In response to the Joint questionnaire of 27 May by Special Procedure mandate holders on Protecting human rights during and after the COVID-19

The Corona virus sees no borders. It is likely to affect the poorest countries with weak health systems the hardest, and the consequences will be particularly difficult to manage in countries that are affected by conflict or other humanitarian crises.

National and global action need to go hand in hand and address the needs of entire populations and societies. This is the time for collaboration, solidarity and for building back better, together and in the most inclusive way possible. We must stand up for and support international principles and institutions and for multilateralism. A global crisis requires a global response.

UN leadership to coordinate international response to COVID-19 is essential in this regard, and Sweden therefore welcomes the UN Secretary-General’s Call to Action on Human Rights and his report We Are In This Together, and the UN’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. The humanitarian consequences of the pandemic could be very grave. As the fourth largest donor to the humanitarian system,Swedenprovides core support to major humanitarian organisations.

Sweden further welcomes the strong leadership of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her office. Sweden would like to thank the Special Rapporteurs for highlighting the many human rights aspects of States’ measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and for posing relevant questions in this regard. Sweden believes that continued reporting and monitoring of such measures is essential to ensuring accountability in the longer term, and is looking forward to the reports of the Special Rapporteurs on the topic.

Sweden notes with concern that the global trend of democratic backsliding and weakened respect for human rights in many parts of the world risks beingfurther compounded by the pandemic. It entails enormous consequences in many areas, such as health, humanitarian, developmental and economic, which are aggravated by weak health systems and governance, socio-economic inequality, poverty and conflict. It risks having a major impact on the poorest countries, and particularly on individuals who already are discriminated against and marginalised and on existing inequalities.

Efforts in response to the pandemic may have serious and far-reaching repercussions on the enjoyment of human rights. The crisis should never be taken as an excuse for undue restrictions of democracy or human rights. Of particular concern is the negative impact of response measures on civil society and human rights defenders. So is the risk for abuse of surveillance technology, especially pertaining to the right to privacy. Sweden will continue to support and strengthening civil society, respect for freedom of expression and information – including on the internet – and reducing inequalities.

The pandemic further entails dramatic implications for gender equality and women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights. One of the most severe consequences is the increase in gender-based violence. But the consequences can be seen in every field, including in the economic area. We need to ensure a gender perspective in all response actions. Women’s rights organisations play a crucial role.

The Swedish Government wants to contribute to putting human rights, democracy and the rule of law at the core of the response to the pandemic. The Public Health Agency of Sweden has a national responsibility for public health issues and works to ensure good public health, and that the population is protected against communicable diseases and other health threats. FAQ about COVID-19 in Sweden, including recommendations, new legislation for restaurants, bars etc. can be found at the Agency’s webpage (<https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/the-public-health-agency-of-sweden/>). The National Board of Health and Welfare is continuously monitoring the development of COVID-19 in Sweden, and a selection of the statistics published translated into English can be found on its webpage (<https://socialstyrelsen.se/en/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-on-covid-19/>). All published statistics are available on the Swedish webpage.

In April, Sweden informed ODIHR about measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please see the attached note verbal.

The Swedish Government has taken initiative to set up a commission with the mandate to evaluate the handling to reduce the spread of COVID-19.