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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Management Segment

Agenda item 19 (f): Human rights

Introduction of report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

by

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here today to share with you preliminary highlights from the report of the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the COVID-19** crisis (E/2020/63) which is under preparation and will be available soon. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues in ECOSOC for enabling us to hold this meeting today through remote means.

The pandemic is presenting an unprecedented threat to societies and exposing the weaknesses of a political and economic system that has neglected to invest sufficiently in fundamental public services such as health care and social protection.

The report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights provides an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on key economic, social and cultural rights and suggests human rights based measures to protect the poorest and most marginalized groups and individuals in overcoming the crisis and building better and more inclusive societies.

Worldwide, the level of enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, especially for the most marginalized and disadvantaged was already inadequate prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. The current crisis has unveiled the wide gap between States' human rights commitments and the effective fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights. This gap has signaled the urgent need to accelerate the progress towards achieving specific goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the area of health, water and sanitation, decent work, social protection, housing and education, which commits to leaving no one behind and to reaching first those who are furthest behind.

The report raises an alarm that the pandemic is worsening the already scarce availability of essential healthcare services, goods and supplies, including those for testing and treating COVID-19 infections. In particular, poor health infrastructure, shortage of trained health personnel and medical equipment and supplies such as personal protective equipment, diagnostics and ventilators are undermining the enjoyment of the right health especially in those countries where the majority of the population lacks access to adequate health care.

The COVID-19 crisis is exerting an enormous and disproportionate negative impact on the most marginalized, including women, persons with disabilities, older persons, persons living in informal settlements, minorities, homeless persons, migrants, including those working in the informal and agricultural sectors, persons in detention and refugees. The reports calls for a State's response to the crisis that take into account and address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities these groups are subjected to, including persistent gender inequality.

Undoubtedly, women are suffering disproportionately from this crisis. They are over-represented in the health sector, at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, risking their lives and health. In the informal sector, they are in the impossible situation to operate and support their livelihood due to the restriction placed on movements. Women are also shouldering most of the

regular and additional unpaid care work imposed on families following the closure of childcare services and schools and who, in larger proportion than men, care for older persons and the sick.

The report invites States to adopt gender responsive measures to the crisis, including by promoting the participation of women in decision-making processes. Women represent half of the world's population and their meaningful participation is key as only their lived experiences, talents, and perspectives will make sure policy making for the recovery responds to their needs as well.

The crisis is having a more significant impact on those who have no access to social protection, a group which overwhelmingly includes children. The report recommends that children be at the center of any social protection scheme due to the heightened vulnerabilities that they face for their early stage of physical, intellectual and emotional development. Practice shows that universal cash transfers directed at families with children have been effective in the protection and fulfilment of children's rights, including their rights to life, to health and to education.

Finally, in looking towards recovering better, the report points out that States have a responsibility to protect everyone from the impact of COVID-19 and build resilience, by reprioritizing the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. This requires socio-economic measures based on human rights, and therefore anchored on participation, accountability, equality, non-discrimination and empowerment, with a specific focus on those most at risk or disproportionately impacted.

Such an approach would prioritize:

- access to reliable information as essential for the active and meaningful participation in decision-making of affected communities
- the use of maximum available resources to ensure the enjoyment of at least minimum essential levels of economic and social rights, including health, social protection, work, food, housing, water and sanitation and education
- the collection of comprehensive and disaggregated data to inform the design and implementation of effective response measures that reach those furthest behind first.

I thank you.
