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Chair: Mr. Doualeh (Djibouti)

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Zhang Jun** (China), delivering a joint statement on global solidarity for vaccine equity and speaking also on behalf of the other members of the core group – Algeria, Egypt, El Salvador, Mexico, Pakistan and South Africa, - and over 60 other States, said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was one of the greatest global challenges in the history of the United Nations. It had had a severe impact on all spheres of society, including health care, and had exacerbated poverty and hunger. It had disrupted economies and hindered the enjoyment of human rights. It had had a disproportionate impact on women, older persons, youth, children, migrants and persons with disabilities, especially those in vulnerable situations, and had led to a rise in discrimination, hate speech and xenophobia. Every human being had the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

2. As the pandemic knew no borders, the only solution to the crisis lay in global solidarity, unity and multilateral cooperation. All States were urged to strengthen international cooperation in order to contain, mitigate and overcome the pandemic and its consequences, ensure protection for those most affected and counter misinformation, disinformation, stigmatization, discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

3. The COVID-19 vaccine should be treated as a global public good. While some countries had made commendable contributions to the promotion of vaccine accessibility and affordability through bilateral and multilateral channels such as the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and its vaccine pillar, the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, vaccine equity had not been reached. The roll-out of vaccines globally had been uneven and unfair, with many countries, particularly in the developing world, still lacking adequate and affordable access. A disturbing trend of vaccine nationalism had emerged, and doses had been stockpiled in certain countries. The call of the World Health Organization (WHO) to prioritize vaccinating those most at risk around the world was welcome, as was the call of the Secretary-General for vaccine equity. All States and stakeholders should redouble their efforts to promote the fair distribution of vaccines in developing countries, including the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing countries and low- and middle-income countries. Vaccine-producing countries should ensure the timely and adequate delivery of vaccine support to recipient countries. Support should be provided to the ACT

Accelerator and the COVAX Facility, and international financial institutions and other international organizations should provide financial support for vaccine procurement and the strengthening of production capabilities in developing countries.

4. States were urged to demonstrate solidarity by rejecting vaccine nationalism and avoiding the stockpiling of doses. They should also lift export restrictions on relevant vaccines and raw materials and ensure the cross-border flow of vaccines. A decision should be made at the World Trade Organization to waive intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines. Countries should further strengthen international cooperation by conducting joint research and development activities and by authorizing production and technology transfers with the aim of increasing local, national, regional and global production capacities.

5. **Mr. Francis** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the COVID-19 pandemic had drastically increased the hardships and vulnerability of those already in vulnerable situations. The international community faced the daunting task of building back better while also dealing with the existential threat posed by climate change and the need to scale up efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Regrettably, the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic had eroded gains made on the path to development and had diverted resources from development projects. CARICOM therefore continued to support the call for international efforts to support social development.

6. The commitments made 26 years previously at the World Summit for Social Development related to poverty eradication, reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion were still relevant. CARICOM remained committed to ensuring that the region's citizens, particularly children and youth, women, persons with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations, were afforded the opportunity to live their best lives.

7. CARICOM Governments were committed to ensuring that children and youth had equal opportunities and the tools necessary for reaching their full potential. To that end, those Governments were designing and implementing holistic programmes geared towards poverty eradication, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality and peace, justice and strong institutions.

8. The lives of people of African descent continued to be shaped by racism and other legacies of slavery, phenomena that must be addressed through reparatory

justice. CARICOM had therefore welcomed the convening in September 2021 of the high-level meeting to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which had focused on reparations, racial justice and equality for people of African descent. That meeting had been held in the same month as the first Africa-CARICOM summit. CARICOM had also welcomed the establishment in August 2021 of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent as a consultative mechanism for people of African descent and other relevant stakeholders and as an advisory body to the Human Rights Council.

9. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls were also priorities for CARICOM. Women contributed substantially to the overall development of the CARICOM region and could be found in leadership positions in politics, public service, business and civil society. CARICOM Governments were working to eliminate violence against women and girls and to ensure access to justice for victims and support for survivors. Data collection had been improved in order to better understand and address the underlying causes of violence, and programmes had been developed to promote economic empowerment for women. Much remained to be done, however, as the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the impacts of climate change, had adversely affected women and girls in the region. Childcare, education, health care, and robust social protection services were essential for creating an enabling environment for women and girls.

10. The challenges posed by porous borders, transshipment of drugs and emerging threats in the domain of cyberspace remained cause for serious concern in the region. A significant role was played by the CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security in ensuring coherence and effectiveness in the regional response to those challenges and in the implementation of the Crime Prevention and Social Development Action Plan.

11. **Mr. Maes** (Luxembourg) said that the promotion of human rights nationally and internationally was a priority for his country. Luxembourg would continue to assume its responsibilities in that area, in line with its long-standing commitment to multilateralism and an international order based on the rule of law. As part of that commitment, Luxembourg had presented its candidacy for a seat on the Human Rights Council for the 2022–2024 term.

12. The main priority of Luxembourg was support for the rule of law, civic space, human rights defenders and the fight against impunity. In that regard, Luxembourg

fully supported the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the International Criminal Court. The situations in Myanmar and Yemen, among others, were reminders that the international community had a responsibility to protect, particularly when it came to human rights defenders. In countries such as Afghanistan, the risk of reprisals against human rights defenders, and especially women human rights defenders, was high.

13. Civil society held Governments accountable for their actions and was a valuable source of expertise and ideas. It played an essential role in the development of inclusive and democratic societies and in the proper functioning of the United Nations. It was regrettable that, since the beginning of the pandemic, civic spaces had continued to shrink, and civil society groups had been excluded from United Nations meetings. Luxembourg, as Chair of the Committee at its seventy-fourth session, had organized the first informal consultation between those groups and the Committee.

14. Human rights-based sustainable development and climate action were the second priority of Luxembourg. Climate change threatened the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights. Global challenges could be met only through international cooperation in a spirit of solidarity. Luxembourg would continue to devote 1 per cent of its gross national income to official development assistance and would also contribute to international climate finance and vaccine solidarity efforts, particularly through the “Team Europe” initiative.

15. The country’s third priority would be gender equality and efforts to combat all forms of discrimination. Women’s rights were integral to human rights. Luxembourg would build on the momentum created by the Generation Equality Forum to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including through the protection of their health and sexual and reproductive rights. Luxembourg would continue to work to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual and intersex persons and to combat all forms of discrimination based on gender or sexual expression.

16. The country’s fourth priority was the rights of the child. It was imperative for the voices of children and youth to be amplified and for their needs to be taken into account when developing policies that affected them.

17. **Mr. Szczerski** (Poland) said that his country remained deeply concerned about the situation of human

rights in Afghanistan, especially for women, children, persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, human rights defenders and journalists. Poland was engaged in the negotiations related to the resolution on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan presented by the European Union at the forty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council and believed that the Committee should also try its best to address the suffering of the Afghan people. Poland would also contribute approximately \$190,000 in response to the joint appeal by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

18. Poland attached great importance to protecting people from persecution based on their religion or beliefs, especially those belonging to religious minorities. It therefore called on other Member States to engage with the work of the Group of Friends of Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, of which Poland was the Chair.

19. Poland would continue its activities in support of persons with Down syndrome and those on the autism spectrum. It would also continue to promote the rights of the child, including through the promotion of the role of the family. Efforts should be made to ensure that every child had access to education and was raised in a safe environment. Children, persons with disabilities and women were also among the most adversely affected by climate change, and any response to that crisis should fully incorporate respect for human rights.

20. Poland remained concerned about the lack of funding for the United Nations human rights pillar, which had been worsened by the liquidity crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Such financial stressors could be addressed by reducing reliance on voluntary contributions and gradually increasing funding for the human rights pillar from the regular budget of the United Nations.

21. Poland was extremely concerned about the deteriorating situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus. Poland strongly condemned the massive violations of human rights by the authorities and called on the regime to immediately and unconditionally release over 650 detainees, including former presidential candidates, human rights defenders, lawyers, leaders of the Union of Poles in Belarus and independent journalists and bloggers. In addition, the Belarusian authorities had over the course of weeks brought inhabitants of the Middle East to Belarus and had pushed them to the borders with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, where they were camped, for the purpose of creating an artificial humanitarian crisis. Aid offered to

the migrants by Poland had been rejected by Belarus, which had denied entry to the humanitarian convoy.

22. The infringements by the Russian Federation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Georgia should not be forgotten. Poland was concerned about the dire situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol occupied by the Russian Federation. Repression had intensified against the Crimean Tatars, who were persecuted and harassed for their support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Similarly, human rights violations in the breakaway regions of Georgia constituted a worrisome trend. Those in control of the concerned regions were urged to grant unimpeded access to international human rights mechanisms.

23. **Mr. Lipand** (Estonia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the risks faced by the most vulnerable, such as women and girls, while limiting the means for protecting their rights. The empowerment of women and girls was a priority for Estonia in its development cooperation and humanitarian aid activities. The country supported the full inclusion of a gender perspective in the deliberations of the Committee and other United Nations forums, including the Security Council. In the framework of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) campaign entitled “Generation equality: realizing women’s rights for an equal future”, Estonia had made commitments under the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation. As a member of the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, Estonia encouraged all Member States to become signatories.

24. COVID-19 had increased the challenges to protecting children affected by armed conflict. Estonia therefore underlined the importance of renewing the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The country also continued to provide support for the work of the United Nations Children’s Fund.

25. Freedom of expression, access to information and a free media were important. On average, one journalist was killed every five days and there was a lack of accountability and impunity for the perpetrators of such crimes. In addition, Governments sometimes restricted access to the Internet in order to silence dissenting voices. Estonia, as a member of the Freedom Online Coalition and of the Media Freedom Coalition, stressed the importance of freedom of online and offline expression. Estonia commended human rights defenders and was deeply concerned about the continued reprisals

against them, in particular women human rights defenders, for cooperating with the United Nations.

26. International humanitarian law and international human rights law must be upheld in Afghanistan, and any future Government must respect human rights, including the rights of women, children and persons belonging to minority groups. Estonia underlined the need for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in that country and for the continued monitoring of human rights.

27. For more than a year, the human rights situation in Belarus had deteriorated. Estonia had consistently called for the immediate release of all political prisoners, accountability for the perpetrators of crimes and the holding of democratic elections. The Government was also concerned about the grave violations of international law, including extensive violations of human rights, in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and reiterated that respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and the prohibition of the use of force were fundamental principles of international law. Estonia was also gravely concerned about violations of human rights and systematic sexual and gender-based violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and supported justice for victims of human rights violations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

28. **Mr. de Souza Monteiro** (Brazil) said that the COVID-19 pandemic was the most serious health emergency in living memory. Over the past year, hunger, unemployment and poverty had grown and inequality between countries had increased. Nevertheless, Brazil was confident that durable solutions to those challenges could be found.

29. Brazil had worked tirelessly to guarantee health care for its population. Its comprehensive, universal public health system, staffed by dedicated front-line health-care workers, had provided free health care to Brazilians over the previous three decades. The country's COVID-19 vaccination campaign had administered more than 236 million shots, with priority given to groups such as health workers, indigenous peoples and older persons. Around 70 per cent of the population had received a first dose and more than 42 per cent were fully immunized. Infections and fatalities had been falling consistently since early March. Brazil expected to be able soon to assist other countries with their vaccination efforts.

30. The pandemic had had an impact on disparate issues such as mental health, family life, socioeconomic vulnerability, education gaps and lack of access to fuel. In fulfilment of its commitment to leave no one behind,

Brazil had devoted special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, women and girls and persons living with pre-existing health conditions. The Federal Government had implemented the largest emergency income distribution programme in the country's history, granting emergency relief to 68 million people.

31. Brazil had recently ratified the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance, which would have a legal status equivalent to a constitutional amendment. Brazil had redoubled its efforts to combat and eradicate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls and had strengthened policies to prevent and prosecute cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence.

32. The pandemic had exacerbated violent attacks on religious communities. Along with more than 30 other States members of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, Brazil had mobilized to counter growing threats to freedom of religion and belief and would host the Alliance Ministerial Forum in 2023. Brazil was making efforts to respond to current humanitarian issues, especially those arising from the influx of migrants and refugees from the northern border with Venezuela and from other countries. Brazil had recently decided to issue humanitarian visas to Afghans, especially to those from religious minority groups.

33. **Mr. Koba** (Indonesia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed deep social inequalities and had had profound impacts on all aspects of life. Global solidarity was important for building a more sustainable and inclusive future. Indonesia strongly rejected any form of vaccine discrimination. Vaccine equality, equity and affordability were vital to ensuring a fair and equal recovery. The global economic recovery must take into account those most affected by the pandemic, including women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and migrant workers.

34. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had begun to send COVID-19-related humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar. At the same time, efforts to restore democracy in the country must be pursued. Indonesia called for the swift implementation of the Association's five-point consensus, including the guarantee of access to the country for the Association's special envoy to Myanmar.

35. The pandemic had disproportionately impacted women and children. Indonesia reiterated its commitment to ending and preventing violence against children and strengthening the full and meaningful

participation of women in social, economic, cultural, civic and political life. The pandemic had also had an impact on migrants, including more than 200 million migrant workers. Indonesia joined the Secretary-General in calling on all stakeholders to protect migrant workers and their families and to reduce remittance transfer costs.

36. Indonesia reiterated the need to protect the right of human rights defenders to carry out their legitimate work and to be free from threats, attacks, reprisals and intimidation. It was also necessary to ensure that their work did not run counter to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Health workers, teachers and other front-line workers must also be protected as they were true human rights defenders who risked their lives to save others.

37. Indonesia stressed that the reports of special rapporteurs and representatives must be impartial and independent. Special procedure mandate holders, if they were to maintain their credibility, must undertake more in-depth consultations with all relevant stakeholders before making any claims or allegations concerning particular countries or cases.

38. Each Government was responsible for promoting and protecting the human rights of its citizens, and each Government's approaches and policy options in addressing its national security challenges must be respected. At the same time, Indonesia reaffirmed its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights through genuine international cooperation with Member States and the United Nations system.

39. **Mr. Marschik** (Austria) said that, even in times of crisis, each State must abide by its human rights obligations. Limitations of those rights and freedoms should only be temporary, proportionate and non-discriminatory and must enjoy democratic legitimacy. Austria was committed to the collective discussion of human rights violations and abuses and supported the consideration by the Committee and the Human Rights Council of country-specific human rights situations. Freedom of speech and the right to free and peaceful assembly were important and journalists must be able to conduct their work freely and without fear of arrest, persecution and harassment.

40. Austria stressed the importance of actively pushing for gender equality and women's rights. Space for civil society organizations and human rights defenders must be protected on a national level and at the United Nations. Given the importance of combating transnational crime, particularly trafficking in persons and cybercrime, Austria commended the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and hoped

that the upcoming negotiations of the open-ended ad hoc intergovernmental committee of experts, representative of all regions, to elaborate a comprehensive international convention on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes would help ensure that a future United Nations convention on cybercrime would be an effective tool for law enforcement.

41. Austria, owing to its own painful historical experience, paid special attention to the rights of minorities. In 2022, the world would observe the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Austria proposed that a high-level meeting of the General Assembly be held in September of 2022 to highlight the commitment to uphold the rights of minorities.

42. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the suffering of young people had often been overlooked. The pandemic had led to a rise in depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts among the general population, and that rise was 80 per cent higher among youth. Concerted efforts were needed to promote awareness of mental health issues. Moreover, young people should be heard when they expressed their deep concern over the climate crisis and its resulting inequalities and should be acknowledged as shareholders in a common future and deserving of a prosperous future.

43. **Ms. Al Abri** (Oman) said that her country's legal system protected the human rights of all groups in society, including women, children and persons with disabilities. Oman also provided the protection and support necessary to allow those groups to participate in sustainable development in accordance with international and regional agreements.

44. The Oman Vision 2040 campaign stressed the importance of education and included a plan for comprehensive scientific research. Omanis were proud of their modern health care system, whose well-trained staff were able to address global health challenges.

45. Protecting the social and civil rights of children remained a priority for the Government. Measures had been taken to protect children from abuse, violence and exploitation. The 2014 Child Law had been enacted to protect them. The high level of education and employment opportunities available to Omani women enabled them to participate effectively in economic, social, political and civic life. They held leadership and decision-making positions and were members of legislative councils and domestic and international committees.

46. The Government attached the utmost importance to the role of youth and encouraged young people to participate in training programmes and development and investment plans and fostered their creativity. Omani youth played a role in the country's social and economic development and participated in scientific, cultural and sporting events and competitions. The country had striven to promote awareness among its young people of development objectives by incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into school curricula.

47. The current global revolution in information technology was accompanied by an increase in cybercrime. To address that issue, the Government had enacted the 2011 Cybercrime Law, which ensured the protection of personal data and contained provisions against cybercrime, misuse of data and acts of forgery and fraud.

48. **Mr. Margaryan** (Armenia) said that in order to leave no one behind, the international community must ensure that human rights were at the centre of response efforts to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continued to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. Since its independence, Armenia had upheld the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as an irreversible reality, as reflected in the policies of his Government. His country also prioritized the economic empowerment and the equal and meaningful participation of women in public life, and remained fully committed to the achievement of gender equality, including through access to digital technologies and the implementation of action-oriented policies.

49. Armenia supported efforts to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations and regional organizations to identify and respond to the warning signs of gross violations of humanitarian law and human rights law. In particular, the promulgation of hate speech and incitement to violence on the basis of ethnicity and religion created environments that were conducive to genocide, crimes against humanity and other atrocity crimes. His delegation was committed to identifying and addressing such practices through international cooperation and multilateral engagement, including through the Human Rights Council.

50. The aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020 had involved grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including extrajudicial killings, the torture and inhumane treatment of prisoners of war and civilian hostages, mass displacement and the destruction of cultural monuments. Armenia would continue to support the restoration and protection of human rights for the people of Artsakh, including the right to determine their

own future without fear, violence or oppression. Attempts to suppress the legitimate aspirations of the people, particularly their right to self-determination, should be firmly rejected by the international community.

51. **Mr. Ghorbanpour Najafabadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that large-scale human rights violations had become routine in various places, including Palestine and Yemen. There was both hypocrisy and a lack of resolve among those who portrayed themselves as defenders of human rights but who supported the criminals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and sponsored the weapons that were routinely used against Palestinian and Yemeni civilians. Moreover, the Israeli regime had embarked on ethnic cleansing in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, violating the basic rights of Palestinians on a daily basis. In that connection, the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly supported the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Meanwhile, the recent revelations in Canada of horrendous crimes against indigenous peoples proved that the practice of occupying territories through ethnic cleansing had become normalized or accepted.

52. The displaced persons within and outside of Afghanistan were in dire need of international support, including to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation in that country demonstrated the true nature of the United States of America and of those who had invaded Afghanistan under the pretext of combating terrorism and upholding human rights. Moreover, the Islamic Republic of Iran condemned any attempts to prevent the development of developing nations by countries that wished to maintain a monopoly in the sphere of international relations.

53. His delegation strongly condemned the inhumane and illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States, which were intended to confiscate the resources of his country and deter other countries from pursuing legitimate trade with it, including for the provision of humanitarian goods. Those measures had also blocked the allocation of COVID-19 vaccines to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Claims by certain countries that humanitarian goods were exempt from sanctions were therefore false.

54. His country remained committed to upholding the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and had consistently made efforts to promote and protect human rights, which must be addressed through a non-selective approach in order to avoid politicization. Engaging in dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect was the only way to guarantee

the promotion and protection of human rights at the international level. It was crucial to avoid the weaponization of human rights, a selective approach and double standards, which only served to divert international human rights organizations from the achievement of their basic objectives.

55. **Ms. Horváth** (Hungary) said that in its current chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, her country had been prioritizing issues closely related to the Third Committee agenda, including youth policies, children's rights and the protection of national minorities. It was important to uphold the collective rights of national minorities in order to protect their identities against assimilation, in addition to eliminating discrimination and respecting the individual rights of members of those minorities. The use of minority languages should be promoted, including in education, and a legally binding international framework on minority protection should be established.

56. Hungary was a long-standing advocate for communities persecuted for their religion, particularly Christians. The systematic violation of freedom of religion should be addressed through an effective and holistic humanitarian response, as entire communities were being discriminated against and excluded from essential services. In that regard, her Government had established an assistance programme for humanitarian and rehabilitation projects that helped to create adequate conditions for people to return to or stay in their homelands.

57. Gender equality was enshrined in the law of her country and supported through a range of policies that included financial assistance and free childcare for families and support for women's employment. Hungary was also committed to upholding the rights of the child by taking measures to combat child poverty, foster the deinstitutionalization of children by providing alternative care, and increase awareness and regulation of the risks associated with digital technology. Her Government promoted the rights of persons with disabilities and their independent living and inclusion in the community with personalized social services and supported housing. In addition, her Government had recently made people under 25 years of age exempt from personal income tax in 2022, with a view to combating youth unemployment in Hungary.

58. **Mr. Kelemen** (Hungary), speaking as a youth delegate, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that many young Hungarians had spoken to him about issues including their mental health disorders and experiences of online harassment and cyberbullying. Many had

expressed their concerns about politics and whether their voice would be heard. The vast majority of his generation was also concerned about climate change, but believed that there was more talk of sustainability than action to achieve it. In addition, through his voluntary work with a non-governmental organization, he had gained an understanding of the realities faced by minority communities facing discrimination and social exclusion. Effective communication would foster mutual trust, so that cooperation could thrive and progress be made towards building more inclusive societies.

59. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka) said that the recovery of societies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic must be centred on a rights-based framework that was consistent with the Charter of the United Nations. Inclusive domestic policies must incorporate the needs and vision of every sector of society, in line with the principles of equality and respect for freedoms. Nations must also show respect for each other's distinct traditions and value systems, and the culture and traditions of one country must never be superimposed onto another. In that regard, development programmes must be tailored to meet the needs of local populations.

60. In light of the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and children, Sri Lanka was working to ensure that those groups were protected and had implemented several policies to that end. Given that economic autonomy was a critical factor in the empowerment of women and girls, his Government was committed to bridging the gender gap and providing more opportunities for women in the workplace. It had also taken measures to ensure access to high-quality education, which was a key means of eradicating poverty and ensuring progress.

61. Despite being a developing nation, Sri Lanka had provided universal health care coverage to its citizens since the 1930s through a well-organized national network of facilities. The national vaccination programme had therefore been very successful. His country had also eradicated terrorism from its soil and was taking steps to build back better, in order to ensure equitable economic development in a climate of peace and prosperity.

62. **Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom) said that the promotion and protection of human rights was at the heart of the work of the United Nations. Scrutiny of country-specific human rights situations was therefore crucial in order to help States to uphold their obligations. While no State had a perfect human rights record, all States could learn from one another in the endeavour to do better. The United Kingdom was

committed to the elimination of racism, which it condemned in all its forms, and was working to build a fairer country in which all people were valued and could reach their full potential, regardless of ethnic origin.

63. Her delegation would continue to champion freedom of religion and belief, and had convened a Security Council meeting to highlight religion and belief in conflict situations earlier that year. The continued attempts to roll back the rights of women and girls was a cause of concern, and the promotion and protection of gender equality and the rights of women and girls must be upheld. The United Kingdom would also continue to defend those discriminated against on account of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The criminalization of same-sex relations in 69 countries worldwide was shameful.

64. The values of democratic and open societies must be upheld, including civil society participation and support for media freedom, which was an essential component of a functioning democracy. Corruption was a scourge that diminished the rule of law, democracy and public trust in institutions; all States should therefore implement strong anti-corruption laws. There had been too many examples of infringements of rights under the pretext of tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. Human rights must therefore be central to the work of the United Nations in its efforts to build back better.

65. **Mr. Malovrh** (Slovenia) said that the global demographic changes and trends resulting from ageing societies must be addressed. Not only had the pandemic disproportionately threatened the lives, rights and well-being of older persons, it had also highlighted the gaps they faced in terms of social protection, access to health services, autonomy and meaningful participation in decision-making. Age-based discrimination exacerbated the social isolation and loneliness of older persons. In November 2021, Slovenia would host an international conference on ageing and intergenerational cooperation.

66. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls must remain central to efforts to build back better through inclusive recovery efforts that ensured full, equal and meaningful participation. Developing the full potential of women and girls was a precondition for the development of any society, a process in which men and boys had an important role to play.

67. The global environmental crisis demanded urgent action. A sustainable environment was essential to protect human life, well-being and dignity, particularly for those most at risk from environmental harm, including women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and other vulnerable individuals. His delegation had contributed to a recent Human Rights

Council resolution on the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

68. **Ms. Karnelutti** (Slovenia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that young people were facing a clear set of challenges as a result of the ongoing pandemic, most of which were connected to their economic situation, education and mental health. The crisis had led to a sharp rise in mental health issues, which were currently reported by 30 per cent of young people in Slovenia. That increase was a result of limited access to mental health services following the introduction of social distancing and related pandemic measures.

69. Mental health support in education should also be improved, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 on the right to quality education should be a pillar of social development. Moreover, the importance of the Goals had increased during the current crisis. Online learning was unsustainable, and education must be prioritized as part of the transition out of the pandemic.

70. **Ms. Şiman** (Republic of Moldova) said that respect for human rights, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, must remain at the heart of the global recovery effort following the COVID-19 pandemic. That response must fully incorporate a gender perspective, as true recovery would only be possible with consideration for the specific needs of women and their involvement in decision-making processes. The serious social and economic disruptions caused by the pandemic were a cause of great concern and had led to a heightened risk of poverty, unemployment, increased inequality and a decline in access to basic services.

71. The confinement measures taken worldwide had exponentially increased cases of violence against women and girls and domestic violence, exacerbating a situation that had already been dire prior to the pandemic. Efforts must therefore be redoubled towards achieving gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. Furthermore, the switch to online education had had a severe impact on enjoyment of the right to education for millions of children without Internet access, as well as children with disabilities who did not have access to specially adapted devices and curriculums. Moreover, a lack of social contact had aggravated the mental health of children and young people.

72. To respond to the challenges faced, it was crucial to work together in a participatory and inclusive manner in order to identify sustainable solutions to combat the pandemic and the related human rights issues. In that regard, non-discriminatory access to the COVID-19 vaccine was a human right. Without coordination at the global level, all previous efforts to improve the human

rights situation worldwide would be jeopardized, while the global community would be left unprepared for future crises.

73. The international community should remain focused on the human rights situations in specific countries, particularly in conflict-affected regions, including the human rights violations perpetrated by the separatist regime in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. Human rights defenders were being persecuted; civil society space was limited; freedom of expression and free media were virtually non-existent; and there had been cases of enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention.

74. The pandemic had been used as a pretext to impose further restrictions on the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights abuses were also of particular concern in the conflict-affected areas of eastern Ukraine, including in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, and in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia. The international community must monitor such violations, as impunity further aggravated the plight of the inhabitants of those regions.

75. **Ms. Stoeva** (Bulgaria) said that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were damaging for human rights and must be addressed at the international level through more inclusive multilateralism. In light of the challenges faced, it was more important than ever to ensure the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the effective protection and promotion of human rights. In that regard, it was critical to guarantee the meaningful participation of civil society and the protection of human rights defenders.

76. Strengthening the rights of the child and improving children's safety and well-being was at the top of the human rights agenda of Bulgaria. Her delegation was committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child worldwide, both online and offline, with priorities including inclusive education for children with disabilities and the process of deinstitutionalization. Bulgaria was also actively contributing towards initiatives for the elimination of child labour, including by presenting a joint statement by members of the Group of Friends for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals and members of the Group of Friends of Decent Work for Sustainable Development. States should prioritize education; social protection for the most vulnerable children and full employment and decent work for their families; and meaningful engagement of children and young people in pandemic recovery strategies.

77. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated gender inequalities and resulted in a shadow pandemic of sexual and gender-based violence. The meaningful participation of women was vital, including their input in responding to the crisis. Empowering women and girls and promoting their full enjoyment of all human rights, including those related to sexual and reproductive health, was a high priority for Bulgaria.

78. **Ms. Todorova** (Bulgaria), speaking as a youth delegate, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that intergenerational dialogue was just as important as international dialogue for tackling current challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated that any issue could be resolved through trust and cooperation. In Bulgaria, the main priorities of young people were access to quality education, health and climate change. While COVID-19 had wreaked havoc across the generations in terms of physical health, its impact on youth was especially damaging in terms of development and overall well-being. Young people in Bulgaria considered that education and mental health had suffered the most as a consequence of the pandemic.

79. Education must be inclusive, equitable and of sufficient quality, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4. Students were not currently provided with all of the necessary tools to navigate the complex health-related and environmental challenges that they faced. Her delegation therefore strongly supported the training of educational specialists to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to integrate innovation and civic and environmental issues into curriculums.

80. Ambitious and binding commitments were required to tackle the impacts of climate change and pollution, which were major threats to health and well-being. Young people should be considered the designers of a sustainable future and invited to contribute to decision-making processes across national governments. Cooperation was necessary to ensure inclusive and innovative educational policies and health systems and the implementation of climate commitments, while amplifying the voices of young people in the international system.

81. **Mr. Kim Song** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the global health crisis, civil war and armed conflict posed serious challenges to the enjoyment of human rights in many parts of the world. The military occupation of Afghanistan was the worst of all crimes against humanity, and had resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of refugees. Moreover, the "Black Lives Matter" movement in the United States had drawn attention to the deep-rooted racial discrimination and institutional

violation of human rights that took place every day in that country. It was in Western countries that human rights violations were taking place and where social equality was worsening with the global health crisis. Japan had invaded many Asian countries in the past, including Korea, committing crimes against humanity. Although a century had passed since then, Japan had yet to admit to those crimes and continued to discriminate against Korean residents living in the country.

82. Certain countries submitted and voted in favour of the General Assembly draft resolution on human rights in his country on an annual basis. The reason was not the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but rather that hostile forces sought a regime change in his country because it had a different system and ideas. In that regard, his country would safeguard its socialist system and respond strongly to hostile countries. Dignity and the right to life were firmly guaranteed in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, even in the context of the pandemic and global natural disasters. His country would join the international community in its efforts to oppose and reject double standards, while protecting and promoting the human rights of its people.

83. **Mr. Odida** (Uganda) said that Uganda had made steady progress in terms of women's empowerment, health care services, education and the provision of safe water. Women and girls were now central to decision-making processes and political leadership in Uganda, and gender-responsive policies and solid legal frameworks had been implemented to better protect their rights.

84. His country currently hosted the largest number of refugees in Africa, having maintained an open-door policy, notably to refugees from Afghanistan. However, the circumstances of refugees and host communities posed an enormous challenge and must be addressed through international solidarity. Equitable burden-sharing in terms of hosting was necessary, in order to support refugees in line with international commitments. The international community should address the gap between humanitarian and development assistance; support the national development plan of Uganda in order to address that gap; and tackle the root causes of displacement, to enable the eventual return of refugees to their countries of origin. Moreover, the international community and the countries of origin should recognize that refugees were in a transitional situation.

85. In order to ensure a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Uganda had taken deliberate and targeted decisions to

strengthen the capacities of its national health systems and key sectors of the economy. However, an effective response could only be achieved through collective action. Equitable and affordable access to vaccines must be ensured for all peoples, including those under sanctions and in conflict situations. Member States must also work closely to combat crime and terrorism, particularly in light of the new and increasingly dynamic crime trends in the world today.

86. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that the current health crisis continued to undermine efforts to overcome such challenges as poverty, hunger and malnutrition, inequality, unemployment and climate change. The hoarding of COVID-19 vaccines by developed countries was inhumane and unacceptable, and prevented the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines to all, including in developing countries. It was necessary and just to ensure the transfer of technology and financial resources and to declare vaccines a common good for humanity. The pandemic should be faced with solidarity, unconditional cooperation and a robust multilateral system that allowed access to vaccines without politicizing their distribution.

87. As part of the efforts to achieve stability, peace and development, illegal unilateral coercive measures must cease immediately. Coercive and aggressive policies posed a serious obstacle to the eradication of poverty, impeded progress towards sustainable development and, in times of a pandemic, constituted a crime against humanity.

88. With regard to 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. States should cooperate with countries in Central America, and resources should be provided for the fight against drug trafficking that had been imposed upon it.

89. Nicaragua, with the lowest average rate of homicide in Central America, continued to 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 preventing violence from reaching countries in the South.

90. Safe, regular and orderly migration was being hindered by the lack of will on the part of Western countries. Millions of people from developing countries, victims of the unjust neoliberal model, were migrating with the hope of finding better opportunities in

developed countries, where they encountered rejection, in violation of their dignity and human rights.

91. Thanks to his Government's efforts in the area of gender equality, international organizations had recognized the extraordinary and consistent progress made by Nicaragua in reducing gender inequalities. According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2020, Nicaragua was ranked fifth and was the most gender-equal country in Latin America and the Caribbean, having closed 80.4 per cent of its overall gender gap. If progress continued, the gender gap would be closed in 2034, according to World Economic Forum projections.

92. His Government had increased the number of health personnel and had constructed many new health care facilities, including four specialized centres that provided services to the population free of charge. Moreover, children were included in the social security system even before they were born.

93. Nicaragua recognized the existence of indigenous peoples and peoples of African descent, who enjoyed the rights, duties and guarantees set out in the Constitution. Those rights included the right to keep and develop their cultural identity, have their own forms of social organization and administer their local affairs, keep communal ownership of their land and elect their authorities and representatives.

94. **Mr. Ilnytskyi** (Ukraine) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a devastating impact on human rights. His country was deeply concerned by the deterioration in the human rights situation in many countries, including the Russian Federation, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Myanmar, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Syrian Arab Republic.

95. The deplorable human rights situation in Belarus was particularly troubling, as the Lukashenko regime was further deepening the rift with Belarusian society. The recent talks between the Presidents of Belarus and the Russian Federation, along with the signing of 28 road maps on integration of the Union State, had resulted in the de facto annexation of Belarus by the Russian Federation and its transformation into a new military base, similar to occupied Crimea, in order to destabilize Europe.

96. In view of the devastating impact of conflict on human rights in Afghanistan, Ukraine called on States to prioritize the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in order to ensure security and to prevent all forms of discrimination against women and children. Noting that the same call had been made in the statement

adopted at the Kyiv Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen on 23 August 2021, Ukraine invited States who had been unable to participate in the Summit to express their support for that statement.

97. Ukraine remained seriously concerned about the deteriorating situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, where violations included the brutal suppression of peaceful political protests, the killing or imprisonment of opposition leaders and interference in and manipulation of the electoral process. The recent elections held in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine constituted a clear violation of international law; it was no surprise that the democratic world had refused to recognize the results of such a farce.

98. The illegal actions of the Russian Federation in the region, including in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, were the cause of massive human rights violations. Since the beginning of the armed Russian aggression against Ukraine, over 25,000 people had been wounded, over 15,000 people had been killed and 1.5 million had been displaced. The occupying Power had especially targeted Ukrainians and indigenous Crimean Tatars. It was implementing coercive measures to force the population of Crimea to leave. Furthermore, Mr. Nariman Dzhelyal, the First Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, and his compatriots were still being illegally detained by the occupying Power for supporting the International Crimea Platform – a new international consultation and coordination forum that was intended to increase the effectiveness of the international response to the ongoing temporary occupation of Crimea.

99. Ukraine appreciated the work of the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, which had the tools necessary to track violations committed by the occupying Power. It also appreciated the Secretary-General's readiness to continue monitoring the situation in temporarily occupied Crimea. Guided by General Assembly resolution [75/192](#), the Secretary-General should provide his good offices to ensure compliance with the resolution by the Russian Federation, including the immediate release of all 450 Ukrainian citizens who had been unlawfully detained, sentenced or even transferred from the occupied territories to the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the Secretary-General and the monitoring mission should also engage actively in the implementation of the objectives set out in the Joint Declaration of the International Crimea Platform, thereby significantly contributing to the prevention of further gross human rights violations in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Until the end of the occupation of all Ukrainian territories, it was imperative

for the Third Committee to continue to adopt resolutions on the situation of human rights in Crimea.

100. **Mr. Fernandez De Soto Valderrama** (Colombia) said that, during the pandemic, his Government had allocated an additional \$1.7 billion for social development, which had facilitated access to opportunities and income generation for the most vulnerable households through cash transfer and subsidy programmes and in-kind assistance. His Government would continue to guarantee a basic income for 4 million families until December 2022 and was moving forward with the national COVID-19 vaccination plan to cover at least 70 per cent of the national population by the end of 2021.

101. Colombia had passed laws relating to women's economic and political empowerment and had developed a strategy to tackle violence against women. Cognizant of the fact that sustainable economic growth and economic recovery were not possible without the full and effective participation of women, Colombia had drawn up a long-term road map with a view to establishing itself as a leader in terms of gender equality by 2030.

102. Colombia's national development plan was designed to expand comprehensive care from early childhood to adolescence, ensuring that everyone had access to education, nutrition, health care, family guidance and protection. Furthermore, Colombia had become the sixty-third State to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children.

103. Since the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Colombia had strengthened public policies to respond comprehensively to the challenges of migration. In addition to the actions taken to protect Colombians abroad and those returning to Colombia, his Government had taken the historic step of adopting the Temporary Statute of Protection for Venezuelan Migrants. The Statute reflected Colombia's public policy on migration, based on the protection of human rights and on gender and comprehensive child protection perspectives, and was a tool to protect migrants from human trafficking networks.

104. Colombia, a country with almost two million indigenous people comprising 115 native peoples, considered the inclusion of ethnic groups in decision-making through the prior consultation mechanism to be an indispensable component of intercultural dialogue that ensured the timely and effective protection of such groups. All administrative and legislative decisions were agreed upon in those communities through the permanent roundtable for consultation with indigenous

peoples and organizations, one example being the standardization of criteria for the immunization of indigenous peoples.

105. In the past year, Colombia had made progress in realizing the aims of the International Decade for People of African Descent through efforts focused on intersectional forms of discrimination. In addition, it had worked with members of its Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquera communities to conduct workshops and training courses targeting those populations.

106. Concerned by the growing links between transnational organized crime and terrorism, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons, of which corruption was a source and facilitator, Colombia welcomed the political declaration adopted at the special session of the General Assembly against corruption.

107. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had reminded States of the fragility of human existence and the imperative need to restore to the human species the enjoyment of all fundamental rights without hindrance. Human rights were indivisible, interrelated and permanently influenced by the circumstances of the social, historical, cultural and religious evolution of the most diverse peoples in the regions of the world.

108. No one should favour one human right over another to suit their own agenda, nor should they try to impose their agenda on others – an unfortunate tendency currently displayed by a number of States that presented themselves as “educators”, particularly in the field of sexual reproductive health and the defence of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons. Moreover, emphasis was very often placed on the enjoyment of human rights, rather than on the infrastructure critical to their enjoyment. The right to education, for example, could not be enjoyed without schools. Those States should therefore focus on helping developing countries to strengthen their infrastructure in that regard.

109. Cameroon had made notable progress in the areas of literacy, especially for girls, poverty reduction, the media and equal pay. It had gained experience and learned lessons during its earlier membership of the Human Rights Council. His country hosted the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, and it had submitted periodic reports under all the conventions to which it was a party. It also punished, as necessary, any proven violation of human rights on its territory, as shown by the recent cases in Ngaruh and Zeleved. In addition, the Ministry of

Public Health and the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms regularly published reports acknowledging both progress and shortcomings in terms of human rights, democracy and governance in general. On that basis, unanimously endorsed by the African Union, it was once again presenting its candidature for membership of the Human Rights Council. Cameroon sought the support of all Member States in that regard.

110. **Ms. Alammadi** (Bahrain) said that her country, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, had taken precautionary measures consistent with international standards and the recommendations of WHO. It had also set aside approximately \$12 billion to support its citizens and safeguard their rights and had made quarantine centres and free medical examinations available. The Government had introduced initiatives to improve the working conditions of expatriate workers and had offered free treatment and vaccinations to citizens and residents alike. The opening of a WHO office in Bahrain was the culmination of efforts to strengthen its strategic partnership with the United Nations with a view to offering comprehensive health and welfare services to Bahrainis.

111. Women's rights in Bahrain were safeguarded through an integrated legislative framework under the support and direction of the King and with the assistance of the Supreme Council for Women under the presidency of Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa. In 2021, Bahrain had celebrated the twentieth anniversary of that Council, whose mission was to promote and advance the status of Bahraini women, strengthen their role within the family and society, and facilitate the process of development on the basis of justice and equal partnership.

112. The Government had signed a declaration of intent for cooperation and coordination with the United Nations to develop the National Human Rights Plan for 2022–26. Bahrain was keen to involve various civil society groups and other organizations in the process of determining the Plan's priority areas.

113. Bahrain continued to enact legislation to protect and promote human rights. The country had recently promulgated Act No. 4 of 2021 on corrective justice for children and protection from ill-treatment, which was in line with international instruments. According to a report of the United States Department of State, Bahrain had been ranked in tier 1 for the fourth consecutive year for its actions to combat trafficking in persons. That achievement reflected the country's significant progress in consolidating a culture of human rights. Bahrain was also the first country in the Arab world to establish a prosecutor's office devoted to human trafficking cases.

114. **Mr. Abd Aziz** (Malaysia) said that, 18 months after the outbreak of the pandemic, public health systems and socioeconomic situations around the world remained under immense strain. It had been clear from the outset that vaccinating the global population en masse was key to overcoming the pandemic. However, despite the progress made, the unequal access to safe, effective and affordable vaccines remained deeply troubling. There was a need for renewed international solidarity and urgency to narrow the vaccine equity gaps that were leaving many developing countries behind.

115. To date, Malaysia had fully vaccinated 85 per cent of its adult population – each person in the country, regardless of their status, had access to medical care, testing and vaccination. His Government had introduced a national recovery plan to progressively reopen society and the economy and had implemented gender-responsive policies, such as cash assistance for single mothers, childcare subsidies and flexible work arrangements, and had set up helplines, online advocacy, shelters and counselling services to address gender-based violence. Furthermore, social support services had been provided to the elderly and persons with disabilities.

116. At a time when unity and solidarity were most critical, Malaysia was concerned about the increasing reports of intolerance, racism, hate speech, religious discrimination and xenophobia around the world. In facing the health crisis, Malaysia's multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-faith communities had taken the unique opportunity to come together to help the most vulnerable segments of society. The international community, in its diversity, must also come together to condemn and counter any acts of intolerance and divisiveness.

117. The situation of Rohingya refugees and of internally displaced persons in Rakhine State was particularly troubling. Malaysia continued to house hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees and to provide them with assistance, including COVID-19 vaccination. Although Malaysia was not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, his Government continued to provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers on humanitarian grounds. The signatory countries of the 1951 Convention should uphold their commitment to proportionate burden- and responsibility-sharing.

118. Malaysia, as a founding member of ASEAN, encouraged the Government of Myanmar to take steps to resolve both the current political situation and the Rohingya issue and to expedite the implementation of the ASEAN five-point consensus.

119. Malaysia remained strongly committed to defending the inalienable rights and dignity of the Palestinians. In that regard, it urged Israel to end the human rights violations committed against the Palestinians by the Israeli security forces and by illegal settlers. The international community 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.

120. **Mr. Mlynár** (Slovakia) said that the pandemic had resulted in an escalation of domestic violence, which had brought enormous suffering to women and children. Moreover, the increase in populism, fake news and hoaxes was having a detrimental impact on democratic systems, undermining shared values such as the principle of democracy and disrupting trust in public authorities. The rise in hate speech, with its potential to fuel chaos and hatred, required particular attention; urgent measures were needed to combat racist, xenophobic and discriminatory rhetoric and to prevent intolerance.

121. The deterioration of the human rights situation in Afghanistan was of deep concern, with reports of arbitrary and extrajudicial killing, sexual slavery, forced marriage and gender-based violence. Particularly alarming was the situation of Afghan women and girls, whose right to education and work was at stake. Human rights violations must not go unpunished and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

122. Slovakia paid due attention to freedom of expression and the protection of journalists, whose role as public watchdogs was essential for democratic societies. States had an obligation to adopt legal, administrative and practical measures to ensure a safe environment in which all journalists could work without fear. Slovakia was deeply concerned about the mass arrests of journalists and the continuing systematic repression of the media and representatives of the opposition and civil society in Belarus. The recent closure of the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the harsh prison sentences imposed on political prisoners Maria Kolesnikava and Maxim Znak clearly demonstrated that the situation in Belarus deserved continued attention.

123. Noting the importance of the role of young people and the age-based discrimination they faced, Slovakia urged States to recognize their potential and ensure that they could fully enjoy their rights. Young people were both the present and the future. Their involvement in the work of the Third Committee was welcome.

124. **Mr. Hotea** (Romania) said that the present and future generations of all genders and ages should seize

the moment to reimagine economies, societies and political systems and use their transformative power to ensure that no one was left behind.

125. Freedom of expression, as an important enabler of other fundamental rights and freedoms, should be exercised responsibly, and diversity of opinion, debates and exchanges of views on all matters of public interest should be encouraged. At the same time, Romania denounced abuses of the freedom of expression to spread hate speech, racism and xenophobia, to call for violence or to instil panic and fear. Traditional and digital media should remain a safe space free from censorship and from political or other interference.

126. There was no place in society for any act of discrimination, racism or xenophobia. States should combat the rise in hate speech, violence and intolerance by monitoring and sanctioning hate-related incidents, including online, and by protecting all individuals and communities, regardless of their background or condition.

127. Gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the realization of their human rights were essential to building more equal, inclusive, democratic and resilient societies and to overcoming the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The President of Romania had been involved in the HeForShe campaign since its inception. Furthermore, his Government had created two new professions – Expert in Gender Equality and Gender Equality Technician – in support of local and national strategies to achieve gender equality and combat domestic violence.

128. In its current capacity as President of the Community of Democracies, Romania aimed to promote a more resilient democracy. To that end, it had established the Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience, a platform to efficiently address an ever-wider range of challenges. Moreover, in view of the importance of cooperation and support in challenging times, Romania provided assistance for development, participated in election monitoring missions and promoted multilateralism.

129. **Ms. Rogojînaru** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the lack of human interaction and the overwhelming information about the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the mental health of young people in Romania. The pandemic had also hindered their access to quality education, thereby preventing the accomplishment of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Moreover, they faced problems related to gender inequality, increased domestic violence, discrimination, unemployment and hate speech.

130. **Mr. Zvîncă** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that young people had adapted to the pandemic situation and demonstrated the utmost solidarity and inclusivity by volunteering – caring for vulnerable people, organizing vaccination campaigns and promoting solutions for building resilience. They were also raising awareness about all human rights, focusing on building a world where all could live in peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet. In that connection, the youth of Romania stood ready to contribute to the work of the Human Rights Council.

131. **Mr. Dang** Dinh Quy (Viet Nam) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought countries further hardship that, unless mitigated, would fuel tensions and provoke civil unrest. States had an obligation to ensure that all people were protected and included in their response to the crisis.

132. All States and stakeholders should strengthen global solidarity and jointly promote the production of vaccines and their fair, affordable, equitable, timely and universal distribution worldwide. In that connection, Viet Nam thanked its partner countries, international organizations and people around the world for their assistance with its pandemic response efforts.

133. Transformative leadership and political will were needed to build back better and ensure a firm commitment to leaving no one behind. Recovery should be sustainable and inclusive with a variety of short-, medium- and long-term people-centred policies. Particular emphasis should be given to poverty eradication and to education and universal health care.

134. It was in the interests of every State to uphold the rights of all. The promotion and protection of human rights towards a common objective must be addressed through a constructive, non-confrontational, non-politicized and non-selective dialogue-based approach, with non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respect for territorial integrity and political independence in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, taking into account the historical, social, cultural and development circumstances of each country. All rights must be treated equally.

135. The promotion and protection of human rights was the highest priority for Viet Nam and the ultimate goal and driving force of its sustainable development. It had continued to introduce legal, administrative and judicial reforms in order to better protect people's rights, both as defined by the law and in practice. During its fourteenth tenure, the Vietnamese National Assembly, together with relevant agencies, had developed, revised,

completed and promulgated 72 human rights-related laws and many other legal documents.

136. Thanks to his country's socioeconomic programmes and strategies for economic growth and improving living standards, Viet Nam's poverty rate had been reduced to 2.75 per cent and health insurance coverage had increased to almost 91 per cent in 2020.

137. Cognizant of the importance of international cooperation and dialogue in the protection and promotion of human rights, Viet Nam had established dialogue mechanisms with several partners and had attained positive outcomes over the years while actively participating in regional efforts. At the global level, Viet Nam remained ready to cooperate with United Nations organizations and the special rapporteurs and independent experts of the Human Rights Council.

138. **Mr. Blanco Conde** (Dominican Republic) said that, with new virus variants and possible outbreaks, the world still faced a challenging global health and economic crisis with serious implications for the protection and promotion of human rights and social development.

139. Concerned about the rise in gender-based violence and child abuse as a result of the pandemic and the alarming increase in forced and child marriage, the Dominican Republic had enacted a law prohibiting child marriage as a demonstration of its strong and determined political will to implement social, economic and educational plans and policies.

140. Sustainable development was not possible if young people faced structural barriers limiting their personal, educational and professional development. Member States should build more institutional channels to strengthen youth participation in intergovernmental processes as part of a revitalised multilateralism. However, participation could only be full, meaningful and inclusive if young people were able to speak freely and safely. Unfortunately, the number of cases of reprisals and attacks was increasing. The protection called for in Security Council resolution [2535 \(2020\)](#) went hand in hand with the recently launched global report "If I Disappear" on protecting young people in civic space, which provided data on attacks and harassment and recommendations.

141. The Dominican Republic welcomed the inclusion by the Secretary-General in his report "Our Common Agenda" of proposed actions related to listening and working with youth, and looked forward to the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office, which would represent the interests of young people and

support the protection and promotion of their human rights.

142. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had highlighted the laudable improvements made with regard to women's rights, despite the threat of social and political reversals. States were at a critical juncture where urgent action was needed to fully achieve gender equality, human rights and the empowerment of women and girls, under a renewed commitment and with a greater level of ambition, investment and accountability.

143. Trafficking in persons remained one of the world's foremost human rights violations. The Dominican Republic, as co-facilitator of the 2021 Political Declaration on the Implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, hoped that Member States would reflect on the progress made and on the key issues yet to be prioritized in their common response to that heinous crime.

144. The Dominican Republic's strong commitment to combating corruption had been demonstrated by its consideration of the criteria for effective political and operational independence when appointing the Attorney General in August 2020 and by the appointment of local experts to implement the Convention against Corruption.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.