



General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
18 January 2021

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 4th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 October 2020, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bogyay (Hungary)

later: Mr. Almanzlawiy (Vice-Chair) (Saudi Arabia)

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Central American Integration System (SICA), said that the national health systems of SICA were responding to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in accordance with the protocols recommended by the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization. In March 2020, a declaration had been adopted entitled “Central America allied against the Coronavirus COVID-19”, which included a regional contingency plan aimed at complementing national efforts to prevent, contain and treat COVID-19. The States members of SICA called for a potential vaccine and related health technologies to be accessible, equitably distributed and affordable.

2. Over the previous two decades, the countries of the region had made progress towards the achievement of equality, empowerment and inclusion for women and girls. Public policies, programmes and actions had been adopted to prevent, detect and eradicate violence in the public and private spheres and promoting the right to a life free from violence. National, regional and international agendas needed to promote the full and active political participation of women and provide equal opportunities for them to take on leadership positions at all levels of government. Renewed commitments, improved policies and more funding from all sources, including official development assistance, were required to ensure that no woman or girl was left behind.

3. Member States and other stakeholders needed to make efforts to prevent, monitor and address the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on older persons, including the risks that they faced in accessing social protection and health services, and to ensure that health-care decisions were made with respect for their dignity, autonomy and human rights. Member States must also prevent the negative effects of the pandemic on children by mitigating adverse socioeconomic impacts, including by upholding their right to an inclusive, equitable and high-quality education and supporting school systems, teachers and families to ensure a reliable source of daily nutrition. It was necessary to implement accessible and inclusive distance learning solutions and close the digital divide, while protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation in digital settings.

4. Public safety was essential to ensure the effective enjoyment of human, political and economic rights and

respect for the sovereignty of peoples. In that context, Central America and the Dominican Republic were working together to combat transnational organized crime, including the illicit trafficking of drugs, by taking measures such as eliminating its sources of financing and scrutinizing all suspicious monetary transactions. SICA called for the strengthening of cooperation with Central America and the Dominican Republic in the fight against drug trafficking.

5. **Mr. Skoknic Tapia** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Older Persons, said that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a devastating impact across the world, with a disproportionate risk of mortality and severe disease for older persons. In his policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons, the Secretary-General had noted that, with lockdowns and reduced care, violence against older persons was on the rise, especially against older women, who were more likely to depend on family members for their daily survival. Older persons should be a priority group to receive the vaccine as soon as it became available. In that context, the Group welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolutions [74/270](#) on global solidarity to fight COVID-19 and [74/274](#) on international cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19.

6. More national efforts were needed in the context of the pandemic to meet the specific needs of older persons. To that end, States should increase their capacity to collect statistics and qualitative information, disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant factors, such as marital status and disability. The international community and the relevant agencies of the United Nations system, within their respective mandates, should support national efforts to provide funding for research and data-collection initiatives on older persons, including on violence against older women, in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities presented by population ageing.

7. The Group was committed to promoting the full participation of older persons in social, economic, cultural, civil and political life, without any restraints and free from all forms of discrimination and violence, with a view to ensuring their independence, dignity, empowerment and ability to fully and effectively enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, while actively participating in their societies and contributing to their development. A successful response to COVID-19, with a human rights approach for older persons, could be achieved through shared efforts and must include the participation of older persons. The international community must work together to ensure their full empowerment, and the promotion and

protection of their human rights. Intergenerational dialogue, solidarity and co-existence should be actively fostered to make societies truly cohesive.

8. **Mr. Fialho Rocha** (Cabo Verde) said that the COVID-19 pandemic should not be the cause of a new divide in which developed countries had greater means to address and mitigate the pandemic, while developing countries struggled to address challenges resulting from their limited fiscal space and the shutdown of vital economic sectors. There was hope for renewed solidarity, as discussed during the high-level week of the General Assembly, when States had made a strong call for improved multilateralism focused on providing immediate responses, supporting quick recovery and helping to build back better.

9. There was a heightened need for international cooperation, solidarity and a reduction in inequality among and within countries. Enforcing social rights for all, including children, women and girls, migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, older persons and youth, was key to the prosperity of nations. It was also essential to ensure that the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, such as equal and universal access to medical supplies and vaccines, were available to all.

10. The Government of Cabo Verde was fully committed to establishing policies and legal frameworks to address barriers to gender parity and equality and to promote the empowerment and advancement of women and girls. A law had been adopted to ensure parity in national decision-making bodies and electoral lists, and progress had been made in ensuring universal access to education, providing national health services, including reproductive health services, and strengthening the role of women in the fight against climate change. In addition, Cabo Verde was firmly committed to implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by establishing strong institutions and increasing investment in education, health and social protection.

11. **Mr. Vorshilov** (Mongolia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge for global health systems, exposing underlying social, economic and environmental challenges and triggering or worsening numerous human rights problems. His Government had taken proactive measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic, lessen its adverse impact on socioeconomic development and protect vulnerable groups, including by introducing economic stimulus packages. The Government's action plan also contained counter-cyclical policies to overcome the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 and ensure an employment-led and people-centred recovery.

12. The parliament of Mongolia had adopted the Vision 2050 policy that contained the country's long-term development priorities. Aware that education was an important pillar of social and economic development and a critical tool for empowerment, his country actively promoted education and literacy efforts at both the national and international levels, including through an education policy for the period 2014–2024. His delegation commended the efforts made by States and the leadership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in mobilizing the international community to build a more enlightened and humane world through its literacy programmes and initiatives, such as the UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–2025).

13. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, justice and equality were at the heart of his Government's policies. A wide range of legal reforms were under way, including the revision of a law on international treaties, with a view to harmonizing national laws with international human rights norms and standards. Mongolia, which worked actively with human rights treaty bodies, had extended a standing invitation in 2004 to all special procedure mandate holders and had received several visits from special rapporteurs and working groups. A strong supporter of the universal periodic review process, his Government had submitted its mid-term progress report on the implementation of the universal periodic review recommendations.

14. **Ms. Al-Amiri** (United Arab Emirates), speaking in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had only served to deepen global inequalities. Out of its commitment to ensuring health rights for all, the United Arab Emirates had provided assistance to some 1.5 million health workers in over 118 countries. It had enacted legislation to protect the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and workers. In 2019, it had adopted an Act on domestic violence that contained provisions on psychological and economic violence. A national human rights plan was being drafted as part of United Arab Emirates Vision 2021. A draft law had just been written to create an independent national human rights body along the lines of the Paris Principles.

15. **Ms. Al-Marzuq** (United Arab Emirates), speaking in a pre-recorded video statement, said that her Government valued opportunities to exchange expertise and best practices with United Nations human rights agencies, and had invited both the Special Rapporteur on the right to education and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities to visit the country. Some 50 per cent of the members of her country's Federal

National Council were women. A law on gender equality in wages and hiring had been enacted in 2018, and a gender equality indicator had been established to assess Government efforts, all in keeping with the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Emirati Women 2015–2021. Protection and empowerment of women was also one of the three major components of the foreign aid strategy of the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates would be a candidate for membership in the Human Rights Council for the 2022–2024 term.

16. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that his Government had implemented national plans for human development, in which poverty had been identified as the main historical and structural problem to be eradicated. The establishment of partnerships between the Government, business sectors and workers had enabled his country to address the main challenges and to achieve economic growth and social development indicators that had been recognized by the international community. So far, more than 40 programmes and projects had been implemented to fight poverty, thus contributing to the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of the population.

17. With regard to the issue of crime and drugs, his delegation denounced the dramatic situation in Central America and the Dominican Republic, where significant efforts were being made to tackle drug trafficking and organized crime, including the transit of drugs from Colombia to the United States. That tragic situation was forcing States in the region to divert resources that should be allocated to addressing poverty. States should cooperate with countries in Central America in the fight against drug trafficking that had been imposed upon it.

18. Nicaragua, with the lowest average rate of homicides in Central America, set the standard in Latin America for its excellent levels of security. Its security strategy contributed to regional security by preventing drugs from reaching countries in the North and violence from reaching countries in the South. Special police services had recently been established with a view to strengthening the investigation of crimes that threatened the life and dignity of women. In addition, a law had been adopted on gender equality that had significantly increased the political participation of women in the executive branch, ministerial positions, the Supreme Electoral Council and the legislative and judicial branches. Free health services had also been expanded.

19. **Ms. Croon** and **Mr. Klahre** (Germany), speaking as youth delegates in a pre-recorded video statement, said that young people had been particularly affected by the pandemic in the areas of education, mental health, work, security and human rights. States should take an

anti-racist, youth-inclusive and intersectional feminist approach to mitigating structural inequalities and discrimination.

20. The United Nations must ensure the meaningful participation of young people in its efforts to establish peaceful societies. It was necessary to advance the youth and peace and security agenda by placing human security before State security, providing opportunities for young people to share their experiences of conflict and peace, and financing youth-led initiatives to promote social cohesion and protect young peace activists. Young peacebuilders should be given opportunities to channel their ambitions and ideas into policymaking, so that they could realize their full potential as agents of change.

21. Women could transform the world, but they needed to have the opportunity to make their vision a reality. It was necessary to actively redistribute power and end sexism; find global solutions for global problems; fully realize all human rights; work in cooperation for peaceful conflict settlement; adopt a humane approach to migration and forced displacement; find radical solutions to the climate crisis; and build trust in global institutions. It was regrettable that the Sustainable Development Goal indicators had not resulted in more ambitious national action.

22. **Ms. Heusgen** (Germany) said that young people around the world were asking States to include them in political processes to fight inequality, particularly gender inequality and racism, and to stop the global threat of climate change. His Government fully shared those expectations. It was necessary to work together towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and to not let those young people down. Germany would continue its efforts to promote and protect human rights, including the rights of the Uighurs in China, the Rohingya in Myanmar and the victims of the Syrian regime, and to stop the violations of human rights in Iran.

23. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking on a point of order, said that the representative of Germany had just referred to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic as a “regime”. Such talk was not in keeping with the need for discussions to be conducted in good faith, as the Chair herself had mentioned in her opening remarks at the Committee’s first meeting. It was also a violation of the principle of the sovereign equality of all Member States and the requirement for Member States to fulfil their obligations in good faith, as enshrined in article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations. He would exercise his right of reply in response to the substance of the allegations of the representative of Germany later in the debate.

24. **Mr. Akram** (Pakistan) said that, over the years, the General Assembly had adopted a series of resolutions proclaiming the centrality of the right to self-determination. However, through obfuscation and oppression, India had long denied that right to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. On 5 August 2019, India had eliminated the statehood of occupied Jammu and Kashmir, imposing a siege. Over the past 14 months, India had imprisoned Kashmiri political leaders, illegally detained young Kashmiris, summarily executed young boys, violently stifled protests and imposed collective punishments, such as the destruction of entire neighbourhoods and villages. No Indian soldier had been punished for those crimes. Around 1.5 million settlers had been issued domicile certificates to transform Indian-occupied Kashmir from a Muslim-majority State into a Hindu-majority territory.

25. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had urged India to fully restore the rights that had been denied to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and 18 special procedure mandate holders had recently stated that the human rights situation in Indian-occupied Kashmir was in “free fall”. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation had called on India to halt its oppressive policies, and similar concerns had been voiced by political leaders and legislators in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and the European Union. Rather than responding to such calls, the Indian authorities had launched a witch hunt against those who had dared to report those crimes. The previous week, Amnesty International had been forced to stop its work in India, citing harassment by the Government. The international community must demand that India halt its egregious human rights violations against Kashmiris, accept an international inquiry commission and agree to enable the people of Jammu and Kashmir to exercise their right to self-determination, in accordance with Security Council resolutions.

26. Prejudice, discrimination and violence against Muslims, including Islamophobia, was one of the manifestations of the extremist trends of the present time. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation had officially recognized 15 March as the international day of solidarity against Islamophobia. His delegation called for the support of Member States for the proposal to declare an international day to combat Islamophobia.

27. **Ms. Pierre Fabre** (Haiti) said that her country was suffering the serious economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite its extremely limited means, Haiti must respond to the legitimate expectations of its people in terms of economic and social development. Between 2010 and 2020, Haiti had suffered several natural disasters, including the cholera

epidemic in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. In 2016, Hurricane Matthew had further aggravated the country’s already devastated economy.

28. A coherent social policy must include respect for all individual rights, including gender equality, access to education and improved support for young people, families, older persons and persons with disabilities. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it was necessary to highlight the reasons why many countries, particularly developing countries, had not yet achieved gender equality. There were still significant gender disparities in the economic, political and legal areas, as well as income inequality and low participation in decision-making bodies. Violence against women had increased during the pandemic. With a view to promoting and protecting the rights of women, the Government of Haiti had adopted laws on paternity, maternity and responsible parenthood, on domestic working conditions and on domestic partnerships.

29. **Ms. Calem-Sangiorgio** (Monaco) said that, following the closure of schools in Monaco in March 2020 as a result of the pandemic, her Government had reacted quickly to ensure the continuity of education through digital technology. However, a third of the world’s young people were excluded from online education and had therefore been unable to continue their studies. For education to be accessible to all, it was important to reduce the digital divide. The impact of isolation and physical and social distancing measures, stress, lack of access to education and uncertainty about the future was also affecting the mental well-being of young people. It was therefore essential to include mental health measures in responses to COVID-19 and to establish programmes, such as the Graduate Integration Commission of Monaco, to promote training and access to the labour market for young people.

30. The pandemic had deepened pre-existing inequalities between men and women, and had led to an increase in unpaid work, domestic violence and discrimination. Furthermore, the global gender pay gap was stagnating. Monaco had redoubled its efforts to address those issues. Since the creation of the Women’s Rights Committee in 2018, gender equality had been strengthened in Monaco. The country was also working towards achieving gender equality internationally through its development cooperation policy and women’s empowerment programmes. Achieving gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals required the participation of women in decision-making processes and their equal representation in leadership positions. Her delegation welcomed the United Nations “Women Rise for All” initiative.

31. The coronavirus crisis had dominated global media coverage, but the conflicts affecting various parts of the world had not disappeared. Despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, vulnerable populations in conflict situations remained in grave danger. Monaco reaffirmed its support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

32. *Mr. Almanzlawiy (Saudi Arabia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

33. **Ms. Al Abri** (Oman) said that her country's commitment to providing basic health services to all without discrimination had been reflected in the Oman Vision 2020 and the Oman Vision 2040 development plans. Legislation had been enacted to protect women, children, and persons with disabilities and special needs. Oman complied with its obligations under the international agreements to which it was a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

34. Her country had scored major achievements in health care, education, children's programmes, services for persons with disabilities and special needs, and services for older persons. An integrated legislative framework had been established to protect all classes of society on an equal basis. United Nations statistics had recorded a significant drop in maternal mortality, improvements in reproductive health and rises in life expectancy for both sexes. Education was free of charge from grade 1 to grade 12. In the academic year 2018/2019, some 61 per cent of college and university graduates in Oman had been women. The 2014 Child Act and the National Strategy for Children 2016–2025 guaranteed the rights of children within the family, society and public and private institutions. Numerous programmes had been established to empower persons with disabilities and special needs to become self-reliant; welfare, training and rehabilitation programmes for older persons were consistent with global standards and trends. Women and men had equal opportunities for employment, promotion and benefits, and arbitrary dismissal of women for illness or pregnancy was prohibited by law. Some 40 per cent of employees in the Omani public and private sectors were women.

35. **Mr. Ilnytskyi** (Ukraine) said that, despite rapid and decisive action by the international community and the United Nations, even the most developed States

were struggling to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. All action to tackle the pandemic should be in line with existing international obligations and standards, should not be arbitrarily or politically motivated and must uphold the dignity and human rights of all without discrimination.

36. As a country that was struggling to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty under foreign armed aggression and occupation, Ukraine knew that sustainable peace and security could not be achieved in isolation from human rights. As reported by the Secretary General and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, over 40,000 people had been wounded, over 15,000 people had been killed and 1.5 million had been displaced since the beginning of the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine. Russia had been unwilling to uphold its international obligations, including to provide necessary medical assistance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea. Although voices of dissent with the occupation regime had been silenced, the United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine had the tools to track the violations perpetrated in the temporarily occupied regions of Crimea and Donbass and to prevent the occurrence of new violations by providing regular and timely reports on the wrongdoings that were being committed there.

37. The President of Ukraine had recently announced the establishment in Kyiv of an international office to counter disinformation and propaganda. The occupying Power had targeted human rights activists, journalists and minority Ukrainians and indigenous Crimean Tatars. It was implementing coercive measures in Crimea, thereby forcing people to renounce their citizenship and give up their land. Until the end of the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and all Ukrainian territories, it was imperative for the Third Committee to continue to adopt resolutions on the situation of human rights in Crimea.

38. **Mr. Stefanile** (Italy) said that the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms were at the heart of his country's agenda, which was pursued through inclusive dialogue with partners and with full respect for diversity. Italy also attached great importance to crime prevention and criminal justice, and was on the frontline in the campaign for a universal moratorium on the death penalty. His country was also strongly committed to advancing women's rights. In that regard, efforts to recover better from the pandemic must include the fullest promotion and protection of women's rights. There could be no societal growth, or peace and stability unless women were equal, protected from violence, given access to education, invited to

negotiating tables and included in decision-making processes. It was necessary to continue to push back against the pushback on women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights.

39. States must prioritize the protection of children, particularly girls, who were often more exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage. Italy would also continue to support the advancement of the agenda on children in armed conflict. Italy supported the right of every person to freely express their sexual orientation and gender identity, and stood ready to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, older persons, persons belonging to minorities and all those in vulnerable situations.

40. **Mr. Hawke** (New Zealand) said that effective responses to the pandemic must be aligned with human rights commitments nationally, regionally and globally. In attempting to contain the COVID-19 health crisis, many Governments, including New Zealand, had imposed a range of temporary measures that restricted civil liberties. His delegation was deeply concerned by the efforts of some States to use those responses to improperly curtail or prescribe the rights of citizens. All States should be transparent in their pandemic response measures, which must be temporary, necessary and proportionate in the light of the circumstances, and must not be used as a pretext for infringing human rights.

41. The pandemic had not affected everyone equally. Women, children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons, older persons and people belonging to minority groups were disproportionately affected. The pandemic had also shone a spotlight on injustice, inequalities and racism within societies, and had heightened social stigma and discrimination against people of particular ethnic backgrounds. Around the world, there had been many examples of people raising their voices to protest those issues of injustice. Troublingly, there had also been instances of peaceful public assembly met with repression, including through the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement, arbitrary arrests and detention of protesters, as well as Internet shutdowns.

42. New Zealand was still addressing the legacy of its colonial past. Although progress was being made, inequalities persisted. His country was still striving for the partnership that had been envisaged in its founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, between the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, and the British Crown. History had shown that there was power in the search for shared solutions. In that regard, indigenous-

led initiatives in response to the pandemic had enabled better outcomes for the Maori in New Zealand.

43. **Mr. Katemula** (Malawi) said that his country had made progress towards achieving gender equality and women and girls' empowerment over the past two decades through progressive gender-related laws and policies that had helped to safeguard the rights of women and girls, including by guaranteeing equal opportunities at all levels, protecting land ownership rights, preventing child marriages and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes.

44. The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health crisis, but also a threat to socioeconomic structures, heightening already existing economic gaps, poverty and hunger and leaving developing countries like Malawi in a more vulnerable position. In just a few months, the ongoing pandemic had derailed progress made over decades in socioeconomic development, gender equality and women's empowerment, thereby threatening efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Women and girls continued to bear the brunt of the pandemic as more women were losing their economic livelihoods, and girls were often taking on caretaker roles at the expense of their right to education.

45. Schools and businesses had been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Malawi had experienced an unprecedented surge in gender-based violence, early pregnancies and child marriages. Despite those disheartening developments, the Government of Malawi remained committed to ensuring a dignified life for all its citizens without discrimination. It continued to invest in socioeconomic services aimed at ensuring accessible quality education for all, including persons with disabilities and albinism; providing universal health coverage; and increasing the number of beneficiaries on its social cash transfer programme.

46. **Ms. Bakytbekkyzy** (Kazakhstan) said that her country was committed to working to mitigate the health, humanitarian and socioeconomic turbulence of the pandemic by expanding primary and universal health care and making efforts to ensure that the vaccine was made available to all and was not politicized. A truly global economic recovery and fiscal certainty required the suspension of debt repayments. International financial institutions should implement innovative solutions such as debt-to-health swaps, and education must be reinforced by civil society and business sector engagement.

47. In the COVID-19 crisis, global solidarity had been expressed through volunteering. In line with her country's decision to designate 2020 as a national Year

of Volunteers, her delegation proposed the proclamation by the United Nations of an international year for mobilizing volunteers for development. Her Government was determined to build an economically strong, democratically advanced and people-oriented “listening State”. With a view to developing a society based on people’s aspirations for a just society, her Government had decriminalized defamation, adopted new laws to ensure the right to hold peaceful gatherings and signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

48. A new society called for equal opportunities for women, young people and children. The gender inequality index value in Kazakhstan had halved in recent years and a mandatory 30 per cent quota had been introduced for women and young people in all election party lists. Her Government had ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016 and had adopted a law on the social protection of persons with disabilities. In addition, Kazakhstan had a comprehensive social security system in place that was assisting the 4.5 million citizens who had been left unemployed by the pandemic, and was providing additional funding and programmes for persons with disabilities and older persons.

49. **Mr. Moncada** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the application of unilateral coercive measures had devastating effects on more than a third of humanity, including the people of Venezuela. Those illegal measures hindered access to medical equipment, medicine, treatments, screening tests, food, fuel and other essential goods in the midst of the greatest pandemic suffered by humanity in the past hundred years. The Government of the United States was using the pandemic as a weapon to escalate its aggression and economic suffocation of Venezuela. Such a planned and systematic policy constituted a crime of extermination, as provided for in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

50. The complex global crisis caused by the pandemic was aggravated in his country by the looting of national financial funds located in banks in Europe and the United States. The Government of the United States must comply with its international obligations and completely and immediately repeal all unilateral coercive measures that had been imposed in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. At such an exceptional time, attempts to seek selfish political gains through international dominance, using the pandemic as a weapon to gain advantage over other countries, constituted a violation of human rights and a crime against humanity.

51. Venezuela reaffirmed its firm commitment to guaranteeing and promoting human rights without distinction of any kind, and to advancing in a constructive dialogue to strengthen cooperation in that area. Human rights must be promoted in accordance with the universally accepted principles of objectivity, impartiality and non-selectivity.

52. **Ms. Gebrekidan** (Eritrea) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed the structural fragility of the dominant economic system, growing inequalities and the limits of international solidarity. Two decades since the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, hundreds of millions of women, men and children were still languishing in poverty. The global economic and political system, which continued to perpetuate structural inequalities between States, was skewed against developing countries, stifling their voices and marginalizing their contributions, while encouraging the continuation of exploitative economic practices. While the pandemic had affected every State, its medium and long-term social and economic consequences would be particularly profound in countries with underdeveloped economies and limited social welfare systems. However, the crisis also presented an opportunity for States to work together for inclusive and people-centred sustainable development, and the 2030 Agenda offered a road map towards sustainably covering the fundamental human needs of every person on the planet.

53. The current crisis should not reverse hard-won gains in the areas of gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women. Innovative measures were required to accelerate achievements and consolidate the progress made in that regard. The ability to protect children from the negative effects of the pandemic would determine their future resilience. Progress had been made towards the universal provision of basic education; however, the lack of high-quality education affected up to 80 per cent of children in poor countries, and hundreds of millions of adolescents were unable to read and write at the elementary level. The lockdowns instituted to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had highlighted the digital divide, as many students from low-income countries were unable to continue their education. The digital divide would also have an impact on long-term economic development and maintain the dependency of developing countries.

54. Urgent concrete action was needed to combat the alarming levels of xenophobia, racism and stigmatization around the world. Migrants had played a vital role as essential workers in key sectors, including the health sector, in destination countries that had been severely affected by the pandemic. Greater efforts were required to provide those workers with adequate

protection and to facilitate their contributions to development and recovery in their countries of origin. In that context, the Eritrean diaspora had organized the “Eritrea Fights COVID-19” campaign to contribute to her Government’s efforts to fight the pandemic.

55. **Mr. Koba** (Indonesia) said that the pandemic had exposed deep inequalities, not only within countries but also within communities, so it was particularly important to promote global solidarity, multilateralism and multi-stakeholder partnerships to ensure that all States had a fair and equal chance of recovery. In that regard, it was possible to prevent the pandemic from reversing the achievements made in the social, cultural and humanitarian fields.

56. His delegation was committed to ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women in social, economic, cultural, civil and political life, as well as access by persons with disabilities to health and social protection services. It was necessary to ensure that human rights were fully respected and that there was no place for discrimination, racism and xenophobia, including in responses to the pandemic. Moreover, the protection of children in armed conflict must encompass all facets, from preventing grave violations to advancing family and community-based reintegration.

57. It was important to guarantee the impartiality and independence of special procedure mandate holders. In that regard, his delegation encouraged any discussion regarding mandate extension, renewal or cessation to be approached with caution, especially during virtual consultations. It was important to ensure non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and to respect the policy options of Member States in addressing challenges to their national security and integrity. The universal periodic review was the proper forum in which to address human rights concerns.

58. **Mr. Aidid** (Malaysia) said that, following the outbreak of the pandemic, his Government had taken several initiatives to boost the economy, including an economic stimulus package focused on preserving the welfare of citizens, supporting businesses and strengthening the economy. The package included gender-responsive policies, such as cash assistance for single mothers and childcare subsidies. Aware of the rise in gender-based violence, the Government had also taken measures to safeguard and protect women by setting up helplines and shelters and providing counselling services. Mental health services, including for front-line workers, were also being offered.

59. Although Malaysia was not a signatory to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) and its 1967 Protocol, his Government

continued to provide assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers on humanitarian grounds. However, the large influx of illegal immigrants into the country had increased exponentially over the years, amounting to almost 200,000 registered refugees. Such large numbers were of concern to Malaysia, owing to the slow resettlement process. The signatory countries of the 1951 Convention should uphold their commitment to receive more refugees for resettlement or relocation.

60. Human rights concerns should be addressed constructively, and the principles of sovereignty and non-interference should be respected. In Malaysia, the exercise of certain rights and freedoms were curtailed only insofar as to prevent their abuse or misuse in a manner that would infringe upon the enjoyment by other individuals of those same rights.

61. Malaysia strongly condemned all acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance in all its forms and manifestations. The international community should come together to combat such acts, despite differences in religion and faith, including through interfaith dialogue. Addressing transnational crime was also crucial to the protection and promotion of human rights and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16.

62. Malaysia remained strongly committed to protecting and promoting the human rights and dignity of Palestinians. In that regard, it urged Israel to end its human rights violations, such as those committed against Palestinians by the Israeli security forces and illegal settlers. Israel had an obligation to investigate violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and to prosecute those who were responsible for such violations.

63. **Ms. Craft** (United States of America) said that her country was committed to protecting and promoting the fundamental human rights of all, including ethnic, religious and other minorities. The United States had led in humanitarian assistance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, having contributed more than \$9 billion globally. There had been other significant donors, but more donors should share in that responsibility.

64. Her delegation was gravely concerned that authoritarian Governments were using the COVID-19 pandemic to justify unwarranted crackdowns on their citizens and on civil society. The systemic repression of freedom of association, assembly and expression was stunting the capacity of societies to respond to the pandemic. The stifling of such freedoms by the Chinese Communist Party had transformed a local epidemic into a global pandemic that threatened to set back decades of developmental and economic gains.

65. The United States was deeply concerned by the ongoing abuses of fundamental human rights by many Governments. China was attempting to divert attention from its horrendous disregard for human rights and paint mounting global concerns as a bilateral issue, including by accusing the United States of lying when the world could clearly see the cruelty inflicted by the Chinese Government. More than 50 independent United Nations experts had called for collective action to ensure that China abided by its human rights obligations. The arbitrary detention by the Chinese Communist Party of over one million Uyghurs and other minority groups in internment camps in Xinjiang was alarming, and the claim by the Chinese Government that it had provided “vocational training” to nearly 7.8 million workers in the previous six years was a matter of grave concern, given the pervasive nature of State-sponsored forced labour schemes in that region. Her delegation was deeply disturbed by reports that the Chinese Communist Party was using sterilization, forced abortion and coercive family planning as part of its continuing campaign of repression. Moreover, the Chinese Communist Party had eroded autonomy and liberty in Hong Kong, and had perpetrated a wide range of human rights abuses against members of minority communities, including Africans and Tibetans, as well as lawyers and human rights defenders, across China.

66. Her delegation condemned the wide-scale human rights abuses committed by the Assad regime in Syria. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic had documented thousands of credible cases of extrajudicial killings, torture and violations of international humanitarian law that had led to millions of Syrians being displaced inside the country, needing humanitarian assistance or being registered as refugees in nearby countries. The regime’s decade-long barbaric campaign of killing, torture, detention and impunity must end immediately.

67. The gross human rights violations in Iran, including death sentences imposed following unfair trials and forced confessions reportedly obtained through torture, were also a matter of grave concern. Impunity for the killings of up to 1,500 protesters in November 2019 and the repression of members of religious minority groups must end.

68. Venezuelan citizens suffered as the corrupt, illegitimate Maduro regime enriched its officials, committed extensive human rights abuses and blocked the holding of free and fair elections. In September, the independent fact-finding mission to the country had assessed that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the regime had committed crimes against humanity.

69. Her delegation was troubled by the threats, harassment and violence against the press, independent civil society, religious and other minority groups and the political opposition in Russia. The United States was also alarmed by reported cases of enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings, particularly in Chechnya. It condemned the ongoing aggression by Russia in eastern Ukraine and its invasion of Crimea. Russia should implement its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

70. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking on a point of order, said that properly speaking, under the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the Chair should have interrupted the representative of the United States as soon as the point of order had been raised. He demanded that the Chair seek a ruling from the Legal Counsel of the Secretary-General regarding the terms being used by certain delegations. He would exercise his right of reply in response to the substance of the allegations of the representative of the United States later in the debate.

71. **Mr. Sahraei** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on a point of order, said that all States should respect one another by using the proper terms, and his delegation therefore fully supported the request of the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to consult the Legal Counsel of the Secretary-General.

72. **The Chair** said that, on the basis of previous consultations with the Office of the Legal Counsel, he was of the view that the question was not a matter for the Chair or the secretariat to address. He would pursue the matter further after the meeting.

73. **Ms. Gunasekera** (Sri Lanka) said that her country had managed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to its universal health policy and the adoption of a series of inclusive and holistic measures, which had been commended by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The World Travel and Tourism Council had recently declared Sri Lanka a safe destination for tourists.

74. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Parliamentary elections had been conducted successfully and peacefully, and in August 2020 the Government had been elected with an overwhelming majority. The Government had adopted a new policy framework based on three main pillars: national security; friendly, non-aligned foreign policy; and people-centric economic development. In line with that vision, a number of measures had been taken to uplift rural economies, address socioeconomic issues and protect people against organized crime and the drug menace.

75. Sri Lanka had demonstrated its commitment and political will to improve the circumstances for women in the country. The Government had adopted a policy framework and national plan of action that was aligned with its principle of zero tolerance on sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, policy reforms had been adopted to increase the minimum age of labour and ensure that no child entered the adult prison system. Her delegation called for global efforts to address the challenges that were threatening the progress of children, including climate change, conflict, cybercrime and the spread of terrorism and violent extremism.

76. Concerned about the increasing sophistication of transnational criminal groups engaged in the illicit manufacture and trafficking of drugs, her Government had appointed a task force to tackle the drug menace and create a more secure country. Sri Lanka also remained deeply concerned by the growing number of victims of diverse nationalities and faiths that fell prey to the recruitment drive of terrorist networks. Hateful and destructive views that promoted those ideologies were enabled and amplified by digital technology. It was necessary to proactively address the underlying factors that allowed those ideologies to manifest and propagate.

77. **Mr. Kim Song** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the most serious human rights violation was the infringement on the right to life. Certain western countries had distorted and denounced the human rights situations of other countries, thereby abusing the United Nations arena, which should be used to direct efforts towards the protection of the right to life in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those countries were not qualified to talk about the human rights situation of other countries. Western countries were a human rights wasteland, where people widely and systematically suffered from poverty, unemployment, violence and discrimination, and where police killed innocent black people. Western countries had overthrown the legitimate Governments of developing countries and created the refugee crisis – a human rights catastrophe – under the pretext of defending human rights. Rather than drawing lessons from their unjust human rights policies and institutional contradictions, those countries were scheming to present another resolution on the human rights situation in his country. His Government categorically rejected the resolution, which was full of falsehoods and fabrications. Before criticizing others, Western countries should first correct their own human rights issues.

78. His country condemned the unscrupulous discriminatory acts of Japan. Rather than acknowledging, making an apology and offering compensation for its crimes against humanity, such as the abduction of 8.4 million young Koreans, 1 million

genocidal killings and the imposition of sexual slavery on 200,000 Korean women and girls, Japan had excluded schools attended by Koreans in Japan from the beneficiary list for disease protection aid and had instigated right-wing gangsters to conduct criminal acts in front of the Korean University, gravely threatening the right to life and safety of Koreans in Japan. The Japanese authorities must recognize, reflect on and settle their criminal past and put an immediate end to their discriminatory acts against Koreans in Japan.

79. **Mr. Sahraei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, despite more than four decades of unlawful external pressure, his Government had made significant progress in improving the human rights situation in his country. The insistence of the United States on continuing its illegal sanctions policy was not only immoral and against international law, but also endangered the lives of people who were fighting the pandemic across the globe. Contrary to claims by the United States, humanitarian goods and services were being affected by its cruel sanctions. As financial institutions feared vengeance from the United States, the financial channels created to facilitate transactions for humanitarian commodities had had no tangible results.

80. The inhumane unilateral coercive measures against his country had blocked the efforts of Iran to import medicine and other medical supplies needed to fight the pandemic, thereby denying Iranians the right to health and life. The unlawful sanctions had dealt a hefty blow to the very basic and fundamental rights of Iranians. The ironic tragedy was that the United States and its blind followers who supported the adoption of unilateral coercive measures believed that they could lecture others on human rights. According to the United States, its targeted assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani had not been a human rights violation. The United States had turned the entire region into a wasteland with its arms sales and crimes.

81. Palestinians had long been forced to bid a bitter farewell to the realization of their very basic human rights. The occupying regime's systematic oppression, human rights violations and blatant disregard for international law continued unabated even during the pandemic, grossly violating the right to health and life. The reason his country had been the target of a sustained disinformation and propaganda campaign was its resistance and refusal to surrender to the whims of an outlaw bully. The knee-to-neck policy of the United States had deprived many of the right to breathe, but Iranians had proved that they would not buckle down under pressure.

82. His Government would remain committed to engaging in constructive cooperation with the United

Nations mechanisms in a balanced and non-politicized manner. Mechanisms such as the universal periodic review should be further strengthened as a workable solution and as the sole mechanism that considered the human rights situation in all Member States equally.

83. **Ms. Kipiani** (Georgia) said that her country's recent efforts to strengthen national human rights mechanisms and inter-agency coordination included the development of a human rights strategy for 2021–2030 focused on gender equality and the protection of women's rights; the protection of children's rights; the combating of discrimination and establishment of equality policies; and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. In line with the global call of the Secretary-General for peace in the home, her Government had taken steps to reduce the increased risks of violence against women through a new communication strategy on domestic violence.

84. Determined to promote the rights of the child, her Government had adopted a new Code of the Child and had introduced the Barnahus model in Georgia, aimed at preventing secondary victimization of children who were victims of sexual violence. Several new measures had been developed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including the provision of financial and medical support under the COVID-19 anti-crisis plan. To ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, her Government had adopted a policy on sexual orientation and gender identity rights.

85. Her Government was unable to share the human rights protection framework with persons living on the other side of the barbed wire fences that had been illegally erected by Russia in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia. It was alarming that even amid the pandemic, and despite the call by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, Russia had continued its destructive actions, worsening the already dire human rights situation in that region. Violations included illegal detentions, kidnappings, shootings, infringement of the right to property and health and restrictions on the right to receive an education in one's native language. Iron fences had recently been installed close to the villages of Atotsi, Khurvaleti and Zemo Nikozi. The lengthy closure of the so-called crossing points and continuous restriction of freedom of movement had led to a humanitarian crisis, in which 15 ethnic Georgians had died for lack of access to urgent care, since the closure of the occupation line in September 2019. It was alarming that the Georgian language would soon cease to be a language of instruction in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. The Russian Federation bore the sole responsibility for those violations of universal human rights.

86. **Ms. Dinollari** (Albania), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that 63 per cent of the responses to the UN75 survey originating from her country were from young people, which was a clear indication that Albanian youth were determined to have their voices heard, actively contribute to the international dialogue and assist in finding solutions. Youth were demanding a reinvigorated multilateralism that was open and inclusive to all actors, including young people. The United Nations should upgrade the UN75 initiative into a permanent process and engage youth in its follow-up actions.

87. **Mr. Fero** (Albania), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that COVID-19 had shaken the world and was hampering the progress made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As an underrepresented group, youth were disproportionately affected by the social and economic upheavals that had altered their employment, health and education opportunities. It was therefore important to take advantage of the momentum created by the mobilization around COVID-19 to renew collective efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In their recovery plans, all States should place human rights at the core, mainstream youth perspectives, properly address the issues of mental health and climate change, and reduce inequalities of all kinds, particularly those linked to gender and wealth. It was also necessary to establish a modern and adaptable education system to facilitate an organic transition to the labour market. Reinforced global solidarity and more financing for development, in particular for quality education and health care, would be needed to achieve those goals.

88. **Mr. Lamce** (Albania), speaking in a pre-recorded video statement, said that, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, States should reflect on how to strengthen the human rights system, build more resilient societies, create accessible and effective educational systems and develop responsive social protection and health systems. States needed to work together to address common challenges, while focusing on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Third Committee should help in the implementation of the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights by taking concrete steps to tackle the common challenges faced in advancing the human rights agenda.

89. Albania was working to promote women's rights and gender equality in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. Advocacy for human rights would be meaningless without the participation of women and girls. It was also important to protect human rights defenders and ensure that their voices were heard. His delegation strongly supported all efforts

to ensure accountability for any acts of intimidation or reprisal against those who sought to engage with the United Nations. Freedom of religion and belief must be protected everywhere on the basis of the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

90. **Ms. Kormanova** (Bulgaria), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that young people were more involved than ever in sustainability efforts. Youth in Bulgaria actively sought development in the fields of quality education and employment, even within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was more important than ever to ensure youth participation, engagement and empowerment at all levels, given that young people were vital in bringing about positive social change.

91. **Mr. Panayotov** (Bulgaria) said that, given the challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, the commitment to ensure the effective protection and promotion of human rights was more relevant than ever. Closer international cooperation was needed to guarantee that no one was left behind, especially vulnerable groups. Bulgaria, in its capacity as Co-Chair of the Group of Friends for Children and Sustainable Development Goals, had presented a joint statement with the European Union and the Latin American and Caribbean Group on children's rights in the context of the pandemic. The initiative was aimed at raising awareness about the adverse effects of the pandemic on children's well-being, development and protection, including their access to education, food, safety and health. Bulgaria remained committed to the promotion of the rights of children around the world, and in particular children with disabilities and those deprived of parental care.

92. In the framework of commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Member States had discussed the advancement of women's rights and the progress made towards gender equality. States had also discussed the impact of the pandemic on women's rights, especially with regard to the risks of gender-based violence. Gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment and the full enjoyment of all human rights should be central to the common political agenda, especially in periods of crisis. In that context, Bulgaria was committed to protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights and had adopted a national action plan on women and peace and security for the period 2020–2025.

93. **Mr. Casper Stenger Jensen** (Denmark) said that his delegation was deeply concerned to witness how the COVID-19 crisis was amplifying the existing pressure on human rights, democracy, civic space, rule of law and

good governance. People in vulnerable situations, including women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons and human rights defenders, were disproportionately suffering the consequences of the crisis. The pressure was not new: the pushback on fundamental human rights, including violations of individual rights and restrictions on civil liberties, had been a cause for concern for a long time. There was increased pressure on women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, the space for civil society was shrinking and human rights defenders were being persecuted.

94. In February 2020, the Secretary-General had underscored in his call to action for human rights the importance of human rights in a world that had not yet been hit globally by COVID-19. The pandemic had demonstrated that human rights were crucial for effective response and recovery efforts. Member States must work together to promote and protect human rights in order to deliver on the collective promise to leave no one behind, and to create a world of greater equality and more justice.

95. **Ms. Idres** (Sudan) said that, since its December 2018 revolution and the signing of its August 2019 Constitutional Declaration, the Sudan had undergone a transformation in the area of human rights. Her Government had made protection of women's rights a priority and was committed to implementing Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security, especially in rural areas damaged by conflict. A number of laws restricting women's freedoms had been repealed or amended. Child protection units had been set up at police stations and within the armed forces. Civil society organizations were raising awareness of children's rights, particularly in conflict-affected areas. She reiterated her country's commitment to fulfilling its obligations under international and regional agreements and the relevant Security Council resolutions on children's rights, and to cooperating with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF.

96. The Sudan was instituting constitutional and legislative reforms to promote public freedoms and lift restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. In 2020, a commission had been formed to reform the human rights and justice systems with a view to guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary, strengthening accountability and ending impunity. The death penalty had been abolished for minors. In a clear sign of the progress being made, on 6 October 2020, the Human Rights Commission had adopted a resolution

ending the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan. She reiterated her country's commitment to compliance with human rights conventions and cooperation with the Human Rights Council and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

97. The Sudan looked forward to international assistance during its reconstruction phase, in particular from the Sudan United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS). Her Government would continue to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Committee of the Red Cross. She stressed the need for unilateral economic sanctions on the Sudan to be lifted immediately and expressed gratitude to the United Nations for pledges in that regard.

98. **Mr. Davies** (Liberia) said that his Government had appointed two women to head its national coronavirus response team to ensure that the response and recovery plans addressed the gender impacts of the pandemic. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection had carried out awareness-raising campaigns for women-led organizations and persons living with disabilities on addressing sexual and gender-based violence within the context of COVID-19. In response to a recent surge in rape-related cases during the lockdown, the Government had declared a national emergency on rape, appointed a special prosecutor for rape, established a national sex offender registry, as well as a national security task force on sexual and gender-based violence, and would launch a road map to fight all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

99. His Government had adopted a revised national gender policy aimed at promoting gender equality, socioeconomic development and the empowerment of women and girls. A domestic violence bill had been enacted in 2019, and the "bush schools" had been suspended with a view to ending unwarranted traditional practices, in particular female genital mutilation. Other initiatives included an economic livelihood programme to empower traditional women leaders, and a national action plan on women and peace and security.

100. In partnership with UNICEF, a care facility offering psychosocial, educational and recreational services had been established for children who had been separated from families affected by COVID-19. In recent years, Liberia had made education more accessible, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, and the provision of tuition-free education at public universities had led to an increase in girls'

enrolment. In a context in which the pandemic had exposed the digital divide and social inequality faced by children in developing countries, the Government had implemented a remote learning programme via radio to enable students to continue their education. In addition, cases of trafficking in persons, especially children, had significantly decreased in Liberia.

101. **Mr. Kabba** (Sierra Leone) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had had an enormous impact on the lives and welfare of women and children. His country's experience with the Ebola epidemic had revealed that the lockdowns implemented to curb the spread of the virus had led to an increase gender-based violence. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, his Government had therefore paid close attention to the issues that affected the health and social well-being of women and girls. It had also worked collaboratively with international and national partners to deliver social protection interventions, including a social safety net programme, and had launched a free education project.

102. Sierra Leone had prioritized the meaningful participation of women in its COVID-19 response mechanisms; established national hotlines to increase access to services; developed a gender equality and women's empowerment policy to increase the representation of women in politics and other senior management positions; adopted a national male involvement strategy to prevent gender-based violence; offered free and quality care to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; established a court to expedite cases of sexual offences; adopted a national strategy to reduce adolescent pregnancy and child marriage; included sexuality education in the formal education curriculum; and used the media to raise awareness among adolescent girls of available sexual reproductive health services in the context of the pandemic.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.