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Chair: Mr. Doualeh (Djibouti)
later: Mr. Shin (Vice-Chair) (Republic of Korea)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador) said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had exposed and exacerbated global human rights violations, vulnerabilities and inequalities, deepening poverty and exclusion. It was necessary to implement gender-sensitive approaches to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and to make poverty eradication measures, social assistance and stimulus packages accessible to all. As noted by the Secretary-General in his report “Our Common Agenda”, the world needed to decide whether to continue with business as usual and risk significant breakdown and perpetual crisis, or instead make concerted efforts to build an international system that delivered for people and the planet.

2. Health was a basic human right, yet people on the move were largely excluded from health-care systems because legal and policy frameworks limited or prohibited their access, which was inconsistent with human rights norms, ran counter to efforts to overcome the pandemic and hindered the ability to take preventive measures against COVID-19. States must therefore ensure that all migrants, regardless of their migration status, had access to diagnostics, treatment and vaccines. In that regard, there was no place for vaccine nationalism – the international community must ensure timely and equitable access for all. Since the start of the pandemic, her Government had established measures to offer protection to the entire population, regardless of race, religion and political ideology, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.

3. With a view to reducing the digital divide, her Government had provided computers to 1.2 million students and over 40,000 teachers in the public sector. The Government was also working to modernize the national health, education and security systems, and had recently approved the ratification of the Convention against Discrimination in Education. Given that the promotion and protection of the rights of children and adolescents was a priority, her country was implementing a comprehensive early childhood policy, which would contribute to the achievement of target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Aware that discrimination and violence against women prevented societies from becoming free and equal, her delegation reaffirmed its commitment to promoting gender equity and equality.

5. **Mr. Nze** (Nigeria) said that his delegation wished to express its appreciation to the international community for the concerted response in containing the

COVID-19 pandemic. However, the current state of access to COVID-19 vaccines was unacceptable. The global community could not afford a situation in which a handful of countries kept the global vaccine supply to themselves at the expense of other nations. States should therefore act to accelerate equitable vaccine distribution.

6. Education must be central to the global agenda. In that regard, Nigeria would continue to advocate inclusive and quality education for all, irrespective of class, gender or geographical location. His country, which would be hosting the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in October 2021, reaffirmed the need for collaborative and concerted efforts to protect education from attack and to build resilience through hope in order to recover from COVID-19 and rebuild sustainably.

7. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, held in Beijing in 1995, his country had been working to ensure that women were present in all sectors, including in the decision-making process of public and corporate entities. In addition, his Government maintained its principled stance against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Given the rise in race-related crimes in some countries, the international community needed to unequivocally denounce and work together to combat those scourges. Human rights were key to achieving peace and development globally, and their promotion and protection were the most important quality and expression of humanity. In their efforts to end terrorism in Nigeria and the subregion, soldiers were held to the highest standards in defending the rights of all.

8. **Ms. Al-mashehari** (Yemen) said that the country’s humanitarian crisis had been intensified by the Houthi assault on constitutional legitimacy and the national consensus regarding a future federal State, as represented in the outcomes of the All-Inclusive National Dialogue Conference. Houthi militias continued to obstruct the delivery of humanitarian aid and relief to the areas under their control and used the suffering of the Yemeni people to score political points and prolong their senseless war. The militias also continued to violate the rights of children, forcibly taking more than 35,000 children from their homes and schools and sending them into battle. In 2021, 60,000 children had been recruited into “summer camps”, where they were brainwashed with racist ideas. Since the beginning of the militias’ brutal assault on Ma’rib in January 2020, more than 2,000 children had been forced into the militias and sent to the frontlines there, and in September 2021, the militias had executed a minor who

had been paralysed after years of torture. They had also sown more than 1 million land mines since the coup, a crime against humanity and a hidden disaster that blatantly violated international instruments providing for the protection of civilians during conflicts.

9. Her Government called on the international community to speak out about that situation, which threatened the futures of Yemeni children in the regions under Houthi control, and to take steps to stop that unprecedented violation of all international laws and instruments. It urged support for the National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations of Human Rights, whose efforts had been commended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, the Government of Yemen regretted the inaccuracy and lack of professionalism of the reports of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts of the Human Rights Council, which relied on allegations from biased and untrustworthy sources.

10. The Iranian-supported Houthi militias had attacked Ma'rib Governorate with ballistic weapons and drones, killing many innocent civilians. Recently, the district of Abdiyah in Ma'rib Governorate had come under siege and military attack. Her Government called on the international community to intervene immediately to break that siege and end the targeting of civilians, which constituted a grave violation of human rights and international humanitarian law.

11. Numerous reports by domestic and international organizations had exposed degrading treatment, including arbitrary arrest, rape and torture, suffered by women in the regions under Houthi control. Yemen called on the international community, particularly the Human Rights Council, to highlight the issue of imprisoned and abducted women in Houthi militia prisons. Yemen was committed to a political settlement of the conflict based on mutually agreed principles, with a comprehensive ceasefire as an important step. However, that good faith had been met with intransigence from the Houthi militias, which had rejected all initiatives and proposals aimed at ending the conflict.

12. **Ms. Niamba Congo** (Burkina Faso) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in the least developed countries, which were also facing the scourges of hunger, malaria, HIV/AIDS, drought and floods. Despite the health and security crisis, her country had implemented projects and programmes aimed at improving people's income, ensuring the economic empowerment of women and girls, improving gender parity in education and establishing a national strategy for students in areas with

major threats to security. Inclusion policies had also been adopted to provide children under 5 years of age and pregnant women with free health care, create a legal aid fund and improve measures to promote and protect persons with disabilities and older persons, whose vulnerability had increased as a result of terrorism.

13. The empowerment of women was a priority for her Government, which had adopted measures to improve their access to drinking water in rural areas, as well as to land and health services. Efforts were also being made to ensure the participation of women in local governance and decision-making. Actions aimed at combating violence against women and girls included strengthening legal systems, creating shelters for victims of violence, setting up a toll-free number for reporting cases of gender-based violence and establishing a psychosocial care protocol for survivors. Eliminating female genital mutilation was also a priority for her country.

14. The efforts made by her Government to promote the rights of children had led to an increase in school enrolment and gender parity rates at all levels of education. An initiative had been launched to provide children with at least one balanced meal a day, and systems had been strengthened to protect children from violence, child labour, child marriage and homelessness. However, despite those initiatives, the population remained vulnerable to terrorist attacks, which had led to mass displacements. In a context in which children were at risk of being recruited by armed groups following the closure of schools and health centres in insecure areas, a protocol was being created to provide care for children and adolescents who were involved in such groups.

15. Peace, security and development would not be possible without respect for human rights. Her country had therefore strengthened its legal framework on human rights and taken measures to foster peace and social cohesion.

16. **Mr. Rai** (Nepal) said that the COVID-19 crisis had seriously affected people's lives and livelihoods and threatened to reverse the gains made, including in the areas of socioeconomic development and the protection and promotion of human rights. The pandemic had further marginalized vulnerable groups, and could lead to a lost decade for development. The international community must ensure universal and equitable access to vaccines and that recovery efforts were beneficial for all.

17. Firmly committed to the protection and promotion of human rights, Nepal viewed such rights as universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually

reinforcing. They formed the bedrock of the country's Constitution, and human rights principles and values had been enshrined in national laws, policies and practices. The implementation of human rights commitments had been ensured by an independent judiciary, the National Human Rights Commission, the media and constitutional commissions that safeguarded the rights of diverse groups.

18. Nepal had made significant progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, including by making it mandatory for women to account for 33 per cent of positions in federal and provincial parliament and 40 per cent in local governments. In addition, in line with Alliance 8.7, his country had committed to end all forms of child labour by 2025. The right to representation of indigenous and marginalized people in public service was guaranteed by law, plans and policies had been devised to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and social protection programmes had been established for older persons, single women, persons with disabilities, Dalits and other marginalized communities. Nepal had laws guaranteeing freedom of religion as a fundamental right.

19. The safety, security and well-being of migrant workers remained a high priority for his delegation, which called for the effective implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Discrimination based on race, religion, cast, class and gender was against the law in Nepal, and its Constitution guaranteed equal rights to sexual minorities and ensured that no one was discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. As a member of the Human Rights Council for the second consecutive term, Nepal was contributing constructively to the promotion of human rights through an objective and apolitical approach.

20. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that global solidarity was lacking when it came to the COVID-19 pandemic, with certain Governments monopolizing the global supply of vaccines despite proclaiming their support for human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic required an international response based on cooperation, fairness and multilateralism.

21. The challenges posed by the pandemic had been exacerbated by the punitive measures imposed by certain countries to coerce other countries economically and politically, including Syria. Those measures flagrantly violated the Charter of the United Nations and constituted violations of fundamental human rights that rose to the level of crimes against humanity. In that context, the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had called for the

lifting sanctions owing to their deleterious effects on health and human rights and the ability of States to respond to the pandemic.

22. There was a need for full respect for international law and the principles of the Charter, particularly regarding the sovereignty of States and non-interference in their internal affairs, as well as respect for the right to self-determination of peoples under foreign occupation. In that regard, the occupied Syrian Arab Golan must be returned and any resolutions prejudicial to its legal status as occupied Syrian territory were null and void and a violation of legitimate international resolutions. Syria firmly supported the Palestinian cause and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

23. During the previous 10 years, Syria had experienced blatant violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity and interference in its internal affairs. Aggressive actions by the United States of America, under the umbrella of an illegitimate coalition ostensibly assembled to combat terrorism, had destroyed entire cities and vital infrastructure in the north-east of the country. The United States had also supported separatist militias that had violated the rights of women and children. In the north and north-west of Syria, Turkish military forces continued their policy of demographic change and Turkification and had deprived more than 1 million citizens of drinking water in Hassakah Governorate.

24. On 15 August 2021, Syria, in line with its obligations under international law, had enacted a law on the rights of children, which addressed issues such as trafficking in persons, corrective justice and the military recruitment of children. An additional global challenge to children's rights was the refusal of certain States to accept the repatriation of the children, wives and mothers of foreign terrorists fighting in Syria and Iraq. Some countries had even gone as far as revoking the citizenship of those individuals, while other countries had agreed only to the repatriation of children under the age of 10, without their mothers.

25. The Syrian delegation opposed the practice of some States of politicizing human rights issues and mechanisms for the purpose of undermining other States, including Syria, China, the Russian Federation, Iran, Belarus, Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

26. **Mr. Abu-mohammed** (Iraq) said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, his country had taken all measures necessary to safeguard its citizens' health while addressing the economic and humanitarian consequences. The Government had provided money and food aid packages to persons with special needs,

older persons, women heads of households, children and persons displaced by terrorist acts. It continued to enhance the capacities of workers in the health sector and to provide necessary medical supplies for the treatment of large numbers of COVID-19 patients. It had raised awareness among citizens and residents of how to prevent the illness and had urged the population to become vaccinated. Over 10 million vaccine doses had been administered throughout the country, and in that regard, the Government appreciated the assistance offered by the World Health Organization and friendly States.

27. Human rights formed an important pillar of the country's constitution and laws. Iraqi institutions made efforts to incorporate human rights principles into their work and to hold individuals and entities accountable for violations of human rights. The Government had promoted the principles of human rights, freedom and dignity, with the assistance of civil society and citizens, through complaints submitted to the judiciary, the Ministry of Human Rights and the independent National Human Rights Commission.

28. Iraqi women shouldered many burdens as a result of the country's experience with terrorism and the legacy of the former regime. The Government had worked exceptionally hard with international and civil society organizations and other stakeholders to pass laws and follow best practices to ensure that women and girls, especially those affected by terrorism, benefited from economic and political improvements. The Iraqi parliament had enacted a law to assist and compensate members of the Yazidi, Turkmen, Christian and Shabak communities for the crimes they had suffered, which had been tantamount to genocide. The Government also continued to prosecute the perpetrators of terrorist crimes against all members Iraqi society. The Iraqi parliament had updated Act No. 2 of 2020, the second amendment to the Act on compensation for victims of war operations and military mistakes.

29. As half of the country's population was under the age of 25, the Government had implemented many capacity-building programmes for youth. Iraq was committed to fulfilling its promise to hold early parliamentary elections on 10 October 2021, which would lead to the formation of a Government that would reflect the aspirations of the Iraqi people.

30. **Mr. González Behmaras** (Cuba) said that the COVID-19 virus killed people, as did the unilateral coercive measures, lack of solidarity and selfishness imposed by an unjust international order. The pandemic had laid bare global inequalities. As of August 2021, more than 80 per cent of the 5 billion doses of COVID-19

vaccines administered worldwide had been administered in high- and middle-income countries, even though those countries represented far less than half of the world's population. In contrast, hundreds of millions of people in low-income countries were still waiting for their first dose, in what was clearly a discriminatory practice.

31. The full and timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was becoming increasingly unlikely. A paradigm shift was essential in order to preserve the global gains made in such areas as child protection, gender equality and women's empowerment, the elimination of racism and intolerance, care for persons with disabilities and older persons, and the promotion and protection of human rights. A new, fairer and more democratic international order, based on multilateralism, solidarity and international cooperation, was needed. Unilateral coercive measures were an affront to self-determination and had a negative impact on the human rights and socioeconomic development of the peoples against whom they were applied. The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba was a flagrant violation of the human rights of all Cubans, a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law and an obstacle to the development of Cuba. For more than six decades, the United States has not ceased its policy of hostility against his country, and such hostility had only intensified during the pandemic.

32. Nine months into the current Administration of the United States, the 243 measures adopted by the former Government remained in force, including the inclusion of Cuba on the list of countries that allegedly sponsored terrorism. The United States lacked morality and an international mandate to draw up such a list. The application of coercive measures, central to the foreign policy of the United States, was aimed at punishing those countries that did not conform to its interests. It was unacceptable to identify a nation's right to economic and technological development as a threat; the right of every State to develop the political, economic, social and cultural system sovereignly chosen by its people should not be questioned.

33. The United States had launched an unconventional war against Cuba, using campaigns based on manipulation and lies to destabilize the country and justify the doctrine of regime change. It politicized human rights issues and tried to obstruct the medical cooperation provided by Cuba, pressuring other Governments to join in its actions against his country. The perverse conduct of the United States towards Cuba was incompatible with values of democracy and

freedom, which Cubans had already won for themselves. Despite the blockade and interference, Cuba was sparing no effort to protect its people from the pandemic. In the midst of significant shortages, the country had created three vaccines and two vaccine candidates against COVID-19; had sent 57 medical teams to 40 countries and territories to support efforts to combat the pandemic; and was the first country in the world to launch a vaccination campaign aimed at children between the ages of 2 and 11. After applying the same agenda for more than 60 years, the United States should know that great challenges would not defeat the Cuban people, who would not surrender their independence and sovereignty to the imperial plans of the United States. Cuba would continue taking steps to build a more just, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable country.

34. **Mr. Haji Mohammad** (Kuwait) said that the COVID-19 pandemic, which had killed over 4 million people worldwide and infected more than 200 million, had repercussions that were felt in the health-care sector, the economy and in politics. It was imperative to learn the lessons and work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by assisting vulnerable groups that had been disproportionately affected by the short- and long-term consequences of COVID-19, including women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

35. Since 2020, young people had made outstanding contributions in their efforts to combat COVID-19. In Kuwait, they had volunteered on the front lines against the virus. The Government of Kuwait paid special attention to youth and understood that they were a pillar of development and essential to achieving sustainable development.

36. The Constitution of Kuwait recognized the equality of persons regardless of their gender, origin, language or religion. The State had worked to empower Kuwaiti women, enhance their rights and ensure their effective participation in all aspects of daily life. They had played important roles in building the modern State and were pivotal to development. They had also made valuable contributions over the past year and a half at the forefront of national efforts to combat COVID-19.

37. Fifteen years previously, women had obtained political rights and since then, they had made gains every year. Legislation on women's rights had been enacted and women occupied positions in the diplomatic corps, the judiciary, the police force and the petroleum sector. They had assumed political leadership positions and were ministers, members of the National Assembly and ambassadors.

38. Against a global backdrop of increasing conflict, persecution, racism and religious intolerance, Kuwait affirmed its full commitment to the principles of human rights at all levels, in line with relevant international laws and conventions, the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Kuwait also affirmed its support for the rights of the child.

39. **Mr. Prongthura** (Thailand) said that it was necessary to address the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in tandem with the ongoing challenges of climate change, by building resilience through hope. Joint efforts were needed to deal with COVID-19. In that context, nations needed to unite to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines as global public goods and combat other health challenges, including through technical cooperation, technology transfer and the exchange of best practices. It was necessary to strengthen health systems and ensure access to quality health services through universal health coverage, and ongoing discussions should be held on a possible international treaty aimed at strengthening the global health architecture to better prepare and respond to future pandemics and health emergencies.

40. People must be at the centre of actions. The promotion and protection of human rights, human dignity and fundamental freedoms were more vital than ever, given that the pandemic had exacerbated inequalities and vulnerabilities. Thailand remained fully committed to improving gender equality and the rights of women and girls, in particular in such areas as access to health-care services, economic empowerment, quality education and the prevention of gender-based violence. The Government was equally determined to redouble its efforts to protect the right to education, including by bridging the digital divide. In addition, a hotline had been established to support children experiencing mental health issues or violence in the context of lockdowns, isolation and remote learning.

41. Aware of the valuable contribution made by migrant workers to society and the economy, Thailand had regularized over 2 million undocumented migrant workers, thereby improving their safety, welfare and access to basic services, including social protection, education, health care and the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

42. States must continue to adapt and keep pace with evolving challenges, including criminal networks that were taking advantage of new and unexpected uncertainties. In that regard, his delegation had recently submitted a resolution at the thirtieth session of the

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice to better respond to COVID-19 and other challenges.

43. **Mr. Kassaye** (Ethiopia) said that the health challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were a cause of grave concern in developing countries, and in particular in Africa, where health systems were underdeveloped. In a context in which vaccine equity gaps were leaving Africans behind, concerted national efforts and international cooperation were essential. Urgent and decisive action was also needed to address social ills, including violence and discrimination against women and girls, as well as the challenges affecting older persons, youth and persons with disabilities. The international community must ensure that vulnerable groups had access to essential services and justice.

44. Ethiopia had taken steps to promote social development and alleviate poverty, making notable progress in the areas of education, health, children's rights and civil and political rights. Institutional and policy measures had also been taken to enhance the role of women in the economic, political and social spheres. Progress had been made in terms of expanding employment opportunities, including by helping small and medium-sized enterprises to create job opportunities for young people through innovation and entrepreneurship. The country's 85,000 cooperatives, with close to 20 million members, played an essential role in generating employment and reducing poverty. To ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, Ethiopia had harmonized its laws with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; established monitoring mechanisms to include persons with disabilities in government institutions; and set up a federation of eight national associations of persons with disabilities.

45. Ethiopia had initiated political, administrative and legislative reforms that had contributed to the protection and promotion of human rights. However, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) terrorist group, which had committed serious human rights violations over the previous three decades, continued to destabilize the country with the aim of reclaiming power through illegitimate and unconstitutional means. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had conducted a joint investigation on the human rights violations committed during law enforcement operations in Tigray, the outcome of which would soon be made public. His delegation called on the international community to condemn the use of terrorist tactics and child soldiers, and the mass killing of civilians by TPLF in the Afar and Amhara regions.

46. His Government was working with international humanitarian agencies to provide food and non-food items to people who were in need of such assistance. While the Government remained committed to ensuring the provision of humanitarian assistance, it urged humanitarian organizations to adhere to the core humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality and to respect the laws of Ethiopia.

47. **Archbishop Caccia** (Observer for the Holy See) said that while improvements had been made in addressing poverty, hunger, education and health needs, the COVID-19 pandemic had hindered progress towards sustainable development. It was therefore necessary to strengthen and support the family, which was the natural and fundamental group unit of society. The family was entitled to protection by society and the State, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It provided the best environment for childhood development in ways that no programme could replace.

48. The Holy See was deeply concerned by persistent efforts to assert, as rights, novel concepts that did not enjoy consensus and often lacked common definitions. Such an approach did not advance human rights but politicized and diluted them, privileging the strong over the weak. That was apparent in the refusal to recognize the inherent value and dignity of each human life at every stage and in every condition, leading to grave inequalities and injustices, such as disposing of children in the womb, treating the lives of older persons and persons with disabilities as burdens, and imposing the death penalty.

49. Children needed special care and protection. The Holy See welcomed continued developments in legal protections for children. In contrast to those gains, violence against children, exploitation, child labour and child marriage had increased during the pandemic. The Internet posed unique risks to child safety, including online sexual abuse, exploitation and cyberbullying, which some reports indicated had increased during the pandemic. It was necessary to work together to address those problems and their underlying causes. His delegation regretted that the report on the gender dimension of the sexual exploitation of children used a non-negotiated definition of gender and promoted sexuality education, both of which would confuse and harm those who it aimed to defend.

50. Violence against women constituted a global emergency with negative consequences for the health and lives of women and girls, but also for families, communities and society. It was a problem that could not be separated from the broader problem of a dehumanizing vision of the human person that

especially degraded women. Many women were victims of a hedonistic and consumerist culture that reduced them to sexual objects and their bodies to products, such as through pornography, prostitution, surrogacy and human trafficking. It was not possible to claim to advocate women's equality while supporting any of those practices, nor to be satisfied with an "equality" that required women to conform to norms that treated their unique childbearing capacity as a problem rather than a gift.

51. Indigenous peoples and communities were often among those hit hardest by crises, including poverty, COVID-19 and climate change, and their cultural, political, economic, social and human rights were often undermined. The exploitation of their lands was a human and environmental problem. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, indigenous peoples could not be left out of decisions made about their lives and their lands, nor could their rights be ignored for economic gain.

52. His delegation supported the elaboration of a framework of international standards to guide the use of information and communications technologies for the good of humanity, and continued to follow with great interest the workings of the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes, overseen by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

53. **Mr. Ibragimov** (Uzbekistan) said that the nature of international relations was changing dramatically; the international threat to peace, security and sustainable development was growing; the climate was rapidly changing; mass migration flows were increasing; and traditional values were declining. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to pose a major challenge to humanity and required a global response based on unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation.

54. His Government was taking steps to ensure human rights and freedoms in Uzbekistan. In recent years, effective measures had been implemented, including with respect to freedom of speech and media, freedom of religion and conscience, and gender equality. In addition, a new strategy had been developed aimed at strengthening the role of civil society institutions, protecting human rights, reducing poverty, providing citizens with a guaranteed source of income and achieving sustainable environmental development.

55. The large-scale democratic reform in Uzbekistan had become irreversible. A number of priority areas had been identified for further enhancing the democratic transformation: fundamental human rights and freedoms

remained essential in reforming the country; efforts were being made to strengthen the role of women in public affairs, politics and the economy; the Government had recently ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and enacted a new law on those rights; 2021 had been declared the Year of Supporting Youth and Strengthening Public Health; decisive steps were being taken to reduce the number of stateless persons; Uzbekistan had actively participated in the World Programme for Human Rights Education; support would be given to civil society institutions and efforts were being made to ensure freedom of speech; and a national mechanism was being implemented for the prevention of torture and inhuman, degrading treatment.

56. Presidential elections would be held in Uzbekistan on 24 October 2021, during which election observation missions, including from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and other regional and international organizations, would be present. His delegation was confident that the upcoming elections, held on the basis of new electoral legislation, would be in full conformity with international standards and the democratic principles of openness and transparency.

57. **Mr. Hermann** (Denmark) said that, as a member of the Human Rights Council, his country had been working to ensure that the international community kept a close watch on situations in which human rights were endangered, such as in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Belarus. The international community must not turn away when rights and freedoms were curtailed, a democratically elected Government was overturned by a military coup, or peaceful protesters and journalists were arbitrarily arrested and tortured. Those acts undermined individual human rights and fundamental freedoms and left civil society and human rights defenders in danger.

58. Women and girls' rights were under immense global pressure, which had been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was unacceptable that, in too many places, women and girls did not have the right to make decisions about their lives and bodies, including whether they wanted to have children. Denmark would work to ensure the right of every woman and girl to full bodily autonomy. In a context in which widespread discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity deprived people of their dignity, and sometimes of their lives, his delegation would work to counter discrimination and promote human rights for all.

59. Denmark remained deeply concerned by the continued use of torture and ill-treatment. Although the

prohibition against torture was a peremptory norm of international law, torture was still applied by authorities in many countries. His delegation would therefore continue its efforts to put an end to torture worldwide and called on others to do the same. Also of concern were the rising governmental restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion worldwide. Denmark would continue to be vocal about any restrictions on such rights.

60. Indigenous peoples' rights were continuously under pressure. As guardians of 80 per cent of the biodiversity of the world, indigenous peoples were the most affected by climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss and had a central role to play in efforts to save the planet. However, they remained among the most marginalized groups. Denmark supported indigenous peoples in their right to participate in decision-making, including in multilateral settings.

61. Denmark was deeply concerned about the continued shrinking civic space. In 2020, more than 40 per cent of the world's population had been living in countries with limited space for civil society, and nearly 70 per cent of civil society organizations globally had experienced repression and even closure of civic space. Human rights defenders, journalists and non-governmental organizations were harassed and prosecuted for conducting their work. Securing a safe and enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders was therefore a priority for Denmark. Member States had a responsibility to enable, promote and protect civil society participation, including in United Nations processes. In that context, the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations had been proud to contribute to the preparation of a document which contained recommendations for ensuring meaningful civil society participation at the United Nations. His delegation strongly supported the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, and recommitted its efforts to place human rights at the heart of civic engagement.

62. **Ms. Ahangari** (Azerbaijan) said that deepening inequality in access to vaccines between developing and developed countries continued to undermine hard-won gains in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Azerbaijan had already expressed its discontent with the stockpiling of COVID-19 vaccines and vaccine nationalism. The Human Rights Council had unanimously adopted a resolution calling for equitable and universal access to vaccines, initiated by the delegations of Azerbaijan and Ecuador on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Among the practical measures taken to protect the population from COVID-19, her Government had launched a successful

immunization campaign and released a socioeconomic stimulus package.

63. Committed to protecting all human rights and freedoms, her Government was working to improve the country's regulatory and legal framework; enhance people's understanding of human rights issues, including among children; empower women and achieve gender parity in State institutions; and protect the rights of children, especially those affected by armed conflict.

64. Multiculturalism was supported in Azerbaijan as a way of life, including through the Baku process for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Moreover, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, held regularly in Baku, had been recognized as a key global platform for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

65. An opportunity for sustainable peace and stability had emerged in the region following the resolution by Azerbaijan of the 30-year-long Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the restoration of her country's territorial integrity. The Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur economic zones had recently been created by presidential decree. There was no administrative territorial unit called Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and delegations should avoid using legally non-existing, politically biased and manipulative names in referring to its territories. Her country had entered a new stage of post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration, and steps were being taken to eliminate the consequences of the decades-old occupation of its territories. The vision for post-conflict reconstruction was centred on people's needs and priorities.

66. Following the conflict, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons were finally able to realize their inalienable right to return to their homes. Securing the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed to ensure the dignity of those persons were top priorities. Azerbaijan was also determined to reintegrate its citizens of Armenian origin who resided in conflict-affected territories into the country's political, social and economic space, ensuring equal rights and freedoms for all, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. The Constitution of Azerbaijan provided a solid legal framework in that regard.

67. However, massive mine contamination in the liberated territories seriously impeded the realization of wide-ranging rehabilitation and reconstruction plans, as well as the realization of the right of return of internally displaced persons. Since the signing on 10 November 2020 of the trilateral statement by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia, more than 30 Azerbaijani citizens, including two journalists, had been killed and 130 citizens had been wounded by landmines.

68. The principles of respect for territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States were enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, issues brought to the attention of the Third Committee, including those related to China, must be approached in full conformity with those principles.

69. **Mr. Wallace** (Jamaica) said that, as the world continued to contend with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of new variants, there were increasing uncertainties. In Jamaica, where the economy was driven by the services sector, restoring the health and well-being of its people, primarily through vaccinations, remained at the core of his Government's strategies. Jamaica was grateful for the support received from bilateral and international partners, as well as through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, in accessing vaccines. His delegation called for a globally coordinated approach to the scaling up of production and equitable distribution of vaccines as a global common good, and for the rejection of nationalistic approaches, including unequal recognition of vaccination programmes.

70. The pandemic had laid bare the severe vulnerabilities that existed in the developing world. There was a need for increased innovation in health across the global South, and especially for investment in research and development and health services infrastructure. As a strong proponent of health-related research and development, Jamaica continued to work towards the establishment of a centre for research on emerging infectious diseases, aimed at expanding the knowledge of emerging and re-emerging viruses in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

71. Like most other small island developing States, Jamaica had witnessed significant regression in its hard-won gains towards sustainable socioeconomic development. The impact on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups was a cause for great concern, given the increase in cases of violence and sexual abuse, losses and gaps in learning, malnutrition and deteriorating mental health. His country was committed to supporting its citizens, including by enhancing psychological support to parents and caregivers and strengthening shock responsive social protection strategies.

72. Jamaica welcomed the convening of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action under the theme "Reparations, racial justice and equality for people of African descent". His delegation looked forward to the first

session of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, aimed at improving the lives of Afrodescendants who had suffered the pains of racism, racial discrimination and the legacies of enslavement, including structural underdevelopment. At the regional level, his country strongly supported the mandate given to the Reparations Commission of the Caribbean Community to prepare the case for the region's indigenous and African-descendant communities who had been victims of crimes against humanity in the forms of genocide, slavery, slave trading and racial apartheid. Jamaica remained committed to the universal recognition of the imperative for reparatory justice and would continue to call for that duty to be internationally recognized as a necessary path to healing, restoration of dignity and progress for people of African descent.

73. **Mr. Konfourou** (Mali) said that economic recovery and inclusive social development would require States to better protect people from the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that vaccination was an effective preventive measure against the pandemic, Mali welcomed the efforts made by the COVAX Facility to ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, and in particular in developing countries. The health crisis also offered an opportunity to rebuild more sustainably in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, through measures based on poverty reduction and social protection, the creation of decent jobs and the integration of policies and programmes to combat climate change. The measures adopted by his country were centred on human capital and human rights. In that respect, the transitional Government was investing a significant proportion of national resources in reducing the social divide and ensuring that everyone benefited from the fruits of the country's development. It was also working to strengthen actions to implement the law on universal health coverage, adopted in 2018.

74. At the humanitarian level, his delegation was working to implement actions and programmes to alleviate the suffering of Malian refugees and displaced persons. Committed to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, his delegation was pleased to note that thousands of Malian refugees and internally displaced persons had returned to their places of origin. In that regard, it welcomed the presentation on 29 September 2021 of the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, which contained relevant recommendations.

75. His Government, in accordance with its international obligations, was implementing policies and measures to promote and protect the rights of all individuals living in Mali, with special attention being

given to vulnerable groups, in particular children, women, persons with disabilities and older persons. Efforts were also under way to implement the law on the protection of human rights defenders, adopted by the National Assembly in December 2017.

76. **Mr. Kayinamura** (Rwanda) said that during the current session, his delegation, in line with his country's priorities, wished to focus on the promotion of human rights, the need for collective political mobilization to counter the spread of terrorist groups in Africa and elsewhere, and the increase in internally displaced persons and refugees around the world. As set out in the report of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, the number of internally displaced persons had increased significantly in the last decade, driven among other factors by conflict and violent extremism. The global crisis could only be solved if significant improvements were made to prevention programmes and humanitarian interventions. Humanitarian work needed to be modernized and redefined, moving beyond traditional ad hoc interventions towards building systems to assist in delivering essential services, including sanitation, health care and water, to populations in humanitarian settings.

77. Interference by some Western countries in judicial matters and the judicial process in developing countries was a cause for alarm, had an overreaching impact in the promotion and protection of human rights and went against the rule of law. It was necessary to address foreign judicial interference and act decisively to safeguard developing countries' democratic institutions and judicial processes. The principle of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity was paramount in international cooperation. The promotion of human rights required an effective international cooperation system that was responsive to countries' needs.

78. Protecting children's rights was a priority for Rwanda. States must fully implement their international legal obligations outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The COVID-19 pandemic had reversed decades of progress in poverty eradication and the advancement of women's rights. The effects of the pandemic had devastated the most vulnerable and had left them further behind, negatively affecting the 15-year global effort to improve the lives of people everywhere.

79. **Mr. Klíma** (Czechia) said that his country strongly supported the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international human rights mechanisms, including the special procedures. Czechia, which had gradually increased its

financial contributions to the human rights mechanisms, reiterated the need to strengthen their regular budget funding.

80. The COVID-19 pandemic was a global human rights issue that should not be used as a pretext to shut down criticism and silence dissent. It was essential to respect civic participation, the role of the media and civil society, and the rights of women and girls. Czechia remained concerned about the state of human rights in several countries, including in Belarus, where the situation continued to deteriorate following the holding of fraudulent presidential elections. The regime of that country continued to escalate its attacks against members of the opposition, human rights defenders, independent journalists and activists. Of particular concern were the credible reports of severe abuse of detainees, including torture of political prisoners. His delegation called for the immediate and unconditional release of all persons who had been arbitrarily detained, and for an independent international investigation of such atrocities.

81. In Russia, civil society organizations, human rights defenders and independent media continued to be targeted and their work was being curtailed by recent legislation. His delegation condemned the practice of shutting off websites as a means for silencing independent voices. The recent elections to the Duma gave a distorted picture of the real political situation in the country. In that regard, the Russian authorities had long excluded a significant part of the opposition and civil society from participating in the election process. The deteriorating human rights situation in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea was also a matter of concern.

82. His delegation strongly condemned the recent violence committed by the Taliban against demonstrators, journalists, human rights defenders, persons belonging to minorities and others in Afghanistan. Those responsible for human rights violations and abuses must be held accountable, and the Taliban must ensure that humanitarian and United Nations staff had safe and unhindered access to the entire country. His delegation strongly condemned all forms of violence against Afghan women and girls, who deserved to live in safety, security and dignity. Their rights must be safeguarded, and they must be able to participate fully in Afghan society and political processes.

83. Concerned about the human rights situation in Venezuela, his delegation condemned the persecution of members of the opposition and attacks against media freedom and civil society actors. The independent

international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela established by the Human Rights Council had recently reported that there were reasonable grounds to believe that prosecutors and judges had failed to protect opponents of the Government of Venezuela from arbitrary arrest and often deprived detainees of their right to legal defence. The humanitarian situation in the country, including access to food, water and health supplies, was a matter of grave concern. Czechia urged the Venezuelan regime to ensure basic conditions for free and fair presidential, parliamentary and regional elections.

84. **Ms. Eman Hussain** (Maldives) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed the fragile nature of domestic and international institutions and had challenged the norms of equality and fraternity that underpinned global systems. Human rights were a key pillar of all sustainable development and it was therefore vital for all to work together to protect human rights to achieve inclusive growth.

85. The pandemic had demonstrated the need for an inclusive recovery that reaffirmed gender equality. Despite the deep fiscal impacts of the COVID-19-related decline in tourism, her Government had initiated a basic safety net for the most vulnerable citizens, providing income support mechanisms, debt moratoriums and tax relief programmes. It had also established mechanisms to facilitate women entrepreneurs' access to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprise loans and had developed Internet-based systems for women to work from home.

86. Maldives continued to advance engagement with various human rights bodies and to ratify human rights instruments. It remained committed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had officially withdrawn its reservations regarding some paragraphs under article 16 of the Convention.

87. For a small island developing State like Maldives, small climatic shifts had devastating effects on the economy, infrastructure and people. Climate change threatened the enjoyment and fulfilment of the rights to health, housing, employment and a life with dignity. Such impacts were keenly felt by the most vulnerable, particularly women and girls. In the face of increased risks of flooding, food insecurity and displacement, and as adaptation costs imposed increasing budgetary burdens, access to quick, effective and affordable climate financing and technical assistance was needed in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As women and girls were disproportionately susceptible

to climate change and natural disasters, it was essential that developmental gains be distributed equitably.

88. Her delegation was troubled by various global political crises. It denounced the military coup in Myanmar and called on the military junta to return power to the civilian Government. The junta in Myanmar must also cease all atrocities and hostilities against the Rohingya people and conduct repatriation in a humane and timely manner.

89. Her delegation was also deeply concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Maldives reiterated its call for an internationally agreed two-State solution, with an independent and sovereign State of Palestine living in peace and prosperity on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

90. **Ms. Kipiani** (Georgia) said that her Government had elaborated a national human rights strategy for the period 2021–2030 and was currently drafting a national action plan on human rights. In addition, the Government had commenced work on two stand-alone national action plans with gender-related aspects: a national action plan on the implementation of the Security Council resolution on women and peace and security and a national action plan on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

91. Georgia had a strong commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. In 2021, the Parliament of Georgia had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The process of establishing a national coordination mechanism for the implementation of that Convention was under way and would be finalized by the end of 2021.

92. The Government prioritized the protection of the rights of the child, including the elimination of various forms of violence against children. A pilot project would be launched in 2021 to provide psychosocial rehabilitation to child victims of sexual abuse. Georgia had also made progress in combating violence against women. In accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Government continued to follow a proactive policy with respect to combating and preventing violence against women. Georgia had taken steps to create mechanisms for the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.

93. Georgia regretted that the ongoing occupation by the Russian Federation of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia continued to prevent the Government

from sharing the human rights protection framework with persons on the other side of the illegally erected razor-wire fences. Notwithstanding repeated calls by the Human Rights Council, the Russian Federation, the occupying Power, continued to prevent the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international human rights monitoring mechanisms from entering those Russian-occupied regions of Georgia. The local population in both regions was forced to endure severe humanitarian challenges and increasing human rights violations, such as kidnappings, torture, ill-treatment, illegal detentions and the restriction of freedom of movement, including the denial of medical evacuations during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to the deaths of dozens of Georgian citizens.

94. Recently, the Russian occupation regime in the Gali district in Abkhazia had extended a ban on education in the Georgian language, including at higher grade levels, as part of a deliberate policy to drive ethnic Georgians out of the occupied regions. It was deplorable that hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees who had been ethnically cleansed from the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions were still deprived of the right to return to their homes in safety and dignity. There had been no progress in negotiations conducted within the framework of the Geneva International Discussions, owing to the unconstructive attitude of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the perpetrators of extrajudicial killings of Georgian citizens in the occupied regions remained at large, fuelling a sense of impunity.

95. On 21 January 2021, the European Court of Human Rights had noted the occupation and effective control of the Russian Federation over the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia and had ruled that the Russian Federation was responsible for violations of fundamental norms of international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights. The international community should apply that Convention to ensure that the Russian Federation fulfilled its obligations, including the immediate and unimpeded access of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the area.

96. *Mr. Shin Joongil (Republic of Korea), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

97. **Mr. Hmoud** (Jordan) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had been a difficult and unprecedented period with far-reaching effects on societies and economies. His delegation was convinced that multilateral cooperation was needed to exterminate the virus and quash the pandemic.

98. Despite the progress made in increasing women's participation in economic life and strengthening their rights and equal opportunities, the pandemic had exacerbated the challenges faced by women in every country, including Jordan. The Government would nevertheless continue to strengthen the role of women and would work towards gender equality. The country had adopted numerous policies to bolster women's economic participation, the most important of which was the National Strategy for Women in Jordan, the Women's Economic Empowerment Action Plan and the Jordan 2025 national vision, which was aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the international commitments of Jordan. The Government had enacted or amended legislation governing equal pay for equal work and was committed to establishing day care centres at workplaces. The Jordanian army had worked with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to launch a gender mainstreaming strategy to increase women's participation in senior leadership positions.

99. More than 40 per cent of his country's population was under the age of 18. Out of a concern for investing in children, especially in their early years, the Government had taken pains to ensure quality education and an environment conducive to children's creativity and development. Jordan had also joined the Safe to Learn initiative, which aimed to protect children from violence at school. The Government also supported networks for young people to encourage their participation in political and economic activities and human rights mechanisms. Greater efforts and resources were needed at the international level to create programmes for young people to ensure their political and civic participation. As protecting youth and girls and women with disabilities was important, the Government of Jordan sought to improve their living conditions and provide them with opportunities to be ambassadors of peace, development and human rights.

100. Internationally, an unprecedented increase in xenophobia, discrimination and hatred had prompted some in even the most developed countries to choose the path of violence. Poverty, unemployment, inequality, oppression, discrimination and abuse of social media created fertile ground for terrorism, particularly among young people, who were exploited by terrorist groups to spread extremist thought. The international human rights system was facing challenges because of wars, conflicts and extremist and populist ideas in various States. In the face of such phenomena, there was a need to ensure that human rights gains were not lost.

101. The question of Palestine remained a fundamental issue in the Middle East. Jordan reiterated the right of

the Palestinian people to build a viable and independent State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the context of a two-State solution.

102. **Mr. Sharma** (India) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had prompted his country to redouble its efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government's development agenda focused on the deployment of digital technologies to alleviate poverty, the provision of health services, the promotion of agricultural reforms and the enhancement of cooperative federalism.

103. Through improved technology, more than 434 million people, over 50 per cent of them women, had bank accounts opened through the Government's financial inclusion initiative, which was one of the world's largest financial inclusion programmes. In addition, the country's biometric identification system, Aadhaar, covered more than 95 per cent of the country's population, facilitating access to a range of social protection services. As a step towards universal health coverage, India was implementing the world's largest Government-sponsored health-care programme, which would cover more than 500 million people.

104. Gender equality and the empowerment of women were an integral part of the country's development strategy. More than 1.3 million elected women representatives worked on the formulation and implementation of public policies. The democratic and pluralistic framework in India rested on an ethos of equal respect for all faiths and every religion enjoyed equal protection.

105. The principles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been enshrined in the Constitution of India. The universal periodic review was a platform for dialogue and cooperation on human rights situations in all countries. The Human Rights Council, whose special procedures mechanism was important for fostering genuine dialogue among Member States, must not be turned into a platform for politicizing human rights issues. Mandate holders must remain independent and impartial and carry out their tasks responsibly and sensitively.

106. All Member States must safeguard the gains made in combating terrorism, a major threat to the full enjoyment of all human rights. They must also ensure that terrorism could never be excused or justified, whether on the grounds of religion, ideology, ethnicity or race, as that would only encourage terrorists to escalate their activities. New phenomena such as anti-Buddhism, anti-Hinduism and anti-Sikhism needed to be dealt with firmly.

107. The Committee had witnessed another attempt by the delegation of Pakistan to exploit a United Nations platform to utter falsehoods against India while continuing to foment violence at home and across its borders. Such repeated falsehoods deserved nothing but collective contempt and pity. The best way to protect human rights, promote development and strengthen cooperation was to foster democracy and pluralism and inculcate values of tolerance, understanding and respect for diversity.

108. **Ms. Rivera Reyes** (Honduras) said that the serious problems that the COVAX Facility had experienced in delivering vaccines to Member States had highlighted the importance of ensuring that the World Health Organization did not wait for a critical situation to arise before preparing solutions and developing contingency plans. A lack of preparedness cost human lives, as the COVID-19 pandemic had shown. The international health system needed to be transformed with a view to eliminating inequity in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries, which, despite having the resources to purchase them, had been unable to access them in a timely manner. An emergency fund should be created, with contributions from all countries, to ensure equitable access to vaccines or any other medicines.

109. Her country was pleased to be part, together with Guatemala and El Salvador, of the humanitarian needs overview and humanitarian response plan for the period 2021–2022. The plans were aligned with actions taken by her Government to address the emergency situations caused by COVID-19 and tropical storms Eta and Iota.

110. Honduras was proud to present its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2022–2024. Her country wished to promote cooperation and constructive dialogue between States within the Council in order to defend and protect human rights, including the right to development, taking into account the social and cultural contexts of each nation. Honduras had a robust legal and policy framework, in line with the highest international human rights standards, it recognized the principle of universal justice for serious human rights violations, and the right to human dignity was enshrined in its Constitution.

111. Honduras, which had seen significant changes in the past 30 years, had been recognized for its leadership on the issue of human displacement. It had promoted initiatives to address the issue, including the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework. Although further progress was required, her country had also adopted legislation and policies to

promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other persons.

112. **Mr. Lamce** (Albania) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted almost every aspect of life, causing significant societal, political and economic disruption. No country could face the pandemic alone and no individual would be safe until all people were safe. The international community should use the current moment to consider ways of improving the human rights system, building more resilient societies, creating accessible and effective education systems and developing social protection and health systems.

113. Albania aimed to work within the framework the United Nations in general and the Committee in particular to ensure universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion. During its upcoming membership in the Security Council for the period 2022–23, Albania would prioritize the issue of human rights as a precondition for durable peace, security and sustainable development. As promoting education in human rights was a valuable tool for conflict prevention, Albania would work to increase synergies in that area between New York and Geneva. It would also continue to support the full implementation of the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights by encouraging concrete action to tackle common challenges in advancing the human rights agenda.

114. Albania would pay special attention to women's rights and gender equality in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, as human rights advocacy was meaningless without the participation of women and girls. Albania, which ranked in the top five countries for women's representation in government, would apply a clear gender perspective in addressing women's access to political and economic resources. In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, freedom of religion must be protected everywhere, and the Government aimed to marshal the country's long history of religious harmony as a counterexample to rising intolerance.

115. **Ms. Sauku** (Albania), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to turn the greatest reversal in human development into a historic leap forward. Member States should ensure that they involved youth, a group that had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic in terms of health, education and employment opportunities, in constructive consultations on recovery policies. Albania called on members of the Security Council to bring new

momentum to the youth, peace and security agenda and incorporate that perspective into all its priority areas.

116. **Mr. Kolici** (Albania), speaking as a youth delegate in a pre-recorded video statement, said that Tirana would serve as the European Youth Capital for 2022, hosting hundreds of activities and cultural exchanges between young Albanians and youth from all over Europe. That programme should be used as a tool even beyond the initial 12-month period to enhance the opportunities of young people living in small towns and rural areas and of minorities. The empowerment of youth and their inclusion in decision-making processes was critical for moving towards a more sustainable and peaceful planet.

117. **Ms. Frazier** (Malta) said that her country remained committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls and to the achievement of gender equality both internationally and locally. The delegation of Malta stressed the importance of involving men and boys in efforts to reach that goal. COVID-19 pandemic recovery plans must also be formulated with involvement from women and girls, in order to ensure that they enjoyed their full human rights, including the right to freedom from sexual and gender-based violence. Firm in its belief that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, deserved equal access to opportunities, Malta would continue to combat the social marginalization and discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons and to address the needs and rights of that important segment of society.

118. In the light of the heightened risks of abuse, neglect and a lack of social protection for older persons during the pandemic, Malta called on countries to join efforts to prevent discrimination and encourage the social participation of older persons. Efforts were also needed to increase the involvement of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes at all levels so that their voices would be heard regarding matters that directly affected them. Malta also affirmed its commitment to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion and belief.

119. As the COVID-19 pandemic had caused an increase in child labour and had had a negative impact on children's education, especially in conflict situations, Malta affirmed its commitment to the protection of children and their right to education. If selected to serve as a member of the Security Council during the period 2023–24, Malta would focus on issues of education, literacy and digital technology.

120. Malta called for enhanced protection of human rights defenders, offline and online, from harassment,

hate speech and reprisals, especially harassment related to engagement with the United Nations system. Her delegation reiterated its unwavering support for the international human rights system and commended the work of the United Nations special procedures mechanism in guaranteeing the protection and promotion of all human rights, as well as accountability for violations and abuses, wherever they occurred.

121. **Mr. Micallef St. John** and **Ms. de Gabriele** (Malta), speaking as youth delegates in a pre-recorded video statement, said that, not the first time, young people were trying to combat human rights violations and attempting to propel the change that the world needed. The battle against climate change was being spearheaded by youth. Maltase youth joined them in calling for the fulfilment of international commitments in order to reverse the harmful effects of climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. Those commitments also called for equal access to justice for those affected by environmental degradation. Maltese youth were also strongly committed to concrete action on gender equality, access to education and the meaningful civic participation of youth. Across the world, youth had recognized that there was no longer time for rhetoric, and that concrete actions were needed. All should join them to create a better future.

122. **Mr. Duarte Lopes** (Portugal) said that the world could only overcome the COVID-19 pandemic through a response that was anchored in human rights. As the pandemic surged, Portugal had approved a set of urgent measures to safeguard the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, prevent domestic violence, protect job security and strengthen social benefits. It was crucial that vaccinations be made universally available as public health goods. Portugal supported the Secretary-General's call in that regard and was committed to contributing to that effort, both bilaterally and through the COVAX Facility.

123. Full realization of economic, social and cultural rights, which had arguably been the rights most impacted by the pandemic, had been a long-standing priority for Portugal. The Government called on all States to ratify the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its Optional Protocol. The right to education must be respected, including in emergency contexts. Portugal called on all States to implement the Safe Schools Declaration, along with the guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict. In that context, the Global Platform for Higher Education in Emergencies, an initiative of the former President of Portugal, offered higher education scholarships to young Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons.

124. During the current session, Portugal would once again submit a draft resolution on policies and programmes involving youth in order to ensure that their human rights remained high on the United Nations agenda. Portugal attached a high priority to combating all forms of discrimination and in July 2021 had approved a national plan to prevent and combat racism. The country had made strides when it came to protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons and to combating violence, stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

125. Portugal, which had abolished capital punishment over 150 years previously, firmly rejected the death penalty under any circumstances. Despite a general trend towards abolition, capital punishment persisted in some parts of the world, and in some countries death sentences had recently resumed or increased. Coordinated action was needed to engage countries that still retained the death penalty in dialogue and to promote moratoriums on executions as a first step towards abolition.

126. Lastly, Portugal supported the international recognition of the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and had been the first country to enshrine that right in its Constitution. A healthy environment was integral to the full enjoyment of several other human rights, including the right to life, health, safe drinking water, sanitation, food and adequate housing. Portugal was committed to gender equality and to the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls. The realization of all the human rights of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive rights, was a priority for the country.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

127. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) said that while the representative of Iran had warned other delegations about human rights (see [A/C.3/76/SR.3](#)), Iran continued to play a destructive role in Yemen, destabilizing the country and supplying the terrorist Houthi militias with money, weapons and military vehicles, thereby prolonging the war and advancing the expansionist Iranian agenda in the region to the detriment of millions of Yemenis. The fact that Iran continued to create sectarian armed militias in Yemen reaffirmed that it remained a problem, and not part of the solution, in the Middle East. Successive reports of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution [2140 \(2014\)](#) showed conclusive proof of Iranian interference in Yemen. One report stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran was in breach of paragraph 14

of Security Council resolution 2216 (2015), which prohibited the supply or smuggling of arms into Yemen. The report also stated, with conclusive proof, that the Houthi militias had used sophisticated Iranian weapons that had not appeared in the lists of weapons used by the Yemeni armed forces before the conflict. Such weapons were used in attacks that had killed civilians in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, such as the one on 30 December 2020 which had targeted members of the Yemeni Government upon their arrival at Aden airport. Iran had also provided oil derivatives to the Houthi militias for sale on the black market in order to prolong their unjust war against Yemen, which flew in the face of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

128. In statements to the media, Iranian regime officials and Houthi militia leaders openly boasted of their relationship and of their victories in Yemen. Recently, the new Iranian regime had received Houthi militia members as an official delegation claiming to represent the Republic of Yemen, in flagrant violation of all international protocols governing diplomatic relations between States. That was nothing new. Every sectarian terrorist militia bore the fingerprints of the mullahs of Iran and its revolutionary guard, which had been classified as terrorist by many countries. In its hypocritical and misleading statement, the representative of the Iranian regime had claimed that his country protected human rights at home, while in fact it constantly executed political dissidents and members of minority groups. The regime should protect human rights at home, stop exporting terrorism elsewhere in the region and stop interfering in the domestic affairs of other States.

129. **Mr. Pilipenko** (Belarus) said that it was unacceptable to refer to a sovereign State as a regime. It was ironic that certain delegations, in disregard of the basic principles of civilized communication, so freely made such disrespectful statements and were then surprised when dialogue with their partners did not turn out well. Many problems could be solved if those delegations were to engage in respectful dialogue for a change. His delegation was always prepared to engage in respectful and equitable dialogue.

130. His delegation firmly rejected the accusations made by the representatives of several European Union countries and Ukraine. While many delegations had, as was customary, described their national priorities and efforts in the area of human rights, a certain group of countries seemed to be prepared to talk about anything but their internal human rights situations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus had contributed to openness and transparency in that regard by outlining in detail recorded cases of systematic and gross violations

of rights and freedoms in those countries in a report issued in 2021.

131. Belarus had the sovereign right to decide with whom to build and develop relations and did not need advice from Ukraine in that regard. The decisions of other States should be respected, just as Belarus had once respected the path chosen by Ukraine.

132. **Mr. Kaoru** (Japan), responding to the comments made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said that the claims made regarding Japan were groundless and based on factual errors. In addition, the term "sex slaves" as applied to "comfort women" was not factual and should not be used. Japan had strived to eliminate racial discrimination. There was no policy or rule that allowed racial discrimination against Korean residents of Japan. On the contrary, the Government had been developing approaches to eliminate discriminatory speech and behaviours against persons originating from outside of Japan. For over 75 years, since the end of the Second World War, Japan had regarded the facts of history in a spirit of humility, had consistently respected democracy and human rights, and had contributed to the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and in the international community as a whole. Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should bring true peace to North-East Asia by overcoming mutual mistrust and deepening cooperation. Japan called on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to work together with Japan for a bright future.

133. **Mr. Kim** Nam Hyok (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his delegation totally rejected all the allegations made against his country. Japan had worked very hard to cover up its past crimes against humanity and the international order. Japan was the worst war criminal State in the world and the world's foremost abductor State. During its colonial rule of Korea, Japan had committed unprecedented crimes against humanity, including the forcible abduction and drafting of 8.4 million Koreans and the forcing of 200,000 Korean women and girls into sexual slavery for Japanese soldiers. However, Japan continued to resist its moral obligation to apologize and pay compensation for its past actions, and instead pursued policies of political pressure and discrimination against Korean residents in Japan.

134. With respect to the "abduction issue", it had already been resolved, thanks to the efforts of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. His delegation urged Japan to stop its politically motivated campaign against his country and to take immediate concrete measures to officially acknowledge, apologize and provide compensation for its inhuman past crimes.

135. **Mr. Kaoru** (Japan) said that the reply of the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had been groundless and contained factual errors. With respect to the issue of abductions, the claims by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were erroneous. Under the 2014 Stockholm Agreement, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had promised to carry out a comprehensive and thorough investigation related to all the Japanese nationals concerned, including abductees. Japan had urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to implement that Agreement and return all abductees to Japan immediately. There was no time to lose, as family members of the abductees were advanced in age, and two had recently passed away.

136. It was well known that Japan, in a spirit of humility, had accepted the facts of history and had sincerely addressed the issues raised by the international community over the previous 75 years, particularly during its 65 years of membership in the United Nations. That had been demonstrated by the country's active contribution to international peace and security, including its 11 terms as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. In order to realize true peace in the region, the mutual distrust between Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must be overcome.

137. **Mr. Kim** Nam Hyok (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that although the "abduction issue" had already been completely and irreversibly resolved, the Government of Japan had continued to manipulate the issue in order to divert global attention from its past war crimes. Despite the denials of Japan, history could not be changed and crimes against humanity had no statute of limitation. Unless Japan offered complete compensation for its past war crimes and put an immediate end to its discriminatory acts against Korean residents in Japan, there could not be a bright future for the relations between the two countries.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.