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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Management Segment

Agenda item 19 (f): Human rights

**Introduction of the report of
the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
on economic, social and cultural rights**

by

**Ilze Brands Kehris
Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to share with you today highlights from the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on economic, social and cultural rights (E/2022/...) which is under preparation and will be available soon.

Following last year's report to ECOSOC, it showcases the recent work of our Office in supporting Member States in responding to the Secretary-General's call for a new social contract through the work of the Surge Initiative launched by the High Commissioner in 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hurled the world into its worst economic crisis since the Second World War, exacerbating pre-existing patterns of discrimination, marginalization and inequalities. It has submerged lives and livelihoods and pushed over a hundred million more people into poverty.

The pandemic has exposed the dramatic consequences of chronic underinvestment in economic, social and cultural rights, including public health, social protection, food, housing, education, water and sanitation.

In recovering better, the Secretary-General has set out a range of practical measures needed for a transformative economy in his vision for "Our Common Agenda".

It requires us to better appreciate the role of economics in human rights promotion and protection and translate this into actions.

More than ever, we need to bring together economics, development and human rights rather than leaving them siloed and disconnected from each other.

Over the last two years, our Office has made it a priority to better bridge human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights with development practice and economic policy making.

In June last year, the High Commissioner called for a 'human rights-enhancing economy' in her speech to the Human Rights Council. Our work in this area has been supported by the Surge Initiative launched in response to growing social unrests, poverty and inequality and very slow progress of the 2030 Agenda.

It is clear for us that an economy that enhances human rights would uphold the dignity and rights of all and promotes sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

It compels us to ask some questions. How to boost investments in health, education and social protection considering they provide economic and societal benefits in the mid- to long-term? How can we promote well-being for all? How can we ensure that the benefits of economic growth leave no one behind? How can economic policies better align with human rights and

environmental justice goals? What would human rights enhancing economic measures and tools look like?

These are key questions that we seek to address as we work closely with UN partners and country teams in supporting Member States. The report I am presenting today highlights some of our nascent, but growing efforts under the Surge Initiative to assist countries and partners with tailored and context-specific analyses and advice, with our combined expertise on macroeconomics, human rights and sustainable development.

Allow me to share with you a few examples of our work towards a human rights-enhancing economy.

In Kenya and Zimbabwe, our Office is undertaking a human rights-based analysis of the national budget, with a view to identifying options to expand fiscal space and investment in key priority areas for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

In Malaysia and Somalia, we are looking at how social protection programmes can become more aligned with principles and standards of human rights and ILO conventions, as follow up to recommendations by the Universal Periodic Review and treaty bodies.

In Buenaventura district of Colombia, our Office has supported the local authorities in strengthening accountability and monitoring of the implementation of the 2017 Buenaventura Agreements that ended a general strike in 2017. During the strike, around 70 per cent of the district's population, mostly Afro-Colombians, took to the streets to protest structural violations of economic, social and cultural rights and to demand more resources for public services.

In Nepal, our Office is also helping to cost the minimum essential levels of the right to reproductive health care for the most marginalized women workers, including domestic and sex workers. Considering the economic cost of stigma and criminalization of certain forms of livelihood options, sex workers often pay three to four times more by going to distant private clinics rather than local public hospitals.

Excellencies,

Economy is a critical part of society that for too many years has operated outside the guardrails human rights can provide. A human rights enhancing economy is an essential part of the solution to addressing inequalities, fighting poverty, recovering better from COVID-19 and making societies more resilient to future crises. Above all, for the solution to be sustainable and equitable, human rights must be at the centre of economic policies and objectives.

Rethinking economy through a human rights approach will also be key in addressing climate change, violence, social unrest and conflicts worldwide. An economy that works for the benefit of all, in particular those in situations of vulnerability, will be key to a new social contract and rebuilding public trust between people, their governments and institutions.

The experience of the Surge Initiative has demonstrated the value of the human rights framework in guiding national economic policies, promoting and protecting equality and non-discrimination, allowing for the meaningful participation and empowerment of people in decision-making processes, and ensuring transparency and accountability.

Our Office stands ready to continue and hopefully expand our support to Member States to place human rights at the centre of their economic policies and development strategies towards building a more equitable and sustainable world.

Thank you.
