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**Human Rights Council Advisory Committee**

**Twenty-fourth session**

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**Opening remarks by**

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**Director, a.i.**

**Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division**

**Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

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Palais des Nations, room XX

Madame President of the Human Rights Council,

Distinguished Chair of the Advisory Committee,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address your Committee today at the opening of its twenty-fourth session. This is the first time that I am interacting with your Committee and I value this opportunity, as your expertise and the important work carried out by your Committee certainly has an impact on the effective realization of human rights across the globe.

On behalf of the High Commissioner and her Office, allow me to also join H.E. Ms. Tichy-Fisslberger in congratulating the **newly elected members**: (i) Ms. Costas Trascasas, (ii) Mr. Kolesnikov, (iii) Ms. Nakai and (iv) Mr. Palummo; and the **members re-elected for a second term**: (i) Mr. Bouzid; (ii) Mr. Liu; and (iii) Ms. Omar.

The President of the Human Rights Council has just given you an overview of the activities of the Council. For my part, as per our established practice, I will inform you of certain recent developments in the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and also generally within the United Nations; developments which may be of particular relevance to the activities and priorities of your Committee.

Distinguished Members,

As the President just highlighted, this year marks the **75th anniversary of the United Nations Charter**. However, as we all have seen since the new decade kicked in at the beginning of this year, new issues are surging forward to challenge human rights in an unprecedented manner, while old issues continue to create suffering. The United Nations Secretary-General has in fact identified **four main challenges for this year**: (i) global geostrategic tensions; (ii) an existential climate crisis; (iii) a deep and growing global mistrust in the political systems; and (iv) a fast-moving digital world with unknown consequences. To address these four challenges, the Secretary-General has suggested investing into four different areas: (i) peace and security, (ii) climate action, (iii) the SDGs and (iv) steering technology for positive change in order to address the dark side of digital world. The High Commissioner has also set her Office’s priorities for 2020, in line with her 2018-2021 UN Human Rights roadmap, in **five key “frontier” areas** that have already shown accelerating impact on fundamental human rights: (i) climate change, (ii) digital space, (iii) inequalities, (iv) corruption, and (v) people on the move. As she has noted, these are complex issues with serious and expanding effects on rights, development and peace. The Office will therefore continue to dedicate special attention towards strengthening its work and expanding its expertise and partnerships on these frontier issues, in order to step up its assistance and guidance for Governments, civil society and regional and international bodies in these areas.

I note here that the Human Rights Council has been rightly entrusting your Committee with mandates to study such pressing issues, some of which you are currently examining (e.g. new and emerging digital technologies and human rights), while others have been completed (such as the negative impact of corruption on human rights). The Advisory Committee, as the think-tank of the Council, has successfully fulfilled its mandate in this role on each of the topics it has been requested to study. I am therefore pleased to note that the collaboration of your Committee with OHCHR will continue to be a valuable advantage for tackling the existing challenges the world is currently facing and those yet to come.

Let me start with **new and emerging** **digital technologies**, which have increasing consequences on privacy, freedom of expression, gender equality, hate speech and exploitation. While the Secretary-General proposes to promote global digital cooperation and ensure artificial intelligence is a force for good, OHCHR is seeking to strengthen public policy and corporate practice, both to avoid harm as well as to leverage new tools in support of human rights. Building on our already extensive engagement with technology companies, the Office’s B-Tech project will seek to embed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in the technology sector. Furthermore, this approach will also provide civil society partners, and States, with practical guidance on how to evaluate the human rights impact of new technologies, and what can be done to avoid and mitigate harms. Capitalizing on this expertise and engagement with tech companies, the Office therefore stands ready to collaborate with your Committee in the finalization of your report to the Council on new and emerging technologies and human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We now have just ten years to achieve the **2030 Agenda**, and while some progress can be noted, it is apparent that not enough has been achieved to fully attain the goals by 2030. In view of this, the Secretary-General has announced the launch of the [Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/). The Decade of Action calls for accelerating sustainable solutions to all the world’s biggest challenges – ranging from poverty and gender to climate change, inequality and closing the finance gap. At the same time, as we have witnessed lately, **inequalities and corruption** have caused people to take to the streets and demonstrate massively. The High Commissioner has underscored, in this regard, the need for guidance to ensure that human rights-based economic policies place people at the centre of prosperity. I am therefore pleased to inform you that our Office is heightening its technical cooperation to assist specific countries to diminish the impacts of inequalities and re-assert rule of law in the economy. We will work with States on issues relating to **public investment, budgets, tax policies, illicit financial flows**, as well as **economic and social rights**, addressing the human rights impacts of austerity measures, which often have disproportionate consequences on marginalised communities. We will also further assist States and partners to undertake human rights-based budget analyses, for better allocation of resources to the implementation of the SDGs and more equal access to health, housing, social protection and other rights in national policies. I am confident that the report by your Committee on **national policies and human rights**, to be submitted for the Council’s consideration at its September session this year, will also be of assistance to States in their efforts to achieve the SDGs.

This year also marks the **25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration** **and Programme of Action**, as pointed out by the President. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 25 years ago saw an extraordinary mobilization for women’s human rights and led to a visionary roadmap to end discrimination and realize **gender equality**. The commemoration of Beijing +25 is therefore a great opportunity to rethink economic, political and social systems from an equality perspective, and assess where we stand and how we can accelerate progress. Moreover, I am pleased to inform you that the Office has launched a campaign for this year with the aim of raising awareness of how gender stereotypes are still reflected online and in the media and perpetuate gender-based discrimination. The OHCHR campaign promotes a fair and non-stereotyped portrayal of women, girls and LGBTI people online and in the media; and encourages people to change the narrative by editing and/or expanding the content available online or by flagging gender discriminatory content. The United Nations as a whole, while giving a much-needed voice to young people, is also ensuring equality and non-discrimination for LGBTI staff in the UN system and its peacekeeping operations.

At the same time, I am also pleased to inform you that Office has successfully rolled out an in-house programme – **the UN Human Rights Gender Accreditation Programme** – which is a new gender and diversity accreditation programme for OHCHR field presences and New York and Geneva entities, where participating field presences/entities commit to a number of specific goals based on existing commitments to gender equality, diversity and inclusion. The purpose of this programme is to translate our commitments to gender equality, diversity and inclusion into concrete actions and boost gender equality both inside and outside the Organization. And as the High Commissioner puts it, this programme “helps us walk the talk on gender equality” and “gives us the tools, the knowledge and support to embrace gender equality in the way we operate, treat one another, prioritize, analyze, design and implement programmes.”

The Secretary-General has also noted that he will continue working on the reforms he has undertaken, including achieving gender parity and ensuring greater inclusion and parity at all levels of the Organization. It is indeed noteworthy that on January 1st – for the first time in UN history – the UN achieved gender parity across its senior-most ranks of full-time Under- and Assistant- Secretaries-General taken together. We therefore look forward to the work of your Committee on its mandate on **current levels of women represented in UN human rights organs and mechanisms**, which we are confident will strengthen the endeavours by the Secretary-General and our Office and in turn provide critical recommendations and 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.

Distinguished Members,

Alongside gender parity in human rights organs and a gender perspective in your work, let me also refer to another consideration that your Committee is required to always integrate in its work: that of **persons with disabilities**. You may be interested in noting that the Secretary-General has launched a **disability inclusion strategy**, which includes a policy and an accountability framework, with benchmarks to assess progress and accelerate change on disability inclusion. The policy establishes a vision and commitment for the United Nations system on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the UN is making remarkable progress on that front.

While progress is notable in some areas, we continue to see that **discrimination, exploitation and violence** are still rife everywhere across the globe and unfortunately, are the realities for the nearly **272 million** **migrants** nowadays. The Office of the High Commissioner is therefore continuing to monitor and issue in-depth reports on the situation of people on the move in Southeast Asia, Central America, Sahel countries, and along the central Mediterranean route. The Office will also be supporting human rights-based approaches to migration governance, including through targeted capacity-building for frontline border officials in the Middle East and North Africa, Asia Pacific and Americas. And I am pleased to inform you that the newly-established **Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund** to support the implementation of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (GCM) is currently capitalized at approximately 7 million USD with total pledges of approximately 12-15 million USD expected within this year. This trust fund will provide funding to UN-entities for projects at the local, national, regional or global level in support of GCM implementation.

In addition, while the Secretary-General has announced that he will be convening a conference on the **role of education in tackling hate speech**, OHCHR is also working with **UN Global Pulse** – an initiative by Secretary-General on big data and artificial intelligence for development, humanitarian action, and peace – to develop digital tools to enhance monitoring and analysis by UN field presences of hate speech and incitement to violence and discrimination. The Office will also be launching a **global communications initiative to counter xenophobia and discrimination**, focusing on fundamental human values and the need for solidarity.

Distinguished Members,

Before I conclude, I am pleased to note that at your previous sessions you held meetings with NGOs in an endeavour to enhance your cooperation Civil Society. As regards your interaction with national human rights institutions, I am pleased to inform you that OHCHR has a section that facilitates interaction between NHRIs and the international system for human rights, and works closely with the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs (ICC). You may wish to engage with colleagues of this section to further discuss the possibilities to strengthen the interaction of national institutions with your Committee. In addition, I would also like to recall that at your 15th session you decided to establish a network of Academic Friends of the Advisory Committee in order to collaborate and share knowledge on mandated topics. Academics from around the world had responded to your call to join this network. As you continue your discussions this week in the context of the review of your working methods, you may also wish to look into reviving this network of excellent and internationally recognized academics, who may be able to engage you in productive and insightful discussions on issues under consideration by your Committee.

Distinguished Members,

Let me conclude here by assuring you the full support of the Secretariat for your activities. I wish you very fruitful deliberations at the present session.

Thank you.

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