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Summary record of the 2nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 5 October 2020, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Almanzlawiy (Vice-Chair) (Saudi Arabia)
later: Ms. Eugenio (Vice-Chair) (Argentina)
later: Ms. Charikhi (Vice-Chair) (Algeria)
later: Ms. Bogyay (Hungary)

Contents

General debate (*continued*)

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In the absence of Ms. Bogyay (Hungary), Mr. Almanzlawiy (Saudi Arabia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

General debate (continued)

1. **Ms. Sekerešova** (Slovakia), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video message, said that social media presented a significant opportunity for young people. The United Nations could create an online system, similar to that of the #UN75 campaign, for young people to share innovations.

2. **Mr. Babjak** (Slovakia), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video message, said that young people had a great deal of potential to help those in need as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including by helping older persons or creating a national platform to mobilize volunteers.

3. **Mr. Kováčik** (Slovakia) said that States should not allow the COVID-19 crisis to become a crisis of human rights, in particular at a time when the world was commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations, an organization built on the guiding principle of promotion and protection of human rights.

4. As the pandemic evolved and lockdowns were put in place, the rates of domestic violence had escalated, bringing enormous suffering to women and children. It was essential to improve responses to domestic violence and protect the most vulnerable. Gender inequalities were still deeply rooted in every society and no country was on target to achieve gender equality by 2030. It was therefore necessary to tackle critical challenges and address the structural causes of such inequality. The pandemic had also prevented children from attending school, maintaining social contacts and engaging in physical activity, and was causing socioeconomic impacts that might affect them for the rest of their lives. It was necessary to act and invest in the youngest generation immediately.

5. Deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus, his country condemned the unacceptable violence against peaceful protesters and representatives of the media, the opposition and civil society. Inclusive dialogue, free and fair elections and the reestablishment of democracy and the rule of law were the only feasible way forward for Belarus.

6. The lockdown had exposed millions of people to risks and challenges, including domestic violence, the

suspension of education and awareness-raising programmes and the disruption of access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services. Vulnerable groups, including women and girls, who suffered from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, were disproportionately affected. Of particular concern were the staggering reports of increased domestic violence, which had led his Government, in partnership with civil society, to establish a 24/7 hotline and a safe shelter for victims.

7. The unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19 had required Member States, both domestically and at the level of the United Nations, to take exceptional measures that had sometimes set aside human rights considerations and multi-stakeholder participation. Non-governmental organizations faced the risk of being excluded from the conversation around key human rights issues owing to a lack of resources and mechanisms for virtual engagement with the United Nations. The United Nations must reassure civil society organizations, journalists and human rights defenders that their contributions were valued and that it was working to ensure their meaningful engagement and to mitigate any challenges and restrictions they faced as a result of the pandemic.

8. **Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein) said that the measures adopted by States to contain the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in far-reaching restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and it was therefore of paramount importance to ensure that those measures were necessary, proportionate, limited in time and fully reversible if the circumstances allowed. The international response to the pandemic needed to be guided by solidarity, cooperation and the rule of law. In that regard, Liechtenstein welcomed the unified message of solidarity and cooperation sent by the General Assembly in its resolution [74/270](#). The Third Committee had a special contribution to make in that respect, given its key role in the promotion and protection of human rights. It was necessary to ensure more effective coordination and to mainstream human rights within the United Nations system, including through more robust cooperation between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council.

9. Liechtenstein remained concerned about ongoing human rights violations during armed conflict, including in the Syrian Arab Republic and Myanmar. It was disappointing that the Security Council had failed to fully provide the necessary humanitarian assistance in those countries and to address the crimes committed against victims and survivors of such violations. The persisting impunity was a matter of concern. Aware that ensuring accountability was a necessary precondition

for justice and peace, his country continued to fully support the work of the accountability mechanisms. The International Criminal Court provided the most appropriate path to justice. It was therefore disappointing that the Security Council continued to ignore calls from States, the United Nations system and victims and survivors for referrals to the Court in cases where States were unable or unwilling to conduct national investigations and prosecutions.

10. The pandemic, the wider inequality gap and the resulting economic impact further increased vulnerability to human trafficking and slavery. With the transition to more online activities as a response to the pandemic, traffickers were using online technology to recruit and exploit victims, making those crimes and the fight against them even more complex. Liechtenstein had contributed to that fight with a public-private partnership initiative and blueprint for financial actors to help eradicate slavery through the promotion of sustainable and innovative financing, responsible lending and investment, and compliance and regulation. The General Assembly, and in particular the Third Committee, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and the Security Council could play an important role in disseminating the blueprint.

11. **Mr. Samson** (France) said that serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law attested to the dangerous undermining of rule-based multilateralism and the institutions that embodied it. Such violations were proliferating in crisis areas, targeting civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel. It was therefore necessary to ensure effective humanitarian access. France reiterated its call for a global ceasefire, as provided for in Security Council resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#), and would take steps to ensure compliance with international law, the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel and the fight against impunity. France was concerned about the upsurge in violations by States of international commitments and the stalling of progress towards the full protection of human rights.

12. The COVID-19 pandemic represented an additional challenge in the protection of human rights. In that context, France upheld three priorities: to promote the rights of women and girls; to protect human rights defenders; and to defend freedom of expression and information. The rights of women and girls were still being flouted around the world 25 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In June 2021, France would organize the Generation Equality Forum, at which it would submit ambitious proposals for sexual and reproductive health and other rights. With regard to the protection of human

rights defenders, France would continue to stand in solidarity with those men and women of courage and conviction who sought to uphold people's rights despite the threats they faced. Concerning the defence of freedom of expression and information, in a context marked by greater manipulation of information, as well as pressure and violence against journalists, it was incumbent on States to preserve the principles of democracy. Through the Alliance for Multilateralism, France was leading an international partnership for information and democracy.

13. **Mr. Klima** (Czechia) said that his country reaffirmed its commitment to the rules-based international order and multilateralism, and strongly supported the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international human rights mechanisms, including the special procedures. Czechia, which had been gradually increasing its financial contributions to human rights mechanisms, reiterated the need to strengthen their regular budget funding.

14. The COVID-19 pandemic was an urgent, global human rights issue that should not be used as a pretext to shut down criticism and silence dissent. Respect for civic participation, the role of the media and civil society was essential. Czechia remained deeply concerned about the human rights situation in several countries. Serious human rights violations had been committed in the run-up and aftermath of the recent elections in Belarus, including arbitrary arrests of peaceful protesters, enforced disappearances and torture. It was unacceptable that people were being punished, beaten and tortured for exercising their basic rights. In Russia, legislation on "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" had set serious limits on the ability of non-governmental organizations to operate and had a serious impact on freedom of expression. The deteriorating human rights situation in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea was also a matter of concern.

15. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Covid-19 and the state of emergency had been used as an excuse to crack down on dissent. Journalists, human rights lawyers and political opponents had been arbitrarily detained, and some had been subjected to physical abuse. According to the most recent report of the fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the human rights violations documented there amounted to crimes against humanity. The perpetrators must be brought to justice. Czechia urged the Venezuelan regime to ensure basic conditions for free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections.

16. Concerned about the violations of human rights in Xinjiang and Tibet, Czechia had repeatedly called for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to play a more prominent role and for special procedure mandate holders to have unhindered access to China. The situation following the introduction by China of a new national security law for Hong Kong was a matter of grave concern.

17. **Mr. Popolizio** (Peru) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had generated an unprecedented global health and economic crisis. It was essential that the vaccines developed against COVID-19 be declared global public goods. Since the start of the pandemic, the progress made by States had been seriously undermined, and the most vulnerable groups were suffering the most adverse effects. For economic recovery to be accompanied by inclusive social development, it was necessary to strengthen multilateralism and deepen international cooperation and solidarity.

18. Equality for women was a prerequisite for sustainable development. His country was determined to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls, in particular in a context in which the pandemic was affecting them severely. Aware that the greatest inequalities originated during the first years of life, Peru prioritized child development and care. Children were the hidden victims of the pandemic and must be protected. It was urgent for States to implement measures to prevent the spread of the virus among communities of indigenous peoples and to address their needs in a culturally appropriate manner. Older people, one of the groups at greatest risk from COVID-19, required special care and should be declared a priority group to receive vaccines once they became available.

19. With regard to human mobility, international cooperation was very important, given the significant burden on countries that were hosting large numbers of displaced persons. One example was the nearly five million people who had left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a result of the severe democratic, economic and humanitarian crisis that had afflicted the country since long before the pandemic.

20. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba) said that, although the COVID-19 pandemic would have severe economic and social consequences for all States, developing countries would bear the greatest burden. It was important to prevent any loss in the gains made in social development, the rights of women, children and indigenous peoples, the right to self-determination, the elimination of discrimination and intolerance, human rights protection and crime prevention. A new international order was needed – one that was fair and

equitable, in which States did not subjugate the poor, favour the rich or apply unilateral coercive measures. The pandemic should not be used to advance unilateral agendas or impose the vision of one country over that of others, and no selective policies or double standards should be imposed against the South. Issues as prominent as human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable sectors of society must be dealt with in an objective, non-politicized manner. Multilateralism, dialogue and cooperation should be prioritized.

21. The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed against Cuba was a flagrant violation of the human rights of all Cubans, a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law and an obstacle to the country's development. The United States had recently strengthened the blockade, thereby hindering the efforts of Cuba to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and protect public health. In clear violation of international law, the United States had financed efforts to subvert and change the constitutional order of Cuba and had recently included Cuba on a list of countries that allegedly violated religious freedom. It was the United States, during its military operations and in its own territory, that was violating human rights, including freedom of worship for millions of Muslims.

22. The United States was undertaking a campaign to smear Cuban doctors by accusing Cuba of human trafficking. The United States could not accept that, despite the blockade and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba had sent 52 medical teams to 36 countries and territories. By attacking Cuba for its South-South cooperation efforts, the United States was trying to obstruct access to high-quality health care for millions of people. The United States did not have the authority to judge Cuba: in the first eight months of 2020, police in the United States had killed 64 black people and the Government had promoted racist statements about other countries while diverting international attention from its terrible response to the pandemic, which had killed over 200,000 people in the country. Moreover, the President of the United States had failed to condemn white supremacists.

23. **Ms. Rosa Suazo** (Honduras) speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had a greater impact on the most vulnerable individuals and groups, in particular on women. In Honduras, women made up the majority of health workers, who were continuously exposed to infection. Domestic violence had increased significantly around the world, and access to health services, including maternal and child health services, had been adversely affected. It was imperative for States to increase their commitment to achieving true equality for women and

girls, fully guaranteeing their rights to education, health, including reproductive and sexual health, a fair wage and equal participation in all decision-making spaces.

24. The pandemic had intensified the already precarious situation of migrants, given their dependence on the informal economy, their lack of access to protection systems and the difficulties they faced in ensuring social distancing both at work and at home. Honduras remained committed to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and supported the work to be conducted by the International Migration Review Forum. Irregular migration needed to be addressed in a manner that included solutions to the drivers of migration, adherence to the principle of shared and differentiated responsibility, the strengthening of institutions and protection of the rights of migrants.

25. *Ms. Eugenio (Argentina), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

26. **Mr. Baror** (Israel) said that the pandemic had led to a devastating rise in gender-based violence amidst lockdowns and curfews, and to alarming reports of an upsurge in child, early and forced marriages. One year after the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a growing number of children worldwide, even after the pandemic, might never return to school. Women lacked access to sexual and reproductive health care, while lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons did not have access to the medical support that they needed.

27. **Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. The national and international focus had quickly shifted towards combating the pandemic, putting tremendous pressure on the resources that had been devoted to human rights and gender equality worldwide. Strict security measures taken to prevent infections had led to unintended consequences for the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

28. The pandemic, and the restrictions required to fight it, were being used by some Governments as political tools and as justification for arresting journalists, preventing human rights defenders from doing their work and denying human rights. Some Governments were taking advantage of the fact that the world's attention was focused on the pandemic to further their malicious agendas and commit crimes against their own citizens and those of other States.

29. The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic must not be conducted at the expense of common values. When the pandemic was over, the world should not have

to struggle to regain past achievements. The pandemic served as a reminder that people's basic needs were similar, despite the diversity of national agendas, and cooperation was more necessary than ever before. A spirit of unity had led to the signing of a peace treaty between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, a significant achievement and the beginning of a new era in which more countries would choose to view Israel as a friend. His delegation hoped that the peace treaty would result in a true and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

30. **Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia) said that the pandemic threatened to reverse the gains made in women's rights, despite the recent celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. On the twentieth anniversary of the women and peace and security agenda, women and girls continued to be disproportionately affected by conflicts, and their voices were still not sufficiently considered in peace processes. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's call to continue to work towards a truly gender-equal world.

31. Her delegation urged all States to refrain from Internet shutdowns, given the importance of freedom of expression both online and offline. Access to timely and accurate information was crucial, in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic and in times of conflict and political turmoil. Internet freedom was also highly relevant for human rights defenders.

32. Estonia was appalled by the human rights situation in Belarus, including the brutality of the authorities against peaceful demonstrators, who rightly demanded that their civil and political rights be respected and their will as electors be honoured. His delegation condemned the intimidation, imprisonment and torture of peaceful protesters and the repressive measures against journalists and opinion leaders. The human rights situation in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk continued to deteriorate. Disturbed by the persistent campaign of oppression against the Crimean Tatars, Estonia reiterated its call to grant unimpeded access to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including to places of detention, to independent international observers from, among others, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

33. Serious crimes and grave human rights violations continued to unfold in Myanmar. His delegation urged all parties to cease the violence immediately and to hold the perpetrators accountable. The Government of Myanmar must comply with the January 2020 order of the International Court of Justice and take all measures

to stop mass atrocities being committed against the Rohingya people.

34. In Syria, which had been suffering conflict for ten years, there was an entire generation of children who had known nothing but war. The denial of access to humanitarian aid and the deliberate attacks against schools and hospitals were alarming. Aware that human rights violations were often an early warning sign of conflict, Estonia strongly supported strengthening the linkages and synergies between Geneva and New York.

35. Estonia reiterated its determination to fulfil its international commitments and its support for the work of the various human rights bodies. At the national level, it had implemented a public policy and national plan of action on human rights.

36. *Ms. Charikhi (Algeria), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

37. **Ms. Juul** (Norway) said that the consequences of Covid-19 were dramatic and would have long-lasting effects. Millions of children were unable to attend school; people had lost their jobs; there had been a strong rise in food insecurity; pressure on health systems was affecting access to vital health services; democratic rights and norms were being challenged; access to information was restricted or lacking; targeted measures were being taken by Governments to silence critical voices, limit civil society, clamp down on peaceful protesters and undermine the rights of ethnic and religious minorities; and human rights defenders were increasingly subject to reprisals. Norway acknowledged and thanked those individuals who continued to stand up for human rights, democracy and equality and who spoke out against racism, discrimination and intolerance. All States must respect the principles of the rule of law and protect their citizens' rights and freedoms without discrimination.

38. Around the world, women risked suffering the greatest economic and social impacts of the pandemic. The increase in gender-based violence, and the lack of access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, had serious and long-lasting consequences for women and girls. Response and recovery efforts, including the humanitarian response, needed to have a gender perspective at their core and to include women's full and equal representation in all decision-making processes.

39. The voices of young people also needed to be heard. One year after the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, children's rights were under increasing pressure, and children were at greater risk of poverty, violence and abuse. Young people had a right to influence decisions that affected

their lives and should have a central role in finding solutions to present-day challenges. Moreover, digital gaps must be closed to ensure equal participation and opportunities for all young people.

40. **Mr. Khashaan** (Saudi Arabia) said that his country had recently been amending its legislation with a view to mainstreaming gender equality. A number of initiatives had been launched to empower women in the labour market. The Labour Code had been amended to set the same retirement age for women as for men and to grant women 70 days of paid maternity leave. The Saudi Arabian Human Rights Commission had been reconfigured to include an equal number of men and women.

41. The Kingdom had also made progress on children's rights. A Child Protection Act had been adopted. A minimum marriage age had been established and was being enforced. A committee on children had been established within the Family Affairs Council and a helpline and complaints centre had been set up to receive reports of child abuse. When the COVID-19 pandemic had broken out, the Ministry of Education had been quick to set up remote learning arrangements for students to continue their studies from the safety of their homes. The Juveniles Act had established special procedures for the arrest, detention and trial of juveniles, and provided that anyone under 18 years of age convicted of a crime punishable by the death penalty should receive a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment.

42. Dissemination of racist ideology or incitement to racist acts in the Kingdom – including via electronic media – was punishable by law, as were any other acts liable to cause social discord or damage human dignity. Medical services for the treatment of COVID-19 were provided free of charge to citizens and residents alike.

43. **Ms. Bavdaž Kuret** (Slovenia) said that stronger action was needed to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including by providing equal opportunities for their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Advancing global awareness of the correlation between human rights and a healthy environment had been at the forefront of her country's efforts in the field of human rights. Fast development had led to many positive achievements but also to new challenges and threats to human rights. It was time to act and react, maintaining human rights at the centre of actions to build back a better, greener, more resilient and more equal world.

44. Reading a statement on behalf of the youth delegate of Slovenia, Lucija Tacer, she said that women were still underrepresented in decision-making

positions, holding only 25 per cent of Parliament seats and 27 per cent of business leadership positions in her country. A society whose leadership did not proportionally represent women could not be expected to make decisions that reflected the needs of the entire population. Unequal opportunities were multidimensional: women were devoting two more hours per day to household work than men and were paid 8 per cent less, while over 50 per cent of women aged 15 years and above had experienced some form of violence. Serious efforts were needed to address the issue of gender inequality and act against discriminatory practices that limited everyone.

45. **Ms. Rikalainen** (Finland) said that the Covid-19 pandemic had further emphasized that gender-based violence was a global emergency requiring immediate action. States must work together to fight the so-called shadow pandemic and to engage men and boys so that they became part of the solution to ending gender-based violence. Full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls was a prerequisite for inclusive societies. Women and girls should have the right to make decisions regarding their own bodies, sexuality and reproduction. Strengthening those rights contributed to the well-being of individuals, families and society as a whole, as well as to sustainable development. Universal access to quality and affordable sexuality education that was scientifically accurate and age-appropriate was essential. Finland condemned all forms of discrimination and was committed to protecting the full range of human rights for all persons, including persons with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities.

46. Promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples were longstanding priorities for her country. Indigenous peoples were at risk of discrimination related to, among others, land tenure rights, labour rights, climate change and corporate abuses. Finland was deeply concerned at the attacks and threats against indigenous human rights defenders, the criminalization of their work, acts of impunity and systematic protection gaps. It was necessary to continue to consult with indigenous peoples on ways to enhance the participation of their representatives and institutions in United Nations meetings on issues that affected them.

47. Reading a statement on behalf of the youth delegate of Finland, Yuri Birjulin, she said that Member States should recognize the fundamental role of youth participation in the creation of peaceful, just and sustainable societies, as outlined in Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#). The most pressing demands in relation to human rights and climate action and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

were coming from young people, but they needed more institutional channels to voice their demands.

48. **Mr. Fifield** (Australia) said that his delegation was particularly concerned about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people who experienced discrimination and inequalities, in particular indigenous peoples, women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons and LGBTI persons. His Government had worked in partnership with indigenous Australians to protect their communities from the impacts of the pandemic and urged all States to do the same. His delegation also urged States to support disability-inclusive responses and recovery efforts, given that people with disabilities and their carers could experience barriers that hindered their ability to protect themselves from COVID-19.

49. The pandemic had escalated gender-based violence, affected the education of women and girls, heightened their economic insecurity, increased their unpaid labour and reduced their access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive health services, all of which would have profound and long-lasting adverse effects on their health and lives. Australia would continue to support gender equality and the rights of women and girls, including in discussions on economic empowerment, education, leadership and gender-based violence, and through national statements and strong support for specific resolutions.

50. Australia continued to work to ensure that international institutions were fit-for-purpose, effective, transparent and accountable to Member States. In that context, his delegation was concerned by emerging practices that undermined long-established human rights and worked against the norms and values that underpinned the global order. Alongside efforts to control the spread of COVID-19, it was necessary to shine a spotlight on the dangers of disinformation, which cost lives, created a climate of fear and division and was counter to his country's values and beliefs. Australia was deeply disturbed by the politically motivated and arbitrary arrest, detention and sentencing of foreign nationals. The pandemic should not be used as a pretext for reducing or removing access to justice and consular assistance for people in detention.

51. **Ms. Squeff** (Argentina) said that Argentina was among the countries that had been recognized in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker for taking measures with a gender perspective in response to COVID-19. Deeply concerned at the severe impact of the pandemic on the lives of older persons, her delegation emphasized the need to strengthen international and intergenerational solidarity to promote

and implement measures to protect their rights. However, a universal, specific and binding instrument was needed that offered adequate standards to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights of older persons. Her Government reiterated its commitment to the respect, promotion and protection of the rights of children, pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

52. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it was a priority for her country to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Argentina had created the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity and a national cabinet to mainstream gender policies. At the international level, Argentina had participated in the “Generation Equality” campaign and was co-leading a coalition to protect women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Other priority areas for her country were the defence and protection of the human rights of LGBTI persons and progress towards universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a crucial instrument in the fight against impunity and the search for memory, truth and justice.

53. **Ms. Mudallali** (Lebanon) said that her country had been severely affected by the deadly explosion in Beirut on 4 August 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and an unprecedented economic and financial crisis. Lebanon valued the contribution of thousands of volunteers who had supported relief efforts following the explosion, and welcomed every opportunity to foster dialogue and partnerships with them. On the day of the explosion, many Lebanese women, among them paramedic Sahar Fares of the Beirut fire brigade and nurse Pamela Zeinoun, had shown strength and resilience in the midst of chaos, proving once again that women were agents of change.

54. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, too many women were still being silenced, harassed and killed, and the many hurdles they faced had been exacerbated by the pandemic. Only 9 of the 190 speakers at the high-level debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly had been women, which confirmed that progress was unacceptably slow, in particular in the political field. Lebanon remained committed to the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. The National Commission for Lebanese Women, alongside non-governmental organizations, was making efforts to fight the shadow pandemic of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic and had presented a bill criminalizing sexual harassment. In addition, in its efforts to promote, protect

and enhance human rights, her Government had adopted measures to protect migrant domestic workers.

55. An estimated 600,000 children in Beirut could be suffering from the negative psychological impact of the explosion, and many education facilities had been damaged or destroyed. Lebanon was relying on its partners to help ensure that children and young people in the country continued their education. The blast had added another layer of hardship on a country that was hosting a number of displaced persons from Syria that amounted to one-third of the population of Lebanon, in addition to Palestinian refugees. Reiterating its calls for the safe and dignified return of displaced persons, her delegation stressed that Lebanon was not an asylum country and that its Constitution rejected any form of settlement of refugees.

56. **Mr. Allen** (United Kingdom) said that States that respected human rights and recognized their obligations in that regard could foster the conditions for more secure and prosperous societies. Given that human rights were central to the international system, it was essential to bring the worst violations and abuses to light by looking into the human rights situation in specific countries. It was only through honest and open scrutiny that States could be properly brought to account. Aware that some Governments were using the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic to disregard their obligations, his country had recently launched a global human rights sanctions regime aimed at holding to account those accused of serious human rights violations or abuses.

57. In the line with its pledges as a candidate for the Human Rights Council, the United Kingdom would continue to champion freedom of religion or belief for all and remained committed to bringing the protection of religious and belief minorities in conflict to the attention of the Security Council. It would also continue to promote gender equality, advocating at least 12 years of quality education for all girls and working to end gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence. The increase in cases of domestic and gender-based violence since the outbreak of Covid-19 was a matter of concern. His country would continue to defend and promote comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as the empowerment of women and girls through meaningful participation in the COVID-19 response and recovery. As Co-Chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, the United Kingdom was also working to advance LGBTI equality. It was shameful that countries continued to criminalize same-sex relations, discriminating against whole sections of their societies.

58. A rich civil society and a free media were essential to hold the powerful to account, and free speech, supported by reliable information and journalism, was essential to democracy. As a founding member of the Media Freedom Coalition, the United Kingdom would work to create a safe operating environment for the media to work in.

59. **Mr. Suan** (Myanmar) said that his Government had been reforming legislation and public institutions and strengthening the rule of law to create a society that guaranteed fundamental human rights and development for all. The country had launched a sustainable development plan for 2018–2030 and had doubled spending on health care and education since 2015. It had also implemented a national health plan to provide universal health coverage; a national education strategic plan to provide equitable and non-discriminatory access to quality education; a social protection policy; a youth policy; a national strategic action plan for the advancement of women; and a social safety net programme.

60. The Government had been working to protect public health and mitigate the economic fallout of the pandemic by implementing a COVID-19 economic relief plan. A national strategic master plan for people with disabilities was being developed in line with the 2030 Agenda, and the country's law on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities was being reviewed. A national crime prevention strategy and plan of action had been launched to combat trafficking in persons, and efforts were under way with neighbouring countries to combat human trafficking under bilateral agreements. In addition, the law on narcotic drug and psychotropic substances had been amended, a new law had been enacted in line with international standards, and the country was adopting a harm reduction approach to drug use. A law had been drafted to protect women from all forms of violence, including domestic and sexual violence, and support centres and helplines had been set up to provide crucial services to women and girls.

61. In 2019, Myanmar had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict to reinforce its ongoing efforts to protect and promote children's rights in line with international law. In the same year, a new law on the rights of children had criminalized grave violations of children's rights and provided stronger legal protection for children in the context of armed conflict.

62. **Mr. Edrees** (Egypt) said that, at a time when the most fundamental human rights, namely the right to life,

health and security, had been jeopardized in many places in the world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to emphasize the indivisibility of human rights. The pandemic had put unprecedented pressure on health systems and had exposed their defects, so States should be persistent in their efforts to achieve universal health coverage for their citizens.

63. The human rights system was facing increased challenges, and intolerance, racism, xenophobia and terrorism was on the rise around the world. Millions of people still lived in abject poverty under foreign occupation and in situations of armed conflict. Development should be promoted as a moral, economic and security imperative, in particular in countries in which youth constituted a large percentage of the population, in order to safeguard them from falling prey to extremism and terrorism. While there was an agreement on the ultimate objectives of upholding rights and fundamental freedoms, States had different views on the way forward as a result of their differing historical backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions. Attempts by some Member States to impose their narrow viewpoints on others had fomented divisions and threatened international solidarity. The global advancement of the human rights agenda should be undertaken based on non-selectivity, impartiality, transparency and objectivity, and without politicization and double standards.

64. In cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the National Council for Women had recently issued a policy paper responding to the particular needs of women and girls in the context of the pandemic, including special measures to be taken by the Government and its partners to address school closures and the increased pressures that led girls to leave school in order to contribute financially to their households or to marry and have children when they were still children themselves.

65. **Ms. Fatima** (Bangladesh) said that the people-centric and whole-of-society development approach of her country, with an emphasis on education and health, had prepared it well to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the likely longer-term impact of the pandemic on development gains was a matter of concern, especially with regard to the progress made in social development, in strengthening institutions, human rights and the rule of law, and in addressing global challenges such as terrorism and violent extremism, cybercrime and drug trafficking and related crimes. The global rise of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance during the pandemic was alarming, and national and global efforts should be

intensified to avoid any reversals in those areas. The promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development, was of the utmost importance.

66. A range of measures had been implemented by her Government to address the health risks and impact on socioeconomic activities of the pandemic, including by strengthening social safety nets. However, those efforts were putting enormous stress on the country's modest resource base. Furthermore, for over three years Bangladesh had been hosting over 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals, the Rohingya, who were also being covered by her country's pandemic response programmes. Her delegation urged the Committee to provide support in finding a solution to the Rohingya crisis.

67. Like many other migrant-sending countries, Bangladesh had been hard hit by the pandemic owing to a drop in remittances, job losses and the return of migrant workers. The economic downturn was severely impacting marginalized groups, especially women and children. Millions of children in developing countries, who had limited or no access to online education, were being left out of any learning environment, which raised their risk of becoming victims of trafficking, child labour, gender-based violence and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

68. *Ms. Bogay (Hungary) took the Chair.*

69. **Ms. Wronecka** (Poland) said that, while the measures undertaken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 would temporarily affect some fundamental rights and freedoms, those extraordinary measures should be time-limited and could not be an excuse for illegitimate action against members of society. The international community should not turn a blind eye to the fact that some States were using the pandemic to justify repressive changes to legislation or violent incidents, or that the unprecedented rise in hate speech towards members of religious minorities had intensified antisemitic, anti-Christian, anti-Muslim and other negative sentiments.

70. Having experienced a peaceful and democratic political transformation, Poland perceived the respect for democratic values and good governance as a condition for sustainable social and economic development. It therefore deplored the unprecedented scale of repression against political opponents and civil society in Belarus, both during and in the aftermath of that country's recent elections, the result of which could not be recognized. Poland was appalled by the frequent incidents of mass detention of peaceful protestors and forced disappearances, as well as allegations of torture and ill-treatment, including violence against women and

children. Poland reiterated its call for Belarus to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of peaceful assembly and association, to release all detainees and to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations. The authorities must engage in an inclusive and broad dialogue with society and cooperate with international human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus.

71. Although there had been some major improvements in recent years with regard to women's rights, much still needed to be done. Poland undertook supportive actions for women based on the principle of equality and dignity between men and women, taking into account the religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of individuals and their communities.

72. **Ms. Abraham** (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused an existential threat to human health and safety around the world, jeopardizing the progress made towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. The protection of the rights of children and their well-being was embedded in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, its national development strategy for 2030 and a draft national child policy that provided long-term guidance to support suitable legislation, interventions and infrastructure. Aware that education was a key to success, her Government remained attentive to the needs of all children, with a special emphasis on children with disabilities, those living in extreme poverty and those suffering from mental health issues.

73. Women's full participation on an equal basis with men, including in governance and leadership positions, was key to the post-COVID-19 recovery and to ensuring preparedness in responding to future emergencies. In that context, a gender policy had been developed to provide a framework for the inclusion of gender perspectives in all areas of national development, and services and safe spaces had been established for victims of domestic violence.

74. Although only 0.1 per cent of the country's population were indigenous, her Government acknowledged that the preservation of indigenous heritage was inextricably linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, the Government was working to ensure the appropriate recognition, inclusion and development of the country's original inhabitants.

75. Trinidad and Tobago continued to be plagued by persistently high levels of violent crime, which had overwhelmed the justice system with caseloads that

exceeded the processing capacity. In addressing national and personal security, the primary focus was on ensuring human security, maintaining law and order, addressing social conditions that served as incubators for criminal activity and monitoring prison and criminal justice reform.

76. **Ms. Schlyter** (Sweden) said that gender equality, human rights, democracy and the rule of law must be at the core of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's equal participation in political, economic and social life was a central element in a democratic society, particularly at the present time. If the human rights of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, were considered less important than those of men and boys, the whole world would lose. Every person should have the right to decide freely over their own body, sexuality and reproduction, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. Comprehensive sexuality education was necessary for making informed choices and for combating violence against women and girls, as well as child, early and forced marriage.

77. Her Government's "Drive for Democracy" initiative was aimed at highlighting the role of democracy in equality, participation, sustainable development, inclusive growth, governance, human rights and security. Action to support civil society, strengthen the role of political parties and ensure the right to freedom of expression, opinion and information was crucial in that context. Standing up for democracy also required the defence of decent working conditions and trade union rights. In its effort to strengthen democracy, Sweden had recently launched the Friends in Defence of Democracy partnership with a cross-regional group of countries.

78. The defence of human rights came with great risks, in particular for women human rights defenders, and those risks were further compounded by the pandemic. States had an obligation to ensure a safe and enabling space for human rights defenders, including by protecting their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Impunity perpetuated human rights violations and abuses, and standing up for human rights therefore also meant holding accountable those people who were responsible for violations and abuses, including extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Human rights were universal and applied to all, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. Violence, discrimination and stigmatization against LGBTI persons must be addressed.

79. **Mr. Sharma** (India) said that financial inclusion, universal health coverage, affordable housing and decent employment opportunities for all were at the

heart of his country's inclusive developmental strategy, with special consideration for women, older persons, youth and persons with disabilities. Sustained economic development and pro-reform initiatives, including through innovative technology, had lifted 270 million people out of multidimensional poverty over the previous decade.

80. It was necessary to conduct an honest appraisal of whether the international community had improved the human rights situation in different countries by employing aggressive and intrusive methods without the consent of the countries concerned. With regard to the international human rights framework, it was necessary to prioritize the right to development; to avoid turning the universal periodic review into a platform for pushing selective human rights issues; to envision human rights protection measures for the digital age; and to counter the misuse of technologies that led to human rights abuses. The Human Rights Council had strengthened consensus on a wide range of thematic issues, and its strength lay in its emphasis on dialogue, cooperation, transparency and non-selectivity in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The special procedures were an important mechanism for fostering genuine dialogue for strengthening the capacity of Member States. Mandate holders must remain truly independent, impartial and carry out their tasks with responsibility and sensitivity in accordance with their mandates.

81. India was a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multilingual society based on the principles of peaceful coexistence and tolerance, and its Constitution upheld the principle of equality and expressly prohibited discrimination on account of race. As a former colony, India supported the right of peoples to self-determination. The United Nations had established that the principle of self-determination was a vehicle for decolonization, and it must not be abused or misrepresented with the aim of undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a Member State.

82. **Mr. Belmont Roldán** (Spain) said that greater efforts were needed to prevent discrimination and violence against women and girls. Children were one of the social groups that were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to manage it. Of particular concern were the setbacks the world was experiencing in the prevention of child deaths, the provision of vaccines, children's education, efforts to counter child abuse and violence against children, and children's mental health. Public health considerations must be in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

83. The fight against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity continued to be one of his country's priorities at the national and international levels. LGBTI persons must be able to enjoy their human rights under the same conditions as everyone else. Although significant progress was being made towards equality, some countries were using religious and populist arguments to curtail the rights of LGBTI persons and threaten their physical and psychological integrity. The international community could not and must not remain indifferent; the Third Committee was a platform from which LGBTI persons could be supported. It was also a priority for Spain to ensure that persons with disabilities were given equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of life.

84. Human trafficking remained one of the major human rights violations around the world. The work of the Third Committee must be geared towards initiatives that supported prevention, prosecution and victim reparations, with a human rights-based approach.

85. **Ms. Le Thi Minh Thoa** (Viet Nam) said that the pandemic had demonstrated global weaknesses that had persisted for decades, including inadequate health systems, gaps in social protection, structural inequalities and environmental degradation. States should work together with a greater sense of unity and solidarity, rather than confrontation or politicization. It was important to uphold the sovereign equality of all States and respect territorial integrity and political independence on the basis of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. The United Nations continued to play a central role in advancing cooperation in the promotion and protection of human rights. Technical assistance and capacity-building should be further strengthened to assist all countries in ensuring human rights for all, particularly women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.

86. The protection and promotion of human rights were national development priorities for Viet Nam. During the pandemic, the country had attached great importance to socioeconomic stability policies and measures to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of its people. As a result, the country had had no community infections for the previous 30 days and the national economy was showing signs of recovery.

87. Since the approval of the 2013 Constitution, Viet Nam had fine-tuned its institutions and policies and revised more than 100 human rights laws. The achievements made in the protection and promotion of

human rights, including the implementation of the recommendations made in the third cycle of the universal periodic review, had demonstrated the strong commitment and constant efforts made by Viet Nam to achieve national development through people-oriented, people-driven and people-centred policies. Her country would continue to improve its legal system, policies and institutions to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

88. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the representatives of the European Union and certain Western countries had demonstrated that 75 years after the end of the Second World War, the "big lie" theory pioneered by Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels was still alive and well. Evidently, lying was a feature of Western culture; it was no accident that the famed liar Baron von Munchausen was a character from German literature. The Western countries were lying to cover up their economic terrorism. However, there was no concealing the fact that Syrian children were freezing because of the lack of heating in their homes and schools. Any objective United Nations assessment would reveal the inhumane consequences of the sanctions for the Syrian people and be forced to conclude that they were illegal and illegitimate. They were crimes that rose to the level of war crimes and constituted violations of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, as well as infringements of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. When he heard the representative of Canada say that Canada was committed to Syrian citizens exercising their rights, he could not help but remind the Committee that until quite recently, indigenous women in Canada had been forced to undergo sterilization. Such practices were typical of the genocide that had always been a feature of European colonialism.

89. **Mr. Dai Bing** (China), responding to the statements made by the representatives of the European Union and Canada at the previous meeting (see [A/C.3/75/SR.1](#)) and to the statement made by the representative of the Czech Republic, said that his country firmly opposed the irresponsible comments made by those representatives with regard to the internal affairs of China. The Xinjiang question was related to the fight against violence, terrorism and separatism. China had effectively suppressed terrorist activities through deradicalization, thereby ensuring the protection of all ethnic groups, advancing the economy and improving people's livelihoods. That in itself constituted the ultimate protection of the basic human

rights of all people belonging to the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang. In response to the concerns of the international community, China had invited over 1,000 people from some 100 delegations to visit Xinjiang. China had also extended an invitation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Xinjiang.

90. The enactment and implementation of the Hong Kong national security law was a lawful, legitimate and necessary measure taken by the Government of China to safeguard national security. Since June 2019, Hong Kong had witnessed violent activities that seriously endangered national security, activities that no country would tolerate as they only served to wreak havoc. It was imperative to safeguard the national security of Hong Kong by closing legal loopholes and strengthening enforcement measures. The purpose of adopting a new national security law was to protect the rights and freedoms of the residents of Hong Kong, in accordance with the law and international human rights covenants. It did not affect the high degree of autonomy of Hong Kong and was supported by all sectors there.

91. Since the founding of the new China, Tibet had made a great leap from poverty to civilization and progress. Tibet was governed by the rule of law, everyone was equal before the law, and the rights of all ethnic groups in Tibet had significantly improved. Those involved in criminal activities, regardless of their professions, would be subject to punishment by law. The legitimate rights of all people were legally protected.

92. Issues related to Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet were not human rights issues. The European Union, the Czech Republic and Canada pontificated about human rights, politicized human rights issues and interfered in the internal affairs of China. If they truly cared about human rights, they would first review the egregious problems festering in their own countries, such as racism and the violation of the rights of migrants. They should also express their overriding concern about the human rights abuses in the territories of their allies, such as the United States, where the right to life and health were slighted and excessive enforcement of the law was the norm, coupled with the proliferation of guns and resulting violence. They should take action to atone for the heinous crimes committed during the colonial era instead of pointing fingers at the human rights situation in other countries and turning a blind eye to the situation in the United States and their own countries in a selective application of double standards. The issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong were part of the internal affairs of China. The Government of China was firmly committed to safeguarding national sovereignty and implementing the principle of two countries, two

systems, maintaining the development and stability of Xinjiang and opposing foreign interference.

93. China urged the European Union, the Czech Republic and Canada to respect the truth and discard ideological bias, to refrain from politicizing human rights issues and applying double standards and to stop using issues related to Xinjiang and Hong Kong to interfere with the internal affairs of China. At a time when the international community was calling for greater solidarity and cooperation to address common challenges, China advised the European Union, the Czech Republic and Canada to put the fundamental interest of the international community first, to stop abusing the United Nations platform to provoke confrontation, return to the right track of dialogue and cooperation and work with other countries to respond to challenges and resolve difficulties.

94. **Mr. Kim Nam Hyok** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), responding to the statements made by the representatives of Japan and the European Union at the previous meeting (see [A/C.3/75/SR.1](#)), said that he categorically rejected all of the groundless allegations made against his country. Japan, which had committed crimes against humanity, had no right to talk about the human rights situation in other States. During its occupation of the Korean peninsula for more than 40 years, Japanese imperialists had slaughtered over 1 million innocent Koreans, forcibly drafted 8.4 million young and middle-aged Koreans into slave labour and imposed sexual slavery on 200,000 Korean women and girls. Japan had not atoned for its past crimes and even denied their existence. The abduction issue repeatedly raised by Japan had already been resolved in an impeccable manner thanks to the sincere efforts of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Government of Japan had continued to manipulate the issue for political purposes in order to divert the attention of the international community away from its past war crimes. Japan should stop the politically motivated campaign against his country and take steps to officially acknowledge, apologize and provide compensation for its past inhumane crimes. His delegation strongly demanded that Japan immediately stop the unjust pressure and acts of national discrimination against Koreans in Japan and the Chongryon organization.

95. His delegation categorically rejected the accusations made by the representative of the European Union. The so-called human rights issues mentioned by the European Union had never existed and would not be allowed to exist in his country. Such accusations had nothing to do with the protection and promotion of human rights; they were a political plot by hostile forces

that sought to damage the dignity and image of his country. His delegation urged the European Union to clean up its serious human rights issues at home, including sexual violence and discrimination, gun violence, islamophobia, xenophobia and the refugee crisis, rather than criticizing situations other countries.

96. **Mr. Ilnytskyi** (Ukraine), responding to comments made by the representative of the Russian Federation at the previous meeting (see [A/C.3/75/SR.1](#)), said that a country that had repressed the Ukrainian language and forcibly replaced it with Russian in all spheres of public life, that had carried out armed aggression against Ukraine for over six years and that continued to occupy the territories of Ukraine was not in a position to tell Ukraine how to protect the rights of its citizens. His delegation would like to know when the Russian Federation would adhere to and implement the order of the International Court of Justice in the case of Ukraine against the Russian Federation regarding the violation by the latter of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In accordance with the decision of the Court, the Russian Federation should refrain from imposing limitations on the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People and allow it to resume its activities. Since April 2017, the Russian occupying authorities in Crimea had failed to comply with that decision. There were no Ukrainian schools in the Russian Federation, where more than 3 million Ukrainians lived. In addition, there had been 7 Ukrainian and 15 Ukrainian Tatar schools in Crimea before the Russian occupation in 2014, but the occupying authorities had closed most Crimean Tatar schools.

97. His delegation would also like to ask how many activists and journalists had been persecuted on political grounds and forcibly disappeared in the Russian Federation or set themselves on fire, as Irina Slavina had done in Nizhny Novgorod after suffering intimidation from the Russian authorities. How were the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of Russian citizens, including the right to life, being safeguarded? Should those questions be posed to Alexei Navalny and Sergei Skripal, who had been poisoned with the nerve agent Novichok? The international community and international institutions should not stay silent but be proactive in bringing those responsible for such heinous crimes to justice. The Russian Federation should stop giving poor advice on human rights and focus on the implementation of its international obligations, including as an occupying Power, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

98. **Mr. Rae** (Canada), responding to the statements made by the representatives of China and the Syrian

Arab Republic, said that the premises behind both of those statements had been that there was no such thing as universal human rights and that, because there were examples of human rights abuses in all Member States, no country had the right to comment on abuses that had taken place in other countries. Both premises were false. The United Nations had reaffirmed the universality of human rights and the significance of establishing systems of accountability for breaches of human rights whenever and wherever they occurred. The representatives of China and the Syrian Arab Republic had said that great injustices had been committed towards indigenous peoples in Canada, and therefore his country had no right to talk about Xinjiang, Tibet or Hong Kong or the tragedy of the hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of refugees in Syria. However, the Prime Minister of Canada had clearly stated during the high-level meeting of the General Assembly that Canada accepted responsibility for the injustice done to its indigenous people and had established commissions of accountability and truth and reconciliation. Where were the commissions of truth and reconciliation in China and Syria? The representative of Syria had made a racist, stereotypical, xenophobic statement that was unworthy of presentation as the basis of his argument when he said that lying was an inherent feature of Western culture.

99. **Mr. Ichiba** (Japan), responding to the statement made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said that the allegations made were factually incorrect and groundless and that the claims made regarding the abduction issue were based on false perceptions. The abduction issue should be resolved without further delay. The families of the victims continued to age: Arimoto Kayoko, mother of the abductee Arimoto Keiko, had passed away in February 2020, and Yokota Shigeru, father of Yokota Megumi, had passed away in June 2020. Under an agreement signed in Stockholm in May 2014, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, notwithstanding its previous position, had promised to carry out a thorough investigation into all of the Japanese nationals concerned, including the abductees. His delegation urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to implement the agreement and return all abductees to Japan as quickly as possible. The independent commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had taken up the abduction issue and called for a return of the victims and their descendants to their country of origin. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea should sincerely listen to the calls of the international community, including those set out in the report of the

commission of inquiry, and take concrete actions to resolve the abduction issue.

100. As for the statement made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regarding North Korean residents in Japan, there was no policy or rule that allowed discrimination against Korean residents in Japan. On the contrary, the Government of Japan was working on approaches to eliminate unfair discriminatory speech or behaviour against persons with origins outside the country. All persons living in Japan, regardless of their nationality, had the obligation to observe Japanese laws. The claims made by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that the Government of Japan was putting undue pressure on people of North Korean origin in Japan was groundless. For more than 70 years, since the end of the Second World War, Japan had regarded the facts of history in a spirit of humility, had consistently respected democracy and human rights and had contributed to peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should bring true peace to North-East Asia by overcoming their mutual mistrust and deepening their cooperation with one another. Japan wished to share that approach and called on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to join Japan in aiming for a bright future together.

101. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Syrian Arab Republic would hold Canada responsible for the economic, social and humanitarian damage that its sanctions were causing to the Syrian people. He reminded the Committee that such sanctions were contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and had been condemned in reports from the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

102. **Mr. Kim Nam Hyok** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), responding to the statement made by the representative of Japan, said that history could not be changed, even though Japan was denying that history. The irrational arguments made by Japan would not make its crimes disappear. There was no way for Japan to evade its responsibility for its past crimes against humanity. The abduction issue had been resolved in an impeccable manner thanks to the efforts made by his country. Instead of acknowledging, apologizing or providing compensation for its crimes against humanity, Japan had excluded schools for Korean residents from State benefits and had encouraged right-wing gangsters to gather in front of the Korean University, which was a serious threat to the rights and safety of Korean residents in Japan. There could not be a bright future in the relations between the two countries unless Japan compensated for its past

inhumane crimes and put an immediate end to its discriminatory acts against Korean residents in Japan.

103. **Mr. Zhang Zhe** (China), responding to the statement made by the representative of Canada, said that his delegation strongly rejected that statement. Canada had fully exposed its ignorance and hypocrisy in a statement containing pure fiction and lies. Canada always posed as a lecturer on human rights, despite its own tarnished history. Instead of reflecting on its own problems, it had been pointing fingers at others, fully exposing the hypocrisy and double standards of its human rights policy. In addition to making ungrounded accusations, Canada had detained Chinese citizens without a legitimate reason, gravely violating their human rights. Canada was responsible for inequalities, pressure and exploitation of its indigenous peoples. Lies repeated a thousand times remained lies. The issues of Hong Kong and Xinjiang were not human rights issues; they related to the rule of law and ensuring people's livelihoods, safety and security. China would maintain its unwavering commitment to national security and stability and to ensuring a better life for its people. Canada should abandon its double standards and confrontation and stop interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. It should reflect on and address its own human rights problems, support international solidarity and dialogue and work with others to contribute to peace, stability and the development of human rights.

104. **Mr. Ichiba** (Japan), responding to the statement made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said that under the agreement signed in Stockholm in May 2014, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, notwithstanding its previous position, had promised to carry out a comprehensive and thorough investigation into the cases of all the Japanese nationals concerned. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea should implement the agreement and return all abductees to Japan as quickly as possible. Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should bring true peace to North-East Asia by overcoming mutual mistrust and deepening cooperation with each other. Japan would like to share that approach and called on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to work together with Japan towards a bright future.

105. **Mr. Rae** (Canada), responding to the statement made by the representative of China, said that China had referred to the case of Meng Wanzhou, who was under house arrest because of an extradition treaty between Canada and the United States, pursuant to the rule of law in Canada. In response, the Government of China had arbitrarily arrested and detained two Canadian citizens, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, who were living

in a Chinese prison in terrible conditions, without consular access and without humane treatment. To say that a country of 35 million people was bullying a nation of over 1 billion that was one of the world's superpowers, and which had chosen to treat two Canadian citizens in such a manner, was something his country would never forget. Canada would continue to raise their case, as well as that of other people who had been harshly treated and arbitrarily detained. Insulting Canada would not help to resolve the situation.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.