



General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
10 November 2020

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 5 October 2020, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bogyay (Hungary)

Contents

Agenda item 5: Election of the officers of the Main Committees

Organization of work

General debate

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent as soon as possible, under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, to the Chief of the Documents Management Section (dms@un.org), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

20-12984 (E)



Please recycle



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

Agenda item 5: Election of the officers of the Main Committees

1. **The Chair** said that she invited the Committee to take note of the decision on the election of the Chair and other officers of the Third Committee for the seventy-fifth session adopted through a silence procedure (no-objection procedure) on 11 June 2020, pursuant to General Assembly decision 74/555 of 15 May 2020 entitled “Extension of the procedure for taking decisions of the General Assembly during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic” and taking into account the provisions of General Assembly decision 74/557 of 29 May 2020 entitled “Procedure for holding elections by secret ballot without a plenary meeting during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic”. A decision to which no objection was made was considered adopted and the Committee was required to take note of the decision at its first subsequent formal meeting.

2. *It was so decided.*

3. **The Chair** said that the Group of African States had endorsed the candidacy of Ms. Charikhi (Algeria) and the Group of Asia-Pacific States had endorsed the candidacy of Mr. Almanzlawiy (Saudi Arabia) for Vice-Chairs of the Third Committee at its seventy-fifth session.

4. *Mr. Almanzlawiy (Saudi Arabia) and Ms. Charikhi (Algeria) were elected Vice-Chairs by acclamation.*

Organization of work (A/75/250, A/C.3/75/1, A/C.3/75/L.1, A/C.3/75/L.1/Add.1 and A/C.3/75/L.1/Rev.1)

5. **The Chair** said that the organization of the work of the Committee was contained in document A/C.3/75/L.1/Rev.1, and the note by the Secretariat concerning the allocation of agenda items was contained in document A/C.3/75/1.

6. To take into account physical distancing guidelines and other constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau proposed that the Committee should consider organizational matters, hold a single general debate and take action on draft proposals during in-person formal meetings, and hold interactive dialogues with the special procedure mandate holders, other experts and United Nations representatives during virtual informal meetings. The proposed modalities were the result of numerous rounds of consultations with the membership, and the Bureau believed them to be the most suitable way for the Committee to deliver on its mandate. On an exceptional

basis, representatives would be able to choose to deliver their statements in the general debate at formal meetings in person, virtually or by pre-recorded video, and those statements would be reflected in the summary records of the formal meetings.

7. She recalled the guidelines concerning the conduct of the Committee’s work that were set out in chapter II of the report of the General Committee (A/75/250) and drew the attention of the Committee to paragraphs 70 to 86 of the report of the General Committee on questions relating to the programme budget. Concerning the introduction of draft resolutions, she hoped that main sponsors would continue to make only one statement at the time of action, as that would significantly improve the efficiency of the Committee’s work. Draft resolutions that generally involved lengthy negotiations should be drafted by the main sponsors as early as possible in the session. As consultations would take place on a virtual platform, additional efforts would need to be made by sponsors to meet the deadlines for submission. Main sponsors should also consider streamlining the number of proposals before the Committee, including by biennializing resolutions or implementing a technical or procedural rollover.

8. She took it that the Committee agreed to those recommendations.

9. *It was so decided.*

10. **Mr. Kashaev** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation wished to know whether the recommendation to include pre-recorded video statements in the summary records complied with the rules of procedure, in particular the rules specifying “present and voting” as criteria for participation.

11. **Mr. Mahmassani** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Bureau had proposed that general debate statements could be delivered in person, virtually live or by pre-recorded video during the seventy-fifth session, in view of the limitations imposed by COVID-19. On the basis of the existing practice in the bodies entitled to summary record coverage, whereby virtual live statements and a pre-recorded video statement had previously been included in the summary records, the Bureau was proposing that the Committee’s summary records should also include or reflect pre-recorded video statements, as one of the three methods of delivery proposed for the current session.

12. **Mr. Kashaev** (Russian Federation), speaking also on behalf of Cuba, Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Syrian Arab Republic and Venezuela Bolivarian Republic of), said that the legitimate right of all States Members of the United Nations to participate in its work on an equal

footing and without discrimination should be upheld. The increasingly systematic application by the host country of the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations in a discriminatory fashion was undermining the independent exercise of the sovereign rights and privileges of certain Member States. By imposing travel and movement restrictions on representatives of Member States, insisting on the relocation of personnel of a mission amid the COVID-19 pandemic, breaching the inviolability of diplomatic property, engaging in the illegal and arbitrary expulsion of members of permanent missions and making it difficult to honour financial commitments to the United Nations, the host country aimed to prevent Member States from fully exercising their rights, including to vote.

13. The United States of America was abusing its status as host country, in particular by delaying or even denying the issuance of visas, thereby preventing delegates from gaining access to United Nations Headquarters. The failure to issue visas to the 18 delegates of a Member State was unacceptable, as was the unprecedented decision to deny a visa to a foreign minister. Equally unacceptable was the issuance of visas that prevented delegates from travelling in the course of their mission in New York.

14. The practices of the host country were in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the United Nations Headquarters Agreement, in particular sections 11, 12, 13 and 27, and related norms of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. The affected Member States had repeatedly raised their concerns, including through General Assembly resolution 74/195, but to no avail. The United Nations Legal Counsel had recently noted the lack of progress in talks with representatives of the host country. Member States must ensure that the work of the United Nations was not held hostage to political agendas. The Secretary-General should use his powers to ensure that the principle of the sovereign equality of States was respected and to guarantee the equal and non-discriminatory participation of Member States in the work of the Organization. To that end, section 21 of the United Nations Headquarters Agreement should be triggered. The Chair of the Committee should also follow up on the issue in conjunction with the relevant United Nations authorities.

15. **The Chair** said she took it that the Committee wished to approve the organization of work, as contained in document [A/C.3/75/L.1/Rev.1](#), subject to amendment.

16. *It was so decided.*

17. **The Chair** invited the Committee to turn its attention to the status of documentation for the Committee, contained in document [A/C.3/75/L.1/Add.1](#).

18. **Mr. Mahmassani** (Secretary of the Committee), introducing a revision to document [A/C.3/75/L.1/Add.1](#), said that the report of the Secretary-General on the outline and modalities for the open-ended ad hoc intergovernmental committee of experts should be deleted under agenda item 112, entitled “Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes”. The report would be submitted following the organizational session of the ad hoc intergovernmental committee of experts taking place later in the session pursuant to General Assembly decision 74/567 and would thus be considered by the General Assembly plenary after the work of the Third Committee had concluded.

19. **The Chair** said that she took it that the Committee wished to take note of the status of documentation for the session as contained in document [A/C.3/75/L.1/Add.1](#), as orally revised.

20. *It was so decided.*

21. **Mr. González Behmaras** (Cuba) thanked the Chair, the Bureau and the Secretariat for their efforts to find modalities that were acceptable to all delegations. He hoped that the spirit of transparency and inclusivity that had characterized those negotiations would continue.

General debate

22. **The Chair** invited the Committee to begin its general debate.

23. **Mr. Pierre** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to wreak havoc. It had compounded existing challenges to development, exacerbated inequalities and vulnerabilities and negatively impacted the ability of Governments to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. The long-term effects on social development extended far beyond the domain of health. Marginalized and vulnerable populations were disproportionately affected and decades of progress were likely to be reversed. Recognition of COVID-19 vaccines as global public goods would help to overcome the pandemic and recover the momentum for sustainable development.

25. The Committee’s discussions on social development should focus on the impact of COVID-19 and on strategies to address inequality with the aim of

implementing the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development and the 2030 Agenda and leaving no country and no one behind.

26. Strengthening multilateralism and international development cooperation, especially North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, was fundamental to sustainable development and to promoting the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. The international community and development partners had a pivotal role to play in collaborating with and supporting developing countries as they implemented their social development agendas. South-South cooperation should complement rather than substitute for North-South cooperation.

27. The objectives of the International Year of the Family (1994) had included strengthening national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor family policies and respond to problems affecting families. Member States must invest further in family-oriented policies and programmes as important tools for fighting poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Member States were encouraged to participate actively in preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024.

28. Older persons were active participants in the economic and social life of their societies and the Group was deeply concerned by the devastating and disproportionate impact of the pandemic on their lives. The international community must work to eliminate structural and institutional prejudices, discrimination and stigmatization in order to ensure full respect for their human rights, dignity and well-being. Sustainable and inclusive social and economic policies for older persons could be achieved through collective efforts.

29. The Group welcomed the progress made by Governments and other stakeholders in mainstreaming disability in national development efforts. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 crisis had exacerbated the inequalities and exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities, and their well-being and perspectives must be considered in COVID-19 response efforts.

30. In view of the Bureau's request, the resolution on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the resolution on the International Year of the Family would contain technical updates only. However, that must not constitute a precedent for future negotiations on those very important resolutions.

31. Despite efforts to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, new and historical forms of injustice persisted. Action must be intensified to dismantle the many obstacles

encountered by millions of people throughout the world. On the cusp of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the international community must summon the necessary political will to make it a living document through full and effective implementation.

32. The Group of 77 and China supported the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. They welcomed the measures taken by Member States to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and remained fully committed to gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes.

33. **Ms. Hassan** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group supported the World Health Organization (WHO) and recognized its leading role in containing the spread of COVID-19. The pandemic's multidimensional impact could widen existing gaps and slow implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Concerted efforts must be made to find treatment and vaccines that would be accessible and affordable for all, including those subject to coercive economic measures or in vulnerable situations.

34. The COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the disparities between developed countries and developing countries in terms of children's access to health care and education. Many countries were unable to offer online learning, while increased financial hardship would result in greater socioeconomic inequalities in children's health and development, which could have lifelong impacts.

35. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development remained essential to women's advancement, social protection and poverty eradication, and Member States must preserve and continue to implement those consensuses.

36. Female genital mutilation was a harmful practice that hindered the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and had serious health implications. States therefore needed to adopt comprehensive and multidisciplinary approaches that included the enactment of laws criminalizing the practice and campaigns to address the social, cultural and economic roots of the practice. Obstetric fistula continued to afflict many poor women and girls worldwide who had no access to health-care services; the majority of cases were in Africa.

37. The Group endorsed a balanced, comprehensive approach to drug policy and was committed to prevention and treatment in line with the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016. Drug trafficking and abuse was a global threat and more resources were needed for prevention, treatment, counselling and social reintegration programmes, including increased use of best practices.

38. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was a guide for the international community to commit to a world in which there was universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination, and the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms, regardless of race, colour or ethnic origin. The programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent must be fully and effectively executed.

39. Many national programmes for refugees, returnees and displaced persons were significantly underfunded. The Group commended those countries that, in a spirit of solidarity and pan-Africanism, continued to host refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons and appealed to the international community to implement a global responsibility-sharing mechanism and to find durable solutions to forced displacement.

40. Human rights were indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing and civil, cultural, political, economic and social rights must be treated on the same footing. Human rights issues must be addressed with objectivity and non-selectivity and promoted and protected on the basis of cooperation and dialogue, without double standards or politicization.

41. With a view to enhancing the response to current challenges as well as future recovery efforts, the Group called for the cancellation and suspension of debt and interest payments. It also appealed to its partners to intensify efforts to combat illicit financial flows to their countries from Africa. Stronger partnerships would ensure supportive international frameworks for trade, taxation, technology transfer, climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience in order to build back better and sustain a long-term development approach for all.

42. **Mr. Bhandari** (Nepal), speaking on behalf of the LGBTI Core Group, said that the legal obligation of States to uphold the rights of all people without distinction, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, was well established in international human rights law. Similarly, States had a

responsibility to protect human rights defenders who stood up for the human rights of those individuals.

43. The ongoing public health crisis had had a considerable impact on those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were experiencing increased discrimination and stigmatization, since emergency legislation and lockdown procedures contained discriminatory policies. They were also at much greater risk of violence.

44. To ensure that no one was left behind, the human rights and needs of the most vulnerable must be addressed. Restrictions on movement could impede access to medical treatment and care, which affected individuals on chronic medication and transgender and intersex persons who might have specific health needs. Equal access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment must be ensured.

45. The pandemic had weakened already fragile economic structures, with the greatest impact on those who already faced discrimination in the workplace and in accessing formal employment. A high percentage of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons had low incomes or worked in the informal sector, and had therefore been severely affected by social distancing policies and increased unemployment. Global economic suffering was having a direct impact on physical and mental health, and action must be taken to protect the most vulnerable.

46. Domestic and global responses to COVID-19 must be mindful of the intersecting needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Response plans must include targeted measures to address the disproportionate impact of the virus on marginalized groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. It was an opportune moment to evaluate normative structures that prevented groups and individuals from seeking safety, resources and wellness, and to find practical ways to fulfil the obligations enshrined in international human rights treaties.

47. The Group paid tribute to human rights defenders working to protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons who spoke out and served as role models, and others engaged in combating violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. Their work, often carried out at considerable personal risk, played a critical role in reporting on human rights violations and abuses, supporting victims and raising awareness among Governments and the public. The work of human rights

defenders contributed to the adoption by States of measures to recognize and support their role and ensure that they were protected against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. The members of the Core Group encouraged Member States to consult them before adopting such measures. The Group was fully committed to tackling such violations and abuses at the domestic, regional and international level, including through concerted and constructive engagement at the United Nations. Standing up to violations, violence and discrimination was not and never should be controversial; it was just, right and humane.

48. **Mr. Skoog** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, said that respect for all human rights must remain at the heart of efforts to fight the pandemic and support the global recovery.

49. Human rights must become a cross-cutting priority in United Nations organs and work. Reprisals against civil society actors and human rights defenders engaging with the Organization were unacceptable and those individuals must be given the necessary protection to ensure their full and meaningful participation. Some independent civil society representatives were still denied access to United Nations events without any valid reason, and non-governmental organizations were repeatedly refused accreditation by the ill-functioning Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. Restrictions on freedom of expression, threats and attacks, arbitrary arrests and detention of human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers, media workers and human rights lawyers were a matter of considerable concern.

50. Member States had an obligation to implement all treaties to which they were parties, including human rights treaties. The European Union therefore rejected attempts to replace the requirement to fulfil human rights obligations with an approach in which respect for human rights could be traded for other considerations.

51. All Member States should uphold the highest human rights standards, in particular when elected to serve on the Human Rights Council. Members of the Security Council, especially the permanent members, had a special responsibility to support all three pillars of the United Nations. National sovereignty did not constitute licence to torture, rape, imprison or kill with impunity. The European Union would continue to fight impunity and support the International Criminal Court.

52. The human rights situation in Belarus was extremely worrying. The elections had not been free or

fair, and the European Union did not recognize the results. The so-called “inauguration” and the new mandate claimed by Aleksandr Lukashenko lacked any democratic legitimacy. The violence used by the State authorities against peaceful protesters, human rights defenders and the political opposition was unacceptable and disproportionate. Violence must be avoided, and all those unlawfully detained must be immediately and unconditionally released. The European Union expected a complete and transparent investigation into all alleged violations and abuses and called on the Government of Belarus to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus.

53. There had been no tangible progress on human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The human rights violations committed in and by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea were systematic, widespread and gross. The European Union called on that country to urgently improve the human rights situation, to sign, ratify and implement additional United Nations human rights conventions and to invite the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to visit the country.

54. The international community should continue to follow closely the situation of human rights in Myanmar and should urge that country to immediately end ongoing violence and violations, to fully comply with the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice and to combat impunity, ensuring that those responsible for violations and abuses of human rights, many of which amounted to the gravest crimes under international law, were held accountable. The European Union called on Myanmar to cooperate with the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. Evidence suggesting the occurrence of the gravest crimes under international law should be used to expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts or tribunals, including the International Criminal Court.

55. More than a million people had been displaced in Syria as a result of the hostilities. The civilian population, including many children, had been subjected to indiscriminate, widespread and systematic attacks as well as gross violations and abuses of international human rights and violations of international humanitarian law that could amount to war crimes. The European Union continued to voice strong concern about reports of social and demographic engineering throughout Syria and mass waves of displacement. The deliberate targeting of civilians, humanitarian workers, medical personnel and educational and medical facilities by any party to the

conflict was inexcusable. The European Union also strongly condemned the continued use of arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearances by Syria. Accountability was of the utmost importance and the European Union supported the activities of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The European Union reiterated its call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court.

56. The European Union continued to be gravely concerned about the existence of a large network of political re-education camps, widespread surveillance and systemic restrictions on freedom of religion or belief imposed against Uighurs and other minorities in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and against Christians across China, as well as about reports of forced labour and forced birth control. It called for an independent, objective, impartial and transparent assessment of the issues of concern and reiterated its call on China to allow meaningful access to Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region for independent observers, including for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to uphold its national and international obligations and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression, and including the rights of minorities, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet. The European Union urged China to establish fair trial guarantees and thoroughly investigate reported cases of arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and torture and harassment of human rights defenders and their families, in order to put an end to such practices. The national security legislation for Hong Kong recently adopted by China was a matter of grave concern, in particular the extensive erosion of rights and freedoms that were supposed to remain protected until at least 2047, the lack of clarity in the law, its extraterritorial provisions and its application against human rights defenders, journalists and the media.

57. Despite the pandemic, the international community had taken every opportunity to reaffirm the full validity and force of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the European Union would do its utmost to make the promise of Beijing a reality.

58. **Mr. Gumende** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), commended WHO on its leading role in

addressing the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

59. SADC had a long history of commitment to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender equality was a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development. Gender-based discrimination was one of the greatest impediments to development, while the promotion gender equality was an effective means of eradicating poverty. Through its Protocol on Gender and Development, SADC was committed to removing all barriers to the achievement of gender equality at the regional and national level, including through the implementation of gender-responsive laws and policies. In 2016, SADC had revised the Protocol to bring it into line with the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Beijing Platform for Action.

60. Nevertheless, the region continued to face a number of challenges, including the divergence between statutory and customary law and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care. In response, it was implementing a multidimensional women's empowerment strategy and gender-responsive budgeting guidelines, and prioritizing women's economic empowerment in its industrialization strategy.

61. Despite the years that had passed since the holding of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Durban Review Conference, the problems that States had sought to address persisted around the world. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination still needed robust implementation mechanisms. SADC continued to support the efforts of its member States to act in accordance with the key principles of the Treaty of the Southern African Development Community (SADC Treaty) and relevant international instruments.

62. The management of over a million refugees and asylum-seekers and about five million internally displaced persons present in the SADC region was complex and demanded substantial resources. Conflicts and violence and climate change triggered internal displacement and placed a burden on Governments to provide protection and assistance to those vulnerable groups. As part of their commitment to better address those challenges, SADC member States had ratified various international legal instruments. Furthermore, the Community had recently adopted a common regional policy framework on the management of refugees and asylum seekers, adopted a five-year draft action plan to operationalize the memorandum of

understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, signed in 1996 and reviewed in 2019; and was planning a regional conference to address member States' pledges and bring together all critical stakeholders, including donors. As economies began to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees must not be left behind but rather included in prevention and response strategies by their host countries, with support from the international community.

63. Crime prevention and drug control affected regional peace, security, stability, governance and development. SADC had continued to enhance cooperation within the framework of a range of instruments, including the Protocol on Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking in the Southern African Development Community Region. In addition, while developing a regional strategy to prevent and combat transnational organized crime, SADC was consolidating efforts that would have a lasting impact on the fight against transnational organized crime and drug control.

64. **Ms. Carey** (Bahamas), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that addressing inequalities was fundamental to eradicating poverty, making social progress and achieving sustainable development for all. Vulnerabilities, including the existential threat of climate change, had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

65. COVID-19 had placed additional pressure on the Community's health systems, which were already burdened by high numbers of persons living with non-communicable diseases. CARICOM had a robust project in place to procure medical equipment and other supplies for COVID-19 testing and treatment.

66. CARICOM member States continued to implement policies aimed at making substantial progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to children's education and health. However, COVID-19 threatened that progress. The pandemic had disrupted the learning of over five million students, and resource limitations were affecting access to online instruction, which threatened to widen socioeconomic gaps. The member States were nonetheless committed to ensuring innovative delivery through the CARICOM Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy. Efficient and effective social protection systems were needed to address the dire impacts of the pandemic. To build back better, special attention must be paid to the education, health and safety of children, the primary building blocks of the region's future development.

67. Women played an essential role in the socioeconomic and political development of the region.

Caribbean prevalence surveys had shown that violence was rooted in gender inequality and harmful gender norms. Violence against women continued unabated worldwide and had had devastating effects in the region, while the COVID-19 pandemic had made the situation worse. CARICOM member States continued to implement regional programmes to address the harmful effects of violence against women and girls, including by addressing legislative and policy gaps, strengthening institutions, providing support for victims of violence and their families, producing disaggregated data and empowering women's movements. Better partnerships with men and boys were also at the centre of their efforts.

68. CARICOM was deeply concerned by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on indigenous peoples and welcomed the April 2020 United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19, which included the acknowledgement that indigenous people were among those most at risk. The member States continued to work to ensure that indigenous populations participated effectively in decision-making by instituting consultation processes.

69. According to successive reports of the Secretary-General, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance continued to prevail, to varying degrees, around the world. Efforts to eradicate racism and racial discrimination must continue.

70. High levels of crime in the region remained a cause for serious concern and had been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional challenges such as porous borders, the trans-shipment of drugs and emerging cyberthreats had not disappeared. As a result of the pandemic, CARICOM was reconsidering national and collective approaches to security and ways to avoid the further disenfranchisement or alienation of the most vulnerable. The Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security played a significant role in ensuring a coherent and effective regional response, as well as in the implementation of the region's crime prevention and social development action plan.

71. A holistic approach must be taken to human rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals represented the key link between sustainable development and a full realization of human rights for all.

72. **Mr. Aidid** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that ASEAN leaders had adopted statements and declarations affirming its whole-of-ASEAN response to the pandemic, as they remained focused on achieving the vision of an ASEAN community. Although the pandemic had temporarily halted progress, the ASEAN

commitment to build a community had not diminished and the Association maintained its ambitious goal to achieve its social development agenda. ASEAN remained committed to intensifying regional cooperation that placed vulnerable groups at the centre of COVID-19 response and recovery. It had identified measures consistent with national laws that would mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, facilitate a rapid recovery and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable groups, with their meaningful participation.

73. ASEAN reaffirmed its commitment to advancing the rights of children, including their protection from all forms of exploitation and abuse. It continued to engage with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and to make steady progress in implementing the 2016–2025 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children. In February 2020, ASEAN had held its first regional conference on the protection of children online.

74. ASEAN was concerned that criminal groups were taking advantage of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic to exploit vulnerable groups and was deeply committed to protecting the regional and global community against transnational crime and extremism. ASEAN continued to implement the 2016–2025 ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime. The work programme for 2019–2021 was aimed at developing regional capacity to respond to terrorism and transnational crime threats.

75. ASEAN continued to make progress in implementing the 2017–2020 Bohol Trafficking in Persons Work Plan. To combat the ever-present threat of extremism and terrorism, ASEAN continued to implement the work plan of the 2019–2025 ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism. Regarding cybercrime, the ASEAN cybercapacity development project had entered its second phase, and the ASEAN-Singapore Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence complemented ASEAN efforts in cybersecurity capacity-building.

76. ASEAN was resolutely opposed to the legalization of illicit drugs for non-medical and non-scientific use. The 2016–2025 ASEAN Work Plan in Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs played a key role in the region's fight against the drugs problem and in realizing the ASEAN vision for a drug-free society. The first internal review had highlighted a successful implementation rate of 79 per cent. ASEAN regional cooperation mechanisms had facilitated interdiction

operations to disrupt the flow of drugs and expand information-sharing and drug surveillance in the region.

77. The international community must work together to advance socioeconomic development, protect and promote the rights of children and make the world a safer place. It faced all those challenges at a time when national resources were being stretched by the COVID-19 pandemic. Only through decisive regional and international collaboration would it be possible to weather the multiple crises and build a better future.

78. **Mr. Zhang Zhe** (China), speaking also on behalf of Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Namibia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Sudan, the Sudan, Suriname, the Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Zimbabwe and the State of Palestine, said that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to severely affect all nations, but developing countries in particular.

79. The response to and recovery from COVID-19 required global solidarity and international cooperation. Yet unilateral coercive measures continued to be applied, which were contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations as well as to international law, multilateralism and the basic norms of international relations. Such measures had an undeniable impact on human rights, since they impeded the full realization of social and economic development and adversely affected well-being, especially that of women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. They undermined the right to health by hampering access to medicines, technology and equipment, which was especially important in the context of the pandemic. United Nations senior officials and the international community had recognized the severe impact of those measures. In March 2020, the Secretary-General had appealed for the waiving of sanctions that undermined countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had made a statement on the need to ease or suspend sectoral sanctions in light of their debilitating impact on the health sector and human rights.

80. The delegations on whose behalf he was speaking also welcomed the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on a comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, in which the Assembly strongly urged States to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral

economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. They took note of the work on the issue by the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, other special procedures of the Human Rights Council and the relevant human rights treaty bodies and looked forward to their further consideration of the issue. Those countries called for the complete and immediate lifting of unilateral coercive measures in order to ensure the full, effective and efficient response of all members of the international community to COVID-19. Global solidarity and international cooperation were the most powerful weapons to fight and overcome the disease.

81. Almost 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, incidents such as the death of George Floyd and the shooting of Jacob Blake continued to take place and vulnerable people continued to suffer or lose their lives to racism and police brutality. They were a reminder that chronic and deep-rooted social discrimination, police brutality and social inequalities still existed. The COVID-19 mortality rate among minorities, in particular people of African descent, was disproportionately high in some countries. The health situation of migrants at immigration detention centres in certain countries was also a matter of serious concern, and reflected a contemporary form of racial discrimination. In that regard, they called for the full implementation of the Human Rights Council resolution on the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers.

82. Lastly, speaking in his national capacity, he said that the groundless accusation made by the European Union against China was completely unacceptable.

83. **Ms. Mammadaliyeva** (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that, at the eighteenth summit of the Movement held in October 2019, Heads of State and Government had reiterated that democracy was a universal value based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives, and that while all democracies shared common features, there was no single model of democracy. Sovereignty and the right to self-determination must be respected, and they rejected any attempt to break down constitutional and democratic orders that had been legitimately established by the peoples.

84. General Assembly resolution [67/19](#), which the Assembly accorded to Palestine the status of a non-member observer State in the United Nations, was a reflection of the international community's longstanding, principled support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, and for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

85. Solidarity was a broad concept encompassing the sustainability of international relations, peaceful coexistence, and the equity and empowerment of developing countries, whose ultimate goal was the full economic and social development of their peoples.

86. Human rights issues must be addressed in a fair and equal manner through a constructive, non-confrontational, non-politicized and non-selective approach based on dialogue that takes into account the particularities of each country. Objectivity, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, impartiality, non-selectivity and transparency should be the guiding principles.

87. The Movement condemned manifestations and acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against migrants and the stereotypes often applied to them, including on the basis of religion or belief, and urged States to apply and reinforce existing laws to eradicate impunity for such acts.

88. The Movement was committed to promoting and protecting all universally recognized human rights, in particular the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and as an integral part of all universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, as highlighted at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on 22 September 2016 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development.

89. High food price volatility directly impacted the fundamental human right to food. The resulting and ongoing food crisis posed a serious challenge to the fight against poverty and hunger. The multiple and complex causes of the crisis required a comprehensive, coordinated and sustained response by the international community. It was crucial to strengthen the Global Information and Early Warning System and the Committee on World Food Security to help address and prevent the recurrence of food crises.

90. In conclusion, the Movement was highly concerned by the growing resort to unilateralism and unilaterally imposed measures that undermined the Charter of the United Nations and international law. It

was committed to promoting, preserving, revitalizing, reforming and strengthening multilateralism and the multilateral decision-making process through the United Nations by strictly adhering to the Charter and international law in order to create a just and equitable world order and global democratic governance.

91. **Ms. Van Vlierberge** (Belgium) said that Belgium had traditionally undertaken to ensure that its international action and its respect for human rights at the national level were consistent, which was the best basis for a credible and open dialogue on human rights. Multilateralism was a part of Belgian identity.

92. It was vital to ensure the independence of the special procedure mandate holders and to facilitate their visits; Belgium had issued a standing invitation to them and encouraged other Member States that had not yet done so to do likewise. The effective functioning of the human rights treaty bodies was vital, and Belgium firmly supported the process to modernize them while preserving their independence.

93. The world was confronted by complex challenges. The death penalty continued to be applied in a number of countries, including for behaviours such as apostasy and adultery that did not constitute “the most serious crimes”. It was highly discriminatory, since it targeted certain groups that were exercising their fundamental rights. It did not work as a deterrent and could not be reversed if an error had been made. Belgium would continue to work tirelessly for the universal abolition of the death penalty.

94. Twenty-five years earlier, Member States had made a commitment to take bold measures to achieve gender equality. While progress had undeniably been made, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had yet to be fully implemented by any country. A key priority for the Committee and for Belgium was to combat gender-based violence, which had increased exponentially since the onset of the pandemic. Full access to health care and sexual and reproductive rights remained essential, including access to information and comprehensive sex education. The pandemic must not be used as an excuse to limit access to those essential health-care services. Policies must be gender-sensitive and women should participate in decision-making on an equal footing with men. Political commitment was essential in order to mainstream gender into all areas of action and no tradition, religion, cultural value or custom should ever be used to justify gender-based discrimination or violence, or violations of the human rights of women and girls.

95. On the cusp of the twentieth anniversary of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination,

Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, complacency was not an option. Belgium would continue working tirelessly to combat all forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

96. **Mr. Ishikane** (Japan) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected both the social and economic dimensions and that inclusive measures must be taken to protect and empower all individuals. Japan strongly supported the efforts undertaken by developing countries to build resilient health systems. It was of the utmost importance to place people and their rights at the forefront of the recovery response.

97. The fight against COVID-19 must not be used as an excuse to undermine the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Japan was concerned about the spread of violent extremism, hate speech and intolerance. Freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly were fundamental rights and must be upheld in every country and in every context, including within the anti-racism movement.

98. The impact of COVID-19 must not be allowed to reverse the progress made towards gender equality. Japan had assisted women in Japan by adopting measures to prevent domestic violence, while also continuing to empower women globally, including by providing assistance to tackle sexual violence in conflict.

99. Strengthening the rule of law and fostering a culture of lawfulness were essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Japan would host the Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Kyoto in March 2021, which would advance those critical norms. Japan asked for the support of all countries in ensuring the success of the first major United Nations conference to be held outside of United Nations offices since the onset of the pandemic. Cybercrime had been particularly severe in the wake of the pandemic, and close cooperation among countries was essential to tackling it effectively. Any process aimed at elaborating a new convention on cybercrime must proceed on a consensus basis.

100. The forcible abduction of Japanese nationals by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was one of the most serious human rights violations committed by that country. The families of the victims, who had been abducted in the 1970s and 1980s, continued to age. Ms. Arimoto Kayoko, the mother of Ms. Arimoto Keiko, had passed away in February 2020. Mr. Yokota Shigeru, the father of Ms. Yokota Megumi, had passed away in June 2020. There was no time to lose. Japan sought the understanding and cooperation of the

international community for all abductees to be returned to Japan as quickly as possible, and continued to call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to listen to the calls of the international community and to take concrete steps towards an early resolution of the abductions and cooperation with the international community. Japan was determined to face the Democratic People's Republic of Korea directly and take all possible measures to resolve outstanding issues of concern, including that of the abductions.

101. Japan was committed to hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in the summer 2021 as proof of humanity's victory over the pandemic. The Games would provide an opportunity to embrace diversity and inclusion and to increase accessibility for persons with disabilities through a whole-of-society approach.

102. **Mr. Rae** (Canada) said that the pandemic had exposed and exacerbated human rights abuses and inequalities. Women were shouldering a disproportionate proportion of the caregiving burden and there was a risk that the progress made towards their economic empowerment would be reversed. Gender-based violence was on the rise, and older persons suffered increased social isolation, medical risks and, in many cases, abhorrent living conditions. Indigenous peoples faced systemic barriers to essential services and infrastructure. Religious and ethnic minorities were being targeted by government crackdowns and by social discrimination, and many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were experiencing increased stigmatization. Destabilizing threats to human rights posed by the pandemic, economic shocks and climate change demanded an urgent response.

103. Women had made key contributions to the COVID-19 response through paid and unpaid work, yet too often they had been excluded from decision-making. It was vital to advance gender equality, including through sexual and reproductive health and rights, to commit to active anti-racism and to advance the rights of indigenous peoples rather than simply acknowledging their resilience.

104. None of those goals could be achieved while journalists and media professionals lived in fear. Human rights defenders also risked their lives to denounce abuses, and civil society actors were unable to operate freely. As the former Special Envoy of Canada to Myanmar, he had witnessed the crucial role played by those who had advanced international accountability by documenting patterns of discrimination and abuses against the Rohingya. In Syria, human rights violations continued to be committed with impunity. Canada was

committed to enabling Syrians to decide the future of their country. His delegation also wished to express solidarity with Belarus and condemned the acts of repression against peaceful demonstrators, including during the so-called investiture of Alexandr Lukashenko. Lastly, Canada was deeply concerned by the arbitrary detention and sentencing in China of foreign nationals, including Canadian citizens, for political reasons, and by the lack of consular access. It was part of a broader context of human rights violations in China, including against the minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet and the people of Hong Kong.

105. **Ms. Raz** (Afghanistan) said that the issues before the Committee were central to the collective response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Afghanistan was determined to seize the opportunity to help guide the international community's response in order to build back better.

106. Despite many challenges, Afghanistan had made significant progress in areas related to the Committee's work. The Government had continued to implement the recommendations made during its third cycle of the universal periodic review and address the challenges identified in its national report on the application of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It had established a high council for women to empower women through leadership, especially in the provinces. The council would include female deputy provincial governors, women advocates, civil society activists, representatives from governmental entities and non-governmental organizations. Afghanistan had also decided to include mothers' names on national identity cards, a significant step forward in a traditional society, which would empower women and give them the necessary recognition and identity. The Government was implementing the second phase of its national action plan on women, peace, and security, an important aspect of which was localization and consultations with women and other stakeholders nationwide.

107. The Government was also dedicated to helping Afghan refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. The number of returnees to Afghanistan had increased significantly as a result of the pandemic. The country was working closely with development and humanitarian partners to provide them with essential services while also taking measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

108. To empower people with disabilities, the Government had established a quota for the recruitment of persons with disabilities into the civil service and had adapted the examination to take account of possible disabilities.

109. Before the pandemic had struck, over 9 million children had been enrolled in school. In cooperation with the Education in Emergencies Working Group, the Ministry of Education had released a plan to ensure that learning continued while schools were closed. The Government was committed to reaching the 3.7 million children who were still out of school because of conflict, natural disaster or poverty and to ensuring that all children, especially girls, were able to return to school after the pandemic.

110. In its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had concentrated on providing services to the most vulnerable groups. It had distributed food items and helped meet other basic needs in cooperation with bakeries, mosques, development councils and other institutions.

111. After 40 years of war, achieving sustainable and inclusive peace was the cornerstone of the Government's efforts. On 12 September, the intra-Afghan negotiations had finally begun in Doha and had opened the door to perhaps the most difficult and challenging period of the country's history. Nevertheless, Afghanistan was confident that, with the support of the United Nations and the international community, it would be able to create a framework for a nation that celebrated peace and protected all its citizens' rights, including those of women and minorities. Afghanistan asked for the international community's continued support to fulfil its aspirations for peace and prosperity for all Afghans.

112. **Mr. Fernandez De Soto Valderrama** (Colombia) said that the 2030 Agenda provided a roadmap for collective action to ensure that no one was left behind, and Governments, the private sector and civil society all had an important role to play in that effort. The reduction of inequalities was a central goal of the national development plan and social policies were based on sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, universal access to good-quality education, access to public services and gender equality. Colombia was committed to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Childhood, adolescence and youth were the foundations for development and his Government had launched a national alliance to combat violence against boys, girls and adolescents in August 2019.

113. Indigenous peoples in Colombia were protected and recognized under the Constitution, based on a multidimensional approach to equality. Colombia sought to protect and ensure cultural and ethnic diversity through appropriate mechanisms for participation.

114. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and upholding human rights were indisputably linked. Colombia had a robust institutional framework derived from its Constitution and the international human rights instruments to which it was a party. Protecting human rights defenders was one of the challenges in terms of ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights. The Government of Colombia was committed to fulfilling its due diligence duty and had adopted an action plan to prevent and protect individually and collectively the rights to life, freedom, integrity and security of human rights defenders and journalists. The aim was to build trust in institutions by disseminating information on institutions dealing with prevention and protection and promoting closer cooperation with civil society.

115. The security challenges in Colombia were primarily associated with illicit economies, such as drug trafficking and illegal mining. Colombia was striving to counteract them and called for renewed efforts to apply the principle of common and shared responsibility to combating them. The fight against the world drug problem must be an ongoing endeavour and must address every link of the chain.

116. **Mr. Braun** (Luxembourg) said that measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 should not be used as a pretext for restricting freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly, as had too often been the case since the start of 2020.

117. There was a risk that the progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals could be reversed, in particular where the most vulnerable groups were concerned, since it depended on international solidarity. For its part, Luxembourg had received unaccompanied minors and families from the Moria refugee camp. The pandemic had shown that global challenges could only be addressed at the global level, and the international community needed to work together to realize the right to development. Luxembourg devoted 1 per cent of its gross national income to development assistance and would continue to contribute to that effort.

118. Multilateralism was the best way to guarantee progress on the subject of human rights. Compliance with international commitments benefited each and every individual. Luxembourg called on all States to cooperate with the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary bodies. Moreover, multilateralism required an international order that was based on the rule of law. Luxembourg fully supported the International Criminal Court and mechanisms such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible

for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar, among others, was a reminder that the international community had a responsibility to protect. Multilateral human rights bodies must be given the resources they needed, and the review of the human rights treaty bodies must result in tangible reform.

119. On the occasion of the anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, Luxembourg had recalled its commitment to gender equality, to the fight against misogyny and sexual and sexist violence, to the right to education of women and girls, and to the promotion of their health and sexual and reproductive rights. In 2018, his country had chosen a feminist foreign policy, on the basis of which it had implemented a national action plan on women and peace and security. Luxembourg was committed to combating all forms of discrimination, as illustrated by its membership of the LGBTI Core Group.

120. As Co-Chair of the Group of Friends for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals, Luxembourg had launched, in conjunction with the European Union and the Latin America and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), an initiative to release a statement on the impact of the pandemic on children. A total of 172 countries had endorsed the statement, which was focused on collective action to address the pandemic and give children a future.

121. The repression of dissidents, human rights and environmental defenders was escalating. As Chair of the Committee for the seventy-fourth session, he had undertaken to give a voice to civil society. Although he had received some criticism as a result, he urged the Chair to pursue the same path. Giving civil society its rightful place in the United Nations would be a priority for his Government in the Human Rights Council if elected in October 2021.

122. **Mr. Sparks** (Hungary), in a pre-recorded video statement and speaking as a youth delegate, said that one year earlier, as a youth delegate and as a medical student, he had made a statement to the Committee about the importance of prevention, vaccination and mental health. No one could have imagined how important those matters would become. Everyone had since learned to care more for their health and take prevention more seriously. During the quarantine, he had brought the United Nations into the homes of elementary and high school students, listened to their concerns and trained them to protect their mental health, including by asking for help if they needed it. Young people could and should play a leading role in

combating the virus; they should practise responsible behaviour, help the elderly and not lose touch with loved ones. As a qualified medical doctor, university researcher and teacher, he continued to serve people through science, by training the next generation of doctors. He called on all young people to find a way to contribute to the fight against COVID-19.

123. **Mr. Varga** (Hungary) said that his country strongly supported the protection and promotion of the rights of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, which should include facilitating the use of the minority language in education and elsewhere. To that end, a legally binding international framework on the protection of minorities should be established.

124. Hungary was deeply committed to the universal protection of freedom of conscience, religion and belief, and had been an active advocate for persecuted religious minorities, especially persecuted Christians around the world. In that spirit, it had been among the first countries to join the International Religious Freedom Alliance in February 2020. The systematic violation of freedom of religion or belief had severe humanitarian consequences, such as forced displacement or exclusion from basic services, and humanitarian policies must respond effectively and holistically to such discrimination. Hungary was fast emerging as an international donor in that field, assisting the most vulnerable communities in crisis regions and conflict zones worldwide.

125. Hungary was firmly committed to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Women should have the freedom to choose how they wished to fulfil their true potential, and should be given every support to do so. Economic empowerment, generous paid parental leave and expanded childcare provision were the main policy tools employed by his Government to help women reconcile work and family life. During the pandemic, the Government was stepping up its efforts to ensure the continued delivery of all critical health services, especially for women.

126. Investing in future generations was at the heart of the country's long-term strategy. Its youth policies aimed, inter alia, to create opportunities for young people living in rural areas, boost youth employment through wage subsidies and provide housing benefits to young married couples. Children in need received a nursery education and school meals free of charge, and most children in care were now living with a foster family rather than in institutions. The digital child protection strategy had become more relevant than ever during the pandemic in protecting children from online risks.

127. The rights of persons with disabilities were underpinned by ongoing de-institutionalization and support for independent living and personalized services based on a complex needs assessment. Hungarian sign language was protected by law as an integral part of Hungarian culture.

128. **Mr. Kashaev** (Russian Federation) said that the COVID-19 crisis had highlighted the lack of unity among countries and the unwillingness of certain countries to put aside their political interests in favour of cooperation. Collaborative human rights efforts were being obstructed by the accusatory rhetoric often employed to justify interference in the internal affairs of States and the approach taken by Western countries of replacing the universally recognized principles of international law with a so-called rules-based world order that ignored basic socioeconomic rights and the cultural diversity of the modern world.

129. His delegation was seriously concerned at the use by Western countries of the Human Rights Council as a tool to interfere in internal affairs and topple Governments that were not to their liking. It was unacceptable for diplomats appointed as President of the Council to exploit their position in the political interests of their own countries or of certain groups of countries. A moral and ethical code of conduct should be developed for Presidents of the Council, and they should have to take an oath before assuming the position.

130. Coordinated and concerted action by the entire international community was the key to solving the persistent problems in the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, which had been accentuated during the pandemic. Attempts to glorify Nazism and Nazi collaborators should not be tolerated. The violations observed in Ukraine and the Baltic countries of the linguistic rights of national minorities, including Russian-speaking minorities, were unacceptable and should be duly investigated by the United Nations human rights bodies.

131. Given the transition to online environments because of COVID-19 and the related global increase in cybercrime, the Russian Federation welcomed the decision of the General Assembly, in its resolution [74/247](#), to establish an ad hoc intergovernmental committee to elaborate the first-ever international convention on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes. All States should participate actively in the work of the ad hoc committee, including its organizational session.

132. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs should develop a comprehensive response to the pandemic based on the three international drug control

conventions. International cooperation in combating corruption should be strengthened on the basis of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The Russian Federation remained committed to the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the Convention and looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly against corruption to be held in 2021.

133. **Mr. Manalo** (Philippines) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionately affected vulnerable groups. People in humanitarian situations caused by armed conflict or natural disasters were also at greater risk of dying from the virus.

134. The Philippines had implemented a migrant repatriation programme of unprecedented scale. While thousands of Filipino migrants were serving on the front lines to combat the pandemic, more than 345,000 others had been repatriated because of job losses. His Government had borne the cost of repatriation and provided financial assistance to qualified beneficiaries. Thousands of Filipino seafarers were still on board vessels that were unable to dock due to COVID-19 restrictions. Migration was an enabler of development, and migrant workers had a critical role to play in COVID-19 response and recovery. His delegation called for international cooperation to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration involving full respect for the human rights and the humane treatment of migrants. The Global Compact for Migration was an excellent framework for global solidarity and cooperation.

135. The pandemic had been especially hard on women, particularly in the areas of income, health and security. If no decisive action were taken, the gains made in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women over the past 25 years could be lost. The Philippines was employing gender-sensitive planning and gender and development budgeting that required all its agencies to use 5 per cent of their budget for gender mainstreaming.

136. Laws had been enacted in the Philippines to protect children's rights and dignity and to provide health and nutrition services for children up to 2 years of age. Under a law on protecting children in situations of armed conflict, children were "zones of peace", to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect and discrimination in situations of armed conflict. Free primary and secondary education was guaranteed by the Constitution and free tuition recently been extended to all government colleges and universities. A conditional cash transfer programme ensured that children from poor families stayed in school. The Philippines had also

been active in combating the rising number of cases of online exploitation of children.

137. The rights, needs and well-being of older persons with disabilities must be promoted and mainstreamed. Older persons and persons with disabilities were agents of change as well as beneficiaries of development. However, they had been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and faced a higher risk of mortality. The Philippines called on States and stakeholders to ensure that they had access to health-care services, medicines and vaccines. Their meaningful participation, as well as that of indigenous peoples, in the COVID-19 response and recovery was essential.

138. States had a sovereign prerogative to take measures against crime and terrorism and to pass laws safeguarding national interests in accordance with domestic processes and legal frameworks. His delegation called for an end to the weaponized and politically motivated use of human rights and for constructive multilateral cooperation and genuine dialogue that would enable the United Nations to promote and protect human rights effectively.

139. **Mr. Skoknic Tapia** (Chile) said that addressing the pandemic was an integral part of the Committee's work, given the direct impact of the pandemic on people's lives. The seventy-fifth session was particularly important as a time for Member States to work together to overcome the crisis, which had affected every country.

140. The pandemic had shone a spotlight on social inequalities and on the urgency of strengthening an approach based on human rights and protection. Many vulnerable groups had been severely affected by the crisis, with the alarming increase in domestic violence being one example. Chile reaffirmed the importance of promoting and protecting the human rights enshrined in international instruments and was grateful to the United Nations and human rights and civil society organizations for placing the emphasis on people, their safety and their rights during the current difficult times.

141. More than ever before, in light of the universal nature of human rights, it was necessary to emphasize the value of protecting the State, democracy, dialogue, cooperation and solidarity. Multilateralism gave priority to consensus-building. During a global crisis, the universal nature of human rights enhanced the preventive capacity of the multilateral system, which also benefited from the participation of other stakeholders such as civil society and the private sector.

142. Chile was deeply committed to democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, and

would work tirelessly for human rights to be upheld around the world without distinction, especially in the current difficult circumstances, which presented many challenges to democracy and citizen participation.

143. **Mr. Gertze** (Namibia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had compounded existing challenges in developing countries, such as high debt burdens and reduced fiscal revenues. The high levels of unemployment, particularly among young people, could destabilize some countries, while the crisis could halt or reverse gains made in relation to poverty eradication, food security and inequality.

144. Education had been one of the hardest hit sectors in Namibia. In response to school closures, the Ministry of Education had rolled out an e-learning platform, which ensured that learning continued and that learners could transition back to in-person learning when schools had reopened the previous month.

145. The United Nations must intensify its efforts to prevent violations of women's rights, such as their exclusion from decision-making. The rise in gender-based violence was worrying; changing the mindsets and harmful cultural norms that perpetuated such violence must be a priority. In late October 2020, the International Women's Peace Centre would be opened in Namibia. The Centre was intended to become an institute of excellence for mediation and conflict prevention to ensure that women had adequate tools to contribute to humanity's future.

146. Namibia had been guided by the principle of the promotion and protection of human rights when implementing emergency regulations in response to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the politicization of human rights must be avoided. The human rights of all countries should be assessed in a fair and equal manner, with respect for national sovereignty and dignity. The universal periodic review remained the sole universally agreed mechanism to address the human rights situation of every country through constructive dialogue. Namibia stood ready to work with the international community to address current and future human rights challenges around the world, particularly through dialogue and peaceful means.

147. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the promise to leave no one behind rang hollow for the people who remained under occupation and were still denied their inalienable rights to self-determination and freedom in the twenty-first century. Seventy-five years had passed since the establishment of a global parliament of humanity that had envisaged a world in which nations were united and enjoyed freedom and prosperity. As a nation that had experienced an

outpouring of international solidarity during the dark days of its struggle for freedom and independence, Namibia continued to call for the full implementation of all United Nations resolutions on Palestine and Western Sahara.

148. **Mr. de la Fuente Ramirez** (Mexico), in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the pandemic offered an opportunity to renew commitments to multilateralism, international cooperation and human rights.

149. In the experience of Mexico, close cooperation with the universal human rights system had a positive impact and his country welcomed international scrutiny. Cooperation with organizations and agencies must increasingly be aligned with national priorities, since that contributed to the well-being of the population and to sustainable development.

150. Mexico would participate objectively in the Committee's discussions, fostering dialogue and cooperation while also seeking to ensure strict adherence to international law. It would continue to promote the rights of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls were cross-cutting priorities for Mexico throughout the United Nations system. His country was proud to have a feminist foreign policy and would work to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls. It was no less important to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, hate speech and hate crimes.

151. The pandemic had heightened the challenges relating to the full enjoyment of rights and fundamental freedoms. Health was a human right; international cooperation must be strengthened to ensure fair, transparent, efficient and timely access to the preventive tools, vaccines and medical equipment needed to tackle the current and any future pandemics. Such was the spirit of General Assembly resolution 74/274, introduced by Mexico and adopted in April 2020.

152. **Ms. Abbey** (Ghana) said that there had been successes on several fronts with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, despite a slow pace of implementation in some areas. However, daunting challenges and gaps remained, and there was a real risk of regression in gains made. The COVID-19 pandemic had called attention to persistent inequalities and barriers to women's empowerment and the unacceptable reality of their continued vulnerability to violence. Member States must ensure that COVID-19 response and recovery plans addressed the gender-related impacts of the pandemic. Women must participate equally in decision-making and must occupy a central place in

national development planning to guarantee resilience and sustainability.

153. Ghana had made significant progress in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in all 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. Successive Governments had taken steps to enact legislative and constitutional instruments and to formulate the corresponding national frameworks, which provided a comprehensive blueprint for addressing inequalities, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in national development efforts. The successes to date included an increase in the number of women political appointees, gender parity in education and better reproductive health care for women, as evidenced by a steady reduction in maternal mortality. In addition, the Government of Ghana continued to implement social development programmes aimed at addressing women's vulnerabilities.

154. Violence against women and girls, which was largely fuelled by sociocultural practices and beliefs, remained a critical area of concern. The Domestic Violence Secretariat of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection continued to provide policy guidance, in tandem with the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit, whose mandate was to prevent, investigate and prosecute all cases involving domestic violence, gender-based violence and child abuse.

155. Her Government continued to make steady progress in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. Policy interventions in several sectors had been specifically targeted to improve the lives of children and to address their developmental needs. Medical care at birth had improved considerably over the past five years. The Government had also made significant headway in making education accessible to all children, which had led to gender parity in education, particularly at the lower educational levels. Ghana also remained committed to tackling the sexual abuse of children and child trafficking. Eliminating harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage also remained a priority. In order to complement national legislation with social engagement and education, Ghana was implementing a national strategic framework on ending child marriage and convening national dialogues with major stakeholders such as traditional leaders and the media.

156. On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations, the international community must reaffirm its commitment to the promotion and protection of universal human rights, as one of the foundational pillars of the Organization. In view of the importance of

human rights for peace, security and sustainable development, there was an even more compelling case for strengthened dialogue among Member States on measures that would help advance accession to human rights treaties and their implementation. In that regard, Ghana welcomed the recommendations contained in the report of the review of the human rights treaty body system.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.