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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation and the importance of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution [74/151](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to invite Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to present further practical proposals and ideas that would contribute to the strengthening of United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation, based on the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity, and to submit a comprehensive report on the question to the Assembly at its seventy-sixth session. The present report includes practical proposals and ideas on how to strengthen United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation, drawing on relevant inputs from Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. It highlights the need for greater solidarity between peoples, nations and generations rooted in the inalienable rights of every human person, including in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and related gaps in the provision of basic human rights.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 74/151, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to invite Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to present further practical proposals and ideas that would contribute to the strengthening of United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation, based on the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity, and to submit a comprehensive report on the question to the Assembly at its seventy-sixth session. The present report draws on relevant inputs from Member States, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, in follow-up to a note verbale and letters sent by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on 21 December 2020, to invite contributions.

II. COVID-19, the United Nations at 75 and building better together¹

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has proven again that humanity is interdependent and that global challenges are interconnected, thus making international cooperation both urgent and imperative, especially in the field of human rights. Given the magnitude of the challenge and its global nature, it is clear that the international community cannot succeed in overcoming the vast challenges it is facing today without strengthened international cooperation and solidarity between peoples, nations and regions, as well as between current and future generations. While everyone has been affected by the pandemic, people in vulnerable situations and in the most vulnerable States have been affected most. Human rights are key to shaping our immediate response to the pandemic and its aftermath. By focusing on those most affected and the most effective responses, human rights-based approaches can help to prepare the ground for recovery with resilience and shape prevention strategies for the future, including our responsibilities to future generations.

3. The pandemic, with its vast toll of human, social and economic harm around the world, also provides a generational opportunity to embark on a new social contract and a new global deal in responding to COVID-19, to help bring the world back on track to meet the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and implement the Paris Agreement. The United Nations issued several policy briefs,² including a framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19;³ on debt;⁴ the United Nations comprehensive response to COVID-19;⁵ and a policy brief on universal health coverage,⁶ which outline key elements of a COVID-19 response to put human rights at the centre.

4. A cascade of human rights and developmental setbacks over the past year has led to more people claiming their rights and standing up for future generations,

¹ The present section builds on sections II and III of the previous report on the same subject matter (A/74/351).

² See www.un.org/en/coronavirus.

³ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.

⁴ www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_debt_relief_and_covid_april_2020.pdf; and www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_liquidity_and_debt_solutions_march_2021.pdf.

⁵ https://www.un.org/pga/75/wp-content/uploads/sites/100/2020/10/un_comprehensive_response_to_covid.pdf.

⁶ https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/SG-Policy-Brief-on-Universal-Health-Coverage_English.pdf.

forming a new movement of human solidarity that rejects inequality and division, and seeking to unite, in particular, young people, civil society, the private sector, cities, regions and other stakeholders around policies for peace, protection of the planet, delivery of justice and the promotion of human rights for all.⁷ Against that backdrop, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has highlighted the need for a life-changing vision – and concerted follow-up action, anchoring the world’s nations in the sound foundations of justice, to build resilience and trust.⁸ Rebuilding trust in global institutions will require greater global solidarity and more inclusive, effective and networked multilateral approaches that contribute to more responsive global governance structures.

5. The crisis also provides a singular opportunity to achieve a turning point for racial equality and justice. Drawing upon international obligations and commitments, States must accelerate action for racial justice and translate into action the agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality (A/HRC/47/53). In particular, for groups of historically marginalized people, reparatory measures are essential for reconciliation, justice, equality and solidarity.⁹ These can help mend the social contract between people and the State, with the potential to benefit all of society. As societies become increasingly multi-ethnic, multireligious and multicultural, greater political, cultural and economic investment in inclusivity and cohesion is needed.¹⁰ The twentieth anniversary of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance is an opportunity to urgently accelerate action for racial justice (A/HRC/47/53, para. 23).

6. In building back better together, an enduring challenge is to transform the promise of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into real-world change on the ground.¹¹ World leaders today have key roles in navigating paths out of the pandemic towards a more inclusive, green, sustainable and resilient future. In moving from fragilities to resilience as the world recovers from the pandemic, we must work together to overcome obstacles to progress, through dialogue, collaboration and reinvigorated, inclusive, effective and networked multilateralism.

7. The call to action for human rights¹² charts a way out of the multiple crises currently faced by humanity. It leverages partnerships across the United Nations and underscores the need to approach civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as a compelling and mutually reinforcing synergy. Specifically, the call to action focuses on rights at the core of sustainable development; rights in times of crisis; gender equality and equal rights for women; public participation and civic space; the rights of future generations, including to a safe, clean and healthy environment; ensuring a safe digital world; and concerted collective action.

⁷ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_remarks_on_covid_and_inequality.pdf.

⁸ See www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27178&LangID=E.

⁹ A/HRC/47/53; see also Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, paras. 100–101 and 106.

¹⁰ See www.un.org/sg/en/content/secretary-generals-remarks-the-general-assembly-observance-of-the-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimination-delivered.

¹¹ See briefing by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the call to action for human rights, 24 February 2021, available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2021-02-24/briefing-the-call-action-for-human-rights.

¹² See www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.

III. Member States

8. Contributions relating to ideas and proposals of Member States for the present report were received from Azerbaijan, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, India, Iraq, Maldives, Mexico, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and the Syrian Arab Republic.

9. It was pointed out in the submissions that non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity must be paramount in international cooperation. It was noted that human rights challenges at the multilateral level included the promotion of an effective international cooperation system that responded to countries' needs and supported State capacities through technical assistance and financing. It was observed that increased international cooperation was required to strengthen the right to health through the provision of COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, to mitigate environmental impacts and reduce technological gaps, including access to the Internet and new technologies that allow access to education in low- and middle-income countries. Greater cooperation could support strategic alliances between States, the private sector and universities. Member States' proposals included a United Nations system common policy of international cooperation to unify legal norms to criminalize computer crimes to advance cybersecurity.

10. It was noted that the promotion of international cooperation in the field of human rights implied access to medicines in the context of pandemics and the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to all without discrimination. It was also suggested that advocacy was required for renewed multilateralism, through the following: reforming international organizations; consolidating the universality of human rights; strengthening the role of non-governmental actors; realizing the potential of the universal periodic review; strengthening the status of the Human Rights Council; and financing national policies to implement the recommendations of United Nations mechanisms and treaty bodies, and their inclusion in an integrative scheme for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. Some Member States observed that the universal periodic review process in the Human Rights Council was a good example of how engaging with multilateral processes could benefit countries to progressively realize human rights. They noted that the Council should provide a forum for sharing national experiences and best practices in the promotion and protection of human rights. They also suggested emphasizing capacity-building of States through technical and financial assistance and that the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review and other initiatives should focus on recommendations accepted by concerned States.

12. Member States highlighted that, for countries with limited resources, annual thematic discussions on technical cooperation and capacity-building and general debate under agenda item 10 of the Human Rights Council provided a necessary platform to share country concerns, best practices and lessons learned. They encouraged the work of instruments such as the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance. They noted that the burden on national reporting mechanisms, particularly high for small island developing States and the least developed countries, could be reduced through international cooperation. It was further noted that small island developing States relied on international partnerships for assistance in climate-related humanitarian crises and addressing climate change requires significant preventative measures by all countries. Member States suggested that new technology must be utilized as a tool to facilitate greater participation in the

Council and noted that closer global cooperation was essential in addressing challenges from digital technologies.

13. In their submissions, States stressed the importance of promoting bilateral cooperation and capacity-building in the recommendations of Member States in the framework of the universal periodic review. They stated that it was important to encourage the special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and OHCHR to provide advice and technical cooperation to address challenges, in addition to highlighting the national human rights challenges faced by States. They suggested strengthening international cooperation on disaggregated data and technical specialization, as well as the participation of girls, young women, indigenous women, women of African descent and women with disabilities in the work of the United Nations. They called for improvements to the digital and remote communication capabilities and channels of the United Nations for strengthening its work in the pandemic context.

14. It was noted that effective application of a human rights-based approach to development, notably when human rights were more constrained, involved an understanding of the political economy and the ability in practice to adapt work and programming to locally grounded choices about what was possible in the protection and realization of human rights, and to operate in politically informed ways. A gender equality approach was considered important in development cooperation.

15. One submission highlighted the importance of cooperation among United Nations organs and mechanisms on human rights in full respect of their mandates. The belief that international cooperation programmes in the field of human rights should be implemented according to national priorities and State sovereignty was also conveyed.

16. According to the submissions received, States and stakeholders participating in the universal periodic review mechanism should adhere fully to the foundations and principles of the review process, which must be conducted in an objective, transparent, non-selective, constructive and non-politicized manner. Support was also expressed for the simplified reporting procedure for the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, as encouraged by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/268. It was also noted that the treaty bodies should work towards harmonizing their working methods and elaborating a methodology for the simplified reporting procedure. Suggestions in the submissions further included the following: setting guiding criteria for nominations for membership of the Human Rights Council; putting in place easier and more practical criteria for holding special sessions and decisions that result from those sessions; developing the universal periodic review mechanism in a manner that ensures its independence from political courtesies based on bilateral relations and common interests between countries; and ensuring the effective participation of other stakeholders in the review process.

IV. Intergovernmental organizations

17. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system noted the important role of the development system in supporting Governments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, leaving no one behind, on the basis of full respect for human rights, including the right to development, stressing that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. It requested the United Nations system to work towards building back better and achieving a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery. That work should be people-centred and gender-sensitive and should respect human rights, with a focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those

furthest behind, should protect the planet, and should achieve prosperity and universal health coverage by 2030. It called upon the United Nations system to assist Governments in their efforts to respect and fulfil their human rights obligations and commitments under international law, as a critical tool to operationalize the pledge to leave no one behind.

18. Comprehensive information on the activities of OHCHR in this area and associated recommendations are contained in the report of the High Commissioner on the implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights to the Human Rights Council at its forty-seventh session ([A/HRC/47/47](#)).

19. The Commission on the Status of Women is another multilateral forum at which human rights have been advanced. For its sixty-fifth session, held from 15 to 26 March 2021, the theme focused Member States' attention on ensuring the rights of women to effective participation in public life and taking concrete measures to address and prevent violence against women.¹³ In the agreed conclusions, Member States reaffirmed that the promotion and protection of, and respect for, human rights and fundamental freedoms are crucial for the full and equal participation of women and girls in society ([E/2021/27-E/CN.6/2021/14](#), chap. I. A.). They further affirmed the need to promote women's full and effective participation and leadership in key global policy areas, including COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, climate change and science, technology and innovation.

20. The call to action for human rights by the Secretary-General sets out overarching guiding principles for the United Nations system's work on human rights, including that of placing rights at the core of sustainable development by focusing on advocacy, analysis and programming, human rights mechanisms and strengthening United Nations capacity. At the country level, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is the most important instrument for planning and implementation of the United Nations development activities in support of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁴ Guidance from the Sustainable Development Group on the development and implementation of such frameworks is framed around six guiding principles, including human rights-based approaches, leaving no one behind, gender equality and women's empowerment, resilience, sustainability and accountability, comprising global values of the United Nations development system. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially following the pandemic, will require economic transformation, in synergy with all dimensions of sustainable development, while upholding the commitment to leave no one behind and realizing human rights.

21. Following the launch of the call to action, the United Nations system has focused on its implementation across its seven thematic areas, ensuring action to advance the United Nations system-wide responsibility for human rights. Focused efforts to generate collective and sustained United Nations system engagement on concrete thematic strategic interventions have been accompanied by outreach to Member States, civil society and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the call to action and build momentum for its implementation. System-wide efforts are under way to carry out a human rights review of common country analyses and Sustainable Development Group cooperation frameworks, which will provide key data and analysis on how to reinforce cohesive and effective support to achieve the 2030 Agenda with human rights at the core. Several products have been developed to help implement the call to action, in particular by leveraging the expertise and collective

¹³ See www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw65-2021.

¹⁴ See https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019_1.pdf.

efforts of the system to tackle key human rights challenges, especially at the country level, for example, the practical guidance on the universal periodic review.¹⁵

22. The call to action recognizes the rights of future generations, especially in the context of climate justice, and stresses the critical importance of public participation and open civic space for sustainable development and sustained peace. The 2020 guidance note on civic space¹⁶ stresses that society is stronger and more resilient when women and men can play a meaningful role in political, economic and social life, contributing to policymaking that affects their lives. Heads of United Nations entities also issued a joint commitment to promote the rights of children, young people and future generations to a healthy environment and their meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels.¹⁷

23. The Sustainable Development Group task team on leaving no one behind, human rights and the normative agenda, co-chaired by OHCHR, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), produced several policy products, including the Sustainable Development Group operational guide on leaving no one behind for United Nations country teams. This will be a critical tool to operationalize the guiding principle of the cooperation framework to leave no one behind. The task team also undertook a human rights review of 109 COVID-19-related socioeconomic response plans by United Nations country teams, which was published on the COVID-19 data portal.¹⁸ This drew on guidance in the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19¹⁹ and the checklist for a human rights-based approach to socioeconomic country responses to COVID-19.²⁰ The socioeconomic response plans emphasize that COVID-19 responses should also aim to advance collaboration and solidarity among Member States. In August 2020, a checklist for the inclusion of older persons in socioeconomic response plans,²¹ co-authored by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and OHCHR, was issued by the Inter-Agency Group on Ageing. In partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), a COVID-19 global gender response tracker was established to monitor and highlight responses that have integrated a gender lens.²²

24. The COVID-19 response of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),²³ focused on linking the immediate response to long-term sustainable development needs by helping manage complexity and uncertainty in four integrated areas: governance, social protection, the green economy and digital disruption. Human rights and multilateralism are highlighted as major pathways to recovery. Within UNDP support to the repositioning of the United Nations development system, the United Nations Capital Development Fund is engaging in the development and implementation of socioeconomic response frameworks. It collaborates with resident coordinator offices and United Nations country teams on COVID-19 responses in more than 20 least developed countries, including through a network of investment

¹⁵ www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf.

¹⁶ www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf.

¹⁷ www.sparkblue.org/system/files/2021-06/210615_STEP_UP_-_Joint_Commitment_by_Heads_of_UN_Entities.pdf.

¹⁸ https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_DocumentTracker.

¹⁹ <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.

²⁰ www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/COVID-19/Checklist_HR-Based_Approach_Socio-Economic_Country_Responses_COVID-19.pdf.

²¹ www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/08/Checklist-inclusion-Older-Persons-in-SERPs.pdf.

²² <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker>.

²³ Available from www.undp.org/publications/beyond-recovery-towards-2030.

advisors in Africa deployed to identify investment opportunities that are positive in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as financially viable.²⁴

25. UNDP has worked to advance integrated, multi-agency and multi-partner support to national efforts in financing COVID-19 responses, including through the integrated national financing frameworks – a collaborative initiative by UNDP, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the European Union and others. Such frameworks are in place for 58 countries to plan the financing of their national sustainable development priorities. UNDP supports Governments in aligning finance to green, equitable and resilient recovery strategies. For example, under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, and with support from UNDP, a bottom-up approach to such frameworks was being piloted in five districts in Ghana through the district recovery plans and linking to the national Sustainable Development Goals financing process to promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society integrated approach to financing and planning.²⁵

26. In collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, UNDP launched a new COVID-19 hub to connect policymakers and United Nations country teams in partner countries with the latest information on the impacts of COVID-19.²⁶ The framework for action between UNDP and ILO for 2020 and beyond²⁷ built on key areas of collaboration and seeks to add concrete value to both organizations' strategic priorities within the context of the socioeconomic response plans. The framework is anchored, inter alia, on the value of a global human-centred response grounded in solidarity and the shared conviction that a coordinated global effort is imperative to support countries that lack sufficient fiscal space to finance social policy, especially universal social protection.

27. WHO and its collaborators urged all Member States, United Nations system actors, the private sector, civil society, philanthropic organizations and multilateral financing institutions to work together to end the COVID-19 pandemic and related crises through coordinated, urgent global cooperation and action. Its mission to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable is based on Sustainable Development Goal 3 and the associated triple billion goals, reflected in the thirteenth WHO General Programme of Work, for the period 2019–2023.²⁸

28. In April 2020, WHO, together with France, the European Commission and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, launched the Access to the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator.²⁹ The collaboration of WHO through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility's Advance Market Commitment mechanism, voluntary patent pooling through the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool and advocacy is facilitating the acquisition and delivery of vaccines to lower-income countries. In September 2020, WHO and UNICEF signed a new collaborative framework that

²⁴ UNDP, "Progress update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on repositioning of the UN development system", information note for the Executive Board, first regular session 2021.

²⁵ UNDP, "UN COVID-19 Response in Action: UN Response to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19", Information Bulletin, Issue 2, October 2020.

²⁶ See www.un-page.org/covid.

²⁷ www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/statement/wcms_756457.pdf.

²⁸ https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/thirteenth-general-programme/gpw13_methodology_nov9_online-version1b3170f8-98ea-4fcc-aa3a-059ede7e51ad.pdf?sfvrsn=12dfeb0d_1&download=true.

²⁹ www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator.

accelerates joint public health efforts that put the most marginalized and vulnerable populations first.

29. In January 2021, the Director-General of WHO issued a call to action for vaccine equity, inviting all stakeholders to work together in solidarity to address the lack of supply and inequitable distribution of vaccines, which remains the biggest threat to ending the pandemic and driving a global recovery. WHO embarked on a year-long campaign, launched on World Health Day 2021, with five key actions to address growing health inequalities and inequities within and among countries, with an aim to build fairer, more equitable health systems and societies.³⁰ The immediate socioeconomic response of the United Nations to COVID-19 is funded through the WHO global strategic preparedness and response plan 2021, which sets out the key priorities for the health response worldwide. These health interventions will be financed through multiple financing channels, including governmental budgets, the WHO Solidarity Fund, and the Central Emergency Response Fund.³¹

30. The United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) engages in the setting of human rights standards for the right to health and health-related rights within the Human Rights Council and other human rights mechanisms. UNAIDS also engages with regional human rights bodies for advancing the right to health and health-related rights among Member States and, with academics, experts and civil society, crafts evidence-informed and rights-based guidance for countries to frame their laws and policies. Supporting countries' efforts to give effect to human rights in laws and policies, UNAIDS provides expert advice to policymakers, programme implementers, parliamentarians and courts of final jurisdiction on ending HIV-related stigma, discrimination and violence.

31. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality developed the minimum requirements checklist for integrating gender equality in the implementation of socioeconomic response frameworks. Through its membership in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, UN-Women contributed to ensuring a strong focus on gender equality in such frameworks. UN-Women integrated gender equality in the five work streams of the frameworks, through the inclusion of anti-gender-based violence measures, support to women's employment and women-owned enterprises, unpaid care, gender-responsive fiscal packages, health, the inclusion of women's groups and voices, and sex-disaggregated data.³²

32. The COVID-19 response and recovery programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations addresses the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. To build back better and pursue the Sustainable Development Goals, it aims to mitigate the immediate impacts while strengthening the long-term resilience of food systems and livelihoods.³³ It is working closely with WHO, the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Organization for Animal Health and other partners, harnessing broad networks to drive further research, support ongoing investigations and share critical knowledge.³⁴

33. In its submission, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) highlighted that international cooperation, specifically development financing and official development assistance, was the theme of its Least Developed

³⁰ See www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-world-health-day-webinar.

³¹ <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.

³² See <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/report-on-the-un-women-global-response-to-covid-19-en.pdf>.

³³ See www.fao.org/partnerships/resource-partners/covid-19/en/.

³⁴ See www.fao.org/in-action/fapda/fapda-home/en/.

Countries Report 2019,³⁵ which proposed an aid effectiveness agenda 2.0 that could contribute decisively to structural transformation through better management and delivery of aid, with knock-on effects on poverty reduction and other improvements in socioeconomic development, such as health and education. Productive capacity development, as explored in the Least Developed Countries Report 2020,³⁶ also recognizes the central role that productive capacities play in driving a process of structural transformation. UNCTAD produced research and technical assistance on the interlinkages between trade and poverty to identify policy options on the use of trade as a more effective tool for poverty eradication. For example, a current project aims to strengthen the capacities of selected least developed countries to build, utilize and maintain productive capacities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in Burkina Faso, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. UNCTAD has advanced the Geneva Principles for a Global Green New Deal,³⁷ comprising principles, policies and rights, including social and economic rights, to be applied in different regions and countries with global collaboration.

34. In its submission, the International Trade Centre (ITC) referred to its contribution to the promotion of women's rights and to achieving Sustainable Development Goal targets. ITC co-founded the Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age (the EQUALS initiative) and co-led the EQUALS Leadership Coalition.

35. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States recalled in its submission that the General Assembly, in the political declaration adopted by the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session, at the midterm review of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (General Assembly resolution 74/3), had urged the scaling up of investments in small island developing States for their economic growth and diversification to reduce their vulnerability and build resilience and action to address the adverse impacts of climate change. At the same session, the political declaration at the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries (General Assembly resolution 74/15) reaffirmed commitments to address their special development needs. The preparations for the fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held from 23 to 27 January 2022, and the accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and SAMOA Pathway offered important opportunities for COVID-19 recovery and enhanced action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation, including on the rights to life, development, safe drinking water and sanitation, food, a healthy environment, health, housing, culture, work and the promotion of digital connectivity.

36. In May 2020, the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, together with UNDP, UNCTAD and WHO, launched the Tech Access Partnership as part of a coordinated approach, to strengthen developing countries' responses to COVID-19 and increase access to lifesaving health technologies.³⁸ The Technology Bank is working with the least developed countries, development partners and a range of different actors, including the private sector, to take swift action and boost local capacity in the areas of science, technology and innovation during and beyond the

³⁵ <https://unctad.org/webflyer/least-developed-countries-report-2019>.

³⁶ <https://unctad.org/webflyer/least-developed-countries-report-2020>.

³⁷ <https://unctad.org/webflyer/new-multilateralism-shared-prosperity-geneva-principles-global-green-new-deal>.

³⁸ See www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/UN_agencies_launch_Tech_Access_Partnership_in_joint_effort_to_scale_up_local_production_of_life-saving_health_technologies_for_COVID-19.html.

pandemic.³⁹ With its COVID-19 initiatives, activities and partnerships,⁴⁰ the International Telecommunication Union is helping countries to fully utilize digital technologies to respond to and recover from COVID-19, and to build preparedness for future global emergencies.⁴¹

37. UNEP, together with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, launched the global webinar series on “Environment and emergencies in the face of COVID-19”, aimed at creating a community of practice to bring together environmental, humanitarian and other related actors. UNEP also issued a joint policy note for parliamentarians with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on green approaches to COVID-19 recovery, which guides States in developing environmentally conscious legal responses to the effects of COVID-19.⁴² The fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly was held in February 2021 and focused, inter alia, on COVID-19 recovery stimulus packages. It brought Member States and stakeholders together to take action to build a greener, more sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic world. Universal access to vaccines is a challenge in developing economies, partly due to inadequate refrigerated cold chain networks, especially in rural communities with the highest poverty levels. To tackle those problems, UNEP is partnering with the Governments of Rwanda and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and a consortium of universities on a new African Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Cooling and Cold-Chain.⁴³

38. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032), led by UNESCO and DESA, will provide opportunities to strengthen the human rights of marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples. With a view to enhancing technical assistance to ensure up-to-date targeted policy guidance to address emerging human rights challenges, UNESCO is developing a road map against racism and discrimination in line with the global call against racism,⁴⁴ adopted by UNESCO member States, which includes a universal toolkit targeting policymakers and other social actors. In January 2021, building on the *Right to Education Handbook*,⁴⁵ UNESCO published the *Guidelines to Strengthen the Right to Education in National Frameworks*⁴⁶ and will further expand international cooperation in the global monitoring of this right.

39. In its submission, the World Trade Organization (WTO) highlighted the role of trade in the advancement and enjoyment of human rights. Its engagement in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals was demonstrated by its collaboration with United Nations bodies responsible for implementing the goals, its participation in the United Nations high-level political forum on sustainable development, collaboration with UNCTAD and ITC, and the launch of the SDG Trade Monitor, a repository of trade indicators enabling policymakers and researchers to explore the synergies between trade and the Goals. It noted that further integration of developing country members into the multilateral trading system will advance faster economic development, promoting the development and human rights aspirations of their citizens. WTO helped build the trade capacity of developing countries, especially the least developed countries, through technical assistance and training

³⁹ See www.un.org/technologybank/content/response-to-covid-19.

⁴⁰ See www.itu.int/en/SiteAssets/COVID-19/ITU-COVID-19-activities.pdf.

⁴¹ See www.itu.int/en/Pages/covid-19.aspx.

⁴² See www.unep.org/resources/report/green-approaches-covid-19-recovery-policy-note-parliamentarians.

⁴³ See www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/covid-19-vaccine-could-revolutionize-cold-storage-around-world.

⁴⁴ See <https://en.unesco.org/news/global-call-against-racism>.

⁴⁵ Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366556>.

⁴⁶ Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375352>.

programmes, notably to raise awareness of WTO rules. The WTO Trade for Peace Programme⁴⁷ is aimed at using the multilateral trading system as a pathway to sustainable peace by highlighting the role of trade and economic integration in the peace, security and humanitarian fields.

40. The South Centre, an intergovernmental policy research and analysis institution of developing countries, stressed in its submission that international initiatives such as COVAX and the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) had not been able to achieve their intended objectives in the absence of a genuine cooperative effort by all relevant stakeholders. The Centre has noted that the global response to the health crisis required responses rooted in human rights law,⁴⁸ and that a stronger global partnership was required for the provision of financial and technological resources for developing countries, including through the transfer of technology and know-how, and the investment of public funds to produce vaccines.⁴⁹ In its submission, the Centre also noted that unilateral coercive measures that had severely affected the capacity of targeted countries to respond to the pandemic⁵⁰ must be lifted. The Centre suggested that the effective implementation of the rights of peasants and others working in rural areas could serve as an example of how international cooperation and dialogue could achieve the improvement of human conditions under a broader understanding of the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights. The Centre also observed that effective recognition of the right to development could provide a basis for the advancement of international cooperation towards the full enjoyment of all human rights and the reduction of poverty and inequalities.

41. The Council of Europe highlighted that, besides the development of joint activities and programmes with key partners such as the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, additional emphasis should be placed on avoiding duplication, in particular with respect to monitoring activities. In implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, it was important to strengthen and enhance the references and links between relevant activities of the Council of Europe and specific Goals.

42. The Subregional Office for the Southern Cone of the Ibero-American General Secretariat highlighted that the Ibero-American Cooperation system model of regional cooperation was characterized by a multidimensional and multi-actor approach based on solidarity, with the objective of strengthening the cultural ties among States and contributing through joint actions to achieving sustainable development in the region. Concrete results with a direct impact on the strengthening of national sectoral public policies were achieved through inter-governmental political dialogue based on technical and financial cooperation. This included a regional cooperation programme with specific focus on strengthening the national institutional capacities and knowledge on South-South cooperation. Since the outset of the pandemic, the focus of its regional cooperation had shifted towards ensuring equitable access to vaccines and guaranteeing food security for the most affected populations, among other pressing issues.

⁴⁷ More information on the Trade for Peace Programme is available here: www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/tradeforpeace_e.htm.

⁴⁸ See www.southcentre.int/southviews-no-199-12-june-2020/.

⁴⁹ See www.southcentre.int/research-paper-118-september-2020/.

⁵⁰ See “Unilateral sanctions make it harder to fight COVID-19, must be dropped, says UN expert”. Available at www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26393&LangID=E.

V. Non-governmental organizations

43. Contributions were received from: Africans in America for Restitution and Repatriation, Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession, Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Asus Reluc, Campaign Life Coalition, Club Ohada Thies, Consensus of Sustainable People, Organisations and Communities, Dianova International, Finn Church Aid, International Federation on Ageing, Liberal International, Organisation Mondiale des Associations pour l'Éducation Prénatale, NGO Monitor and Peace Worldwide. Individual submissions were also received from Edith Baguinho, Dean Bordokas, Bruno Coletty, Fern Powers and Ramon Riera.

44. Support was expressed for a treaty on the right to development and a declaration on the right to international solidarity, to enhance effective international cooperation initiatives at all levels, by strengthening the duty of States to cooperate. Reinforcing collective action was noted as key to addressing global systemic issues, through redefining the global financial architecture and filling the resource gaps in advancing the financing for development agenda and financing the Green Climate Fund. It was proposed that global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic should include ensuring equal access to health-care services, medicines and vaccines for all. It was further suggested that all humanity should benefit from progress made by research and that intellectual property rights should not pose barriers to the availability of medical products, including vaccines. A proposal was made with regard to “twinship” between a developed and a developing country, whereby a developed country would accompany a developing country in achieving its right to development without conditionalities but in a relationship of mutual exchange. It was also proposed that military expenditures be converted into a global fund, to sustain global programmes to combat extreme poverty and promote the sustainable development of the most marginalized and vulnerable peoples and communities.

45. It was highlighted that the role of the United Nations as the convener and platform for international cooperation relating to human rights should be strengthened. One submission remarked that existing processes, such as the universal periodic review, allowed for deepening cooperation and an enhanced role for civil society. It was noted that mechanisms were needed to strengthen cooperation, especially in situations of shrinking space for civil society actors and in fragile environments. Another suggestion was that the United Nations should enhance its cooperative efforts at the country level to include local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as key stakeholders in advancing human rights. It was observed that measures were needed: to strengthen the mandate of OHCHR, and the role of special rapporteurs and commissions of inquiry; to develop further working modalities between special rapporteurs and United Nations agencies in the field of human rights and ensure pragmatic cooperation between special rapporteurs and United Nations country teams; and to ensure an independent role for the United Nations to raise human rights concerns. According to the submissions, cooperation in the universal periodic review implementation process must be enhanced: by encouraging Member States to submit midterm reports, and to ensure that the process of planning and drafting midterm reports was collaborative; and by strengthening implementation of universal periodic review recommendations at the country level through the inclusion of local NGOs.

46. It was proposed that the development of a United Nations convention on the rights of older persons be accelerated, to close perceived gaps in human rights standards for their protection. The United Nations was encouraged to ensure strong leadership to maximize the potential of the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). There was also a suggestion that NGOs needed to be involved as the effective partners

in United Nations efforts to facilitate multisectoral collaboration to protect the rights of older persons.

47. A recommendation was made for greater inclusion of people of African descent in the design and implementation of international law, as well as accountability to descendants of enslaved Africans. It was suggested that, to achieve anti-racist outcomes, international public service accountability must be reimagined with victim-centred approaches.

48. A proposal was made for greater protection for members of organizations that fight for human rights. The submissions also called for: the creation of sufficiently funded centres worldwide to care for pregnant women in a holistic manner; the involvement of NGOs in working closely with United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) delegations worldwide; and the maximization of efforts to establish OHCHR offices in countries that had not yet allowed these to open.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

49. **In the seventy-fifth anniversary declaration, Member States reaffirmed that strengthening international cooperation was in the interest of both nations and peoples, and that the three pillars of the United Nations – peace and security, development and human rights – were equally important, interrelated and interdependent. They recommitted to strengthening efforts, political will and leadership, mobilizing resources and working with partners, to support coordination and global governance for the common future of present and future generations.**

50. **COVID-19 has illustrated our interconnectedness, highlighting our common vulnerability and humanity. Transforming the promise of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into real-world change on the ground for everyone, everywhere will require revitalized global solidarity and shared responsibility.**

51. **The “triple planetary crisis” of climate change, biodiversity and pollution reiterates the need for strengthened multilateralism. The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity for greener rebuilding through a transition to zero-carbon economies. Scaling up international cooperation on sustainable production and consumption, including on renewable energy and environmentally sustainable technology, will enhance the enjoyment of human rights, including by future generations.**

52. **The Secretary-General recognized in his call to action that climate actions and sustainable development must be informed by human rights, including the rights of present and future generations to a healthy environment. States and all stakeholders must also ensure the right of children and youth to meaningful and informed participation. This should include measures to create meaningful opportunities and adequate funding for their participation in United Nations processes and support for Member States in enhancing the participation of children and youth in decision-making.**

53. **States and all stakeholders must work together to reverse the disruptive impacts of the pandemic on economies and societies, redressing inequalities within countries and asymmetries between them. Enhanced cooperation between United Nations agencies to strengthen in-country efforts to support Member States and others on human rights, and United Nations support in elaborating COVID-19 recovery plans are vital. A resilient recovery must be rooted in solidarity at all levels.**

54. Particular attention should be paid to African countries, the least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries, middle-income countries facing serious challenges, countries in situations of conflict and post-conflict countries. Increased efforts and greater cooperation are required to help States to fulfil their core human rights obligations, which must be met at all times, to redress structural and systemic discrimination against the marginalized and vulnerable, including people living in poverty, women and girls, children and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, informal workers, peasants, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, people of African descent, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees.

55. Countries urgently need increased development financing to expand fiscal space to scale up social spending to deliver on economic and social rights. Reallocating public expenditure, using proven techniques to combat corruption and illicit financial flows, deploying progressive fiscal policies and increasing budget transparency, participation and accountability can assist in freeing up fiscal space. It is important to work with the international financial institutions to ensure that they uphold human rights in their financing and conditionalities. Development financing must be aligned with international norms, address discrimination and other root causes of inequalities, and integrate participation and accountability. Integrating human rights into the work of international financial institutions is not only crucial for sustainable development, it is essential to prevent conflict and build peace and prosperity.⁵¹

56. The devastating loss of jobs and livelihoods during the pandemic reaffirmed the importance of universal social protection and universal health coverage. States require: the fiscal and policy space to reverse chronic underinvestment in public services; more equitable payment of taxes by individuals and businesses; and affirmative action programmes and targeted policies to redress historic inequalities. In addition to strengthened efforts to mobilize domestic resources, cooperation is vital to meeting those requirements, including through new approaches to financing social protection, such as the proposed global fund for social protection (see [A/HRC/47/36](#)). Financial, technical and other forms of support are needed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the informal sector. The disproportionate impact on women, in view of their disproportionate representation in this sector, calls for focused financial and other support for women-owned businesses, including in the agricultural sector and rural areas, and for women providing unpaid care services in response to COVID-19.

57. The pandemic exposed the urgent need for more democratic governance structures and the need to promptly tackle the lack of inclusion and equality.⁵² As a result, there have been renewed calls for systemic changes, including: a democratized multilateral economic and financial system with a far stronger voice and expanded voting rights for developing countries; a more balanced trading system, enabling mobility up global value chains;⁵³ improved regulations on finance, trade and investment, to advance policy coherence with human rights and advance sustainable development; and enhanced productive capacities, economic diversification and structural transformation (see [A/HRC/46/59](#), para. 68).

⁵¹ For an analysis of these connections, see www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/publication/pathways-for-peace-inclusive-approaches-to-preventing-violent-conflict.

⁵² See www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered.

⁵³ Ibid.

58. The proposed new global deal envisions a global economy with universal respect for international law and a multipolar world governed by more networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism and strong multilateral institutions to redress global structural and systemic inequalities. This echoes the call in the Declaration on the Right to Development (General Assembly resolution 41/128, annex) for a new model of global governance in which power, wealth and opportunities are shared more fairly, and whereby States should realize their rights and fulfil their duties so as to promote a new international economic order based on sovereign equality, interdependence, mutual interest and cooperation, and to support the realization of human rights. Free, active and meaningful participation in development by all individuals and peoples, and fair distribution of its benefits, in line with the human right to development, will enable all to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the gains of development and globalization, leaving no person, group, community or country behind.

59. States should step up efforts to mobilize public resources locally and globally to meet minimum core human rights obligations. Economic and social policies, such as the use of progressive taxation, and efforts to enhance transparency, accountability and a broad space for social dialogue and participation, can support the mobilization of maximum available resources for the realization of human rights and to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

60. Cooperation is key to preventing illicit financial flows, money-laundering and tax evasion, ending tax havens and integrating the principles of sustainable development into financial decision-making. Scaling up North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international solidarity and cooperation through sharing knowledge and expertise, technology and resources, experiences and good practices can serve to advance human rights.

61. States and all stakeholders, including international financial institutions, multilateral development banks and transnational corporations, should collaborate to create an enabling international economic environment. Expansive fiscal and monetary support will be critical to secure a recovery from COVID-19. This will require additional financial support in both the short and longer term. Renewed commitment is needed to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance (ODA) and 0.15 to 0.2 per cent of gross national income for ODA to the least developed countries. The recent allocation of special drawing rights by the International Monetary Fund will help countries to deal with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is crucial that unused special drawing rights be reallocated for low and middle-income countries in need of liquidity to avoid debt defaults and invest in economic and social rights, including health care.

62. It is both urgent and imperative to tackle long-standing weaknesses in the international debt architecture. Global solidarity can enable debt relief for all countries in need, through debt cancellation, restructuring or standstill from all stakeholders, including private creditors. Preventing debt distress, and reforming and building a fairer and more effective debt architecture, including a new, multilateral debt-restructuring mechanism, and extending access to affordable credit will allow wider fiscal space for countries to deliver on socioeconomic rights. Integrating a human rights-based approach to development financing provides a crucial lever for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and a renewed social contract. Low and middle-income countries should be assisted with social bonds, such as “progressive realization” bonds, that could finance social spending for the attainment of specific Goals. Incorporating human rights impact assessments into debt management and

restructuring could help ensure that debt management policies, or other related economic policy reforms, do not have unintended consequences of increasing socioeconomic inequality.

63. Investment in the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action should be supported by a new business model, which promotes effective implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and strengthens United Nations engagement with the private sector and actors across the finance ecosystem, building on existing efforts that incorporate the interest of all stakeholders. Strengthening inclusive and development-focused international tax cooperation and ensuring financial integrity, enhancing United Nations engagement and the promotion of international cooperation on digital financing frameworks and promoting financial inclusion and addressing potential risks are all vital steps towards a resilient recovery.

64. Intellectual property regimes should be aligned with human rights obligations of States. To enable all humanity to benefit equitably from scientific progress, vaccine production capacity worldwide should be scaled up, technologies widely shared, licences made available and affordability ensured. All States and other relevant actors should cooperate to support initiatives to ensure universal and equitable distribution of vaccines between countries, such as the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator and its COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, and to make appropriate use of available policy space to secure non-discriminatory, affordable access within borders. States and stakeholders should adopt as a best practice, irrespective of crisis situations but especially during pandemics and health emergencies, interpretation and implementation of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights in accordance with the right of WTO members to protect public health and, in particular, to promote access to medicines and vaccines for all.⁵⁴ Rolling out COVID-19 vaccines on a global scale will require robust collaboration to expand infrastructure and systems such as capacity of the global cold chain that allows products to move from sites of production to final destinations while remaining appropriately chilled.

65. Quality education and digital technology are two key enablers of the renewed social contract.⁵⁵ Cooperation is essential to redress digital divides and advance information technology, including closing global gaps in online education. All stakeholders should collaborate to revitalize the agenda on technology transfer (see A/HRC/46/59, para. 76) and overcome obstacles such as the expansion of intellectual property rights for sustainable development.⁵⁶ The road map for digital cooperation⁵⁷ emphasizes the need to secure an inclusive and sustainable digital future by connecting to the Internet, by 2030, the remaining 3.6 billion people without access.

66. The protection and promotion of civic space and of the right of all persons to participate in public life is vital for advancing human rights. It is also key to realizing the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Civic space must be protected, including online, to advance inclusive, effective and well-grounded

⁵⁴ See 2001 Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health para. 4; www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/mindecl_trips_e.htm.

⁵⁵ See www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See www.un.org/techenvoy/content/roadmap-digital-cooperation#:~:text=On%2011%20June%202020%2C%20the%20United%20Nations%20Secretary-General,presented%20by%20digital%20technologies%20while%20addressing%20their%20challenges.

approaches to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. In keeping with the human right to development, people must be at the centre of decision-making, including in formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national and global policies. Women and girls, youth and people in vulnerable and marginalized situations must actively participate in decisions.

67. The human rights pillar of the United Nations must be reinvigorated, including contributions by United Nations human rights mechanisms, in order to ensure support to Member States, peoples, multilateral entities and the private sector in using human rights to strengthen governance to address the global challenges identified in the seventy-fifth anniversary declaration. In this way, the United Nations can strengthen its support for full and effective implementation of Member States' vision for United Nations human rights action expressed at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, enshrined in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and highlighted in the call to action.
