



General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 May 2021

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Forty-seventh session

21 June–9 July 2021

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141, and contains an overview of the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at headquarters and in the field, conducted between 1 July 2020 to 15 March 2021. The adjusted length of the reporting period is due to the change in the annual programme of work of the Human Rights Council.¹ The report highlights the work carried out under the thematic priorities defined in the OHCHR management plan for 2018–2021. Given the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the report should be read in conjunction with the High Commissioner’s 2020 report to the General Assembly,² which contained an initial assessment of the impact of the pandemic on human rights worldwide.
2. As at March 2021, OHCHR had 94 human rights field presences worldwide.
3. While the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect its activities, OHCHR actively pursued its mandate, agilely adapting to the new circumstances, including through remote human rights monitoring and online delivery of technical assistance and capacity-building support. OHCHR provided timely advice on human rights-based responses to COVID-19 and offered evidence-based policy options for protecting and promoting human rights in the pandemic recovery process, including through guidance notes on matters relating to civic space, detention, indigenous peoples, migrants, minority groups, women, racial discrimination, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, business and human rights, access to vaccines and states of emergency.³
4. OHCHR also supported the continuous functioning of human rights mechanisms and the discharging of their mandates, in remote and hybrid formats, avoiding protection gaps.
5. Over the year following the Secretary-General’s presentation of “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights”, OHCHR has been taking a central role in launching strategic initiatives across its seven thematic areas, backed by an extensive institutional architecture across the United Nations system. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights at Headquarters has worked closely with the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to lead the operationalization of the call to action, including by spearheading regional dialogues with resident coordinators to further advance the objectives of the call to action at the field level. Focused efforts to generate collective and sustained United Nations system engagement have been accompanied by outreach to Member States and civil society to raise awareness about the call to action.

II. Activities of the Office of the High Commissioner

A. International human rights mechanisms

1. Treaty bodies

6. Due to the pandemic, the 10 treaty bodies supported by OHCHR moved much of their mandated work online. In doing so, they faced several operational challenges, including the limited availability of online platforms with simultaneous interpretation, the complications inherent in scheduling online meetings owing to the wide geographical dispersal of members, the additional costs incurred by experts in connection with working remotely, and issues of sufficient accessibility for experts, persons with disabilities and assistants. The High

¹ See statements of the President of the Human Rights Council PRST OS/13/1 and PRST OS/14/1.

² A/75/36.

³ COVID-19 human rights guidance notes issued by OHCHR are available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID19Guidance.aspx.

Commissioner acknowledges the commitment and dedication of the treaty bodies in enabling the ongoing functioning of the system in difficult, unprecedented circumstances.

7. In addition to issuing timely guidance on the human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the treaty bodies reviewed, online, six State party reports, considered 175 individual communications and adopted two general comments. The Committee on Enforced Disappearances registered 106 new urgent action requests.

8. OHCHR supported States in preparing their reports for treaty bodies, including Belize, Brazil, Chad, Costa Rica, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Namibia, the Niger, Panama, the Republic of Moldova, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Somalia,⁴ Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, the United States of America and Zambia. With the support of OHCHR, Mexico recognized the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive individual complaints, Togo ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Fiji ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and was in the final stage of ratifying the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

9. OHCHR provided support to the co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly at the seventy-fourth session of the Assembly to consider the state of the treaty body system.

10. OHCHR supported five conferences of States parties, convened to elect members of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

2. Human Rights Council

11. Through innovative virtual and hybrid modalities, OHCHR supported the Human Rights Council in the holding of four regular sessions. These included two urgent debates, one on “current racially inspired human rights violations, systemic racism, police brutality and violence against peaceful protests” and one on the situation of human rights in Belarus. It also supported a special session on the human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar.

12. OHCHR also supported the efforts of the Presidency of the Human Rights Council to introduce efficiency measures and refine the methods of work of the Consultative Group of the Human Rights Council⁵ and to adopt a President’s statement on the human rights implications of the COVID-19 crisis.⁶

13. The Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council provided online capacity-building for small delegations, in particular two induction sessions attended by 71 government officials from 33 countries. The Human Rights Council help desk offered virtual consultations for small delegations participating in Council sessions.

14. OHCHR supported investigative bodies mandated by the Council, namely on Burundi, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Yemen, and on the situation in Kasai, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite the complex overall financial situation, OHCHR established capacity to initiate the work of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya.⁷

3. Universal periodic review

15. OHCHR assisted with the adoption by the Council of the outcomes of the universal periodic review in July and September 2020 and in March 2021, and the holding of sessions

⁴ In October, the Federal Government of Somalia submitted its first report to the Human Rights Committee, overdue by 30 years.

⁵ See PRST OS/14/1 and PRST OS/14/2.

⁶ PRST 43/1.

⁷ See Human Rights Council resolution 43/39.

of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in a hybrid format in November 2020 and January 2021. To follow up on adoptions, the High Commissioner addressed letters to ministers for foreign affairs in accordance with usual practice.

16. OHCHR assisted Governments, national human rights institutions, civil society and United Nations country teams in the preparation of reports for the universal periodic review, including in Chad, Eswatini, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, the Niger, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. OHCHR also supported a national plan in Chad to implement recommendations emanating from the review and a national plan in Brazil to monitor implementation.

17. The Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review made it possible for OHCHR to respond to requests for assistance by States in connection with specific universal periodic review recommendations.

18. Along with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Organisation of La Francophonie, and the Commonwealth, OHCHR organized online events to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians to engage with the universal periodic review process. OHCHR also increased cooperation with national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations during all phases of the process.

19. OHCHR issued practical guidance⁸ to provide advice to heads of United Nations entities on how to maximize the universal periodic review process at the country level.

4. Special procedures

20. OHCHR supported the involvement of 55 special procedures in United Nations processes, including in the areas of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, peace and security, peacebuilding and the prevention agenda. An overview of the activities and achievements of mandate holders can be found in documents A/HRC/46/61 and A/HRC/46/61/Add.1. An overview of their conclusions and recommendations is available in the report of the Secretary General A/HRC/46/24. Examples of the impact of their work can be found at www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Making-a-difference.aspx. OHCHR also supported the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures.

21. OHCHR supported special procedure mandate holders in developing tools and advice to respond to the human rights challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹

22. While several mandated activities could not take place due to pandemic-related restrictions, in response to the extraordinary circumstances OHCHR assisted mandate holders in adapting their working methods and facing the challenges arising from the shift to virtual work.

5. Follow-up to the work of human rights mechanisms

23. OHCHR supported the work of the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, particularly that of the Third Committee, which considered 81 reports prepared under the responsibility of OHCHR and held 65 interactive dialogues with human rights mechanisms.

24. Through the treaty body capacity-building programme, OHCHR held remote trainings to strengthen national coordination mechanisms, develop implementation actions plans and monitor progress through human rights and Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

25. OHCHR provided assistance with the establishment or strengthening of national mechanisms on reporting and follow-up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Montenegro, Serbia and Seychelles.

26. OHCHR launched the new Universal Human Rights Index, a database containing over 170,000 recommendations of human rights mechanisms.¹⁰ The thematic indexing of content

⁸ Available at www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf.

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/COVID-19-and-Special-Procedures.aspx.

¹⁰ See <https://uhri.ohchr.org>.

makes it possible, supported by artificial intelligence, to run searches by, for example, concerned group, human rights theme and Sustainable Development Goal.

27. Grants through the Special Fund established pursuant to article 26 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment were awarded for 12 projects to support national preventive mechanisms in nine States parties.

28. OHCHR piloted the #Faith4Rights toolkit with faith-based actors, special procedures and treaty bodies,¹¹ organizing monthly peer-to-peer learning events with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect, in follow-up to the Global Pledge for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organizations to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Collaboration with the United Nations.

6. Humanitarian funds

29. In 2020, the United Nations voluntary trust fund on contemporary forms of slavery awarded grants for 31 projects in 28 countries to support rehabilitation for victims of contemporary forms of slavery. Under the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, 180 grants were awarded, to assist over 47,000 victims of torture in 79 countries. An additional 16 emergency grants were awarded to respond to specific crises, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Development

1. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals

30. During the COVID-19 pandemic, building on the Secretary-General's call to action, OHCHR stepped up cooperation with Member States, United Nations entities and representatives, including resident coordinators, and civil society to provide advice on human rights-based and gender-responsive socioeconomic responses to the pandemic. Notably, OHCHR also coordinated system-wide efforts to measure the effect on human rights of the responses of the United Nations and States to the pandemic. This included developing a checklist for a human rights-based approach to socioeconomic country responses to COVID-19.¹²

31. OHCHR supported Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, El Salvador, Kenya, Liberia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan and Ukraine, as well as the State of Palestine, and Kosovo,¹³ in their efforts to address the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable, including by providing technical support to adopt a human rights-based approach to data. It also conducted targeted country analyses aimed to reinforce data and policy recommendations on disadvantaged groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic (Kenya, Paraguay and Serbia).

32. Through its surge initiative, OHCHR deployed macroeconomists to provide human rights analyses of sustainable development strategies, for example on addressing inequalities in the design of social protection systems (Ukraine), on fiscal space to meet core economic, social and cultural rights obligations (Argentina, Cambodia and Cameroon), and on inclusive economic recovery (Zambia). OHCHR partnered with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Western and Central Africa to provide assessment reports on the effects the COVID-19 crisis has had on the various aspects of the lives of the affected populations.

33. OHCHR supported the holding of the Human Rights Council's third intersessional meeting for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on 14 January 2021, with the theme "Building back better: integrating human

¹¹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx.

¹² See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/COVID-19/Checklist_HR-Based_Approach_Socio-Economic_Country_Responses_COVID-19.pdf.

¹³ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

rights in sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”, which generated input for the high-level political forum on sustainable development.¹⁴ OHCHR also provided technical assistance to countries preparing the voluntary national reviews for presentation during the forum.

34. OHCHR contributed to the collection of data for the official Sustainable Development Goal indicators, in particular on discrimination, civilian deaths in conflict, deaths and disappearances of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists, and national human rights institutions.

2. Right to development

35. OHCHR stepped up efforts to operationalize the right to development in the context of COVID-19, organizing, *inter alia*, the first biennial panel discussion held by the Human Rights Council on that right, entitled “COVID-19 and the right to development: we are all in this together”, pursuant to Council resolution 42/23. It amplified calls to share the benefits of development, including equitable access to vaccines, health technologies, knowledge, intellectual property, data¹⁵ and open science.¹⁶

36. OHCHR launched the Hernán Santa Cruz dialogue series, a new global platform to advance the 2030 Agenda, socioeconomic rights and the right to development.¹⁷

37. With partners, OHCHR delivered online training on the right to development to 214 stakeholders from 83 countries, bringing the total number of trainees to 520 from 135 countries.

38. In October 2020, OHCHR supported the Social Forum, with over 1,000 participants from over 100 countries meeting in hybrid format to consider good practices, success stories, lessons learned and current challenges in combating poverty and inequalities.¹⁸

3. International financial institutions

39. OHCHR convened regional consultations with development finance institutions and their accountability mechanisms from various regions, in relation to its project on accessing remedy in development finance. The project will feed into the accountability review processes of development finance institutions.

40. The High Commissioner deepened exchanges with heads of multilateral development banks on human rights concerns, including on human rights risks arising from measures to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

41. OHCHR supported field actions in relation to investment projects supported by development finance institutions in the Asian and Latin American and Caribbean regions, and contributed to processes to revise the safeguard, accountability and reprisals policies of the African Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank Group and the International Finance Corporation.

4. Economic, social and cultural rights

42. As part of the surge initiative, OHCHR field presences reviewed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, particularly on marginalized populations, and explored with States and other key stakeholders how to leverage recommendations from human rights mechanisms.

43. The High Commissioner advocated for comprehensive and human rights-based social protection measures, universal health coverage and universal social protection to respond to

¹⁴ See A/HRC/46/48.

¹⁵ See www.who.int/initiatives/covid-19-technology-access-pool/solidarity-call-to-action.

¹⁶ See www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26433&LangID and www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Open-Science-Appeal.aspx.

¹⁷ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/ESCR/Pages/hernan-santa-cruz-dialogues.aspx.

¹⁸ See A/HRC/46/59 and www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForum2020.aspx.

the COVID-19 crisis as critical elements of the new social contract called for by the Secretary-General.

44. In Argentina, OHCHR developed an emergency strategy to address the health, food and social protection crisis affecting indigenous communities. In Honduras, it supported an inter-governmental coordination mechanism to promote the economic and social rights of people in vulnerable situations, and, in Mauritania, it supported the ministry responsible for fisheries to develop a strategy for a sustainable fishery sector.

45. In Guatemala, OHCHR provided technical assistance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in indigenous communities. In Mexico, it helped revise national guidelines on maternal health in the context of COVID-19. In Ukraine, it assessed the human rights impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related measures on groups at risk.

46. OHCHR continued to strengthen the capacity of governments, national human rights institutions and civil society with regard to social and economic rights, particularly in Argentina, the Bahamas, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mauritania, the Republic of Moldova, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda.

5. Business and human rights

47. OHCHR continued its global Business and Human Rights in Technology Project (B-Tech Project)¹⁹ to advance the embedding of respect for human rights in business practices relating to digital technology. It also issued guidance for policymakers drafting due diligence regulations.²⁰ OHCHR expanded its technical assistance on business and human rights in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Uganda, and regionally with Pacific Island Countries. OHCHR also addressed human rights concerns in the context of mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Honduras, Madagascar, Mexico and Papua New Guinea.

48. In October 2020, OHCHR provided support to the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights. OHCHR also made a substantive submission to the process based on findings from the Accountability and Remedy Project.²¹

6. Environment, climate change and human rights

49. OHCHR advocated for the advancement and implementation of the human right to a healthy environment, including through its efforts to operationalize the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights. Upon the proposal of the High Commissioner, a new Issue Management Group was established under the Environment Management Group to promote a common United Nations system approach to rights-based environmental action and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

50. OHCHR, the United Nations Environment Programme and the East Asia and Pacific office of UNICEF developed policy guidance on the right of children to a healthy environment in South-East Asia. In Kenya, OHCHR support of litigation by the Owino Uhuru community against a lead smelter contributed to the affected community winning a landmark decision before the Environment and Land Court.

51. In South-East Asia, OHCHR, together with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, organized webinars on the impact of climate change and business activities on indigenous peoples, including environmental defenders.

¹⁹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/B-TechProject.aspx.

²⁰ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/MandatoryHR_Due_Diligence_Issues_Paper.pdf.

²¹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/OHCHRaccountabilityandremedyproject.aspx.

C. Peace and security

1. Support for peace missions

52. While the COVID-19 pandemic posed additional challenges for United Nations peace operations, OHCHR continued to further the integration of human rights into peace operations, including in the context of the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative. It participated in the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, and supported the drawdown of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

53. OHCHR contributed to the induction training of civilian and uniformed leadership of peace operations, the integration of human rights into guidance on special political mission start-up, conduct and discipline, and the selection and extension of heads of police components.

54. OHCHR also supported human rights components of peace operations in documenting, with a victim-centred approach, conflict-related sexual violence.

55. In July, the High Commissioner addressed the Security Council in its first open debate on human rights in United Nations peace operations. In October, OHCHR released a study documenting the contribution of human rights components to the implementation of mandates of United Nations missions.²²

2. Human rights due diligence and compliance frameworks

56. OHCHR contributed to the implementation of the Secretary-General's human rights screening policy, by providing methodological guidance to the Secretariat and other United Nations entities. It also provided guidance to ensure that screening principles were reflected in the relevant frameworks and mechanisms of the United Nations and Security Council-mandated forces.

57. OHCHR engaged further with the African Union for the establishment and operationalization of a framework for human rights, international humanitarian law and conduct and discipline compliance. It also supported the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel in implementing its human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. This led to the establishment of a casualty and incident tracking and assessment cell, a mobile pool of trainers and a robust training curriculum.

58. OHCHR started a project to increase the capacity of the internal security forces of Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania to prevent and address human rights violations. In Malawi and Somalia, OHCHR continued to support implementation of the United Nations human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. It also contributed to strengthening the mechanism of the African Union Mission in Somalia with regard to prevention and response to violations committed by its forces.

3. Prevention, early warning and emergency response

59. OHCHR dispatched teams in the context of potential or emerging crises in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Côte d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, the Niger, Peru and Uganda. It also established remote monitoring capacity, including for Ethiopia and Myanmar, as well as with respect to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone.

60. In Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Guyana, Honduras, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago, OHCHR provided early warning information and practical recommendations to Governments and United Nations country teams to mitigate social and political conflicts and human rights violations, including in the context of electoral processes, and to address systemic issues triggering recurring tensions. In South Sudan, OHCHR worked with

²² See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/WebStories/Going_Further_Together_advance_unedited_version.pdf.

UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme to address the root causes and drivers of increased localized conflicts. In Cambodia, OHCHR supported the development of a human rights risk dashboard for the Common Country Assessment, linking United Nations prevention mechanisms with socioeconomic response plans.

61. OHCHR strengthened its information management and data analysis capacity to support United Nations-wide prevention processes, also leveraging human rights mechanisms' recommendations. It adopted an online tracking system to centrally capture information on pandemic-related human rights issues and enhance risk analysis. It also supported the strengthening of the early warning system of the African Union and the regional economic communities.

62. OHCHR delivered its first fully remote training on human rights monitoring, piloting new education technologies to equip human rights monitors with the highest methodological standards. It also issued a series of user-friendly materials containing know-how on human rights monitoring, compiled in an online repository.

63. In South-East Asia, the Middle East region and several regions in Africa, OHCHR produced risk and trend analyses of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights, focusing on emergency measures adopted by governments and the consequences for groups at risk of being left behind.

4. Peacebuilding

64. OHCHR continued efforts to integrate human rights into the United Nations work on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The new joint workplan for 2021–2022 engages the Peacebuilding Support Office and OHCHR on a strategic partnership at the programmatic, policy and institutional levels. Together, they also support follow-up to Human Rights Council resolution 45/31, in which the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission is invited to brief the Council on an annual basis.

65. With the support of the Peacebuilding Fund, OHCHR implemented projects in 10 countries in 2019/20 and three projects (as a direct recipient) under the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative 2020 of the Peacebuilding Fund, which focused on human rights promotion among, and protection of, women and youth peacebuilders.

66. OHCHR supported the development by the African Union of an advisory opinion to guide efforts to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes.

5. Sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking and related exploitation

67. OHCHR helped to consolidate the United Nations operationalization of a human rights and victim-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse.

68. OHCHR contributed to United Nations advocacy and policy initiatives relating to COVID-19 and gender-based violence in line with the Secretary-General's political engagement strategy, and within the Spotlight Initiative framework and the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign. In Africa, OHCHR supported the African Union in the development of its policy dialogue on gender-based violence and COVID-19. In Latin America, OHCHR facilitated webinars for national stakeholders on reporting and support mechanisms for victims of gender-based violence during the pandemic, in particular hotlines. In some Middle East countries, OHCHR facilitated social media campaigns against gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19.

69. OHCHR supported prevention, accountability efforts, protection of victims and documentation of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Yemen, as well as in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It also held online expert discussions on judicial strategies in cases of gender-based violence, in particular sexual violence, in Latin America.

70. OHCHR provided advice on legislative reforms in Somalia, and on the implementation of action plans to tackle conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. It also supported national institutions in investigating sexual and gender-based violence, and civil society in assisting victims, in El Salvador, Honduras, Kenya, Malawi, the Sudan, Uganda and Yemen. In several countries in Latin America, OHCHR promoted a model protocol for the investigation of gender-related killings of women.²³

71. OHCHR provided support to States, civil society organizations and other stakeholders in addressing trafficking in persons and related exploitation. A guidance note on trafficking in persons and COVID-19 was issued in partnership with other organizations.

72. In partnership with the International Civil Aviation Organization, a training tool was developed for aviation crews on reporting trafficking cases spotted on board flights and at airports.

6. Humanitarian action

73. OHCHR remained engaged in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Global Protection Cluster and the United Nations COVID-19 Crisis Management Team. It contributed to key protection advocacy messages, notably related to COVID-19 and climate change, and the joint statement by the principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on racism and racial discrimination in the humanitarian Sector.²⁴ Since March 2021, OHCHR has been part of the Global Health Cluster, to support the protection of vulnerable groups in the implementation of vaccination plans.

74. OHCHR continued integrating human rights into United Nations operations in humanitarian settings, also in relation to COVID-19. This included participation in the humanitarian responses to Hurricane Eta and Hurricane Iota in Honduras and Guatemala, to the post-electoral situation in Côte d'Ivoire, to the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and to the explosion in the port of Beirut, as well as continued work in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Yemen, regionally with Pacific Island Countries, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

D. Non-discrimination

1. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

75. As coordinator of the International Decade for People of African Descent, the High Commissioner stressed in her mid-term report on the Decade that more needed to be done to advance the equality and dignity of people of African descent.²⁵

76. OHCHR and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean issued indicators to measure ethnic and racial inequalities between Afrodescendant and non-Afrodescendant populations.²⁶ A project was piloted to measure inequalities faced by Peruvians of African descent.

77. In Tunisia, OHCHR supported the drafting of a law on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. In South Africa, it engaged with media representatives in the fight against racism, xenophobia and hate speech.

78. OHCHR issued a guidance note on racial discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, outlining issues that particularly affected people of African descent.²⁷ Together with

²³ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ProtocoloLatinoamericanoDeInvestigacion.pdf (in Spanish).

²⁴ See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-iasc-racism>.

²⁵ A/HRC/45/47, para. 23.

²⁶ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/19-00854_people_of_african_descent-web.pdf.

²⁷ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19_and_Racial_Discrimination.pdf.

the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), it facilitated a meeting of leaders of African descent from Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on their communities.

79. The High Commissioner established a dedicated team to work towards the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 43/1, in which the Council requested her to prepare a report on systemic racism, violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies, especially those incidents that resulted in the death of George Floyd and other Africans and people of African descent, to contribute to accountability and redress for victims.

2. Migrants

80. OHCHR monitored the human rights of migrants worldwide, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It undertook a monitoring mission to Malta to examine human rights issues concerning migrants in Libya and the neighbouring region.

81. With OHCHR support, the Niger adopted a national migration policy. In South Africa, OHCHR contributed to the United Nations pilot programme for strengthening migrant integration and social cohesion. In Panama, OHCHR reinforced the capacity of national actors to report on the human rights situation of migrants. In Honduras, it launched a public information campaign to prevent discrimination and xenophobia against migrants, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in the context of COVID-19. In Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, OHCHR monitored the human rights situation related to the migrant caravans. OHCHR deployed an expert to advise the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) on human rights-compliant policies.

82. OHCHR provided support to Member States in the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration through the United Nations Network on Migration at the global, regional and national levels.

83. On International Migrants Day, OHCHR launched a global migration campaign and an online toolbox with information and practical activities on how to shift harmful narratives on migration.

3. Discrimination on the basis of indigenous or minority status

84. OHCHR convened the first high-level meeting of the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, which published guidance for United Nations country teams on combating racial discrimination and on the protection of minorities, including in the context of COVID-19.²⁸

85. OHCHR facilitated dialogue between indigenous peoples and State authorities on forced evictions of indigenous peoples (Kenya) and the use of human rights standards by the State to prevent and mitigate social conflict and emerging crisis (Guatemala). It provided support for legislative and policy changes regarding access to justice, culturally appropriate education, land rights, and free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples (the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, among others).

86. OHCHR supported the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including on the issue of repatriation of sacred objects to indigenous peoples.

87. OHCHR provided inputs to the draft law on the rights of minorities in Iraq, Tajikistan and Ukraine, and the draft law on the rights of the indigenous pygmy peoples in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Honduras, OHCHR strengthened the capacity of the governmental institutions to work on combating discrimination against indigenous people and people of African descent. In the Republic of Moldova, OHCHR assessed inequalities experienced by Roma communities in the Transnistria region. In Kenya, OHCHR documented the human rights dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic among indigenous communities in 512 villages. It also monitored respect for the rights of Dalits in India and

²⁸ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/AnnotatedChecklist.docx.

Nepal during the pandemic. In Iraq, OHCHR held workshops for the protection of minority rights in the Kurdistan region and the Ninawa plains.

4. Gender equality and women's rights

88. OHCHR supported integration of gender equality in the United Nations responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the development of OHCHR guidance on COVID-19 and women's and girls' human rights.

89. OHCHR rolled out its Gender Accreditation Programme through its office in Colombia and the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine to further gender and diversity perspectives.

90. In the Sudan, OHCHR supported the adoption by the Council of Ministers of a draft bill addressing violence against women and girls. In North Macedonia, it worked on aligning new legislation on gender-based and domestic violence with international norms. In Mauritania, its advocacy led to the establishment of a national observatory on the rights of women and girls. In South Africa and Uruguay, OHCHR conducted training to address gender stereotyping in the judiciary. In El Salvador, it supported a media campaign against sexist stereotypes. In Kosovo, OHCHR helped establish the first shelter for women victims of domestic violence.

91. OHCHR contributed to the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

92. OHCHR co-launched the Right to a Better World video series exploring how human rights-based measures could be used to achieve sexual and reproductive health rights for all.²⁹ It also launched the publication Gender Stereotyping and the Judiciary: A Workshop Guide.³⁰

5. Persons with disabilities

93. In Belarus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Morocco, Namibia and Tunisia, OHCHR provided advice for the adoption or review of legislation on persons with disabilities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Guatemala, OHCHR contributed to communication campaigns, and in Belize, Guyana, North Macedonia, Tunisia and several Eastern Caribbean countries, it strengthened the capacity of organizations of persons with disabilities.

94. OHCHR issued a resource package to guide States in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.³¹ It also developed its own disability rights strategy in line with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

6. Sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics

95. OHCHR continued to raise awareness of the human rights concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, including through the Free & Equal public information campaigns of the United Nations. OHCHR provided technical cooperation in relation to the human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons in Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Mexico, Panama, Senegal, Serbia, Tunisia, Ukraine and Uruguay, as well as regionally in West Africa.

96. The High Commissioner made a submission to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in relation to State obligations concerning appropriate investigation of the killing of a transgender woman.

97. OHCHR launched an e-learning course to guide United Nations staff on integrating the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons into their work.

²⁹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/RightBetterWorld.aspx.

³⁰ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GenderStereotyping_EN.pdf and www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/GenderStereotypingWorkshopGuide.aspx.

³¹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/SDG-CRPD-Resource.aspx.

It also engaged with business and civil society in the implementation of the Standards of Conduct for Business on tackling discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.

7. Older persons

98. OHCHR strengthened advocacy to promote the human rights of older persons in the COVID-19 response. It co-launched the new Global Report on Ageism, as well as a regional initiative to uphold the rights and dignity of older persons in connection with the COVID-19 response in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

8. Children and youth

99. In partnership with the International Labour Organization, OHCHR launched the report of the Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19, exploring the specific impact of the pandemic on youth.³² The OHCHR network of youth officers continued promoting human rights with and for young people across field presences.

100. In the Middle East and North Africa Region, OHCHR expanded its youth network to over 150 young advocates. OHCHR also supported the development of child protection legislation in Guinea Bissau.

9. Persons with albinism

101. In Malawi, OHCHR provided technical support to include persons with albinism in all aspects of society and to address discrimination against them and ensure accountability for such acts.

E. Accountability

1. Transitional justice

102. In the Sudan, OHCHR supported the elaboration of the draft law on the establishment of the transitional justice commission. In the Central African Republic, OHCHR, the United Nations Development Programme and the Peacebuilding Fund provided technical and financial assistance to the Selection Committee for the recently established Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. In Liberia, OHCHR supported the establishment of a transitional justice unit within the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. In Colombia, OHCHR provided technical assistance to the transitional justice system established under the peace agreement. In Mexico, OHCHR provided technical assistance to the federal prosecutor's office to ensure truth and justice in connection with the disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa in 2014. In Kosovo, it supported transitional justice processes concerning missing persons, and assisted survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

103. In Colombia, Guatemala and Haiti, OHCHR monitored emblematic cases of human rights violations. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, OHCHR provided technical assistance to the Attorney-General's Office in the investigations of human rights violations that had occurred in the aftermath of the October 2019 elections. In Honduras, OHCHR advocacy enabled the broadcasting of hearings in emblematic cases, including the killing of human rights defender Berta Cáceres.

2. Death penalty

104. OHCHR continued to advocate with States for the establishment or maintenance of moratoriums on the use of the death penalty, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/175, and for the protection of rights of those facing the death penalty, including in Bangladesh, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States of America.

³² See www.decentjobsforyouth.org/campaign/COVID19-survey.

105. In the margins of the high-level week of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, OHCHR co-organized a virtual high-level event on the death penalty and its gender dimensions, during which the High Commissioner highlighted the discriminatory and disproportionate application of the death penalty to women.

3. Counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism

106. As Chair of the Working Group on Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Rule of Law while Countering Terrorism and Supporting Victims of Terrorism under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, OHCHR continued to ensure that human rights were integrated in United Nations counter-terrorism activities.

107. OHCHR conducted training for law enforcement officials on human rights and counter-terrorism in Cameroon, which led the country to initiate work on its anti-terrorism law.

108. OHCHR launched a research project on human rights implications in the use of artificial intelligence in the counter-terrorism context.

109. OHCHR collaborated with other United Nations entities in the development of a global framework for United Nations support on third country nationals returning from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and ensured that human rights was a central and operationalized component of the framework. This engagement was accompanied by OHCHR public advocacy on State responses to third country nationals held in displacement camps, detention centres and other places in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.³³

4. Administration of justice and law enforcement

110. OHCHR, with the Human Rights Centre at Berkeley, issued a landmark publication on principles and standards on which open source materials should be grounded in order to be usable in court as evidence, in vetting processes or by transitional justice mechanisms.³⁴

111. OHCHR also supported the development of a draft universal protocol on effective non-coercive interviewing and a separate United Nations police manual on the same subject, and advised on the review of the amended Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol).

112. OHCHR reviewed the draft code of Ethiopia on criminal procedure and evidence, and use of force protocols for specialized police units in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It advised prosecutors in the Plurinational State of Bolivia on international norms and standards on the use of force and human rights. It also reviewed the draft decision establishing a supervisory mechanism to monitor use of force by Frontex personnel.

113. OHCHR contributed to the newly published Handbook: Profiling Small Arms Ammunition in Armed Violence Settings, issued by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.³⁵

5. Human rights and drug policy

114. OHCHR carried out research on the impact of drug policies on prison overcrowding in South-East Asia.

115. In November, OHCHR organized the second regional dialogue on the implementation of the international guidelines on human rights and drug policy in South and South-East Asia, with several partners.

³³ See, for example, the statement of the High Commissioner dated 22 June 2020, available at www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25986&LangID=E, and the report of the High Commissioner on terrorism and human rights (A/HRC/45/27).

³⁴ *Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations: A Practical Guide on the Effective Use of Digital Open Source and Information in Investigating Violations of International Criminal, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law* (2020).

³⁵ See <https://undir.org/publication/handbook-profile-small-arms-ammunition-armed-violence-settings>.

F. Participation

1. Enhancing and protecting civic space and people's participation

116. As a result of an inter-agency process led jointly by OHCHR and UN-Women, a United Nations system-wide guidance note on the promotion and protection of civic space was launched, recognizing civic space as a threshold issue for successful United Nations work under all three pillars.³⁶

117. OHCHR supported Member States in the implementation of the guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, and contributed to the revision of the guidance note of the Secretary-General on United Nations constitutional assistance.

118. OHCHR conducted human rights monitoring, reporting and advocacy in relation to the adoption of emergency measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁷ It advocated for the participation of civil society in the responses to the pandemic, including the participation of young people (Serbia) and women human rights defenders (Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa and the Americas), through, inter alia, the leveraging of new technologies. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, OHCHR contributed to the amendment of a decree that would otherwise have generated restrictions on freedom of expression in the context of COVID-19.

119. OHCHR also supported journalists in their work, including by co-organizing a pilot training session for women journalists and media workers across South and South-East Asia to investigate and report on gender-related issues in a context of shrinking civic space, and a multi-stakeholder discussion on the safety of journalists and the end of impunity in conflict situations for the Arab Region. OHCHR also conducted monitoring and reporting in the context of peaceful protests in Iraq, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.

120. In Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Mexico, OHCHR supported human rights defenders and journalists in accessing human rights protection mechanisms. In Mexico, it launched campaigns to end impunity for crimes against journalists. In Somalia, it provided human rights training for journalists in the Jubba Hoose region.

121. In Ethiopia, OHCHR contributed to the creation of a website for civil society, and in Yemen, to the establishment of a human rights defenders forum. In Thailand, OHCHR held its annual human rights defenders school to strengthen the capacity of human rights defenders, mostly women, in the area of physical and digital security. OHCHR also enhanced the capacity of women human rights defenders in Asia and the Pacific, in the Middle East and North Africa and in the Americas. In October, OHCHR launched online training for Roma human rights defenders in the Americas to enhance their capacity and advocacy on minority rights protection. In Kosovo, OHCHR supported organizations from different ethnic backgrounds in documenting and monitoring human rights on a common platform

122. In 2020, OHCHR supported 34 "senior fellows" from minority groups and indigenous communities to receive on-the-job training in OHCHR and United Nations field presences. Under another fellowship programme, it provided virtual training on capacity-building for 28 participants of African descent from 14 countries, and hosted a transgender human rights defender as part of the LGBTI Fellowship Programme. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture continued its fellowship programme, awarding two fellowships.

2. Digital space

123. OHCHR advocated that human rights law and principles must be part of the foundation for governance frameworks for the use of digital technologies, including when such technologies are used for surveillance and contact tracing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the implementation of the Secretary-General's call to action, OHCHR

³⁶ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CivicSpace/Pages/UNRoleCivicSpace.aspx.

³⁷ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/EmergencyMeasures_COVID19.pdf.

led the development of the Hub for Human Rights and Digital Technology, hosted on the OHCHR website.

124. OHCHR used new technological tools to monitor trends in public discourse online during the pandemic, including hate speech during elections in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Ecuador. It also used Internet pressure data for insights on mass behaviour change, or lack thereof, in relation to government-mandated lockdowns and general public awareness of the unfolding pandemic.

125. OHCHR engaged in advocacy in relation to the Digital Services Act proposed by the European Commission. In September, the High Commissioner sent an open letter to the President of the European Commission calling for more transparency, robust safeguards for freedom of expression and better redress mechanisms. In November, OHCHR jointly convened a panel discussion on democracy in the digital age, featuring a Vice-President of the European Commission, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, civil society representatives and a representative from Twitter.

126. In Lebanon, OHCHR organized a virtual symposium on data protection in managing cases of enforced disappearance.

3. Electoral processes

127. OHCHR monitored human rights and conducted related advocacy and technical assistance in the context of electoral processes in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Honduras, Liberia, the Niger, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

128. As a result of OHCHR advocacy, Cameroon adopted quotas for the participation of women, youth, indigenous persons and persons living with disabilities as candidates in regional elections. In Somalia, OHCHR launched a campaign in Hargeysa for the political participation of members of minority groups and women in elections. In the Central African Republic, the Niger and Uganda, OHCHR strengthened the capacity of State actors and civil society to conduct early warning efforts and monitor human rights during elections. In Ukraine, OHCHR issued an early warning note on civic space and fundamental freedoms ahead of local elections.

4. Support for national human rights institutions and regional mechanisms

129. OHCHR supported the adoption of legislation on national human rights institutions in Lesotho and the Sudan, ensuring compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). It also strengthened the capacity of national human rights institutions in Burundi, Chad, El Salvador, Fiji, Gabon, the Gambia, Guatemala, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi and Qatar. In the Niger, OHCHR strengthened the capacity of the national mechanism for the prevention of torture.

5. Human rights education

130. OHCHR published good-practice guidance for human rights training³⁸ and worked with UNESCO and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth to encourage human rights education for youth nationally. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, OHCHR developed a strategy (2020–2021) to build the capacity of its staff to apply technology in human rights training.

131. OHCHR jointly organized a regional online workshop in the Middle East and North Africa region on opportunities for using communications technology in human rights education and a regional round table on gender stereotypes in school curricula.

³⁸ See *Evaluating Human Rights Training Activities: Workshop Guide*, and the Spanish edition of *From Planning to Impact: A Manual on Human Rights Training Methodology*.

III. Conclusions

132. As the High Commissioner noted in her report to the General Assembly,³⁹ the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on human rights worldwide and on the work of OHCHR. OHCHR interactions with partners, including Member States, experts and members of civil society, have been affected by restrictions on gatherings, movement and travel.

133. OHCHR adjusted to the challenges. The Human Rights Council was the last major intergovernmental body in Geneva to interrupt, temporarily, its in-person activities. Through innovative methods, OHCHR managed to move the Council's work online. The forty-fifth and forty-sixth sessions of the Council and the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review were held fully remotely, with the participation of a large number of stakeholders.

134. The work of the treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders was also migrated to virtual modalities, with exceptional commitment displayed by experts and OHCHR staff. OHCHR attaches great importance to the continued ability of human rights mechanisms to discharge their mandates and to avoid significant protection gaps. It notes, however, that their work relies significantly on in-person interactions.

135. OHCHR has adjusted its work in the field, supporting countries to adopt a rights-based COVID-19 response, and has refined its methods of work to further extend remote monitoring in cooperation with partners.

136. The COVID-19 pandemic has also starkly underlined the centrality of equality and human rights to the global agenda. The pandemic exposed the effects of decades of underinvestment in public services and made even more explicit how, during a crisis, poor governance, corruption, a lack of rule of law, limited access to justice, discrimination and weak or biased institutions threaten the principles of equality, dignity and human rights. In that sense, public investments in these areas prove essential for the collective interest and good governance. They lay the groundwork for a strong rights-based recovery that puts people at the centre, and are essential to facilitate a transition to sustainable development and carbon neutrality, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

137. OHCHR played a major role in the development of the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19, and was also instrumental in integrating thematic human rights indicators into the United Nations system response to COVID-19. Through the surge initiative, OHCHR strengthened work in the areas of the Sustainable Development Goals and economic, social, cultural rights and provided technical assistance to guide human rights-based and gender-sensitive economic recovery efforts in relation to the pandemic.

138. During the reporting period, OHCHR noted that on many occasions protests and dissent expressed by rights holders, often provoked by the handling of the pandemic and/or long-standing inequalities, had been met with disproportionate responses and even force, leading to a progressive shrinking of the civic space, including online.

139. The pandemic has aggravated the situation of many vulnerable peoples and communities, who continued to be left behind. Within countries, the poor, and marginalized and vulnerable groups such as older people, women and girls, minorities and indigenous peoples are bearing the brunt of various restrictions. They are suffering most from food insecurity and a lack of access to health care, water and sanitation, education, decent work and social security.

140. OHCHR has consistently advocated for solidarity in the fight against the pandemic. This includes reinforcing the call for equal access to vaccines for all, as a public good, accessible and available to everyone, everywhere; a need for debt relief and swift and generous financial and technical international support;⁴⁰ and a need for

³⁹ A/75/36.

⁴⁰ See, for example, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25833.

the easing of sanctions to enable medical systems to fight the pandemic and limit global contagion.

141. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a vital opportunity to rebuild better based on a new social contract between Governments, people, civil society, businesses and others. The process should be underpinned by a new global deal that measures success in human, rather than purely economic, terms, and that puts the world on track to meet the goals set out under the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. In order to build back better, human rights must be placed at the centre of recovery efforts so that no one is left behind. Human rights are key to shaping the responses to the pandemic and its aftermath. To that end, OHCHR will continue to engage with Member States, civil society and the United Nations system, in line with the Secretary-General's call to action and its broader objective of ensuring a real impact for people on the ground. In that sense, OHCHR will contribute to the work on the common agenda in follow-up to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Organization.

142. The COVID-19 pandemic confirmed that the key priorities that OHCHR had identified ahead of the crisis remain valid: the Sustainable Development Goals, economic, social and cultural rights, inequalities, technology and human rights and climate change were and remain the key priorities for 2021 and beyond.

143. Throughout the crisis, OHCHR has recalibrated its focus and its methods of work. To adjust to the new reality, OHCHR will refine its office management plan and its organizational effectiveness plans to ensure that OHCHR remains effective and catalytic where its work is most needed and has the greatest impact.

144. In building forward together with all partners, our enduring challenge is to transform the promise of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into real-world change on the ground. OHCHR is thankful for the trust placed in it by Member States, as demonstrated by the support for the existing mandates and for the unprecedented number of new mandates added in 2020. The ongoing regular budget liquidity constraints and remaining COVID-19 travel restrictions continue to have an impact on the work of OHCHR and its delivery. The High Commissioner recalls the importance of Member States' ongoing support to OHCHR, both through the regular budgetary process and voluntary contributions, for the effective discharge of its mandate.
