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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Harald Aspelund, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council**

At the opening of the twenty-third session of

the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee

Monday, 22 July 2019, 11 a.m.

Palais des Nations, Salle XX

Ms. Elizabeth Salmón, Chairperson of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee,

Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee,

Mr. Eric Tistounet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of H.E. Mr. Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council, it is an honor for me to welcome all of you to the opening of this twenty-third session of the Advisory Committee. President Seck could not be here for the opening due to previous commitments. He extends his warm regards to you.

As is customary, I would like to start by updating you on the work of the Human Rights Council at its fortieth and forty-first sessions in areas that are of relevance to your deliberations since your last session in February 2019, that was held before the fortieth Council session.

***(40th session)***

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fortieth session of the Council, which took place from 25 February to 22 March, started with the high-level segment and statements from 98 dignitaries, including four heads of States and Governments. During this session, the High Commissioner presented her first annual report to the Council. She highlighted the interlinkage and synergies between economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights, as well as highlighting the killings and other violations against human rights defenders and the restrictions of civic space.

At its session, the Council considered 113 reports addressing 38 themes and 62 country situations and at the end of the session, the Council adopted 29 resolutions, including resolutions that are of particular interest to your Committee.

In its resolution 40/4, entitled “the negative impact of the non-repatriation of **funds of illicit origin** to the countries of origin on the enjoyment of human rights, and the importance of improving international cooperation”, the Council requested the Committee, in preparation of the study on the possibility of utilizing non repatriated illicit funds, “*to seek the views of regional and international experts and organizations, as well as United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations, including by holding a one-day meeting in Geneva in April or May 2019*”.

In addition, the Council adopted resolution 40/8, entitled “the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights”, in which it took note of the work of the Committee on the activities of **vulture funds** and their impact on human rights. The final study was submitted to the Council at its forty-first session, which concluded two weeks ago.

Furthermore, the Council adopted thematic resolutions on previous and current mandates of your Committee such as (i) the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; (ii) combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief; (iii) the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human right; (iv) right to food; and (v) elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport.

***(41st session)***

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The forty-first session of the Council, which took place from 24 June to 12 July, started with an oral update by the High Commissioner. In her presentation, the High Commissioner touched upon different human rights themes, including women’s enjoyment of human rights in the context of work, old age and climate change; targeted surveillance and the private surveillance industry; mental health; migration policies and criminalization of basic human compassion for migrants; and violence and the incitement of violence on the basis of religion.

During the session the Council considered over 70 reports addressing themes and country situations and it held interactive dialogues with 28 special procedures mandate holders and investigative mechanisms, as well as a two-part annual discussion on women’s rights; a panel discussion on women’s rights and climate change; and the annual thematic panel discussion on technical cooperation in the promotion and protection of human rights. Lastly, towards the end of the session, the Council adopted 26 resolutions.

I am pleased to note that the Human Rights Council mandated two new studies to be carried out by your Committee.

In a resolution on the **elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls**, the Council took note of the work of your Committee regarding mainstreaming a gender perspective and the issue of gender equality and requested the Advisory Committee to prepare a report, in close cooperation with the Working Group and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on current levels of representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms such as your Committee, treaty bodies and special procedures. The report should include good practices by States in nominating, electing and appointing candidates to ensure balanced gender representation, in line with the system-wide strategy on gender parity, and recommendations to assist the Council and Member States in this regard. The report is to be submitted to the Council at its forty-seventh session.

The Council also adopted a resolution on **new and emerging digital technologies and human rights**, in which it noted the work done by the Advisory Committee on the issues of digital transformation, new technologies and human rights. The resolution mandated your Committee to prepare a report on the possible impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights, including mapping of relevant existing initiatives by the United Nations and recommendations on how human rights opportunities, challenges and gaps arising from new and emerging digital technologies could be addressed by the Council and its special procedures and subsidiary bodies. The report should be submitted to the Council at its forty-seventh session.

In the same resolution, the Council decided to convene a panel discussion at its forty-fourth session in June 2020 on the impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights and requests your Committee to present an oral update on its preparation of the study during the panel discussion.

The Council also adopted a resolution **on the contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights**, in which it took note of the report of your Committee on the same topic that was submitted for the forty-first session. In its resolution, the Council requests the High Commissioner to organize a one-day intersessional seminar, before its forty-seventh session on the importance of sustainable development in promoting and protecting human rights, in order to allow Member States, relevant United Nations agencies, international organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to identify challenges and gaps and share good practices and experiences in this regard.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished members,

Let me now briefly turn to the upcoming **forty-second session** of the Human Rights Council, which will take place from 9 to 27 September 2019.

The Council will consider a variety of thematic issues though the reports of the special procedures mandate-holders and the Office of the High Commissioner.

The Council will also hold several panel discussions, including the annual discussion on the integration of a **gender perspective throughout the work of the Council** and that of its mechanisms, as well as a panel discussion on **the unilateral coercive measures and human rights**, with a focus on the way forward to a UN declaration on the negative impact of unilateral coercive on the enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to development.

During this session, the Advisory Committee is due to present its final reports on “**negative effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights”** and on “**negative impact of the non-repatriation of funds of illicit origin on the enjoyment of human rights**”. The Committee will also present an **oral update** on the preparation of the report on “**the importance of a legally binding instrument on the right to development**”.

The Council looks forward to the presentation of these reports, as well as the reports of the **twenty-second and twenty-third session** of the Advisory Committee and the interactive dialogue with you, Ms. Chairperson, which is tentatively scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 18 September. The Council stands ready to engage in further dialogue with the Committee on these subjects, and encourages States to review and consider adopting the valuable recommendations contained within your reports.

At the end of the forty-second session, the Human Rights Council will elect **four** new members of the Advisory Committee from the groups of Asia-Pacific States, Eastern European States, Western European and other States and Latin American and Caribbean States. Allow me Ms. Chairperson to remind delegations that the Human Rights Council should give due consideration to gender balance, in electing members of the Advisory Committee, as the current gender balance is 3 women and 15 men.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished members,

Based on the fruitful meeting between the Bureau of the Council and your Committee during your twenty-second session last February, I wish to express the appreciation of the Bureau for your support and readiness to contribute to the efforts on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Council.

[Additional Remarks on the efficiency process by the President Office]

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished members,

Before concluding, I wish to mention that this will be the last session for four Committee members who have completed two terms.

Ms. Hananía De Varela, Mr. Lebedev, Mr. Obata, and Mr. Ziegler on behalf of the President of the Council and my colleagues at the Bureau, I would like to thank you and acknowledge your valuable contribution to the work of this Committee over the past years. Your participation and high expertise have been greatly appreciated, and I wish you all the best in their future endeavors in the promotion of human rights.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished members,

This brings me to the end of these welcoming remarks, and I would like at this stage to reiterate my appreciation for the work of this Committee. Your commitment to protect and promote human rights through your work and your efforts to engage with a broad range of stakeholders are very much valued.

It was a pleasure to address you this morning at the start of this heavy week to proceed with the eight mandates, and I trust that it will be a productive **session** of the Advisory Committee.

Thank you.