



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited  
3 July 2020

Original: English

---

## Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixtieth session

8 June–3 July 2020

Agenda item 7

**Adoption of the report of the Committee on its sixtieth session**

### Draft report

*Rapporteur:* Mr. Felix-Fils **Eboa Ebongue** (Cameroon)

#### Addendum

### Programme questions: proposed programme budget for 2021

(Item 3 (a))

#### Programme 20 Human rights

1. During its sixtieth session, the Committee considered programme 20, Human rights, of the proposed programme plan for 2021 and programme performance information for 2019 ([A/75/6 \(Sect. 24\)](#)). The Committee also had before it a note by the Secretariat on the review of the proposed programme plan by sectoral, functional and regional bodies ([E/AC.51/2020/10](#)).

2. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights introduced the programme and responded to questions raised by the Committee during its consideration of the programme.

#### Discussion

3. Delegations expressed their appreciation and support for the programme and for the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and emphasized its important role in the promotion and protection of all human rights. Delegations recognized the Office as the leading United Nations entity on human rights. A delegation commended the efforts of the Office towards the goal of full realization of human rights for all.

4. A delegation shared the view that human rights were fundamentally about “living a happy life”, and, in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the right to life and the right to health were of greatest importance. The



delegation commented that the programme should be implemented with a people-centred approach, with the aim of improving the rights of all people in a coordinated manner.

5. A delegation stated that human rights were recognized as one of the fundamental objectives of the Organization. The mainstreaming of human rights in the United Nations system was welcomed. Delegations also welcomed the focus of the programme on persons with disabilities. Appreciation was expressed for the emphasis placed on the areas of combating poverty, countering discrimination on all internationally recognized grounds, such as race, sex, language and religion, and advancing the rights of children and women. A delegation welcomed the commitment and work carried out by the Office in the areas of research, production of standards and action in the field, considering the often difficult conditions in which the Office operated. A delegation expressed support for the Secretary-General's priority of prevention, noting that human rights were the best prevention tool.

6. The view was expressed that the Office should adopt a more balanced approach in the geographic representation of its staff, in particular senior officers, to enhance transparency of the management and decision-making process. Another delegation echoed similar views, stating that the number of experts at the top level was not representative of the Organization.

7. Support for the independence of OHCHR and all the human rights mechanisms was expressed. Noting that the Office received significantly more requests for technical assistance than it could resource, a delegation observed that that was a testimony to the high regard in which the Office was held and the value that it could bring. The delegation also pointed out that that was a testament to the urgent work to which the Office needed to respond. Several delegations made remarks on the budget level, being zero-growth or reduced, in particular at a time when demand was growing owing to competing human rights crises, including ones caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in that connection expressed concerns about how the pandemic would have an impact on the implementation of the subprogrammes. The view was expressed that the pandemic highlighted existing inequalities and that, in that regard, addressing inequalities and discrimination became increasingly important. A delegation noted the reliance on extrabudgetary resources and expressed the view that that was not a sustainable funding modality in the long term, as it could have an impact on the ability of the Office to carry out its mandated activities.

8. Regarding the mandate of the Human Rights Council, it was recognized that it dealt with human rights issues and, in that connection, a delegation expressed the view that the United Nations system as a whole must improve in that area.

9. A delegation encouraged all Member States to implement their human rights obligations and commitments, regardless of their level of development, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The view was expressed that full realization of any right did not require resource transfers and debt forgiveness, and that a lack of development was not a legitimate reason for failure to implement well-defined and universally agreed human rights commitments and obligations.

10. A delegation welcomed the efforts of OHCHR to increase transparency in its work. The delegation found the practice of holding briefings in Geneva to be a useful approach in building confidence and cooperation between Member States and OHCHR and in strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights. However, the same delegation stressed that those meetings should not be limited to collecting opinions of Member States but should also provide an opportunity for more substantive discussions. It was observed that, unfortunately, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been no time for substantive discussion in 2020.

11. Delegations expressed their appreciation for the high quality of the report, including its clarity and comprehensive content, as well as its impactful and much improved presentation. A delegation welcomed the return to the “normal” format, stating that the experiment with the new format in 2019 had not been successful. Regarding the presentation, a delegation recognized that the improvements greatly facilitated the reading and understanding of the programme narrative.

12. With regard to the mandate and background of the programme, a delegation stressed the importance of making correct references to mandates and made a comment about the reference to the mandate being derived partly from articles 13 and 62 of the Charter of the United Nations. The delegation disagreed with that reference and stated that those articles were mandates of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, respectively. In that connection, the delegation stressed the importance of being precise and of not interfering in the mandates of other United Nations bodies.

13. In reference to the list of challenges in paragraph 24.4, under Mandates and background, a view was expressed that increasing conflict caused by racism and poverty were challenges missing from the list, and a more comprehensive list was therefore requested. Another view was expressed that there was not an established link between climate change and human rights violations. In that regard, and because it was felt that the list was not complete, a delegation suggested that such a link should be avoided. In contrast, another delegation voiced support for the language in paragraphs 24.4 and 24.5 and expressed appreciation for the emphasis in the programme on the importance of human rights and the focus on combating poverty and countering discrimination on all internationally recognized grounds, including race, sex, language or religion. The delegation recognized a link between climate change and human rights, specifically the impact on women, girls and vulnerable groups.

14. On the issue of terminology, a delegation stressed that only terminology agreed upon in intergovernmental bodies should be used. In that regard, the delegation was of the view that the terms “human rights-based approach” and “human rights-friendly policies” should be changed to “people-centred approach” and “people-centred policies”, respectively. The delegation further noted that “multiple languages” should be changed to “six official languages of the United Nations”.

15. Concerning the list of legislative mandates, a delegation commented that many resolutions had been approved by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Commission on Human Rights, and requested that they be reflected in the list of the programme. The delegation specifically requested the inclusion of resolutions on “human rights and unilateral coercive measures”.

16. Furthermore, a delegation expressed disappointment that, while many relevant resolutions were listed, such as General Assembly resolution [72/195](#) on improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons, the programme did not make any specific reference to the work done in that regard in the programme narrative. In addition, the delegation noted that those resolutions were consensual, while many of the country-specific resolutions were not, and, in its view, the country-specific resolutions were counterproductive. It was further stated that, in the context of limited resources, mandates that had been adopted consensually should be prioritized.

17. A question was raised as to why the number of resolutions included in the list of mandates in the overall section was smaller than the number listed under the individual subprogrammes.

18. Regarding cooperation and collaboration with other entities and the United Nations system, a delegation welcomed the engagement of the Office with a wide

range of stakeholders, including peacekeeping missions, civil society working with Member States, and national human rights mechanisms.

19. It was observed that better integration with United Nations country teams and headquarters planning would increase the value, strategically, in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically those related to “prevention of conflict and promotion of human rights”. In that connection, reflections were sought on how integration could be improved.

20. A delegation expressed the view that the mandate and scope of the cooperation between OHCHR, United Nations country teams and resident coordinators were concentrated on development activities. The delegation expressed the view that integrating human rights approaches into the work of the United Nations country teams was the mandate of neither the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights nor the United Nations country teams. A view was expressed that the work with other United Nations entities was to support Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and that it should not go beyond that mandate. In contrast, another delegation expressed support for a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and shared the view that the 2030 Agenda provided an opportunity and road map for advancing the realization of human rights, given the interdependent nature of its goals.

21. A delegation expressed the expectation that the programme would uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States, refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of States, conduct its business in an impartial, objective and fact-based manner and continue its dialogue and cooperation with Member States.

22. Regarding subprogramme 1.A, Human rights mainstreaming, a view was expressed that there was no intergovernmental decision on the exact list of United Nations areas into which human rights would be mainstreamed, and for that reason it would have been more appropriate not to have such a list. Support was expressed for strengthening the human rights perspective in the country teams, and the view was shared that human rights were essential for development and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Under planned results for 2021, result 2: United Nations country teams integrate human rights approaches into their work (new result), a delegation referred to the mention in paragraph 24.25 of resident coordinators and United Nations country teams “co-leading the United Nations Sustainable Development Group task team on ‘Leaving no one behind’” and expressed the view that it went beyond the mandate of OHCHR.

23. With regard to subprogramme 1.B, Right to development, a delegation commented that the subprogramme was “on the right track” and encouraged its strengthened efforts in that area.

24. In relation to subprogramme 1.C, Research and analysis, under planned results for 2021, specifically result 1: persons with albinism: the challenge of leaving no one behind (result carried over from 2020), a delegation recognized the initiatives that were under way, but expressed doubt as to whether they would reap fruit, considering that albinism was not only connected to the person, but also to health and financial issues, and, in that regard, called for a holistic strategy.

25. With regard to subprogramme 2, Supporting human rights treaty bodies, a view was expressed that addressing racial discrimination should remain a top priority, noting the current protests against racism across the world. In that connection, a delegation expressed support for engagement with civil society and noted with appreciation the increased participation of people of African descent in the work of different human rights mechanisms, in particular those related to young people and

cultural institutions. A view was also expressed that it was important to increase opportunities for engagement of the Chairs of the treaty bodies, and measures that would promote further cooperation were welcomed.

26. Furthermore, in relation to subprogramme 2, with regard to national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up, the work of the Office in assisting States, upon their request, in establishing such mechanisms was welcomed. A delegation noted the added value of creating such mechanisms in Geneva, as they had been able to deal with a backlog of reporting obligations and had improved internal communication on human rights.

27. The performance of treaty bodies was stressed, and the view was expressed that the assistance provided to States by OHCHR in the implementation and improvement of national mechanisms, for reporting and follow-up, was crucial for the implementation.

28. With regard to subprogramme 3, Advisory services, technical cooperation and field activities, a delegation expressed the view that the example provided under programme performance in 2019, “enhanced capacity to prevent harm to civilians in the context of military and counterterrorism operations”, was particularly useful in highlighting the importance of human rights integration into United Nations peacekeeping operations, citing the case of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and other missions, including the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel operations. Furthermore, in relation to the work of the Office with peacekeeping operations, a comment was made that it was an “original, operational approach, close to the realities on the ground”, and the view was expressed that such an approach of preventive engagement with the armed forces might constitute a risk for the Organization, but at the same time it seemed promising. The view was expressed that such work was at the centre of the security and development nexus and, without achievements in that area, the 2030 Agenda would remain a dead letter in many countries affected by war or chronic insecurity. Information was sought on the lessons learned by OHCHR and what could be applied in the future regarding work with peacekeeping operations.

29. Furthermore, with regard to subprogramme 3, specifically paragraph 24.75 of the strategy, a delegation noted the phrase “will ensure the efficient and effective functioning of the country-specific special procedures” and commented that the word “thematic”, which had previously been included in that context, had been omitted. In that connection, a question was raised as to the reason for the omission and whether it meant that OHCHR intended to ensure efficient functioning only of country-specific mandates. In addition, in relation to the same paragraph, another delegation expressed the view that country-specific issues and fact-finding missions should not be politicized.

30. With regard to the deliverables under subprogramme 3, the view was expressed that the Security Council was not the right organ to discuss human rights issues, and, in that connection, a request was made to reduce the number of reports that OHCHR was to submit to the Council, as detailed in table 24.8, Subprogramme 3: deliverables for the period 2019–2021, by category and subcategory.

31. Concerning subprogramme 4, Supporting the Human Rights Council, its subsidiary bodies and mechanisms, delegations expressed support for the mandate of the independent expert on persons with albinism, and a delegation advised that, together with other Member States, it would present a resolution during the forty-fourth session of the Council to renew the mandate of the independent expert.

32. With regard to gender-oriented human rights issues, the problem of women being excluded from land tenure and owning property was highlighted. A delegation

raised the prevalent problem of sexual exploitation, including breast ironing and sexual mutilation in Africa, noting, however, that progress had been made in that area by OHCHR and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). A delegation called for more progress in the area of women and girls in school, and a suggestion was made that an improved collaborative strategy with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization would help in that regard.

33. A delegation drew attention to a sentence in paragraph 24.111, “Under subprogramme 4, extrabudgetary resources support the work of the special procedures mandate holders, including the preparation of their missions and reports thereon”, and expressed the view that it was inaccurate considering that funding for activities mandated by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council were funded from the United Nations regular budget and that, for that reason, extrabudgetary resources were to be used for complementary activities. A request for clarification in that regard was made, to avoid the impression that special procedures existed only on the basis of voluntary contributions.

34. A delegation noted the proposed increase in temporary assistance positions in treaty bodies. In that connection, a detailed justification, taking into account existing and new mandates, available resources and workload statistics, was requested. The view was expressed that the request for resources was not aligned with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 68/268. The delegation further opined that a report of the Secretary-General could not be used as justification, as there was no agreement with its conclusions. The delegation pointed out that the treaty bodies had already received sufficient additional resources but had used them for non-mandated activities.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations**

35. **Owing to a shortage of time, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly review, at its seventy-fifth session, the programme plan of programme 20, Human rights, of the proposed programme budget for 2021, under the agenda item entitled “Programme planning”.**