**A Statement of Special Procedures Mandate Holders**

**June 2019**

The United Nations Charter animates the UN with a founding purpose to promote and encourage *respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all*. The Human Rights Council, and the Commission on Human Rights before it, established independent mandates to assist its efforts to strengthen human rights and to interpret and monitor implementation of this core purpose. Kofi Annan once called this system of expertise, known widely as Special Procedures, the “crown jewel” of the international human rights system.

We are concerned that this “crown jewel” faces serious threats, and we adopt this statement to urge States to redouble their support for the independent mandates of the Human Rights Council.

States have long supported the work the Council has mandated that we pursue. They have offered political support in debates at and resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly. They have provided voluntary contributions to support specific mandates and projects. Many have issued standing invitations for experts to conduct human rights assessments about specific areas of policy, law, and practice. State support enables Special Procedures not merely to survive but to thrive.

Our work aims to identify, engage, clarify, and rectify. In public and private engagements, we offer recommendations to assist government efforts to align their laws and policies with international human rights norms. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct that guides our work, and Special Procedures as a group has also developed mechanisms of self-regulation, including through annual meetings and a regularly reviewed Manual of Operations, designed to ensure that we carry out our mandates with the highest degree of integrity, objectivity, independence, accuracy and constructive impact.

And yet our challenges are greater than ever, threatening our ability to carry out our mandates. We observe a global retrenchment against the values and obligations embedded in international human rights law and the Charter itself. Those challenges include the following:

* Many of our colleagues have faced direct attacks from governments and politicians, online trolls, and other non-State actors using, for instance, the violent language of misogyny, racism, and other forms of discrimination and harassment. Few States have stood up to defend our colleagues in the face of these attacks. We encourage constructive criticism of our work, part of an iterative effort to strengthen the human rights system, but threats to us and to the people we work with worldwide, including reprisals against those who cooperate with us, must be condemned.
* Our efforts to engage States are often met with silence. We use the tools of human rights fact-finding and reporting in efforts to work with States, and many States respond to our concerns with constructive answers to our questions. Yet too often our direct communications, our proposals for visits, our offers of technical assistance, and our specific recommendations following country missions are left unanswered, leaving us with few avenues other than public ones to express the concerns that the Human Rights Council has expected us to identify.
* Our resources, as with the UN human rights system as a whole, are dangerously limited and fragile. Many States ask us to take on new tasks, or raise concerns about perceptions of unfairness or inconsistency, and yet our ability to achieve universality in our work is constantly tested by a lack of funding to hire staff, conduct country visits, or follow up on communications.
* Civil society actors are crucial stakeholders and valued partners for us and for many States, and yet the shrinking of civic space – attacks on advocacy of all sorts – interferes not only with their work at domestic and regional environments but also our ability to conduct fact-finding and reporting.

We understand some States have concerns about our public engagements and other aspects of our work. The tools of modern communications – from media releases to social media to robust web presences – have become essential to fact-finding and reporting. It may be uncomfortable for governments (or companies) to be in the spotlight, and our efforts to break through the contemporary cacophony of information may lead some to see our public-facing work as more problem than solution.

We ourselves are learning to manage this new environment as it evolves, but our work is always done in good faith, motivated by a desire to advance the purposes assigned us by the Council. We aim toward consistency and coherence, and we welcome active, regular, and constructive dialogue with all States. In particular, under the leadership of the Special Procedures Coordination Committee, we have engaged in a discussion on how to continue to improve our methods of work and considered input from States and other stakeholders. During our 2019 Annual Meeting, we initiated an update or our Manual of Operations in order to address best practices related to social media, end-of-mission statements, media releases and other issues that have been brought to our attention by States.

Yet we believe that efforts to constrain our public voice would be a sign of resistance to our work and our independence and would, over time, undermine our ability to address human rights concerns in the most serious situations worldwide. People worldwide rely upon our voices. States rely upon our evaluation and assistance – even our good faith criticism or recommendations. Powerful multinational companies rely upon our guidance to shape how they can meet their responsibilities to respect human rights and remedy abuses. Our every effort is designed to meet the goals that States, through the Human Rights Council, have assigned to us.

The moment is fraught. We implore States to meet this moment with the same commitment that led them to embed human rights in the global system. We urge all to expand their commitments for Special Procedures, not to walk away from them or seek to limit our ability to highlight, privately *and* publicly, the challenges that the Human Rights Council has mandated us to pursue.