having disastrous humanitarian consequences and had increased the needs in all social areas, including food security, health, water and sanitation and livelihood support. His Government was striving to respond, with the help of the international community and its partners, and wished to express its gratitude to them.

28. Peace, security and development would not be possible without respect for human rights. His country had therefore strengthened its legal framework on human rights and taken measures to foster peace and social cohesion. Burkina Faso was a party to almost all international human rights treaties and cooperated with the international and regional bodies that monitored their implementation.

29. Burkina Faso appreciated the efforts made by the Government of China to combat violent extremism in Xinjiang and to maintain unity, stability and prosperity in Hong Kong. It reaffirmed its commitment to the fundamental values of the United Nations and urged all States to respect the principles of the Charter.

30. **Ms. El Guera** (Mauritania) said that the seventy-fifth session was taking place in extremely complex circumstances owing to the health crisis caused by

COVID-19, which continued to have serious repercussions.

31. Mauritania had made great efforts to implement projects and programmes aimed at combating injustice, marginalization, vulnerability and exclusion, providing universal access to basic services, and supporting the health and education systems. It had also given priority to consolidating national unity, strengthening social cohesion, building the rule of law and establishing good governance. Poverty alleviation measures included addressing social inequalities, combating vulnerability, supporting disadvantaged groups and promoting social cohesion.

32. Protecting and promoting human rights was a crucial issue for Mauritania and all fundamental rights were enshrined in the Mauritanian Constitution. The Government had taken a human rights-based approach in its programmes to address the legacy of slavery and had introduced a national action plan focused on legal reform, awareness-raising and social and economic programmes. Awareness-raising campaigns involving scholars, jurists and civil society organizations had been launched to inform people of their rights and responsibilities and the relevant laws and regulations. Mauritania had ratified all international human rights instruments and would continue to fulfil its commitments in that regard, taking into account the teachings of Islamic law, and to align its domestic laws accordingly. Given that young people in Mauritania represented nearly 70 per cent of the population, the country had established a higher youth council in 2015.

33. The Mauritanian Government was mainstreaming a gender-based approach into all national policies and programmes and had adopted a national strategy aimed at empowering Mauritanian women, freeing them from social and economic constraints and ensuring that they could participate effectively in the country's development. Thanks to a positive discrimination policy, Mauritanian women had made great strides in gender equality, and now had a strong presence in the legislative, executive and judicial branches and had gained access to fields traditionally reserved for men, such as the police and the army.

34. The Government of Mauritania paid great attention to fundamental freedoms, especially freedom of the press. In recent years, thanks to liberalization, many independent television channels and radio stations had emerged, which had helped raise awareness among citizens of their rights and responsibilities. In addition, Mauritania had opened up its State-owned channels to all political parties and decriminalized press offences.

35. **Mr. Rai** (Papua New Guinea) said that the international community must build on the momentum generated by the call made on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to redouble efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. In Papua New Guinea, progress continued to be made in enabling women and girls to take their rightful place in nation-building, but much remained to be done with regard to gender-sensitive development. Combating the unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence was a national priority, and an all-of-society and multi-stakeholder approach, together with sustained partnership, was pivotal to eliminating it. The Spotlight Initiative, launched in March 2020 in conjunction with the European Union and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), was a step in the right direction.

36. Papua New Guinea supported the "one country, two systems" policy of the People's Republic of China. Pursuant to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular those of non-interference in the internal affairs of States and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Hong Kong security law and the human rights issues in Xinjiang province were an internal matter for the People's Republic of China.

37. Similarly, the question of whether to establish a moratorium or retain or abolish the death penalty, and the types of crimes to which it should be applied, was the sole prerogative of a sovereign State. Although the death penalty was a valid punishment in Papua New Guinea under its Constitution and Penal Code, it had yet to be applied.

38. Papua New Guinea commended the people of New Caledonia and the administering Power, France, on the peaceful and successful conduct in October 2020 of a second referendum on self-determination. The human rights and dignity of colonized peoples everywhere, and their self-determination, must not be taken for granted, as the United Nations still had unfinished business in that area.

39. Lastly, with regard to capacity-building on human rights and inclusion in the discussions in the Human Rights Council, Papua New Guinea wished to express its gratitude to the Group of Friends of small island developing States and the Group of Friends of Least Developed Countries in Geneva and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for their continuing support of the countries in those groups that did not have a physical presence at the United Nations in Geneva. That support was having

a real and positive impact on their ability to address human rights at the national level and in the Pacific region.

40. **Ms. Moldoisaeva** (Kyrgyzstan) said that her country attached great importance to strengthening and promoting human rights, the rule of law and democracy. In light of its commitment to participate in upholding international human rights norms and standards at the global level, it had presented its candidature for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2023–2025. Kyrgyzstan also supported the review of the human rights treaty body system and was in favour of strengthening the mechanism of cooperation with the special procedures.

41. Migration was a domestic and foreign policy priority for the Kyrgyz Republic. Almost one fifth of the country's working age population were labour migrants, and they were afforded socioeconomic and legal protection. More intergovernmental cooperation was needed on migration issues and Kyrgyzstan called on all States to join the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Refugee protection was one of the most important aspects of the State migration policy; Kyrgyzstan had been the first country in the world to eradicate statelessness in response to the campaign launched by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

42. Kyrgyzstan was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all States Parties must take the necessary measures to implement it. Its programme for the development of youth policy, 2017–2020, aimed to create favourable conditions for the self-realization and development of young people.

43. States should be encouraged to promote human rights and provide a better life for their citizens, while also respecting the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States. On that subject, her delegation noted that the situation in Hong Kong was purely an internal affair of China, and hoped that it would be peacefully resolved.

44. The pandemic was one of the greatest challenges the world had faced since the founding of the United Nations. Nevertheless, human rights must continue to be fully respected and there was no place for any form of discrimination. Kyrgyzstan called on Member States to enhance their coordination of public health and finances and to cooperate at the national, regional and international levels to combat the pandemic.

45. **Mr. Vongnorkeo** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that countries in special situations had

been the most severely affected by the pandemic. The international community must respond to the crisis in concert, in solidarity and with renewed commitment to uphold multilateralism and promote and protect human rights, including the right to development.

46. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had made significant progress over the past few years towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Many of the Goals had been mainstreamed into its national plans and laid a strong foundation for its graduation from least developed country status. Priority had been given to the delivery of adequate social services. His country had also redoubled its efforts to achieve universal health coverage by 2025 through systemic reform. In cooperation with friendly neighbouring countries and international organizations, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had adopted stringent measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

47. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls were an integral part of the national development agenda. Around 27 per cent of National Assembly members, including the President and a Vice-President, were women, and the number of women at ministerial level and among business leaders had increased significantly. The Lao Government had also adopted a number of laws and national action plans to promote and protect children's rights and had continued to implement its education sector development plan.

48. Despite those achievements, much work remained to be done, especially to mobilize sufficient resources to meet current needs, given the persistent gaps between urban and rural areas. Key challenges included child malnutrition, low preschool enrolment and completion rates, and a lack of gender-disaggregated data, especially for children in remote areas. The pandemic had hampered efforts to address those issues. If the impact of the pandemic was prolonged, the national unemployment rate was forecast to rise from 2 per cent to 25 percent, which would inevitably limit income generation.

49. The Lao People's Democratic Republic was strongly committed to implementing the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development and the 2030 Agenda and to fulfilling its international obligations as its circumstances and capacity allowed. With continued support from the international community, no one would be left behind.

50. **Ms. Noureldine** (Libya) said that the world was facing unprecedented challenges owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had brought great loss of life, particularly among older persons. The pandemic posed a particular threat to poor countries and those

experiencing armed conflict and instability, whose health-care infrastructure was fragile. Libya, which was in a transition period, had not been spared. The crisis in Libya would eventually be settled through international efforts, but cooperation with United Nations bodies must be strengthened in order to implement the plans and programmes adopted to contain the pandemic and ease its impact on production sectors.

51. Libya had signed almost all international human rights agreements and treaties and its domestic laws protected women's rights, enshrined gender equality and provided for free health care for all. However, obstacles remained that prevented the country from achieving its aspirations. Efforts to address serious human rights violations had been disrupted by the attacks on Tripoli on 4 April 2019, which had damaged public and private property, displaced thousands of citizens and destroyed health-care and educational facilities and migrant shelters. The massacre in the city of Tarhouna had shocked the world. A call for accountability had been issued, and Libya welcomed the response of the Human Rights Council, which had established a fact-finding mission to investigate those human rights violations. The Chair of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya had told the forty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council that the Libyan parties were prepared to cooperate.

52. The Third Committee had done a great deal to promote human rights, including women's rights and empowerment. However, the misuse of women's issues to introduce values that had not been agreed upon would only sabotage efforts and complicate international cooperation in the area of women's rights. National laws and traditions and religious and moral values must be respected.

53. Illegal migration was an ongoing tragedy and, as a transit country, Libya was a victim of that crisis. Illegal migration had serious social, economic and security-related consequences. Libya would continue to cooperate with its partners and with international organizations and was doing its utmost to save the lives and protect the rights of undocumented migrants. It endeavoured to repatriate them to their countries of origin under dignified conditions and would not tolerate any violation of their rights.

54. **Mr. Shava** (Zimbabwe) said that the international community must focus on addressing the pandemic's multidimensional impact on the most vulnerable. In General Assembly resolution [74/306](#) on a comprehensive and coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Assembly urged States to refrain from imposing unilateral economic, financial or

trade measures that impeded the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries. His country's ability to respond to the pandemic had been greatly curtailed by those illegal sanctions, which had made it difficult to ensure access to medicines and other critical supplies and had had devastating effects on the lives of women, children, older persons and persons living with disabilities. Zimbabwe therefore demanded the unconditional lifting of the illegal coercive measures imposed on Zimbabwe and other countries.

55. Coordinated efforts must be made to formulate a comprehensive evidence-based approach to allocating scarce resources to combat the pandemic, informed by public health needs. Member States should also develop partnerships to conduct research into vaccines and treatments, and the vaccine should be a global public good that was accessible to all. Zimbabwe wished to express its unwavering support for the World Health Organization (WHO) as the agency leading the global response to the pandemic, in recognition of the fact that no country could fight the pandemic alone.

56. It had been clear even before the outbreak of COVID-19 that progress towards women's empowerment had been insufficient; efforts must be redoubled to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. With regard to other vulnerable groups, young people had an important role to play in realizing sustainable development, preventing crises and advancing humankind, and his delegation called for the full implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy. His delegation also called on the Committee to do more to promote the rights of children and persons living with disabilities. Zimbabwe was committed to protecting and promoting the rights of those vulnerable groups, as evidenced by its ratification of the pertinent international convention.

57. **Mr. Duarte Lopes** (Portugal) said that the pandemic had underscored the need to build resilient societies, implement the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement and fulfil the legal obligations arising from international human rights instruments, which together constituted a robust framework for action. Human rights were more vital than ever at a time when bigotry, discrimination and fanaticism were on the rise.

58. Portugal had taken a human rights-based approach in its response to the pandemic to ensure that those in the most vulnerable situations would not be left behind. It had guaranteed that foreign nationals such as migrants and asylum seekers with pending regularization processes would be able to exercise their rights on an equal basis with others, so that they could access the

health system, receive social security benefits, sign leases and open bank accounts.

59. Respect for all human rights was essential to building a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable world. The voices of civil society and young people must be heard. Human rights defenders must be protected, and all forms of retaliation condemned. It was vital to defend free and plural societies that rejected racism, xenophobia and homophobia and ensured inclusion, gender equality and freedom of expression.

60. Gender equality was still far from being achieved. States needed to continue advancing towards the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and fair and equal access to education and the labour market.

61. Portugal opposed the death penalty in all circumstances, on the basis that it undermined human dignity and had no deterrent effect. His delegation called on the few States that still used the death penalty to consider adopting a moratorium with a view to its complete abolition.

62. New members of the Human Rights Council would soon be elected. All had a special responsibility to fulfil their human rights obligations and cooperate in full with the Council and its mechanisms. The special procedures were the eyes and ears of the international community and helped all countries to meet their human rights obligations. Portugal called on all States that had not yet done so to issue a standing invitation to the special procedure mandate holders.

63. **Ms. Mose** (Solomon Islands) said that the promotion and protection of human rights must be based on cooperation and genuine dialogue. The Human Rights Council was the appropriate body to deal with human rights issues in a fair and equitable manner and the universal periodic review provided an opportunity for all Member States to engage in constructive dialogue to address human rights issues and concerns. The examination of all human rights issues must be guided by the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity.

64. Solomon Islands remained committed to achieving gender equality and ensuring women's full and effective participation in political, economic and public life. It was clear, however, that more work needed to be done. The first-ever demand-side survey conducted in her country had revealed that only 20 per cent of women had access to formal bank accounts. In response, a financial inclusion programme, coordinated with development partners, had begun providing fair, transparent and

affordable financial services to women, especially in rural areas.

65. Over a third of the population of Solomon Islands was under 15 years of age and the country continued to work to integrate the views of young people into national decision-making. The Government remained committed to peacebuilding efforts at the rural level with women and youth as agents for positive change and peace. Given its young population, Solomon Islands understood the importance of education to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and was strengthening its education system by issuing policies that addressed the many challenges in the education sector. However, COVID-19 had added another dimension to those challenges.

66. The work towards achieving human rights for all had been hampered by the pandemic, which was having a heightened impact on vulnerable groups such as women and girls and persons with disabilities. Solomon Islands stood with other States in its commitment to achieving equal rights for all, even during such difficult times.

67. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her country was a party to the vast majority of international human rights treaties and had aligned its domestic laws with international conventions. The Constitution provided the legal foundation for its approach to human rights and enshrined equality between women and men in all spheres. Morocco was a pioneer in the use of gender-sensitive budgeting and laws on women's equal access to the collective lands. Women in Morocco were members of the council of religious leaders and Morocco was the only Arab country to have launched a programme of female preachers to combat radicalization and violent extremism. It was also the sole Muslim country to have opened the profession of public notary to women.

68. Morocco had co-facilitated the review of the United Nations human rights treaty body system, which had confirmed the system's ongoing relevance and the need to strengthen the functioning of those independent bodies. National mechanisms such as ombudspersons, mediators and other national human rights institutions continued to promote good governance in public administrations, strengthen the principles of justice and equality and contribute to making the rule of a law a reality.

69. Morocco had taken a proactive and multidimensional approach in its response to the pandemic. It had established an emergency fund, to which public and private entities could make voluntary contributions. In a spirit of solidarity, international



cooperation and multilateralism, Morocco had sent medical supplies to several African nations and the Commission of the African Union as part of an initiative launched in April 2020 to support the efforts of African countries to manage the pandemic. In addition, in its capacity as President of the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, Morocco had launched a call for action in June 2020 to support the humanitarian response to the pandemic, which had been endorsed by the vast majority of delegations, the African Union and the European Union. Not only had COVID-19 made those in need of humanitarian assistance more vulnerable, it had also affected donors' ability to meet those needs. The delivery of humanitarian assistance must be strictly monitored to ensure that it reached the right people, making refugee registration more important than ever.

70. Given the links between international drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, Morocco had adopted a comprehensive and coordinated anti-drug strategy in 2003 that was people-centred and focused on tackling illegal cannabis cultivation. It aimed to reduce supply and demand and establish projects that would foster alternative forms of development in cultivation areas.

71. **Mr. Grba** (Serbia) said that the crisis had highlighted global interconnectedness and interdependence and the need to take collective action rooted in solidarity and multilateralism. Respect for human rights must be at the centre of the fight against the pandemic.

72. Serbia had made significant progress in promoting and protecting human rights by enhancing its normative framework and implementing strategies and action plans. Nevertheless, it was aware that there was room for improvement and was open to cooperation with all United Nations mechanisms.

73. While exchanges of opinion on human rights in the Committee sometimes included very harsh criticism, Serbia was opposed to selective criticism, which usually divided States and did not improve the situation on the ground. Serbia firmly supported the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Member States.

74. As a multi-ethnic country, Serbia attached great importance to the rights of minorities. It had strengthened measures to increase the representation of national minority groups in State bodies in recent years and to give them access to education in their mother tongue.

75. Serbia had long drawn attention to the problems encountered by the non-Albanian population in its southern province of Kosovo and Metohija. Unfortunately, even 20 years after the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), respect for human rights, especially those of minority communities, was far from satisfactory. It was still not safe for over 200,000 internally displaced persons to return. The situation regarding the restitution of their property and its persistent usurpation continued to be a matter of grave concern, while the small number of internally displaced persons who had managed to return to the province were too often the target of attacks and intimidation. One of the most egregious and disturbing examples was a recent attack on Serbian school children by two armed individuals near Pristina.

76. Ethnic minorities faced varying threats to their security and freedom of movement, and institutional obstacles and discrimination regarding property rights, employment, education, social services and language use. The rule of law in Kosovo and Metohija was still a matter of great concern, including with regard to the independence of the judiciary, a lack of protection for victims and witnesses and a failure to carry out court decisions. Those problems had undoubtedly increased corruption and organized crime.

77. Sustainable and mutually acceptable solutions were needed to ensure that all communities in Kosovo and Metohija could lead a peaceful and dignified life and that their human rights were respected. In that spirit and in good faith, Serbia had striven to take positive steps in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, demonstrating commitment to a peaceful resolution and the creation of a climate of reconciliation and sustainable peace, development and security for all communities.

78. Serbia had long supported international efforts to address forced displacement as a global humanitarian problem. Its contribution to the provision of assistance to all refugees and displaced persons in its territory, including internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija and migrants, reflected its efforts to protect those highly vulnerable groups. The positive experiences, models and tools from the regional housing programme established to address the protracted refugee situation in the Western Balkans could also be applied, with certain modifications, to internal displacement.

79. Regarding gender equality, the prohibition of discrimination and the elimination of violence against women, Serbia had substantially improved its strategic, normative and implementation frameworks. Concerning

young people, it was fully committed to the creation of equal opportunities for education, employment and their inclusion in social and political life.

80. **Ms. Cartwright** (Bahamas) said that, as countries grappled with the effects of the pandemic, the ongoing impacts of climate change on small island developing States should not be forgotten. They had not disappeared; rather, they had been magnified, and continued to jeopardize the full and effective enjoyment of a range of human rights.

81. In response to the unprecedented rise in unemployment owing to the pandemic, the Bahamas had activated its unemployment and self-employment assistance programmes and the national food distribution task force. It had also expanded its social safety net at a cost of around \$140 million.

82. To ensure access to education in remote islands, the Bahamas had established a virtual school, the first of its kind in the Caribbean. It had also undertaken successful initiatives to improve access to and the quality of early childhood education. In September 2019, the Government had made admission to the University of the Bahamas free of charge for all Bahamian students. A number of youth programmes had also been made available online to provide training to young people from the Family Islands. The National Training Agency continued to fulfil its mandate for workforce development and job placement among the most vulnerable.

83. National priorities on gender equality were aligned with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and included promoting equal opportunities, combating violence against women and increasing women's ownership of land. The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities continued to work on technological advances, with projects such as the Disability App and the digital identification card.

84. The socioeconomic success and sustainable development of the Bahamas was inextricably linked to the safety, security and health of its people. As it coped with the loss and devastation wreaked by Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19, the Bahamas remained committed to enhancing its strategy for systematically reducing crime and violence. The Government continued to invest in human resources and technologies that would strengthen police accountability and transparency. The citizen security and justice programme continued to make bold strides in its holistic approach to crime and violence prevention through new strategies that benefited young people, inmates, the judicial sector and the wider community.

85. **Mr. Komara** (Guinea) said that the pandemic had devastated economies and exacerbated inequalities, testing the United Nations as never before. Unemployment, under-employment, school closures and a shortage of health-care personnel had hampered global efforts to promote and protect the rights of children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

86. Environmental damage, the exponential rise in extremist violence and xenophobia and an explosion in migration and trafficking in persons posed real threats to the implementation of development agendas.

87. The creation of unapproved concepts by subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies was an obstacle to harmonious and swift United Nations action, and often occurred in the Human Rights Council, where some States and groups of States acted as though it was their job to teach others, in violation of all the guiding principles. Selectivity and politicization in the treaty bodies generated mistrust within the international community and threatened multilateralism. Furthermore, the absence of Africa in conflict resolution processes and in the coordination of humanitarian action on its own continent prolonged tensions and resulted in increased humanitarian needs.

88. The spread of COVID-19 had shown that international cooperation based on respect for human rights and human dignity was the only way to ensure the security of States and peoples. Although no country had been spared, the situation of the least developed countries was worrying, given the economic contraction that had resulted from the collapse of revenue from exports and tourism.

89. Economic and social recovery from COVID-19 would only be possible with policies that placed vulnerable groups at the centre. The Government of Guinea had therefore made the protection of women, older persons and persons with disabilities a priority in its national response plan. A ministerial department had also been established to promote women's rights and empowerment.

90. Lastly, his delegation wished to reiterate its support for WHO in its efforts to coordinate the eradication of COVID-19. Multilateralism was the only solution to the many challenges facing the planet.

91. **Ms. Williams** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed the vulnerability of older persons, and Saint Kitts and Nevis had responded by expanding its social protection programmes. The Government continued to implement family-oriented social protection policies to build strong families and lift

the most vulnerable out of poverty. Strengthening economic empowerment and social cohesion was at the heart of its people-centred approach to social transformation and development.

92. Her Government had deposited its instrument of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in October 2019 and would continue to work with national civil society organizations to implement it. Saint Kitts and Nevis had also recently acceded to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

93. The empowerment of women and girls was high on the national development agenda. A gender equality policy and action plan had been launched to mainstream gender initiatives and incorporate a rights-based approach to human development. To respond to women's increased vulnerability to domestic violence as a result of lockdown measures, an emergency hotline had been set up.

94. Her Government continued to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had renewed its focus on girls. The pandemic had disrupted access to education, and the Government continued to adapt and find innovative solutions and had begun to subsidize the provision of technology to vulnerable children.

95. The intensification of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia around the world was highly regrettable. Saint Kitts and Nevis stood in solidarity with the victims of those hate crimes and called on all countries to promote and protect those fundamental human rights.

96. Only a few years earlier, Saint Kitts and Nevis had been plagued by high rates of crime and violence, especially gang violence, and had had one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world. Following the adoption of a national crime reduction and prevention strategy in 2017 and the implementation of innovative crime prevention mechanisms, not a single-gang related homicide had been recorded over the past year.

97. **Mr. Ley De Araujo Mantilo** (Timor-Leste) said that his country continued to give priority to the rights of all groups in its development agenda. It had ratified seven human rights conventions and a number of optional protocols since the restoration of its independence. The use of the death penalty was prohibited under its Constitution.

98. Timor-Leste had made great strides towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Protection from gender-based discrimination was guaranteed by the Constitution, and women had participated actively in the country's struggle for

independence. In 2016, his Government had approved a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, to include women in decision-making positions.

99. To ensure healthy lives and high-quality education for children, the Government, in cooperation with the National Commission for the Rights of the Child, had developed policies that upheld children's rights. A growing youth population, combined with insufficient employment opportunities, posed a great challenge. Vocational training had a crucial role to play in improving the skills of young people and aligning them more closely with the labour market. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport had established community learning centres in nine municipalities, one of which offered programmes for students with disabilities. The Government had also established a human capital development fund to provide scholarships and training to young people so that they could take advantage of opportunities in newly expanding sectors, such as tourism.

100. Upholding and promoting human rights, including the right to self-determination, was fundamental for the well-being of all humanity. His delegation urged all parties to abide by those principles, rely on dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts and refrain from violence and confrontation. Cooperation and partnership based on genuine solidarity in the current unprecedented circumstances were paramount and must take into consideration the situation of all vulnerable groups.

101. **Ms. Thompson** (Barbados) said that, as the pandemic had highlighted, it was vital to continue to address non-communicable diseases, which were a major cause of morbidity and mortality in the Caribbean and around the world. The pandemic had exacerbated the differences between developed and developing countries, widened the gaps in quality of life between the poor and the wealthy, and exposed the inequities in health and socioeconomic outcomes for people of African descent in some of the world's wealthiest countries.

102. Globalization had reinforced the need for multilateral approaches to global challenges. The apparent politicization of the pandemic was a concern, and countries must work together to improve health systems, create more resilient societies and economies and build back better and greener. A United Nations must be crafted that was fit for purpose and equal to the task of ensuring equity and justice for all through a "new global deal".

103. For small island developing States, that would require continuing to prioritize the Sustainable Development Goals; pursuing climate change mitigation and adaptation to guard against a retreat from the commitments to solving the climate crisis; putting in place structures to protect the rights and dignity of the family; promoting the advancement and empowerment of women and girls; protecting children; fostering respect for and the full inclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities; and recognizing the value of culture to people's lives and sense of identity.

104. Human rights, development and the maintenance of international peace and security were closely interlinked. No country had a perfect human rights record, and States must therefore remain respectful of each other in their discussions. Barbados adhered to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. In line with the basic tenet of its foreign policy for the past 50 years, Barbados would continue to be friends of all and satellites of none.

105. **Mr. Moscoso** (Panama) said that Panama had not escaped the serious repercussions of the pandemic, and institutional restructuring and innovation had been key to its ability to respond. Ministries were working together through an intersectoral social office to meet needs, in particular those of vulnerable groups, by providing digital vouchers and other forms of assistance.

106. The Government of Panama had worked closely with the United Nations system, especially with WHO and the Pan American Health Organization, to provide the public with accurate information on preventing and controlling the spread of the virus. The United Nations was the right entity to steer the response to the global crisis, through international cooperation, renewed multilateralism and the sharing of practices and technical capacities. It had developed innovative forms of humanitarian response and used social media to share information about the virus.

107. Government institutions had also used the Regional Logistics Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, located in Panama, to mobilize the provision of medical inputs and emergency supplies to over 30 countries in the region. Demonstrating the great importance that it attached to international solidarity, his country had ensured that the Panama Canal remained open, which had benefited world trade and enabled cruise ships and other vessels carrying persons suffering from COVID-19 infections to take a shorter route to their destinations.

108. To promote economic growth, human rights must remain at the centre of action. The education of women and girls was key to restructuring the economy. Although significant progress had been made in the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a number of issues remained pending, such as closing the wage gap, increasing women's participation in public life and eradicating gender-based violence. Virtual early childhood centres had been set up to help mothers provide a stimulating environment for their babies and prepare them for school. Such programmes were aligned with the National Secretariat for Childhood, Adolescence and the Family and with the United Nations Children's Fund to ensure a coordinated approach.

109. Both existing mechanisms and those developed in response to the need for social distancing would alleviate the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. Panama was committed to strategic partnerships and new methods of financing that were suited to the new reality.

110. **Mr. Mimouni** (Algeria) said that Algeria was entering a new chapter in its history. Its Government had implemented economic, political and social reforms, culminating in the elaboration of a new draft constitution, in which all stakeholders had participated. The referendum on the draft constitution on 1 November 2020 would lay the foundations for the country's democratic and political system.

111. In order to respond to growing humanitarian needs worldwide, humanitarian assistance must be combined with a prevention strategy that focused on the root causes of conflict, promoted sustainable development and fostered good governance and the rule of law.

112. Algeria was hosting thousands of Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps, where they were waiting for the United Nations to assume its responsibilities in achieving a just and lasting solution to the conflict in accordance with international law. In close cooperation with international organizations and civil society, Algeria had recently added new services, including a field hospital to treat COVID-19 infections. Algeria appealed to the international community, especially donor countries, to provide greater support to the Sahrawi refugees.

113. His country's development model was based on national solidarity, the promotion of social justice and the elimination of disparities. During the pandemic, children had continued to have free access to primary education. Educational programmes were being aired on public television and digital platforms had been activated. His Government had adopted a multisectoral

national preparedness and response plan to address health-care needs in response to COVID-19 and a budget of \$100 million had been allocated to meet urgent needs and provide hospitals with equipment. Algeria had taken several steps to protect and empower women, including the introduction of a quota system to promote their political representation, the criminalization of various forms of gender-based violence and the establishment of maintenance funds for divorced women and stay-at-home mothers.

114. The promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development, was more crucial than ever. Human rights issues must be examined in a non-selective and non-confrontational manner, without interference in the internal affairs of States and with due respect for national sovereignty. Algeria would continue to advocate for cooperation and dialogue on human rights that was free from double standards and politicization. Algeria firmly supported the full realization of the right to self-determination for all the peoples of the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, including their inalienable right to full sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources.

115. His delegation hoped that, in the Committee's discussions, States would focus on the issues that united them rather than those that divided them, with a view to reaching decisions by consensus.

116. **Mr. Mahmaminov** (Tajikistan) said that his Government had been making comprehensive efforts to implement its gender policy and, in collaboration with partners and civil society, had been working on the implementation of related legislation. It was also currently executing a national strategy to enhance the role of women for the period 2011–2020, aimed at creating the conditions necessary for the advancement of women in all areas of public life.

117. Human rights and fundamental freedoms were accorded the highest priority in the national constitution. Tajikistan condemned all forms of discrimination, in particular racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. It recognized the central role played by the Human Rights Council in streamlining dialogue and cooperation on the protection and promotion of human rights. The Council should be guided in its decision-making by the principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity and by constructive dialogue.

118. Tajikistan respected the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and recognized Hong Kong as part of China on the basis of the "one country, two systems" principle. The situation in Hong Kong was therefore an internal

matter for China, and Tajikistan hoped that it would be resolved peacefully in accordance with the law.

119. The proliferation of illicit drug trafficking was leading to an increase in the number of drug users, which posed a serious threat to social stability and undermined government efforts to encourage young people to lead healthy lifestyles. It was also a breeding ground for terrorism and organized crime, which required a coordinated response at the regional and international level, within the framework of the United Nations conventions on narcotic drugs. Tajikistan therefore called on the parties to those conventions to fulfil their commitments and obligations.

120. The COVID-19 pandemic was the most serious crisis in a generation. It had challenged public health systems and economies around the world and forced countries to rethink their priorities to save lives. It had also shown the vital importance of multilateral cooperation. Tajikistan urged all countries to exploit all possibilities for cooperation at the national, regional and international levels to build back as a better and greener world and to transform challenges into benefits.

121. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (League of Arab States) said that the League of Arab States attached great importance to the items on the Committee's agenda, the most important of which during the current session was the advancement of women. The high-level event to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had demonstrated the broad international support for effective gender equality and the importance of enabling women to contribute on an equal basis to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while also taking into account the new challenges imposed by the pandemic. The League of Arab States, in cooperation with the Arab Women's Committee, had developed recommendations on the empowerment of women and on the promotion of their role in the political, security, economic and social spheres

122. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, the League of Arab States had coordinated with the United Nations to hold special sessions of the Arab Women's Committee, with a focus on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. Joint recommendations had been adopted to address the challenges posed by the pandemic and to provide women with the necessary support. The League would continue to pursue its joint action with the United Nations to empower women.

123. The League of Arab States was committed to adopting a consistent social development programme for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and coordinated with its member States

on measures to eradicate poverty and close the gaps that led to inequality and injustice. The League was working with its member States to assess progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals that related to social development.

124. Multilateral action, solidarity and international cooperation were essential to address the COVID-19 pandemic effectively. However, there had been a significant decline in the commitment to a multilateral system based on diversity among nations and to capitalizing on that diversity in order to achieve common goals, as opposed to seeking to impose specific patterns. The League of Arab States would continue to cooperate with international partners to protect fundamental rights and rejected all discriminatory practices.

125. **Ms. Courtois** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross), in a pre-recorded video statement, said that, while COVID-19 was a threat to all, older persons and individuals with underlying health conditions were especially at risk, as were persons deprived of their liberty and those marginalized owing to language barriers, a lack of economic opportunities or limited access to health care and education. It also particularly threatened people in areas where armed conflict and other situations had ravaged public services. In many contexts, it had exacerbated the humanitarian situation. A collective approach from Governments, international organizations and civil society was needed, in particular in the areas of health care, detention, humanitarian assistance and the preservation of family unity.

126. Health care must be accessible, safe and available to all without discrimination. Refugees and other vulnerable foreign nationals were sometimes denied access or faced restrictions because they lacked documentation or financial resources. While States were entitled to and must take action to manage public health risks, measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 must be necessary, non-discriminatory and proportionate under international human rights law.

127. Detainees were at a higher risk of infection because physical distancing was more difficult in places of detention and hygiene measures might be inadequate. The same issues arose at immigration detention facilities, camps and urban settlements. Overcrowding should be avoided, and clean water and sanitation should be available.

128. In situations of armed conflict, the pandemic was both an economic and health crisis, and humanitarian assistance must be able to reach those most in need. Exemptions to public health measures must be made to

allow humanitarian organizations to reach the most vulnerable.

129. Groups faced differing and specific risks. Women and girls experienced heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Women, children and persons with disabilities often encountered obstacles in gaining access to health care or were excluded from channels of information regarding outbreaks. They might also be at greater risk of infection, especially in care facilities with inadequate infection control measures. For children, COVID-19 measures such as movement restrictions, family separation and interrupted schooling could increase the risk of abuse, exploitation and violence.

130. Public health measures should also be adjusted to preserve family unity. Authorities must take all possible action to prevent people from going missing and to ensure dignified treatment of the dead, including by registering persons admitted to health-care or quarantine facilities and properly documenting transfers and deaths.

*The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.*