Summary

In the present report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights provides an overview of the outcomes of the activities undertaken in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, including the organization of regional dialogues and a high-level event in December 2023.

The Human Rights 75 initiative was an opportunity to reflect on achievements as much as on some of the ongoing failures to protect the human rights of all, and on what is needed to address growing challenges effectively. A recommitment to the universality and indivisibility of human rights echoed throughout the year. The Human Rights 75 initiative helped to confirm the value of placing human rights at the centre of national and international governance systems, including to transform our economies and our relationship with the planet and with digital technologies, and to pave the way for lasting peace. The importance of a robust, effective, impartial and transparent human rights system ultimately emerged, including the need for a strengthened human rights pillar.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 52/19, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to implement a programme of activities that included the organization of regional dialogues and a high-level event in December 2023 in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. In the same resolution, the Council requested the High Commissioner to submit a report on the year-long activities to the Council at its fifty-sixth session.

2. The Human Rights 75 initiative was launched on 10 December 2022. Amidst a challenging context of increasing conflict, soaring inequalities, growing hate speech, shrinking civic space, ongoing geopolitical tensions and divisions, the initiative had the aim of rejuvenating the Universal Declaration, demonstrating how it could meet the needs of our time, and advancing its promise of freedom, equality and justice for all.

3. The Human Rights 75 initiative had three main objectives: promoting the universality and indivisibility of human rights; looking to the future; and bolstering the human rights ecosystem.

4. In the present report, the High Commissioner provides an overview of the outcomes of the activities undertaken during the year, culminating in the high-level event in December, and looks ahead to next steps and follow-up.

II. Summary of activities

5. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) undertook regular exchanges and briefings with States Members of the United Nations and other actors and partners on the year-long initiative. A youth advisory group, consisting of 12 young people from across the globe, was established to help to design, implement and follow up on activities.

6. The programme of activities included the organization of national and regional events, a ratification campaign, thematic monthly spotlights, an outreach campaign, and other engagements by all stakeholders, culminating in a high-level event hosted in Geneva in December 2023, connected online to hubs in Bangkok, Nairobi and Panama.

A. National and regional events

7. Several global conferences and events were organized by States and other actors to commemorate the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8. In June 2023, the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria, in cooperation with OHCHR, organized a high-level human rights symposium entitled “Vienna World Conference 30 Years On: Our Rights – Our Future” to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The symposium gathered experts, academics, thought leaders, young people and others to take stock of the human rights achievements of the past 30 years, reflect on current challenges, and set out ideas and visions for the future. Its three areas of focus were promoting universality and indivisibility of human rights; technology; and looking to the future.

9. While placing value on humanity’s cultural diversity, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action underscored the conviction that cultural differences can never serve as a justification for human rights violations. It confirmed that the promotion and protection of all human rights was a “legitimate concern of the international community”, paving the way for numerous other breakthroughs in the field of human rights: an agreement to establish the International Criminal Court, and historical advances on women’s rights, children’s rights, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It also set the path for the creation of the institutional

10. Participants stressed that a concerted effort to return to the essence of universality and indivisibility was required. This meant treating all rights equally, and vigorously pursuing accountability, regardless of where violations occur. It also involved affirming that threats to human rights in one place are a threat to human rights everywhere. Participants agreed on the need to broaden the constituency of human rights, including by ensuring the meaningful participation of all, and supporting youth engagement.

11. Participants in discussions also emphasized that a robust human rights ecosystem, with its various constituent elements working together and human rights at the centre, was crucial for effective governance. Moreover, participants concurred on the need for a strengthened OHCHR, which the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action paved the way to creating. Finally, it was agreed that multilateral forums for open and effective dialogue had to be protected and expanded.

12. Similar global conferences were organized by other States across the globe. For instance, in June, China organized a two-day high-level forum entitled “Equality, cooperation and development: the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and global human rights governance”. In December, under the patronage of King Mohammed VI, the National Human Rights Council of Morocco organized an international symposium that asked “Is the universal humanist ideal unfulfilled?” to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the context of its presidency of the European Union, Spain organized a high-level conference in October 2023 entitled “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: fit for purpose”.

13. OHCHR supported more than 160 national and regional discussions, consultations and events. It also organized high-level round tables in New York on human rights and future generations, on civic space and on prevention, peace and security.

14. Several national and subregional consultations and campaigns on critical human rights themes were held, leading to recommendations, commitments and pledges. For example, a conference on freedom of the media and the safety of journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized jointly with OHCHR presences in Montenegro and Serbia, on the International Day of Democracy in September, gathered officials, national human rights institutions and the media to discuss the criminalization of defamation, strategic litigation on hate speech and the safety of women journalists. A total of 108 journalists and editors from the three countries made a pledge to promote equality and non-discrimination and to ensure that their media outlets did not provide space for hate speech.

15. At a dialogue held in Burundi, participants, including representatives of government, parliament, national human rights institutions and civil society representing specific groups, the United Nations and the diplomatic community, discussed the ratification of outstanding treaties, how to strengthen national systems to improve human rights and the need to align legislation with international standards. The host country’s Human Rights 75 pledges covered child rights, the right to health, prison conditions and the rights of displaced persons.

16. OHCHR in Cambodia hosted a high-level event gathering 300 participants, including senior government officials, civil society actors, development partners, academia, journalists and groups in focus (LGBTQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, youth and Indigenous Peoples). The discussions paved the way for the country’s Human Rights 75 pledge to continue to develop its social protection system.

17. A capacity-building workshop organized jointly by OHCHR and the Commonwealth of Nations was held in Barbados for representatives of 13 Caribbean countries on treaty body reporting and strengthening national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up. Participants agreed to form a regional community to continue to share good practices on

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engagement with treaty bodies and to advance their human rights architecture. In December, four countries pledged to establish or strengthen their own national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, and one to establish a national human rights institution.

18. A regional event on security and human rights was hosted by the OHCHR Regional Office for Central America and the Caribbean jointly with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., with the participation of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti. Participants affirmed the principles of the Universal Declaration and the American Convention on Human Rights. They stressed the need for a human rights approach in the application of security policy models, including through prevention efforts and by addressing the root causes of violence and insecurity, including organized crime.3

19. The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, together with other United Nations agencies and regional partners, organized a side event to the fifty-second Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, held in the Cook Islands, focusing on the role of national accountability structures, in particular national human rights institutions, and how they can promote development and gender equality. The event helped to build momentum towards the establishment in the Cook Islands of an ombudsman’s office as an independent national human rights institution and mobilized support for pledges to establish or strengthen national human rights institutions, promote gender equality and implement the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

20. Following a series of consultations convening more than 200 people from different sectors, the United Nations in Jordan, in collaboration with partners and under the guidance of the renowned Jordanian street artist Suhaib Attar, initiated a street art project in the Al Hashmi al Shamali neighbourhood of East Amman to create a street art trail illustrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Seventeen house walls now showcase human rights, such as freedom of expression, the right to asylum, workers’ rights, women’s rights, and the rights to food, health, housing, clean water and sanitation, and a healthy environment.

21. In November 2023, the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa partnered with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (South Africa) to convene subregional consultations. Representatives of 11 States and civil society organizations discussed the theme “Eradicating inequality as an accelerator to promoting human rights in Southern Africa”. Participants discussed the root causes of inequality in the subregion, as well as climate and the environment, digital technologies, human rights, the economy and development, and population groups at risk of being left behind. Participants adopted a summary of the consultations, with suggestions on ways forward.4

22. Regional organizations, civil society organizations, lawyers’ groups, universities, faith-based organizations, business organizations, artists and other stakeholders from across regions also organized events and round tables throughout the year, focusing on key themes related to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Universal Declaration.5

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5 Examples include the Copenhagen People Power Conference, held on 28 and 29 September 2023; several side events held during the fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council, including on the universality and indivisibility of human rights; side events held at the fifteenth Annual Engaging Business Forum on 11 and 12 October 2023, in Atlanta, United States of America; and the Biennial Conference of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, held in New Delhi, at which the Delhi Declaration was adopted.
B. **Regional dialogues**

23. Regional dialogues, referenced in Human Rights Council resolution 52/19, were held in five regions, providing a forum to exchange on critical themes for each region, and leading to recommendations on ways forward.6

1. **Africa**

24. The Africa-wide high-level Regional Consultation on the Right to Development as a Tool for Transformation and its Nexus with Peace and Security in Africa was held on 8 September 2023 in Addis Ababa. It was convened by the African Union Commission and the OHCHR East Africa Regional Office, gathering 200 participants, including senior representatives of States members of the African Union, including ministers, of whom 22 were from small island developing States, least developed countries or landlocked developing countries, representatives of African Union organs with a human rights mandate, regional economic communities, United Nations entities, civil society, national human rights institutions, youth organizations, academia, the private sector, the diplomatic corps and international development institutions.

25. Participants agreed on the need to leverage the right to development framework to tackle today’s challenges, including those posed by youth unemployment, poverty and inequality, education, debt restructuring, corruption, illicit financial flows and gender inequality. Another key takeaway was the importance of targeted investments in economic, social and cultural rights, including by promoting a human rights economy.

26. Participants called upon the African Union and the United Nations system to redouble efforts to address the challenges in the global financial architecture in order to strengthen the capacity of African countries to promote their development. African countries were encouraged to work for greater inclusivity, gender equality, and socioeconomic and redistributive justice for their people. Participants agreed to take steps to explicitly recognize the right to development and other social, civil, economic and political rights in national policy and legal frameworks, including in constitutions and national development plans, as appropriate. Important steps in that direction would include ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights and making a separate declaration under art. 34 (6) to recognize the competence of the Court to receive cases from individuals and civil society.

2. **Americas**

27. On 25 and 26 October 2023, in Santiago, the OHCHR presences in the Americas organized a regional dialogue on strengthening access to justice by Indigenous Peoples in the region. Participants included more than 90 judges and lawyers, representatives of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations and its human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, human rights defenders, civil society organizations and specialists. The dialogue was opened and closed by ritual ceremonies performed by representatives of Indigenous Peoples.

28. A call was made to advance on laws recognizing Indigenous legal systems and their authority, as well as better coordination with ordinary justice systems and capacity-building of justice operators on indigenous issues.

29. Participants agreed to improve the access of Indigenous Peoples to ordinary justice, including to remedies for any infringement of their individual or collective rights, including by businesses, in full respect of their customs, traditions and legal systems. The need to give more visibility to jurisprudence and recommendations made by United Nations and regional human rights mechanisms, and by national constitutional and supreme courts, was highlighted.

30. The dialogue recognized the importance of launching or accelerating processes of demarcating Indigenous Peoples’ land and territory, respecting indigenous rights and avoiding

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excessive costs and bureaucracy. Lastly, participants emphasized the urgency of creating or strengthening protection systems for human rights defenders, and of investigating and punishing all attacks and threats against them.

31. Calls were made to heed the specific needs and demands of indigenous women and girls, including to ensure that their voices contribute to development and access to justice.

3. Asia-Pacific

32. The Asia-Pacific regional dialogue, hosted by OHCHR, was held on 11 October 2023 in Bangkok, and brought together more than 250 participants, of whom some 150 took part in person and more than 100 online. Discussions focused on regional human rights mechanisms, looking at progress so far in the region, lessons learned from other areas of the world, and ways to move forward.

33. The dialogue brought together States, 11 of which from small island developing countries, least developed countries or landlocked developing countries, regional intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions, United Nations agencies and entities, five special procedure mandate holders, civil society organizations, youth organizations and the three Asia-Pacific members of the Human Rights 75 Youth Advisory Group, academia, and others. The objective was to accelerate the conversation on regional collaboration to advance human rights and take further steps towards a regional human rights mechanism in the spirit of the Vienna Declaration. To date, Asia and the Pacific is the only region that does not have a region-wide human rights mechanism, although mechanisms have developed at the subregional level, like those under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

34. Participants discussed the benefits of regional cooperation, including among national human rights institutions in the region, and the important role of civil society, especially young people and grass-roots peoples’ movements. The dialogue expanded on lessons learned and good practices gleaned from other regions, including the importance of regional inclusiveness, independence and transparency, justiciability and the value of being grounded in the priorities and needs of the people the mechanism represents.

35. Lastly, participants discussed ways forward, concluding that current challenges, including business and human rights and climate change, could provide an opportunity for regional human rights collaboration. While building a consensus reflecting the diversity across the region may prove to be challenging, this could be overcome through a building block approach in the subregions, focusing on local entry points and opportunities. Participants pointed out that the right to development could be a common thread for regional human rights cooperation, and the recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment could provide an opportunity to build a regional human rights accountability system to enforce that right.

4. Europe and Central Asia

36. The regional dialogue held on 20 October 2023, in Brussels, focused on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), OHCHR brought together 100 online viewers, including the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment,7 and 100 in-person participants, including representatives from 30 States, of whom three from small island developing States, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, three regional organizations, five United Nations agencies and a diverse range of partners, including representatives of civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and national human rights institutions.

37. Participants in the dialogue emphasized that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was linked to other human rights. They highlighted the importance of environmental education for children and youth, and that of explicitly incorporating the

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7 In its resolution 55/2, the Human Rights Council changed the name of the mandate to Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
right to a healthy environment into regional instruments, national legislation, and subnational and local processes. There was unanimous recognition of the need for meaningful and informed participation of all rights holders, with particular emphasis on the participation of women, Indigenous Peoples, children, youth and persons with disabilities.

38. The plight of environmental human rights defenders, who are often silenced, tortured, imprisoned or even killed, was highlighted, with delegates expressing the urgency of establishing rapid response mechanisms to protect them. The importance of access to justice was stressed, as was the need for greater criminalization of environmental damage, including at the international level. The issues of the accountability of States and business enterprises and the prevention of conflicts of interest were also flagged.

39. Participants called for greater international cooperation based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities; ambitious targets for environmental action; a commitment to an equitable phasing-out of fossil fuels; and ending the imposition of negative externalities from businesses. Investments for a just transition towards renewable energy and building a sustainable human rights economy were highlighted, with calls being made for financial instruments to have human rights safeguards and for economic and other policies to respect human rights and the environment within the framework of the rule of law.

40. Thirteen participating representatives of organizations, States and civil society shared their pledges as a result of the regional dialogue.

5. Middle East and North Africa

41. On 18 and 19 October 2023, in Cairo, OHCHR, together with the Arab Institute for Human Rights, the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions, the National Council for Human Rights (Egypt) and the League of Arab States, and in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), organized a regional dialogue on the theme “The future of human rights education: towards a new social contract”. Almost 200 people participated, including representatives of States (of whom four were from small island developing States, least developed countries or locked developing countries), national human rights institutions, international organizations, youth and child organizations, academia, civil society organizations active in the education sector, donors and others.

42. Participants discussed the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education and the Arab plan for education in the field of human rights (2022–2026). They identified trends and methodologies to prepare a vision for developing education in a changing world, and how to integrate human rights into pedagogical approaches and in managing educational institutions. They also held an exchange on the elements of a new social contract on education in Arab countries, promoting the integration of human rights education into educational curricula.

43. Participants made several recommendations on establishing a new social contract for education in Arab countries, based on guaranteeing the right to quality education for life. They highlighted quality education as a common good, with meaningful participation of stakeholders as a priority in designing relevant programmes and policies. Further recommendations included ensuring sustainable financing in quality education, harnessing technologies for inclusive and effective education, and training, with special attention to early childhood.

44. The dialogue stressed the role of all stakeholders, including national human rights institutions, to protect the right to education, and the participation of those institutions in advancing the creation of a new social contract on the future of education, urging the competent authorities in countries to advance work in this regard. Lastly, they recommended that a mechanism be established to follow up on and disseminate the recommendations emanating from the meeting.
C. Ratification campaign

45. Promoting ratification of international human rights instruments was an integral component of the initiative, a building block of achieving the universality of human rights. The campaign included strategic advocacy and capacity-building initiatives and advocacy materials. Four were held – in Lebanon, Dakar, Suva and Yaoundé – on the Convention against Torture and Optional Protocol thereto, as were three side events, and one global event for Portuguese-speaking countries in Maputo.

46. The ratification campaign had resulted in 24 new ratifications. In addition, pledges under the initiative were made by 23 States, including 12 States from Africa, three from Asia-Pacific, two from the Americas, four from Europe and two from Central Asia, amounting to an additional 43 ratifications of core human rights treaties and optional protocols. For instance, five pledges were made on the abolition of the death penalty and the ratification of the second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, six on the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, four on the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, four on the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, five on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, three on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, three on the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and three on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Two other pledges by States involved advocacy for ratification of the Conventional against Torture and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

D. Monthly spotlights

47. Each month in 2023, a spotlight was placed on a specific human rights issue enshrined in the Universal Declaration that was in need of concrete and urgent action from States and other duty bearers. Outputs included the issuance of public statements, open letters and communications assets, including on the impact of human rights mechanisms, and events.

48. Drawing on the momentum of the February spotlight on care and support systems, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council each adopted resolutions 8 in which States recognized the need to create gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and age-sensitive care and support systems with full respect of human rights.

49. The sixth intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda was held on 18 January 2024, and confirmed the growing buy-in of the concept of the human rights economy by States, academics, other United Nations entities and civil society organizations, in particular with regard to the need to integrate human rights into reforms of the architecture of international financial institutions.

50. Events linked to the July spotlight on prevention, peace and security were held throughout the year. They included an open debate in the Security Council on “futureproofing trust”, with the participation of the High Commissioner, and an event held jointly by OHCHR, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping and peacemaking activities, which reaffirmed the role of human rights in strengthening the effectiveness of the Organization’s peace and security pillar.

51. The theme on women’s participation in public and political life received significant uptake on social media, including the 16 days of activism. Gender equality and women’s

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8 See General Assembly resolution 77/317 proclaiming 29 October as the International Day of Care and Support and Human Rights Council resolution 54/6.
rights were the subject of the greatest number of pledges made by States in the context of Human Rights 75.

52. Activities in human rights education focused on young people’s advocacy and participation in United Nations processes and stepped up the partnership of OHCHR with civil society bodies, including schools, academia and youth movements, both at headquarters and in the field.

53. The OHCHR Regional Office for Europe ran a series of human rights talks on the monthly theme with the participation of strategic partners; at the request of partners, the talks will continue beyond the initiative.

E. Partnerships and the Youth Advisory Group

54. The Human Rights 75 initiative helped to expand the network of actors engaged in human rights: civil society organizations, economists, tech experts, scientists, academics, artists, philanthropists, philosophers, religious leaders, city officials, policymakers and many more.

55. A round table organized by OHCHR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in June 2023, the month dedicated to women’s participation in political and public life, led to the endorsement of Human Rights 75 pledges by parliamentarians on gender equality and women’s political participation.9

56. The partnership with United Cities and Local Governments built on the achievements of the latter’s global campaign “10, 100, 1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories by 2030”.

57. In particular, reinvigorated support by the philanthropic community and the private sector amplified the Human Rights 75 initiative and galvanized multi-stakeholder partnerships for advancing human rights globally. They mobilized action among their networks, ensuring engagement of global movements, and shed light on the evolving frontiers of human rights.

58. In partnership with Child Rights Connect and its advisory team, OHCHR developed a global survey on children’s aspirations for the future of human rights. Approximately 4,000 children participated, serving as a basis for the children’s vision for human rights.10 The children recommended increasing cooperation with children at the international, national and local levels with on- and off-line opportunities, including by urging countries to develop and implement national laws and policies that make children’s safe participation mandatory; expanding United Nations outreach to include more children and ensure the equitable participation of all children; providing human rights information and training, and financial and technical support; and strengthening local human rights knowledge and awareness.

59. The Youth Advisory Group, consisting of 12 inspiring young activists from around the world, promoted the Human Rights 75 initiative among young people worldwide and integrated youth perspectives into it. A youth declaration on its Human Rights 75 pledge was made.11 The Group called upon Governments, businesses, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, decision-makers and policymakers and those in positions of power to step up for a just, inclusive and sustainable future for human rights for present and future generations. While recognizing that States are the main duty bearers, the Group itself made a commitment to sustaining hope and action to advance human rights and to speak up against human rights violations, injustice, abuse of power, prejudice and discrimination.

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11 See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/youth/hr75/hr-75-youth-declaration.pdf.
F. Outreach activities

60. The Human Rights 75 outreach campaign was aimed at increasing knowledge and raising awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and at inspiring people through stories of individuals and groups who have defended human rights.

61. The campaign included communications assets in several languages, the development of a visual identity, human rights videos (42 films in total) and feature stories, focusing also on monthly thematic spotlights and on the impact of human rights mechanisms, social media engagement products, a variety of promotional materials (both online and printed) and an illustrated version of the Universal Declaration. The initiative, the high-level event and the outreach campaign were widely promoted on social media and digital platforms, reaching some 193.2 million people.

62. Throughout the year, a series of artistic events were organized, igniting a collective spirit of action and remembrance and raising awareness of human rights issues, including the right to a healthy environment, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women, and persons with disabilities, and many more. Events included human rights film festivals (Fiji, Kenya), human rights art competitions, photo exhibitions and workshops (Belgium, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Kenya, Maldives, Peru and Somalia), comedy shows and rap songs or traditional performances (Cambodia, Mozambique, Thailand), contests about human rights (Ukraine) and an event with more than 500 high-school students from public schools in New York City to discuss concrete human rights challenges and solutions in their daily lives. Ten candlelight concerts were also held around the world, in addition to numerous other concerts and events led by communities and young people in different regions.

63. The Open Days at Palais Wilson drew 3,300 visitors (including 300 pupils from schools) to learn more about the Universal Declaration and human rights. Human Rights 75 posters were displayed in the departure hall of Geneva airport and in December 2023 during the Escalade race in Geneva, in which more than 50,000 people participated.

64. On 10 December, a Human Rights Day Concert at the Alhambra Theatre in Geneva was held. The free event featured world-class talent from every continent, representing different artistic genres and human rights themes and was attended by representatives of Member States and the United Nations, as well as members of the general public.

65. The United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights was awarded on 15 December at an event to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration at the General Assembly Hall in New York, organized by OHCHR and the President of the General Assembly.

66. On 16 December, the world premiere of the cantata “Everyone, everywhere” dedicated to the Universal Declaration was held at Carnegie Hall in New York, with the support of OHCHR and the Cecilia Chorus of New York.

67. Furthermore, 35 United Nations information centres, services and offices undertook more than 80 activities in at least 16 languages, in addition to the five official languages of the United Nations. Most activities were organized with the participation of resident coordinators and/or members of United Nations country teams, and in some cases with the involvement of the host Government and civil society. Activities targeted young people, Indigenous Peoples, the Roma community and persons with disabilities.

G. Human Rights 75 high-level event

68. The Human Rights 75 initiative culminated in a high-level event held on 11 and 12 December 2023 in Room XX at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, connected online to hubs in Bangkok, Nairobi and Panama.

69. The high-level event, convened by OHCHR and co-hosted by the Government of Switzerland, gathered more than 130 countries, with all regions represented, of which 26 least developed countries, 11 small island developing States and 12 landlocked developing countries. A total of 16 Heads of State or Government and 58 high-level dignitaries
participated, alongside civil society organizations, human rights defenders, representatives of Parliaments, international and regional organizations, the business community, national human rights institutions and artists.

70. More than 2,200 people participated in person across the four locations, at least 155 of whom were under 25 years of age. The event was accessible to persons with disabilities. More than 1,600 people joined the virtual conference room online, worldwide, and many more through United Nations Web TV. During the two days, a variety of products, including inspiring multimedia materials, were developed, involving the participation of human rights defenders and youth activists.

71. The high-level event provided a unique opportunity for collective reflection on progress made since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, as well as on the numerous failures to uphold human rights, resulting in growing inequalities, cycles of conflict and violence, allegations of double standards and ongoing discrimination, all of which made the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration elusive for many.

72. Day 1 consisted of panel discussions on the universality and indivisibility of human rights and on bolstering the human rights ecosystem; sessions bringing together parties working to defend human rights in different capacities; two pledging sessions by States; and one session dedicated to amplifying the voice of the general public and others on the way forward. Day 2 featured a leaders’ opening panel and four high-level round tables on the future of human rights and peace and security; digital technologies; development and the economy; and the environment and climate.

73. Through its multi-stakeholder format, States, alongside civil society groups, young people, children, business, human rights defenders, artists, philosophers and others, called for a recommitment to the values underpinning the Universal Declaration.

74. Building on the year’s consultations and activities, the discussions held over the two days demonstrated the existence of a strong global movement for human rights. The exchanges showed how people are mobilizing to denounce the atrocities they see, contributing to a growing human rights conscience around the globe. The potential of young people, who increasingly accept and refer to the international human rights framework, as advocates for human rights was also stressed. Efforts were, however, still needed to increase access to human rights education and to broaden engagement, including by building alliances between States and civil society organizations to advance human rights, as witnessed at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and the World Conference on Women in Beijing. By the same token, civic space and human rights must be protected; participants therefore called for strategies to encourage positive engagement by States with human rights defenders.

75. With conflicts raging and growing across the globe, peace and security and conflict prevention were central to the discussions during the two days, including during the high-level round table held on 12 December. Participants recalled the importance of learning the lessons of the past and of reclaiming the humanity of all through full respect for international human rights law, including the right to life, and international humanitarian law. Recalling that human rights violations often precede outbreaks of violence, participants stressed the role of human rights in conflict prevention, with human rights analysis critical to early warning. Crucially, participants recommended that the human rights ecosystem be empowered to feed systematically into early warning and prevention processes. In other situations of violence, such as those relating to gang violence or organized crime, participants stressed that law enforcement responses should comply fully with human rights standards, by preserving the rule of law and avoiding overreach and oversecuritization.

76. Another key message conveyed over the two days focused on the need to urgently accelerate efforts to counter inequalities, including by anchoring the economy in human rights. Specifically, participants in the high-level round table on development and the economy emphasized strengthening fiscal reliance, improving international cooperation on tax and illicit financial flows, and encouraging the care economy, social safety nets and the ring-fencing of social spending. Calls were made for improving the multilateral framework for debt relief and restructuring, which would prioritize social spending, sustainable
development and climate action over debt servicing, and for building up human rights guardrails in the working and reform of international financial institutions and architecture. The participants in the round table also flagged that developed countries should increase their official development assistance and other forms of international cooperation, and the specific challenges that small island developing States, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries faced and had to be addressed.

77. The environment and climate change were other critical challenges discussed during the two days, with clear calls made to ground environmental action, including on climate change, in human rights. Participants agreed on the need to cooperate on the normative advancement of the right to a healthy environment in domestic, regional and international legal frameworks and policies, including through the ratification of existing treaties and the consideration of new ones, and the introduction of effective mechanisms and policies to operationalize the right. States must also live up to their climate finance commitments, including for adaptation, loss and damage. Some participants also emphasized the need to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy, equitably phasing out public subsidies that cause environmental harm, and that the best available science must guide decision-making.

78. In exchanges held during the high-level event, participants also stressed the need for States and companies to put human rights front and centre when developing, using and regulating digital technology. While such technology, including generative artificial intelligence, offers potential for advancing human rights, the risks of human rights harm are real, including of further exclusion of millions from the benefits of the digital era. The value of international human rights standards was stressed, as was the need to shift to regulation and binding industry-wide standards. States with limited resources also must be properly represented at the table. As a way forward, participants agreed to back the Secretary-General’s recommendation on establishing a digital human rights advisory mechanism, supported by OHCHR, to assist States and others in developing human rights-based approaches to the development, use and governance of digital technology.

79. The need to tackle impunity resonated throughout the high-level event. Seeking accountability for human rights violations and pursuing transitional justice were crucial to address grievances which, if unaddressed, could trigger instability and conflict. Participants also called for greater accountability for environmental degradation, including climate change, noting that the elements of a transitional justice approach could inform action; for instance, an international commission of inquiry into the triple planetary crisis could help to explain, memorialize and address the crisis, while also implementing measures to avoid its repetition. Leadership on reparatory justice for the legacies of slavery and colonialism, informed by the perspectives of people of African descent, was also urged.

80. A robust call for an end to discrimination and for the full respect of everyone’s right to participate meaningfully in public life was made throughout the two days, as a vital tool to restore trust in public institutions, nurture social cohesion and pave the way for effective solutions to common challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring this right for those traditionally marginalized and excluded across all areas, for instance by promoting the participation of women in the negotiation of peace agreements, or of indigenous communities in environmental decision-making. By the same token, participants urged full respect for the freedoms of expression and of assembly, which included timely action by States and companies to ensure an open, safe and inclusive digital space.

81. The need to ensure meaningful inclusion of youth and children in decision-making was also clearly expressed, including by the Bangkok hub. Concretely, this could be achieved through well-resourced and transparent youth consultative councils or by addressing the deficit in youth representation in politics. Participants furthermore highlighted the need for radical improvements in the enjoyment of human rights by children in every aspect of their lives, also urging strengthened access to education, including human rights education.

82. Lastly, strengthening the human rights system reverberated as a critical message: a robust ecosystem and human rights pillar were in this sense a foundational force for effective solutions to common challenges. The remarkable evolution of the human rights system was something in which the global community took pride and sought to nurture further. The need for global and regional human rights institutions and mechanisms to continue to innovate for
greater effectiveness and inclusivity was stressed; some participants proposed expanding existing practices of bringing global and regional mechanisms together in a more systematic manner. The critical place of civil society within this system was clearly echoed. Ensuring effective and constructive engagement by duty bearers with the system was also emphasized, as was the need to pursue universality, addressing human rights crises wherever they arose with equal concern and consistency of approach, with an end to selectivity and double standards.

**H. Pledges**

83. One of the key objectives of the Human Rights 75 initiative was to garner pledges to bring about concrete change towards greater enjoyment of human rights for all. The High Commissioner invited all actors, including State institutions (executive, legislative and judicial authorities), regional organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, United Nations entities, international financial institutions, business, young people and others to make a pledge.

84. Pledges were announced during two dedicated sessions at the high-level event, with more than 130 States taking the floor. From the Panama hub, the Minister for Women’s Affairs announced the State’s pledge, which was followed by a high-profile event, co-organized with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with experts from Latin America analysing the region’s contribution to human rights, and the major challenges and top priorities for women’s rights, Indigenous Peoples, business and human rights, freedom of expression and the fight against corruption and impunity since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration. From the Nairobi hub, the Attorney-General of Kenya delivered pledges based on national and regional consultations held during the year. This was followed by a side event on the theme “the power of arts for human rights”, which explored how art, music and creative media could be a force for advancing human rights, and featured two prominent musicians, Eric Wainaina and Juliani.

85. The uptake on Human Rights 75 pledges was strong, with 782 pledges made by different actors. A total of 520 pledges were received from 142 States, in addition to seven joint pledges, while 255 pledges were received from other actors: 111 from civil society organizations; 50 from United Nations entities; 25 from intergovernmental organizations; 44 from national human rights institutions; 19 from the business community and six from others.

86. Nearly 80 per cent of States presented or joined a Human Rights 75 pledge, many of which were concrete, timebound and with potential to be transformative. In many instances, OHCHR, including its country and regional presences, supported States and regional mechanisms in the preparation and adoption of these pledges.\(^\text{12}\)

87. A total of 72 pledges were made on women’s rights and gender equality, including on increasing women’s participation in the labour market and leadership roles, bridging the digital divide, increasing donor funding on gender equality and strengthening feminist foreign policies; 52 were made on strengthening economic, social and cultural rights, including ensuring universal health care, promoting access to education and social protection, and eradicating extreme poverty; 45 were made on justice and the rule of law, including access to justice and transitional justice; 44 were made on youth and children’s rights, including on the participation of young people and children and their engagement in policymaking; 32 were made on the environment and climate change, including on promoting the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment, on mitigating risks and ensuring climate justice; while 32 States pledged to take steps on the rights of persons with disabilities, including by amending legislation, creating ombuds institutions, improving representation in the labour market and protecting rights in armed conflict. A total of 18 States made concrete pledges to either engage with or provide financial support for OHCHR. Some 17 pledges were made on business and human rights, including on adopting national strategies or legislation on due diligence. Sixteen States pledged to establish or strengthen national human rights institutions.

\(^{12}\) See the OHCHR pledges page. The pledges made are also searchable in the Universal Human Rights Index (https://uhri.ohchr.org/en).
rights institutions. Fourteen pledges were made on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and 12 States pledged to protect the rights of older people, including through efforts to open negotiations for a binding treaty and to adopt national plans. Nine pledges were made on combating racism, including through the development of national plans and by establishing institutions to deal with the legacies of the past.

88. Morocco, Paraguay and Portugal made a collective pledge to work towards the institutionalization of cooperation, partnership, dialogue and the exchange of expertise and experience among national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up through the establishment of an international network of these mechanisms in 2024.¹³

89. Other State pledges related to civic space, combating hate speech, digital rights, migrants, conflict and multilateralism and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

90. Pledges made by other actors were also noteworthy; for instance, the B-Tech Community of Practice pledged to look to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for guidance on human rights due diligence and to encourage its partners to respect human rights by doing likewise.

91. OHCHR pledged to be steadfast in its support for partners, in particular States, to fulfil their pledges in accordance with their international human rights obligations.

92. Effective follow-up to Human Rights 75 pledges, by all stakeholders, is a key component of maintaining the momentum generated by the Human Rights 75 initiative and part of the effort of achieving positive change in situations of human rights.

93. States can provide information on their progress in implementing pledges in the context of their review by a human rights mechanism, such as by the treaty bodies or in their reports prepared for the universal periodic review, through their voluntary national review of experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or at the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council. Close consultation with stakeholders, including civil society and the communities concerned, in the process of pledge implementation is greatly encouraged. The special procedures of the Council are encouraged to take into account the pledges made in their mandates.

94. At the country level, OHCHR, together with the United Nations system as a whole, is engaging to support pledge implementation. OHCHR country and regional programmes for 2024 include dedicated support for pledge implementation, as relevant. OHCHR will also give visibility to progress made in pledge implementation on a regular basis. Furthermore, strategic dialogues with United Nations entities are being pursued during which pledge implementation is promoted, and OHCHR is engaging with business entities to urge follow-up to their commitments.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

95. The Human Rights 75 initiative offered a unique opportunity for collective reflection on the remarkable progress made since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on some of the ongoing failures to protect the human rights of all, and on what is needed in looking to the future in order to effectively address growing challenges. What emerged was the confirmation that the many human rights challenges do not reflect a “failure” of human rights themselves, but rather the need for greater implementation.

96. Acknowledging the many, and growing, challenges facing the global community, stakeholders expressed their recommitment to the universality and indivisibility of human rights. For human rights to be truly universal, all must be enjoyed on an equal footing, while selectivity and double standards on the human rights agenda must be rejected. It is precisely when human rights are under attack that they should be most

¹³ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/udhr/publishingimages/75udhr/Morocco_Paraguay_Portugal%20%28Joint%29_EN.pdf.
vigorously defended by all, including States, international institutions and human rights defenders. The need for more dialogue, more creative solutions and wider partnerships was echoed, with young people demanding meaningful and decisive participation in decision-making.

97. Drawing on the rich and extensive engagement with diverse actors throughout the initiative and the outcomes of the high-level event, the High Commissioner prepared a vision statement (see annex), comprising key messages to ensure that human rights are at the centre of renewed action for peace; economies that work for people and the planet; effective governance; and guardrails for digital and scientific progress. The High Commissioner hopes that these messages will be integrated into the Pact for the Future, the outcome document to be adopted at the Summit of the Future, to be held on 22 and 23 September 2024 in New York.

98. As stressed by leaders in the opening panel discussion on day 2 of the high-level event, addressing the world’s current challenges, including conflict, climate change and inequalities, requires political will, increased collaboration, frank dialogue and a strengthened human rights system.

99. Fundamentally, the Human Rights 75 initiative helped to confirm the value of grounding national and international governance systems in human rights. To honour leaders’ pronouncements and people’s calls for transformation in our economies, in our relationship with the planet and with digital technologies, and to pave the way for true, lasting peace, human rights must be embraced as a path for solutions. Upholding and advancing the full spectrum of human rights, including the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, can help to craft durable solutions. Lasting peace and security are dependent on human rights. On the one hand, human rights violations are often at the root of grievances and conflict; on the other, the realization of all human rights is a key ingredient to building sustainable peace based on equality and justice. Ultimately, they represent the enduring – universal – desire for equality, freedom and justice.

100. Human rights are also a blueprint for more effective and networked multilateral cooperation, because they represent the values that unify and bridge divides.

101. To that end, a robust, effective, impartial and transparent human rights system is vital. Peace and security, development and human rights are the pillars of the United Nations system and are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Recognizing their equal value and importance includes a commitment to strengthen the human rights pillar and to ensure a significant increase in resources for OHCHR to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively. OHCHR will continue to innovate in its ways of working, partnerships and networks to deliver on its mission, as captured in its own Human Rights 75 pledge, to be a trusted partner to all on human rights.

102. In that spirit, and in recognition that the Human Rights 75 initiative offered a valuable opportunity to take stock and to look to the future, the High Commissioner recommends that States:

(a) Express their recommitment to the universality and indivisibility of all human rights, and prioritize the implementation of the full spectrum of human rights, including the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, without discrimination of any kind;

(b) Ensure effective follow-up to Human Rights 75 pledges, in line with States’ international human rights obligations and in close consultation with civil society organizations, United Nations entities, the communities concerned and other stakeholders, and report back on progress to the High Commissioner, as well as in the context of review by human rights mechanisms and at regular sessions of the Human Rights Council;

(c) Recognize human rights as a path for solutions to the world’s most pressing challenges and for revitalized multilateralism, including to transform our economies, our relationship with the planet and with digital technologies, and to pave
the way for lasting peace; and as such, place human rights at the centre of national, regional and international governance systems;

(d) Recognize the equal value and importance of peace and security, development and human rights by committing to strengthen the human rights pillar so it is robust, effective, impartial and transparent, including by ensuring a significant increase in resources for OHCHR to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively.

103. The High Commissioner invites all United Nations human rights mechanisms, United Nations entities, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, academia and other stakeholders to promote the messages and takeaways from the Human Rights 75 initiative and to ensure effective follow-up to their own Human Rights 75 pledges.
Annex

Human rights: a path for solutions

Vision statement offered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk

Renewing our commitment to human rights

1. 75 years ago, the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signalled a new era of progress towards human dignity and agency for all. In retrospect, we have come a long way on that journey, but we are at a precarious moment and cannot take things for granted. With us, devastating conflicts, the triple planetary crisis, skyrocketing inequalities, and new powerful technologies whose risks are yet to be grasped.

2. As we confront these challenges, we recall the Declaration’s conviction that, no matter the context, it is through respect for human rights we craft a better future for “our human family”. In this spirit, I offer this Vision Statement as a contribution to the Summit of the Future and as signposts for the years to come. Its outlook has been informed by an extensive engagement with diverse actors all across the world throughout the year-long Human Rights 75 Initiative, which concluded in December 2023 at a High-Level Event hosted simultaneously in Geneva, Bangkok, Nairobi, Panama and globally online.

3. As an expression of shared values across cultures, the Declaration represents our common heritage, a testament to our universal human condition and our equal worth. Throughout Human Rights 75 we heard a resounding message of renewed commitment to its principles and to the greater cause of human rights.

4. In December 2023 we recorded over 770 pledges to take transformative action, including from 150 States from across the world. The issues covered a wide range of areas, from ratification of human rights treaties, law reform, strengthening national human rights institutions to action on equality for women or on business and human rights—a vivid illustration of the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of the human rights framework. The range of actors pledging, with 255 pledges from business, intergovernmental organisations, national human rights institutions, parliaments, civil society organisations and others—a reminder of the importance of a whole-of-society approach alongside the duties of States under international law.

5. In a world increasingly characterized by fragmentation, Human Rights 75 allowed a rare opportunity for collective reflection on the trajectory for human rights, its successes and failures. And on the current crisis of implementation. It is precisely at these moments, where freedoms are so imperilled, that the Declaration and the global human rights framework it seeded are most needed. Division, unequal outcomes and unsolvable crises are not an inevitability.

6. We see a remarkable level of support for human rights worldwide, despite some attempts to discredit them. The global survey undertaken by the OSF Barometer, for example, found a significant majority of respondents consider human rights to have been a “force for good”, equating them with personal values. Illustrating what we see every day in our work. Human rights have the power to unify us at a time when we need to come together to contend with the existential challenges we face as humanity.

7. We must use this moment for reclaiming our human rights. This is also a moment for critical self-reflection, including by my Office and the entire human rights system. It is in no one’s interest to instrumentalize human rights for political ends or to disregard them cynically. This will only threaten social cohesion, potentially unleash more destruction and chaos, and undermine international cooperation.

8. When the Declaration will reach its centenary, our world will be in so many ways unrecognizable. Reshaped by megatrends, more unknown unknowns and intensifying
complexity. Two paths open up. One of enlightened cooperation and solidarity, stable and seeking balance with our natural world. The other, unmistakably dystopian.

**Delivering on the Promise of Human Rights**

9. Our choice is clear – embrace and trust the full power of human rights as the path to the world we want: more peaceful, equal and sustainable. To do this, we must affirm human rights as protection – a guardian against abuse, a guarantor of accountability and the ultimate tool of prevention. But we must also understand human rights as a propulsive force to meet today’s and tomorrow’s challenges. Unlocking fresh ideas and tools, generating the resilience needed for the shocks we face and those yet to come. This entails honest, constructive, albeit at times uncomfortable and difficult, conversations. This is how societies can evolve, heal and change – and our global community overcome tensions and forge solutions in the common interest.

10. For governments, human rights offer a comprehensive, long-term, problem-solving formula – a blueprint for effective governance. Transcending ideologies and divisions, they open up space for productive cooperation. For individuals, rights are a moral and legal anchor for their aspirations to a life in dignity and justice, a profound acknowledgment of their equality and a source of hope. For youth, in particular, they offer reassurance that the social contract can be reimagined for their futures.

11. We heard powerful testimony throughout Human Rights 75 of how human rights approaches, even in our contested environment, are driving social transformation. It is important to recognise that societies are in a constant state of evolution. Points of divergence are a part of that, and continuous dialogue is therefore critical to address them. Human rights are at the centre of such dialogue and should be at the core of all policy areas at local, national and regional level. And at the global level too, human rights are the connective tissue.

12. We must use the momentum from Human Rights 75 to resolve to do things differently, conscious of the many lessons from the wins and failures in the decades since the Declaration’s adoption. This means embracing fully *all human rights* – civil, political, economic, social and cultural, as well as the right to development, the right to a healthy environment and the right to peace - moving resolutely away from the unhelpful artificial divides erected in the past. Human rights must be at the centre of rebalancing our economies so they start working for all people and for the planet. Human rights can also free us from the impasse on addressing the triple planetary crisis and equip us to manage successfully the technology revolution. We must, at long last, act on their blueprint for ending cycles of bloodshed.

13. As we move forward, eight messages from Human Rights 75 stand out. These have also informed my Office’s strategic direction and priorities, embedded in our Organisational Management Plan 2024-2027, and will guide our longer-term thinking.

1. **We have a strong global movement for human rights: it must be supported and given the space to innovate**

14. The vibrancy, dynamism and diversity of this movement underlines the continued legitimacy of human rights, their universal nature and their resilience for the future. An ever-expanding network of actors engaged in human rights – civil society organisations, environmentalists, economists, tech experts, scientists, academics, artists, philosophers, religious leaders, city officials, policymakers, philanthropists and many more – is generating new entry points for understanding, collaboration and progress. The plurality of perspectives, experiences and expertise, a source of strength. Amongst this diversity lies the opportunity to construct alliances between civil society and States on key human rights goals.

15. At the core of this movement are individuals and communities whose lived experience and concerns must drive the human rights agenda locally and globally. Everyone must have a say in shaping priorities and action. Stepping up availability of human rights education is critical, empowering individuals. The whole of society needs to be engaged in dialogue on human rights. We need to keep broadening engagement, reaching out to the silent majority who support human rights, as well as those who question its universality or relevance. We must keep working on framing new narratives with widespread resonance, making tools for
effective action more accessible, and identifying novel platforms and messengers. The worlds of art, culture and sport hold enormous potential here; a reminder of the centrality of cultural rights, as crucial to social ties as they are to individual identity.

16. For the human rights movement to flourish we need to confront the unacceptable trend of declining civic space in every region. Governments must put an end to regressive and repressive behaviours that suppress freedom of expression, association and assembly. And they must ensure human rights defenders, including environmental activists, are protected from all forms of intimidation and attack. We need to explore strategies for encouraging positive engagement by States with human rights defenders.

2. **To end cycles of conflict put human rights at the centre of prevention and peacebuilding**

17. Human rights transcend politics and ideological mindsets, only ever taking the side of humanity. This is a fundamental truth we must keep coming back to. The principles of international human rights and humanitarian law are our collective conscience, the guarantors of our very humanity. They must be respected without fail.

18. Human rights and peace are intimately connected. Human rights are at once a tool for prevention of violence, essential safeguards even amidst the conduct of hostilities, and a path to sustainable peace grounded in accountability and justice.

19. Widespread and systematic human rights violations often precede outbreaks of violence, making human rights analysis critical to early warning. Inequalities, alongside unaddressed grievances and exclusion, must be recognised properly as a strategic risk to peace and security. We must ensure that the human rights ecosystem in its fullness – UN, regional, civil society – is empowered to feed systematically into early warning and prevention processes.

20. One route could be through regular briefings to the Peacebuilding Commission. Another, through closer links between the human rights ecosystem and the Security Council. Ultimately, though, such initiatives will be futile if early warning does not lead to early action. We see repeatedly the profound human cost of ignoring warnings and concrete recommendations on prevention – along with the damage to multilateralism. We must heed the lessons of the past.

21. This includes ensuring a central role for human rights in shaping the future of UN peace operations and special political missions, and more generally in peace agreements. In all peace work, human rights are by nature inclusive, necessitating the meaningful participation of women, young people and others routinely excluded. Accountability and transitional justice are integral to human rights, as are their capacity to nurture compassion, healing and trust when societies emerge from conflict.

22. It is important to recognise that the human cost in other situations of violence, such as those related to gang violence or organized crime, can be as devastating as armed conflicts. In the long-term, stability can only be achieved through tackling the root causes, including poverty, social and economic discrimination and corruption. It is essential that law enforcement responses comply fully with human rights standards - preserving the rule of law and averting overreach along with over-securitization.

3. **We must transform our economies with equality and sustainability at the core**

23. Our economies are failing us. Mind-boggling inequalities, unbelievable wealth enjoyed by a privileged elite, alongside grinding poverty experienced by millions. This is a human rights crisis. Through the Human Rights Economy concept, we can perform the reset so urgently needed. Looking beyond profit, the short term and the interests of the few, the Human Rights Economy can deliver for people and planet because it is grounded in everybody’s human rights.

24. States have an obligation to realize progressively economic, social and cultural rights through the application of maximum available resources. Human rights are integral to the 2030 Agenda, from the rights to food and water to the rights to health, including sexual and reproductive health, and education. Resolute action is needed to reverse regression in recent years.
25. Concrete ways for anchoring the economy in human rights include: the use of disaggregated data to illuminate intersecting, structural and systemic forms of discrimination; the adoption of metrics beyond GDP to reveal a fuller picture of inequalities and well-being; participatory and inclusive budget-setting processes; prioritizing the rights of women and girls, given the impact of their disproportionate role in unpaid care work and the informal sector; and treating as an investment in society, care and support for children, people with disabilities and older people which preserves their agency.

26. Strengthening of fiscal self-reliance through optimizing progressive tax policies, preventing illegal financial flows and tackling corruption, as well as maximizing official development assistance, result in a public purse better resourced to support institutions and services that advance enjoyment of human rights. More effective international cooperation on both tax and illicit financial flows is also needed.

27. For many countries, though, the fiscal space to invest in education, health, social protection and other public services is thin due to crippling debt burdens. Prioritizing spending in these areas, including through ringfencing, in order to meet human rights commitments are economic decisions that should not be undercut by debt repayments.

28. By respecting the primacy of human rights, we can shape an improved multilateral framework for debt relief and restructuring which would prioritize social spending, sustainable development and climate action over debt servicing. Alongside this, we need more effective human rights perspectives and guardrails both in the workings and reform of the International Financial Institutions and their architecture.

29. Similarly, reframing the relationship between business and society is long overdue. Corporate power continues to grow, largely unchecked. There needs to be a considerable step-up in implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We need to build on the trend of making corporate due diligence for human rights harms, including those related to environmental degradation, mandatory through legislation. Efforts by those businesses who do choose to invest in human rights are welcome.

4. Environmental action, including on climate change, must be grounded in human rights

30. For too long, the health of our planet has been sacrificed for ill-considered and inequitable material gain. The impacts of our triple planetary crisis are equally unfair, with the severest effects landing on the most vulnerable and least responsible. We must build on the remarkable progress on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment: through furthering its recognition in national, regional and international legal frameworks; the ratification of existing human rights and environmental instruments along with consideration of new ones; and the introduction of effective mechanisms and policies to operationalize this right.

31. The growing trend of human rights-related strategic litigation on the climate crisis has much potential to drive significant shifts in policy and practice on the part of governments and business. It may also generate even greater momentum for other accountability initiatives, on ecocide, for example - discussed in the following message. Children and young people are at the forefront of these remarkable litigation efforts. Their commitment is humbling. But none of this should have fallen on them. The responsibility lies squarely with those who hold power.

32. States must, without further delay, live up to their climate finance commitments, including for adaptation, loss and damage. Human rights require mobilization of adequate resources for global climate finance in an equitable manner. Countries that benefited least from the industrial revolution are left without the support necessary to protect their people and their environments. Communities feel abandoned, including those who face the loss of habitable land and possible displacement. Not only is this lack of international solidarity deeply unfair, it is a threat to our collective survival.

33. Human rights must be at the centre of all climate action. These principles are key to ensuring the transition to a low carbon economy is a just one, through placing people at the core of all policymaking and programmes. Difficult choices will have to be made, not least on jobs, and it is critical that these fully consider the needs and human rights of all affected.
The Human Rights Economy approach is integral to all of this; for example, through addressing inequalities, tackling unsustainable consumption and production practices, repurposing budget-setting processes, as well as underlining the need for an early deadline for the phase-out of public subsidies that result in environmental harm.

34. Environmental policies must be informed by a diverse range of voices, including those of Indigenous Peoples who often play a critical role in protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, yet have suffered repeated violations of their human rights, including to their traditional knowledge, lands and resources. We need to have robust and consistent standards governing participation, inclusion, safety, as well as free, prior and informed consent for Indigenous Peoples, for all processes, including those at the UN.

5. Governance must be responsive: through full participation and by ending impunity

35. For trust to be restored in public institutions, everyone must be able to exercise their right to participate meaningfully in public life. Essential for agency in our lives, participation also fosters a sense of having a stake in society, nurturing social cohesion. We must urgently end all forms of discrimination, notably racial discrimination, discrimination against women and girls, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, older people, as well as against minorities. Such practices leave people behind, marginalize individuals and communities, and ultimately corrode our societies.

36. Meaningful participation also helps shape effective solutions. By encouraging input from across society, solutions can be targeted to actual need, benefit from varied perspectives and expertise, and attract widespread support. In an increasingly complex world, societies that fail to cultivate open debate and the free flow of ideas, including through free and independent media, will inevitably risk atrophy and instability. A vibrant civic space is essential for all of us to thrive. This includes a digital town square that is not dominated by hate speech and disinformation.

37. Online and offline, we need to move away from polarizing rhetoric that can only divide; instead valuing respectful discussion which creates the space for exploration, innovation, mutual understanding and ‘more in common’ narratives even in the midst of free expression of sharply diverging views. Connection, community and solidarity are proven conduits for dialogue, collaboration and solutions. We must reject the dehumanization of ‘the other’. The vilification of migrants, refugees, political opponents, victims of conflict – a list that grows longer by the day – puts individuals and our societies at risk.

38. Elections are a litmus test of civic space and of effective governance. Polls are being conducted in an era where both deepfakes and disinformation can be generated more easily and effectively; in a context where the politics of distraction and division, as well as violence, are becoming familiar precursors to the ballot. States and societies cannot afford to fail this test. They must seize the opportunity to strengthen the social fabric and build a national agenda through an engaged process. Rights, such as freedom of expression and of assembly, must be fully respected, including through timely action by governments and companies to ensure an open, safe and inclusive digital space.

39. We must also urgently address widespread impunity. Good governance is dependent on holding accountable those responsible for human rights violations. Beyond an individual remedy, access to justice plays a broader, crucial role: preventing the simmering of unaddressed grievances capable of triggering instability and conflict. It is in every State’s interest to invest properly in institutions that support the rule of law, from independent and well-resourced courts to transitional justice mechanisms and national human rights institutions.

40. Governments must also ensure effective routes for holding corporate actors to account for human rights harms. The accountability gap is apparent in relation to corporate responsibility, along with that of States and individuals, when it comes to environmental harms. This calls for innovative approaches. The potential of criminal law to deter harmful conduct and provide remediation deserves exploration, including efforts to establish the international crime of ecocide. We should also consider transitional justice approaches; for example, through an international commission of inquiry to investigate the causes of
environmental damage, both as an act of memorialization and in order to issue practical recommendations to States.

41. Environmental harms illustrate starkly the accountability deficit endured by Indigenous Peoples. Effective measures to address this include the integration of customary law into plural legal systems and facilitating greater visibility of human rights caselaw from national, regional and international bodies and mechanisms.

42. We also need to see enlightened leadership on reparatory justice for the legacies of slavery and colonialism, fully guided by the perspectives of people of African descent. This is as much about shaping our present and future as it is about addressing, at long last, the wrongs of the past.

6. *Human ingenuity must be in the service of humanity: technology and science that uplifts all*

43. Unprecedented advances in digital technology, including generative Artificial Intelligence, offer us previously unimaginable opportunities to move forward on the enjoyment of human rights and contribute to rescuing the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, the negative societal impacts are already with us and proliferating, and human rights harms are almost inevitably going to grow given the largely unregulated nature of some of these technologies. The enormous digital divide means that millions are shut out from the benefits of the digital era with serious consequences for accessing healthcare, education, employment and other potential opportunities.

44. Placing human rights at the centre of how we develop, use and regulate technology is absolutely critical to our response to these risks. The human rights framework – as developed and applied over decades – constitutes an essential foundation for addressing the many questions raised in the digital sphere, including with regard to our privacy, our dignity and our voice. These standards span continents and contexts, moving us beyond ethics to legal obligations.

45. We need to shift decisively to regulation and binding industry-wide standards rather than relying on tech companies to self-govern, with robust provisions on due diligence, transparency and accountability. In areas where the risk to human rights is particularly high, such as law enforcement, the only option is to pause until sufficient safeguards are introduced.

46. A human rights approach requires inclusive and participatory processes which empower everyone affected by the roll-out of new tech - the online, the offline and the disconnected – to shape the digital environment; with a particular effort to reach out to those most often marginalized. States with limited resources must be properly at the table. But dynamics around technology reflect what is happening in society more broadly. Where civil society space is under pressure, the prospects for inclusive governance of technology are poor.

47. We have already developed a deep understanding of how human rights apply to digital technologies but face a disconnect with the capacity of key actors to translate this into practice. One way to bridge this is to establish, through the Global Digital Compact, a Digital Human Rights Advisory Mechanism. Supported by my Office, this service could provide an invaluable resource for States, companies and others as they develop legislation, policy and practices.

48. It is crucial that States pay greater attention to the right to benefit from science. This includes protecting the space for scientific enquiry and for evidence-based debate and decision-making, including on environmental crises - governments and industry must take decisive steps to end disinformation, attacks on experts and conflicts of interest. We also need to see greater opportunities for public involvement in decisions on the direction and use of scientific innovations, as well as a step-up in international cooperation on technology transfer, knowledge-sharing and financing.
7. *It is time to go beyond voice: youth and children must be included meaningfully in decision-making and we must act on behalf of future generations*

49. The need to hear from young people, both nationally and internationally, is well acknowledged. But as the Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration makes so clear, access must also come with the ability to influence outcomes, for all young people, in all their diversity. By opening up meaningful participation for youth at every level of governance, States create the conditions for better decision-making and stronger outcomes. National youth consultative councils, if well-resourced and transparent on impact, are an important way forward. The deficit in youth representation in politics also needs to be addressed; for many countries, this points towards lowering age requirements for voting and holding office. The new UN Youth Office will open up another route for greater integration of youth perspectives.

50. The ability of youth to lead meaningful lives, including through active citizenship, is being undermined by the crisis in education. The Secretary General’s Vision Statement on Transforming Education outlines practical steps for addressing this. Human rights standards, in particular on equality and on the use of public resources, are integral to achieving the goal of accessible, quality education for children and youth that is fit for purpose in our rapidly changing world. Attention should be paid to coverage of environment-related issues given the disproportionate impact of the triple planetary crisis on younger generations.

51. We must drive radical improvements in the enjoyment of human rights by children - in every aspect of their lives, from social protection through to the implications of the digital world. Children bear the brunt of every crisis, most painfully in conflicts. Meaningful and equitable engagement of children in all their diversity in decisions concerning them at the local, national and international levels is integral to the full realization of their human rights. Capacity-building and support, including human rights education, are essential to empowering children and realizing their vision of a fairer, safer and happier world for all with human rights at the centre.

52. Looking further ahead, we must all - especially governments and the corporate sector – become more vigilant in our responsibility as caretakers for future generations. Long-term approaches which make effective use of preparedness and strategic foresight should become the norm. The Declaration on Future Generations being negotiated as part of the Summit of the Future is a crucial opportunity to safeguard the rights and interests of future generations, including their enjoyment of the right to a healthy environment.

8. *None of this can be achieved without strengthening our human rights system.*

53. Given the growth and complexity of issues before them, global and regional human rights institutions and mechanisms must continue to innovate for the purposes of effectiveness, accessibility, interconnectedness, transparency, responsiveness and inclusivity. This will require deeper collaboration to reduce dissonance and duplication, encouraging instead greater coordination. One concrete option is to expand on existing approaches which bring global and regional mechanisms together in a more systematic manner. We should pursue the openings for moving towards establishment of human rights mechanisms in every region.

54. Technology also has a vital role to play; for example, in managing and, potentially, sharing securely the information received by human rights bodies and other mechanisms. We also need to take human rights recommendations to people. This could be through meetings hosted in country bringing together the public, civil society and government to develop concrete plans for implementation. Building and enhancing partnerships, including creative alliances, will be integral in ensuring the effectiveness and resilience of the human rights system.

55. We must recognise that as the key institution for the UN’s human rights pillar, my Office remains too small to fulfil properly its mandate, to meet demands from States and other actors, as well as respond to the range of challenges faced by the global community. An expansion of staffing, in particular in our country and regional presences, would upgrade our capacity to support peoples and governments more comprehensively. It has long been recognized that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and
mutually reinforcing pillars of the United Nations. This recognition must now be matched by adequate resources for the human rights pillar.

56. To enable my Office and the human rights system to work effectively, impartially and transparently, across all human rights – including the right to development, the right to a healthy environment and the right to peace – requires a significant strengthening progressively, in a predictable and sustainable manner, of our regular and voluntary budget resources. Alongside this, we will continue to innovate our ways of working, cultivate partnerships and develop networks. This includes bolstering our human rights coordination role in the UN system, including through the Agenda for Protection.

57. The long-term health of all human rights institutions and mechanisms depends ultimately on the extent of support from States. Our human rights architecture is their creation: an acknowledgement of the need for international bodies and mechanisms as both guardians of individual freedoms and as guides for all stakeholders on our journey to shaping stable, peaceful and prosperous societies through respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights. Conversations around human rights are often sensitive. But they are indispensable. No country has a monopoly of wisdom on human rights nor a spotless record. We all learn from each other. It is only through such dialogue that lasting change can become a reality, and further division, violence and chaos averted.

58. The remarkable evolution of the human rights system is something we should as a global community take pride in and seek to nurture further. This system is essential for the continued legitimacy of multilateralism. All duty bearers must engage with recommendations constructively. They must treat human rights crises wherever they occur with equal concern and consistency of approach, breathing more life into the principle of universality. We need an end to selectivity and double standards.

Our Commitment to Each Other

59. In pursing this vision for human rights, we stand in solidarity with all those denied their rights and pay tribute to the bravery of human rights defenders, past and present. We must draw determination from their courage to craft this new era for human rights, knowing that a long-term vision yields countless dividends today. And that a connecting thread runs between our actions and outcomes now and the world we will end up with in decades ahead.

60. The challenges are many and escalating, but progress is never linear. Through putting trust in our shared values and in each other, we can resolve to curb our most damaging reflexes. Choosing, instead, to keep moving, with even more conviction and ambition, towards the goal of individuals, societies and a global community thriving in alignment with our deepest values. We must seed that better future now.