

Check against delivery



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**

by

**Craig Mokhiber
Director, New York Office
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**21 July 2021
New York**



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 economic, social and cultural rights (E/2021/...) which is under preparation and will be available soon.

One year ago, on the occasion of the Nelson Mandela Day, the Secretary-General delivered a pivotal speech calling for a new social contract and a new global deal in addressing the inequalities further deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis across the world.

This report focuses on the recent work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in operationalizing the Secretary-General's call for a new social contract.

In late 2019, the High Commissioner for Human Rights launched the "Surge Initiative" in response to galloping inequalities, slow-paced implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and an outbreak of social protests across the globe.

The aim of the initiative was to step up country-focused operational advice to United Nations country teams on economic and social rights.

The Surge Initiative incorporates a team of macroeconomists with OHCHR expertise on economic, social and cultural rights, and sustainable development. This has contributed to filling a long-standing gap in the United Nations system to better link human rights with economics, by translating human rights standards and recommendations of United Nations human rights mechanisms into policy advice tailored to the country context for COVID-19 emergency measures and long-term socio-economic recovery.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, within months of launching the Surge Initiative, lent a compelling urgency to its objectives.

Since its inception, working through OHCHR field presences and UN Country Teams and missions, the Surge Initiative has contributed rights-based macroeconomic analysis to joint United Nations advocacy, planning and programming processes, including to Common Country Analysis and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in 79 countries and United Nations socio-economic impact assessments and response plans to the COVID-19 pandemic in 38 countries.

In Cambodia, where poverty has doubled during the pandemic, the Surge Initiative supported our human rights staff on the ground, in tandem with the entire United Nations system in the country, in jointly advocating for a well-designed and human rights-based social protection system; for the prioritization of healthcare budgets; and for broader civic space.

In Ecuador, the Surge initiative supported the UN Country Team to analyze and advise on the Government's COVID-19 emergency draft law, and assessed the barriers that prevented four vulnerable groups (indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, persons deprived of their liberty, and Afro-Ecuadorians) from accessing COVID-19 socio-economic measures adopted by the Government.

In Lebanon, our Office has worked closely with the Country Team and national partners to raise concern about the impact of the economic crisis, the pandemic, and the Beirut Port explosion on people's ability to meet basic needs. In cooperation with partners, our field team prepared a UN Country Team Position to the IMF which put forward reform proposals through a strong human rights lens, focusing on the rights and needs of people in situations of vulnerability.

In Madagascar, the Surge Initiative supported our Human Rights Advisor in conducting an impact assessment of the mining sector on economic and social rights. The assessment led to policy recommendations on needed revisions for the Mining Code to meet human rights standards and so that profits of the mining industry also benefit local communities most directly affected by the mining.

In Serbia, as the pandemic gathered pace, the Surge Initiative supported our human rights advisor who partnered with UN entities, Government agencies and civil society to undertake urgent outreach to the mainly Roma residents of sub-standard informal settlements across the country. An unprecedented effort to map the most urgent needs ultimately reached more than 700 settlements. It indicated key areas where inadequate access to safe water, electricity, sanitation and basic income pointed to both long-standing neglect and an imminent threat to public health. The exercise – which could only have been achieved with engagement from the entire Country Team – led to immediate and targeted responses by the authorities and facilitated follow-up planning to overcome systemic neglect and social exclusion.

Excellencies,

These are a few among many examples of country engagement by OHCHR supported by the Surge Initiative highlighted in the report.

The experience of the Surge Initiative has demonstrated the value of the human rights framework in guiding national policies and efforts to strengthen social justice and foster a transformative and human rights-enhancing economy that addresses pre-existing inequalities and avoids creating new ones.

The pandemic has not only highlighted glaring disparities in people’s enjoyment of human rights, but also represents an opportunity for change and improvement as we strive to recover better together.

The Secretary-General’s vision of the “new social contract” and his “Call to Action for Human Rights” spells out the transformative role of human rights in our common endeavors.

The Office stands ready to support Member States wishing to seize this generational opportunity to place human rights front and center in recovery efforts and in development strategies towards building a more equitable and sustainable world.

Thank you.
