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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Sixty-sixth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 31st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 30 September 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the sixty-sixth session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

2. **Mr. Korkeakivi** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that issues at the core of the Committee's mandate had recently been discussed by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Specifically, the Committee's statements on climate change and the Covenant (E/C.12/2018/1) and on the pledge to leave no one behind (E/C.12/2019/1) were directly relevant to the Climate Action Summit 2019, the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (Sustainable Development Goal Summit) and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, all of which had been held at the start of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. Those statements provided a timely reminder that respect for human rights was crucial to ensure that global commitments to sustainable development and the environment were met. The efforts made by OHCHR to disseminate the Committee's statement on the pledge to leave no one behind would ensure that programmes implemented on the ground, and global policymaking, were informed by the Committee's work.

3. The Committee's 2016 statement on human rights defenders and economic, social and cultural rights (E/C.12/2016/2) remained highly relevant, given the continuing threats faced by human rights defenders. According to the Secretary-General's report on reprisals (A/HRC/39/41), 321 human rights defenders had been killed in 2018 alone. The fact that most of those killed had been defending land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights reflected the importance of the Committee's role in combating reprisals. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights repeatedly highlighted the importance of economic, social and cultural rights. At the forty-second session of the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner had focused her opening statement on climate change and the threat it posed to human rights, development and peace. OHCHR actively supported the Committee's general discussion on land, which would take place on 14 October 2019.

4. Thanks in large part to the coordinated efforts of the treaty bodies, the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, the treaty body sessions scheduled to be held in the second half of 2019 would not be cancelled. However, the future of the treaty body system was uncertain as it continued to face cash-flow problems and shortfalls in staffing. OHCHR was aware of the specific challenges facing the Committee and was seeking solutions to improve the staffing situation and to ensure that the Committee had sufficient meeting time to consider individual communications. In that regard, the 2020 review by the General Assembly of the human rights treaty body system would provide an opportunity to bring greater stability to the system and safeguard its resources. At the recent annual meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, a position paper on the future of the treaty body system had been adopted and a non-paper on the 2020 review had been endorsed by over 40 States. Both documents highlighted the need to reduce the shortfall in resources, increase the treaty bodies' engagement with regional mechanisms, improve States parties' compliance with their reporting obligations, enhance the predictability of the review cycle and promote harmonization among the treaty bodies. The High Commissioner had welcomed the position paper and identified the 2020 review as an opportunity for the Committee to strengthen the impact of its work on the ground through streamlining and harmonization procedures. OHCHR acknowledged the Committee's efforts to reduce unnecessary overlap between its work and that of other treaty bodies, including in the preparation of lists of issues. The Committee might consider making the simplified reporting procedure more widely available to States parties and identifying those countries for which lists of issues could be drawn up in collaboration with the Human Rights Committee. He encouraged the Committee to continue its discussions on the introduction of a predictable review cycle, which might help to improve States parties' compliance with their reporting obligations.

Adoption of the agenda

5. *The agenda was adopted.*

The public part of the meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.