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Chair: Mr. Doualeh (Djibouti)
later: Ms. Abraham (Vice-Chair) (Trinidad and Tobago)

Contents

General debate (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

General debate (continued)

1. **Ms. Fatima** (Bangladesh) said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities within and across societies. In Bangladesh, the Government had taken pragmatic decisions to strike a balance between lives and livelihoods, including stimulus packages for key sectors and the most vulnerable groups in society. The Committee had a special responsibility to promote actions to protect the most vulnerable and chart a recovery that left no one behind. Ensuring universal and affordable access to vaccines should be the top priority. According to the World Bank, 84 per cent of vaccine doses had been administered to people in high- and upper-middle-income countries, while lower-income countries had received less than 1 per cent. That inequality must be addressed, and vaccines must be understood as a global public good.

2. Bangladesh was deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on women. Gender-based violence had risen and many women had lost their employment and their income. The country had taken targeted measures to address the impact of the pandemic on women, including special allocations for women-led businesses, interest-free loans and special helplines to combat domestic violence and child marriage.

3. Education was the most effective tool for empowering people and upholding their rights. During the pandemic, education systems throughout the world had suffered and almost half of all students had been affected by school closures. Millions of students in low-income countries had no access to remote learning and millions of girls might never return to school. Rates of early marriage and child labour had risen. A global action plan was needed to prioritize education recovery by investing in digital tools and services, Internet access and capacity-building for teachers. Digital education must also be recognized as a global public good.

4. During the pandemic, migrants had faced unemployment, salary cuts, a lack of access to health care or other social services and the threat of forced return. In Bangladesh, 2 million migrant workers, including women, had come home. Bangladesh would continue to work with all countries, especially destination countries, to protect their rights and ensure their well-being.

5. Over 1 million Rohingya continued to live in the camps in Bangladesh as the situation in Myanmar deteriorated. None had been able to return home during the previous four years. Bangladesh was doing its best

to ensure humanitarian assistance for them and had included all eligible Rohingya in a COVID-19 vaccination drive to curb the spread of the disease in the camps. The international community must continue its efforts to ensure the safe, sustainable and dignified return of the Rohingya to their homes in Myanmar. The creation of a conducive environment in Rakhine State and accountability for crimes committed against them were also critical.

6. As a member of the Human Rights Council and a party to all core human rights instruments, Bangladesh was constructively engaged with all concerned to ensure the promotion and protection of all people everywhere. Civil society partners and the media remained an integral part of all such efforts.

7. **Mr. Francis** (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the rate of mutation of the COVID-19 virus was alarming, and countries that had seemed to weather the worst of the crisis were being thrown back into precarious circumstances. The pandemic had overwhelmed many sectors, had hampered socioeconomic development and had affected livelihoods. Given that no one was safe until everyone was safe, measures must be taken to ensure equitable access to and distribution of vaccines throughout the world. The Committee had an important role to play in ensuring that every human being enjoyed the highest attainable standard of health by addressing inequalities, advancing social progress and promoting and protecting human rights.

8. The rights and well-being of children were priorities for the Government. National policies provided for the protection and care of children and offered long-term guidance to inform the development of suitable laws and institutional infrastructure. There was compelling evidence that the continued high investment by Trinidad and Tobago in education over the previous 59 years had been a driver of progress. The Government remained attentive to the needs of all the country's children, with special emphasis on those living in extreme poverty and those with mental health issues and special needs.

9. Trinidad and Tobago was proud of its efforts to ensure that women and girls were equal partners in the collective pursuit of peaceful and sustainable societies and advancing human rights. Women's participation on an equal basis with men must remain at the heart of efforts to recover from the pandemic and to ensure better preparedness. The Government's strategy was to facilitate the incorporation of a gender perspective in all areas of development. The role of the family and the empowerment of women and girls was not overlooked. Recently, the Government had officially recognized

widows as a vulnerable group and had implemented measures to provide them and their families with support. Concerned that violence against women and girls continued unabated, the Government had made efforts to create safe spaces for women and girls to live free from violence and was accelerating efforts to change negative behaviours and stereotypes to ensure respect for the rights of women and girls at home, in the workplace and in the community. The country had established a gender-based violence unit and a national sex offenders' registry and had amended laws to provide for the electronic monitoring of offenders.

10. As a multi-ethnic and diverse society, Trinidad and Tobago valued mutual respect, tolerance and freedom from fear of persecution. It was committed to the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance. Out of a recognition of the challenges to sustainable development posed by violent crime and international criminal networks involved in trafficking in drugs and persons, the country had focused on security, the maintenance of law and order and addressing and redressing the social conditions that served as incubators for criminal activity.

11. **Ms. Shahminan** (Brunei Darussalam) said that, although the pandemic had exposed the world's vulnerabilities, it had also brought opportunities to explore innovative and sustainable ways of implementing development plans. The Government of Brunei Darussalam remained committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of all people, and particularly those of women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Brunei Darussalam had prioritized the safety of its people in its pandemic recovery efforts. It had ensured access to free vaccines for all citizens and residents, with priority given to vulnerable populations. The Government had also maintained delivery of its social protection services for vulnerable populations, including through the contactless payment of monthly pensions and the creation of an online welfare platform. In addition, it had continued to ensure that children from underprivileged families were provided with access to learning materials and devices.

12. During the pandemic, volunteerism and community advocacy had surged. Young people, including alumni of the national youth service programme, had helped to power that civic engagement, which was essential for the country's efforts to foster social resilience, dynamism and empathy. In an effort to address the impact of the pandemic not only on physical health but also on mental well-being, various hotlines

had been set up for people who had been adversely affected by the pandemic.

13. The Government had promulgated an order addressing abuse and neglect of persons with disabilities. It had also amended the Old Age and Disability Pensions Act, introducing an allowance for those caring for persons with disabilities. It had launched the National Framework on Child Protection, a guide that aimed to enhance the existing child protection system during the 2020–2024 period and set out strategies for addressing key national priorities related to child protection with a whole-of-nation and whole-of-Government approach. The Government had adopted the Brunei Darussalam Economic Blueprint, which aimed to produce highly skilled, adaptive and innovative people. The Digital Economy Masterplan 2025, launched in June 2020, attached great importance to fostering relevant skills and knowledge to guide the implementation of digital transformation initiatives.

14. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Brunei Darussalam was the Chair for 2021, had developed the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy, an initiative that would guide policymakers in addressing the challenge of sustaining investment in care work as an indispensable component of inclusive socioeconomic growth. The Framework would complement the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan and the Association's post-2025 vision. ASEAN was also working on finalizing the Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on the Importance of the Family for Community Development and Nation Building, which aimed to promote the role of the family in community development and nation-building and to address children's rights and the empowerment of older persons.

15. **Ms. Persaud** (Guyana) said that the Committee had once again commenced its session in the ominous shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was disrupting engagement with mandate holders and the conduct of negotiations. Decades of progress on social development were being reversed and the situations of marginalized and vulnerable populations were worsening. The pandemic had demonstrated that countries could not operate in isolation and that global goals required national implementation and international cooperation. There was a need for a people-centred and inclusive approach to recovery that ensured respect for human rights and democracy. While the Committee had a reputation for passionate debates and spirited negotiations, it must channel its energies constructively and work to find solutions that would improve the lives of all.

16. The Government of Guyana had made significant investments in progressive and sustainable projects to improve the lives of the population, including the most vulnerable. It had provided cash grants and relief packages to cushion the financial hardships caused by the pandemic. The protection of children and the creation of an environment conducive to their overall development was a priority for Guyana. Recognizing that a supportive family environment was key to a child's well-being, the country had launched a campaign entitled "Together, Let's Keep Children Safe", which included activities to promote bonding between children and their parents. The COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in many lost hours of learning despite efforts to provide virtual instruction, and disparities in access to the Internet and devices had left many children behind. For that reason, most schools in Guyana had reopened for in-person classes. The pandemic had magnified the existing digital divide, with rural and indigenous communities overrepresented among the offline population. The Government supported safe Internet use and looked forward to upcoming negotiations on the elaboration of a comprehensive international instrument on cybercrime.

17. It was a matter of deep concern that, 26 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, no country in the world had achieved gender equality. A concerted effort was being made in Guyana to promote the empowerment of women and girls and substantial progress had been made in ensuring their equal access to education, health care and social protection services. Nevertheless, violence and discrimination against women and girls remained prevalent. The Government was taking action to address the root causes of gender-based violence and was working to eliminate gender stereotypes. As financial independence was an important component of women's empowerment, the Women's Innovation and Investment Network had recently been launched to create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for Guyanese women.

18. The country's 2021 national budget had allocated \$150 million for the construction of a specialized training complex to prepare persons with disabilities to enter the labour market. Despite efforts to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, new forms of prejudice and injustice were emerging in parts of the world. The Government, in an effort to promote racial and religious harmony, had participated in the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Guyana also remained committed to seeking international reparations for the crime of the enslavement of Africans.

19. Lastly, Guyana called for COVID-19 vaccines to be treated as a global public good, for equitable distribution of vaccines and for an end to vaccine discrimination. Furthermore, no one should be subject to restrictions based on which vaccine they had received.

20. **Mr. Arriola Ramírez** (Paraguay) said that COVID-19 vaccines remained difficult for many countries to obtain, and Paraguay was grateful to the States from which it had received vaccine donations. While the pandemic had had a devastating impact on social development, it had nevertheless led to progress in the use of technology. In Paraguay, it had accelerated the implementation of an integrated online information system that provided access to social programmes.

21. The Government of Paraguay prioritized health and human rights, with particular attention to children's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment. It had a national system for the promotion and protection of children's rights and was implementing projects to combat child labour and violence against children. In the area of women's rights, it had worked with United Nations agencies to assist women in violent situations in the context of the health emergency, and it was conducting campaigns to encourage women's use of information and communications technologies and to combat disinformation. Noting women's leadership in health care, family and community tasks and in containment and social protection plans during the pandemic, he said that the crisis had provided an opportunity to envisage a new development model that fostered women's financial inclusion.

22. The Government was continuing to work to promote the country's 19 indigenous languages, which were a fundamental part of its identity, and it had adopted a national plan for indigenous peoples in 2021. Within the United Nations, his delegation had supported the creation of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent. Paraguay remained firmly committed to multilateralism and to the work of the Committee.

23. **Mr. Youssouf Aden Moussa** (Djibouti) said that building a robust multilateralism required a willingness to learn from the lessons of the past. The difficulties in ensuring equitable access to effective COVID-19 vaccines could have been overcome if lessons had been learned from past pandemics, such as the H1N1 swine influenza pandemic of 2009. While some countries had made encouraging efforts, the world had again witnessed a reflexive adoption of vaccine nationalism.

24. The pandemic had led to a global economic slowdown, had hampered progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and

had made poverty more acute, especially among the most vulnerable. To counteract its effects, the Government had developed a social and economic response plan with the assistance of development partners. Its targeted interventions focused on food distribution, cash transfers to the self-isolating, the preservation of jobs, the funding of health-care expenses, financial support for the most affected public institutions, support for small enterprises and support for the informal sector. It was a matter of urgency to counter unequal access to vaccines.

25. The close link between gender equality and sustainable development was important for progress. Djibouti believed that the empowerment of women should be placed at the heart of public policy and had made progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 after decades of strengthening their social and legal status.

26. As the promotion and protection of human rights was incumbent on all, efforts must be made to strengthen the human rights architecture in order to respond promptly to any violations. Djibouti attached great importance to the fight against racism and welcomed the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the political declaration adopted on that occasion. Lastly, Djibouti condemned terrorism wherever it took place and was concerned about the proliferation of such actions, especially in Africa.

27. **Mr. Sisa** (Botswana) said that, in March 2021, his Government had launched a national COVID-19 vaccination programme that had surpassed the World Health Organization (WHO) target of vaccinating at least 10 per cent of the eligible population by September of that year. Botswana expected to have vaccinated at least 64 per cent of its population by December 2021, which was close to the African Union target of 70 per cent vaccination by 2022. An improvement in the country's COVID-19 situation had allowed the Government to reopen its economy and, on 30 September 2021, to end the state of public emergency. Botswana commended its development partners for donating vaccines and providing other forms of assistance, which had helped immensely to stabilize the situation. Botswana supported the call for a worldwide vaccination campaign, which would help to contain the spread of COVID-19 and improve vaccination rates in Africa. It also supported the sharing and transfer of knowledge and the waiving of intellectual property rights relating to vaccine production.

28. Botswana continued to extend assistance to vulnerable groups facing poverty, hunger, unemployment and inequality. The Government was addressing child malnutrition through a universal food programme at all primary schools and at health facilities. In areas with high rates of malnutrition, all children aged between 6 months and 5 years received supplementary feeding. In an effort to improve food security, the Government would launch a transformative food production strategy in 2022. It was also working with United Nations agencies to address challenges facing vulnerable and marginalized groups such as adolescent girls, young women, persons with disabilities and people living with HIV.

29. Botswana appreciated the assistance it had received from United Nations agencies in addressing challenges relating to COVID-19, gender-based violence, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the improvement of sexual and reproductive health services. The Government was optimistic that, through such collaboration, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would be accelerated during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

30. **Mr. Kouakou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to exacerbate the multifaceted challenges facing the world. The emergence of new, more contagious variants was undermining the efforts of the international community to contain the pandemic and limit its devastating socioeconomic consequences. Côte d'Ivoire therefore welcomed the progress made towards lasting solutions to the health crisis, particularly through the development of affordable vaccines, which must be made available to all.

31. Despite the difficult economic circumstances caused by the pandemic, the Government remained committed to carrying out robust reforms aimed at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. Accordingly, a number of legislative and institutional measures, including the National Social Protection Strategy, had helped to reduce inequality, especially gender inequality, and to promote and protect human rights, particularly those of women and children. The Strategy, which was aimed at eradicating poverty and fostering social resilience, focused on improving the standard of living among the poorest, including through direct cash transfers to more than 177,000 households in 2020, a number that had increased considerably in 2021. The Strategy was also aimed at improving access to basic social services, including health services, following the

operationalization of universal health coverage from 1 January 2021 and a massive investment in human capital. Vulnerable groups were supported through efforts to prevent and respond to abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion.

32. His delegation noted with concern that, 26 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, gender parity had not yet been achieved worldwide. The Generation Equality Forum, which had been held in France and Mexico in 2021, had provided an opportunity to reaffirm a commitment to accelerating the achievement of that goal. Côte d'Ivoire had launched initiatives in that regard, including the enactment of a law on women's representation in elected assemblies, which provided that 30 per cent of a political party's candidates for election must be women.

33. The protection and promotion of the rights of the child was also a priority for Côte d'Ivoire. The Government had made education free and compulsory for children from 6 to 16 years of age and had taken legislative measures to penalize early and forced marriage, genital mutilation and child trafficking and exploitation. More generally, the promotion and protection of human rights should be consistent with the principle of non-interference and be based on constructive dialogue. Côte d'Ivoire had ratified all of the main international legal instruments on human rights. It had continued to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and had worked to strengthen its relevant legislation, having established an independent national human rights commission to provide oversight of governmental actions.

34. Much remained to be done to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly when it came to issues of poverty and social well-being. In view of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts must be directed towards the development of more resilient health systems, the provision of universal health coverage and adequate preparation for future threats.

35. **Mr. Valtýsson** (Iceland) said that the pandemic continued to have serious implications for the promotion and protection of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. It had hindered children's education, had caused people to lose their jobs and livelihoods and had placed tremendous pressure on health systems. Amid community restrictions, cases of gender-based violence, violence against children and hateful acts against minority and marginalized groups had been rising, with women, children and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons among the most affected.

36. A serious decline had been observed in respect for human rights defenders, journalists, environmentalists, feminists and defenders of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, who risked their lives and liberty by drawing attention to injustice, standing up for democracy and equality and speaking out against discrimination and intolerance. All States must respect the principle of the rule of law and defend the freedoms and rights of their citizens without discrimination.

37. The promotion of children's rights was a priority for Iceland. The Government strived to protect them from any kind of violence, abuse or exploitation and to provide services to child victims of violence. The Barnahús ("children's house") model, developed by Iceland and adopted by approximately 20 other countries, was a child-friendly and multiagency response framework to child abuse that took a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to the investigation of cases involving child abuse and provided appropriate therapeutic services for victims.

38. The experience of Iceland showed the value of inclusiveness and equality for sustainable development and the importance of improvements in gender equality for economic and social progress. As full sexual and reproductive health and rights were key to ensuring gender equality, Iceland had in 2019 passed progressive legislation ensuring the right of women to self-determination over their own bodies. The country was also proud of its initiatives relating to Equal Pay Day and its leadership role within the action coalition on gender-based violence. Men and boys must join forces with women and girls to advance gender equality and be agents of change.

39. In many countries, people were persecuted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Punishing people for their feelings, self-defined identity or consensual relations was as hateful as penalizing religious beliefs or race or ethnic background. In that regard, the Icelandic parliament had recently passed three laws to improve the legal framework for transgender and intersex persons. Although challenges remained, social stigma had decreased for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, unleashing their potential for society as a whole. The belief that all should enjoy fundamental freedoms and dignity was therefore not only a principled stand, but also a practical one.

40. **Ms. Kamara** (Sierra Leone) said that urgent action was needed to alleviate the health and socioeconomic burdens of the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect vulnerable populations, including by

guaranteeing vaccine access at all levels. Her Government had continued to deliver on its social contract by supporting the most vulnerable citizens, building strong institutions and infrastructure, creating more inclusive democratic spaces and ensuring peace, security and stability, particularly in the Mano River Basin.

41. As the pandemic continued to have devastating consequences for humanity, women and girls had been the most affected both in social and economic terms. Sierra Leone remained fully committed to ensuring that women and girls could live in dignity and freedom and be protected from all forms of violence and abuse. It had undertaken numerous initiatives in that regard, including a campaign to improve access to reproductive health-care services and a national bill for gender equality and women's empowerment, which would ensure that 30 per cent of parliamentary seats and Cabinet positions were held by women. Rape and sexual violence had been declared a national emergency; the penalties for those crimes had been increased and one-stop centres had been established to better serve survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. At the international level, her country had embarked on a global campaign for access to justice and remedies for the survivors of sexual violence, and it encouraged all Member States to become signatories to the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action.

42. In line with the principle of leaving no one behind, her Government was taking action to ensure that children with disabilities were not excluded from the school environment. To that end, it was providing schools with disability-friendly facilities and raising awareness among teachers of the needs of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Sierra Leone had also continued to eliminate threats to democratic freedoms and human rights, including through the repeal of the nation's criminal and seditious libel laws. In addition, the death penalty in Sierra Leone had been abolished and there were currently no politicians or rights activists imprisoned for expressing their beliefs or journalists imprisoned for the practice of journalism.

43. The COVID-19 pandemic threatened to slow down or even reverse the gains made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It was time to intensify efforts and to act in solidarity in order to achieve equality and make the post-pandemic world a better place for all.

44. **Mr. Ly** (Senegal) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused severe setbacks to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, exacerbating inequality both between and within States.

While the efforts by States to respond to the pandemic had been commendable, international cooperation had been seriously hampered by vaccine inequity between developed and developing countries, which risked prolonging the impact of the pandemic and threatened global economic and social gains. Access to vaccines for all remained the only effective global response that would put an end to the pandemic. Senegal therefore welcomed the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility as a mechanism of true human solidarity. However, issues surrounding its implementation must be addressed by strengthening pandemic preparation and response capacities.

45. The swift elaboration and establishment of a fair and equitable international treaty on the global pandemic response was essential. At the same time, post-pandemic recovery efforts must continue in order to increase the resilience of health-care systems and minimize the socioeconomic impact. Senegal welcomed the consensus on the issuance of special drawing rights and called for their rapid implementation to support the weakened economies of developing countries. The international community should also consider a paradigm shift towards stronger economic and financial governance, in which Africa would act as a partner rather than an assisted party.

46. The pandemic had demonstrated the collective vulnerability of nations, which needed to find new ways of living together. Building a future free from stigmatization and intolerance of differences was therefore imperative in order to combat nationalism. In that connection, Senegal wished to reiterate the collective responsibility of the international community towards the Palestinian people and their legitimate aspirations and called for an intensification of efforts to reach a just and viable two-State solution based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. His delegation also welcomed the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and supported the political declaration adopted on that occasion.

47. The advancement of women, their well-being and their personal development in society must be prioritized on a daily basis. It was essential to take concrete action to empower women and girls and ensure that their rights were sufficiently protected. In that regard, Senegal had taken significant gender-responsive measures to ensure the inclusive and equal participation of men and women in the development process.

48. **Ms. Pierre Fabre** (Haiti) said that little progress had been made towards the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, although that was one of the fundamental objectives of the United Nations. It was distressing to witness the expression of xenophobia in certain countries. While freedom of opinion was an inalienable right, racism and xenophobia were crimes, not matters of opinion. Efforts must therefore be made to foster a spirit of tolerance and acceptance of differences.

49. With regard to the promotion and protection of human rights, her delegation condemned all human rights violations and urged States to redouble their efforts to better ensure respect for the rights and liberties of all individuals. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionately affected the most vulnerable, worsening access to basic products and services, including children's access to education. Vulnerability had also been heightened by rising rates of unemployment, an increasing lack of access to health-care services for persons with disabilities and the escalation of violence against women.

50. Haiti had faced several challenges over recent years, including the earthquakes of 2010 and 2021, the cholera epidemic, Hurricane Matthew and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which had claimed numerous victims and been disastrous for the economy. Haiti could not overcome those challenges alone, given their enormity and the lack of available resources. In that connection, her delegation called for strengthened international cooperation, in line with the humanist values of solidarity and mutual aid. Genuine and concrete international solidarity was also required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that no one was left behind.

51. **Ms. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America) said that standing with human rights defenders and speaking out against all forms of human rights violations was crucial. The United States was gravely concerned by the human rights situation in several countries and, if elected to the Human Rights Council, would work to defend human rights accordingly.

52. The situation in Afghanistan was deeply worrying. Claims by the Taliban that it would build a more inclusive political order, respecting the rights of all persons, had not been reflected in its actions. United Nations efforts to monitor and report on the human rights situation moving forward were therefore welcome. In China, the Government of that country was attempting to divert attention from the genocide and crimes against humanity occurring in Xinjiang. Her delegation would not remain silent while over 1 million

Uighurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups were being detained in internment camps. The United States also condemned extreme restrictions on human rights and on religious, linguistic and cultural traditions in Tibet, and called for the immediate release of democratic activists by the authorities in Hong Kong. In Syria, the Assad regime must release arbitrarily detained Syrians and provide information on those missing.

53. **Ms. Nour Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking on a point of order, said that her delegation wished to correct a mistake made by the Permanent Representative of the United States in her use of the word "regime" when speaking about the Syrian Arab Republic. The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic was very passionate about upholding the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly that of equal sovereignty among States. The term "regime" would imply that the Permanent Representative of the United States believed herself to be addressing the representatives of 139 regimes, which the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic believed to be incorrect. She therefore called upon all Member States to use the correct forms of address.

54. **The Chair** said that such concerns would be better expressed in exercise of the right of reply.

55. **Ms. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America) said that as work was being done to hold the Syrian regime to account for its atrocities, her delegation looked forward to hearing from the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic as it documented credible cases of violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights.

56. In Nicaragua, the Ortega-Murillo regime had jailed opposition leaders, students, reporters, business leaders, human rights activists and members of civil society. The United States stood in solidarity with the Nicaraguans risking their lives for their fundamental freedoms.

57. Meanwhile, there had been credible reports of human rights violations and abuses by all parties to the conflict in Yemen, including the use of starvation as a weapon of war, recruitment of child soldiers, arbitrary detention of civilians, torture and sexual violence. The continuous attacks on basic freedoms in areas under Houthi control, where most Yemenis lived, were particularly troubling.

58. In Venezuela, the President, Nicolás Maduro, and his enablers must be held to account for their

intimidation and unjust prosecution of human rights defenders, union and faith leaders and student groups.

59. The expulsion of United Nations officials in Ethiopia was alarming and must be reversed, as it was jeopardizing aid to Ethiopians just as famine was taking hold. There had also been accounts of rape being used as a weapon of war and humanitarian access being blocked. All parties should begin dialogue towards a negotiated ceasefire immediately, without preconditions, with a view to saving lives.

60. The regular reports of politically motivated disappearances and inhumane detention conditions in Eritrea were disturbing and raised serious concerns regarding its candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council.

61. In both Cuba and Belarus, the bravery and courage of peaceful activists was commendable as they stood up to the repressive regimes in their countries to demand their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

62. In Cambodia, continued reports of harassment and arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders, tighter restrictions on civil society and media and the deterioration of multiparty democracy were also alarming.

63. The Russian Government had repressed political opposition, independent media and civil society groups, even beyond its borders, and had orchestrated illegitimate elections in Russia-occupied Crimea and in eastern Ukraine. Officials in Chechnya had committed widespread human rights violations and abuses against members of the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons. The United States also remained gravely concerned by the ongoing human rights violations in Iran, Myanmar and North Korea.

64. While the list was not exhaustive, it was indicative. All countries must do more to promote and protect human rights. The United States would do everything in its power to hold the perpetrators of human rights abuses to account.

65. **Ms. Calem-Sangiorgio** (Monaco) said that her country continued to take a solidarity-based approach in its support of global health security and health systems, notably in terms of the equitable sharing of vaccines against COVID-19, as well as other diseases, and a steady increase in official development assistance.

66. The opportunity should be taken to involve young people in responding to the aftermath of the current crisis and in anticipating future crises, as well as in addressing climate-related issues. For over a year, 168

million children had been unable to go to school and billions of school meals had been missed; it was essential to ensure that those disadvantages did not persist. It was also unacceptable that over 13,000 attacks on schools had been recorded between 2015 and 2020, especially given that international humanitarian law was meant to limit the impact of armed conflict on civilians.

67. A pandemic of violence against women was also under way. Her delegation was particularly concerned by the vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities. In Monaco, a comprehensive legal framework focusing on the protection of women and persons with disabilities had been promulgated and a bill on the criminalization of sexual assault had been proposed. Monaco had also sponsored the Security Council resolutions adopted since 2008 on sexual violence in conflict, with a view to ensuring an effective zero-tolerance policy and bringing justice to victims.

68. Her country was focused on the protection and promotion of the forcibly displaced through its support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR and Bioforce Développement that enabled refugees to train for humanitarian and development jobs in West Africa. Her country was also continuing its partnership with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as its support for humanitarian corridors between the Middle East and Europe.

69. **Ms. Idres** (Sudan) said that her Government had continued to set policies and implement programmes aimed at achieving democratization, promoting the rule of law and promoting and protecting human rights. In early 2021, the transitional Government had ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. All restrictions on humanitarian aid to conflict areas had been lifted, in cooperation with the United Nations and its relevant agencies. The transitional Government had also adopted sustainable solutions for displaced persons in accordance with laws governing humanitarian work.

70. Pursuant to the constitutional document governing the country's transitional period, the Government had continued to promote women's economic and political rights and to combat all forms of discrimination and violence against women in conflict regions. The transitional Government had approved a national plan to implement Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and the framework of cooperation agreement signed with the

United Nations to address gender-based violence in conflict areas. There had also been steps towards ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

71. The Government of the Sudan was concerned with promoting and protecting the rights of the child and improving the well-being of children affected by armed conflict. The transitional Government stressed that it was committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Safe Schools Declaration and to improving basic services for children in all regions of the Sudan. The transitional Government had continued to coordinate with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Sudan appreciated the role played by the Child Protection Units of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan in supporting relevant Government agencies.

72. Despite the economic, social and health challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, international institutions had continued to assist in implementing the priorities related to health, education and economic empowerment contained in the constitutional document. The Sudan appreciated in particular the efforts of WHO and called for the fair distribution of vaccines to all countries.

73. **Mr. Ravelonarivo Andriamasy** (Madagascar) said that his country attached particular importance to social development, inclusivity and the rights of vulnerable and marginalized individuals. In the light of the inequalities associated with the current crisis, many populations would be left behind during the recovery process if timely measures were not taken. In that regard, his Government had allocated specific resources, in the form of cash transfers and safety nets, to support vulnerable individuals and mitigate the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic.

74. Despite the multiple setbacks to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals owing to the pandemic, as well as the need for additional funding in Madagascar to address the related repercussions, his Government was taking steps towards development. Measures included building health infrastructure, sports infrastructure and social housing. Madagascar had also submitted its second voluntary national review in 2021 to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which had enabled the country to assess the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the context of COVID-19 and to better address the challenges associated with post-pandemic recovery.

75. The climate crisis had led to a serious humanitarian situation in the south of Madagascar, which was affected by drought and famine. His Government had launched initiatives aimed at effecting radical and sustainable change in the region, which prioritized areas such as access to drinking water, school attendance rates and agricultural, transport and communications infrastructure. Plans were also under way to strengthen access to and uphold the right to reproductive and sexual health care in the country.

76. The recent availability of country programme documents for the United Nations specialized agencies was welcome, as was the renewed impetus for collaboration between countries and the United Nations system on the ground, particularly in the social and health spheres, which was in line with the national priorities of Madagascar. His delegation was grateful to bilateral and multilateral partners and to the United Nations system for their assistance in alleviating the economic impact of the pandemic, as well as for their support and guidance in implementing projects for growth and development.

77. **Mr. Hikmat** (Tajikistan) said that his country had been making comprehensive efforts to implement its gender policy, in order to ensure the enjoyment of equal rights and opportunities for women. A national strategy was under way to create the necessary conditions for women's empowerment in all areas of public life. In that connection, the 2020 parliamentary elections had led to an increase in the representation of women in the lower and upper houses of parliament.

78. His delegation was deeply concerned by the situation of lawlessness in Afghanistan, including the human rights violations, extrajudicial killings of detainees, war crimes and restrictions of the rights of women and girls, particularly against Tajiks and other ethnic minorities and religious communities. The security and humanitarian situation in Panjshir Valley was particularly dire owing to a communication blockade and a heavy military offensive by the Taliban and its affiliates. The Taliban was also carrying out reprisal killings and extrajudicial executions of civilians, seizing properties and denying food to residents. Tajikistan stood ready to facilitate the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan; the United Nations should take the lead in that process. The international community and key global players must hold the Taliban to account, trusting only the latter's actions and not their words. Creating an inclusive government with the participation of all political and ethnic groups was the only way to end the current crisis.

79. The growing trend of illicit drug trafficking posed a serious threat to the health and stability of societies. Immediate measures and joint interventions by the international community were required, with improved coordination and support to the countries at the front line of efforts to combat drug trafficking. The proliferation of illicit drug trafficking had also led to a rise in terrorism and organized crime, which must be addressed through joint and coordinated action at the regional and international levels, in line with the international drug control treaties. Tajikistan therefore called on the parties to those treaties to fulfil their commitments and obligations.

80. The COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated the vital importance of multilateral cooperation, which must be undertaken at the national, regional and international levels in order to build back better, ensure a greener world and transform challenges into benefits and new possibilities.

81. **Mr. Abdelhamid** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had derailed collective efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, had taken a heavy toll on the most vulnerable and had eroded the pledge to leave no one behind.

82. A collective action plan was urgently needed to ensure equitable, worldwide access to COVID-19 vaccines, save lives and achieve a global economic recovery. The State of Palestine was grateful to Governments and United Nations agencies for their support, including the provision of vaccines and other related supplies, despite intentional and excessive delays on the part of Israel and its unwillingness to fulfil its legal and moral obligations as an occupying Power.

83. The focus on eradicating the virus should not be at the expense of efforts to combat climate change and avert a climate crisis. In Palestine, women were taking the lead in the field of clean energy, which demonstrated the potential of women and youth to pave the way towards a clean, safe and sustainable environment for present and future generations.

84. The principles of democracy and pluralism, respect for human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination and the rule of the law were enshrined in the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine, in full alignment with international norms. Palestine had acceded to international instruments without reservation and had committed itself to respecting human rights, advancing women, empowering youth, protecting children and including persons with disabilities. Furthermore, it was working with civil society, human rights organizations and the United Nations to review its laws and policies, take the

necessary measures to correct any wrongdoing and uphold the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights.

85. The rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been disseminated to governmental institutions, the public and every school in Palestine. True dissemination, however, was achieved by empowering people to know, claim and defend their rights and by ensuring that the legislative, executive and judicial branches were committed to upholding those rights and to guaranteeing accountability for rights violations.

86. A collective approach was indispensable to addressing the most protracted refugee crisis in the world, currently in its seventy-fifth year. The Palestinian civilian population living under Israeli occupation continued its struggle to live in freedom and dignity on its own land. Israel, the occupying Power, which systematically killed and maimed Palestinian children, displaced and forcibly transferred Palestinian communities, demolished Palestinian homes and seized Palestinian land, was also restricting Palestinian movement and subjecting 2 million Palestinians in Gaza to an inhumane blockade with a devastating humanitarian impact. His country would continue its call for protection for the Palestinian people in line with international law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and with accountability measures aimed at bringing violations by Israel to a halt. In order to end the historic injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people, it was necessary to uphold the Charter of the United Nations, international law and human rights, including the sacred right to self-determination.

87. **Ms. Seneduangdeth** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the unilateral measures and politicized approaches regarding human rights issues were contrary to United Nations principles and would lead only to confrontation and division rather than to an improvement in the human rights situation on the ground. In promoting and protecting human rights, her country highly valued a constructive, non-confrontational, non-politicized and non-selective approach based on dialogue, taking into account the circumstances and particularities of each country.

88. The world continued to face numerous challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, which had had a major impact on socioeconomic development, had increased the burden on health-care systems and had affected the financing of development activities for low- and lower-middle-income countries. The international community should support the least

developed countries in addressing the social development impacts and in ensuring vaccine equity. The agenda item on recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and building back sustainability towards achieving the 2030 Agenda was welcome, as was the commitment by Member States to implement the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

89. The promotion of social development was one of the top priorities in her country's national socioeconomic development plan for the period 2021–2025, aimed at achieving true, quality, inclusive and green growth and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It was also an integral part of the national development strategy 2025 and Vision 2030.

90. Other sectoral plans and strategies had been launched, including in the areas of education and sport, health-care reform and women's development. In cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund, her country had organized a virtual event entitled "Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Ending Child Poverty: Exploring Innovative National Solutions" on 30 September 2021 on the margins of the General Assembly.

91. Remarkable progress had been achieved in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, including the recent amendment of the law on persons with disabilities and the adoption of a number of policies, strategies and plans to promote their inclusive participation in the country's social and economic development.

92. The Government had adopted a national social protection strategy and had amended the land law and the decree on Lao workers working abroad, which would provide benefits for vulnerable groups, including the unemployed, small-scale and subsistence farmers, and migrant workers. Her country had been among the first least developed countries to produce a national agricultural livelihood and adaptive capacity data set.

93. **Ms. Shaheen** (United Arab Emirates) said that, despite the gradual return to normal life during the COVID-19 pandemic, the world still faced difficulties that required increased multilateral cooperation. The uneven pace of recovery between developed and developing countries could undermine global security and stability, especially in the light of the new mutations of the virus in the pandemic's second wave.

94. The United Arab Emirates was keen to incorporate a humanitarian response into its foreign policy and had worked with the international community to address the

humanitarian situation in regions affected by conflict and natural disasters. From 2010 to 2021, the country had provided over \$56 billion in foreign aid and had continued to promote peace initiatives and global prosperity while also providing development, humanitarian and charitable support to various developing countries.

95. Her Government had promoted human rights at the national level through the enactment of Federal Act No. 12 of 2021 establishing the national human rights institution. That mechanism was guided by the General Assembly-approved principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights.

96. Her Government had also enacted legislation to protect the rights of women and children at home and abroad. According to a United Nations index, the United Arab Emirates ranked first regionally and eighteenth globally when it came to gender equality. The World Bank report entitled *Women, Business and the Law 2021* ranked the country first in the Middle East and North Africa with respect to freedom of movement, salaries, business leadership and pensions. In 2019 and 2020, the country had approved 11 new laws and legislative amendments that secured gains such as equal pay for equal work in the private sector and increased parliamentary representation for women. From 2016 to 2019, foreign aid aimed at empowering and protecting women and girls had exceeded \$1 billion. In March 2021, the State had approved a national working plan for the women and peace and security agenda, the first State member of the Gulf Cooperation Council to do so.

97. The United Arab Emirates welcomed global calls for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Sustained peace required effective participation from women and youth, owing to their critical role in preventing and resolving conflict and in building prosperous societies. It expected to complete work in 2022 on an Abrahamic family house that would be a centre for interreligious dialogue and an embodiment of the principles of the three Abrahamic religions.

98. *Ms. Abraham (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

99. **Mr. Amorín** (Uruguay) said that, for the Committee to be credible and effective, it must be guided by the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity. Uruguay remained firmly committed to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. In particular, it supported actions to uphold the rights of people of African descent, who were a fundamental part of Uruguayan society and significant

contributors to its culture. Nevertheless, his delegation wished to disassociate itself from the paragraph (see [A/C.3/76/SR.1](#), para. 32) of the statement made by the representative of Guinea on behalf of the Group of 77 and China at the Committee's first meeting, concerning the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the political declaration adopted at that event, since Uruguay had not attended that meeting.

100. In keeping with his country's international leadership on children's rights, it had made the protection of children a cross-cutting element of its national programmes, including in the area of climate change. In that connection, Member States had a human rights obligation to prevent the foreseeable negative effects of climate change by working to implement the Paris Agreement.

101. The COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the interconnected nature of the modern world, as well as the need for a stronger commitment to international cooperation, multilateralism and the defence of human rights. The crisis had also underscored the necessity of enhanced support for vulnerable groups, including older persons, who were key to post-pandemic economic and social recovery, and women. In that connection, Uruguay was participating in the Generation Equality Forum.

102. Lastly, as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) Core Group, Uruguay supported its call for redoubled efforts towards the decriminalization of all sexual orientations and gender identities, which was essential for full and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

103. **Ms. Kuzee** (Namibia) said that, while States had succeeded in responding to the current global health crisis, health-care systems remained under immense strain, with millions of people around the world being plunged ever deeper into poverty. To date, her Government had spent N\$1 billion in response to the pandemic and, with the support of its international partners, had rolled out vaccination to all regions of the country.

104. In June 2021, her Government had adopted a robust and ambitious political declaration on HIV and AIDS. Although the scope of HIV prevention and treatment had never been wider, a plethora of challenges remained. Young women and adolescent girls in the region remained vulnerable and were disproportionately affected by the HIV pandemic. Greater efforts were required to address the structural factors that increased the vulnerability of certain population groups to new

HIV infections. Moreover, investment was needed in interventions that would enable communities to prevent new infections among young women and address gender inequalities. While global progress in the prevention and treatment of HIV had been remarkable, it had also been highly unequal. Regrettably, such inequality had also been evident in the roll-out and availability of the COVID-19 vaccines, resulting in a form of vaccine "apartheid" with many people in developing countries being excluded. States must work together to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines and reject the notion of vaccine nationalism.

105. Given its history, Namibia was well aware of the impact and lasting legacy of racial discrimination and minority rule and remained dedicated to the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

106. As States continued to build back better, they had a collective responsibility to ensure the participation of women at all levels of governance and economic activity. In the belief that women's participation and representation were central to equitable and sustainable development, Namibia continued to advocate increased gender equality around the world and aimed to lead by example in its policies, programmes and actions. As sexual and gender-based violence remained a serious concern in Namibia, the Government had adopted a national action plan on gender-based violence, based on a socio-ecological model, to coordinate national action aimed at addressing the root causes of such violence and improving response systems and community safety so as to build the trust of survivors and victims in protection structures. While Namibia remained concerned by the underrepresentation of women in decision-making structures in conflict and post-conflict situations, it was heartening that, despite the negative impact of COVID-19, the pandemic had provided an opportunity to build more peaceful, inclusive and just societies and had highlighted the importance of the women and peace and security agenda.

107. **Ms. Chimbindi** (Zimbabwe), noting that the work of the Committee was still being constrained by the pandemic, said that it would be prudent to continue addressing the pandemic's multidimensional impacts, paying special attention to the needs of the most vulnerable people in society. Her delegation called for enhanced multilateralism, strengthened solidarity and international cooperation. The need to uphold those principles had been highlighted by the current crisis, which had demonstrated that pandemics had no borders. It was essential for States to move beyond rhetoric and ensure vaccine equity for all if they hoped to defeat the

virus. The emergence of more contagious variants was sufficient proof of the futility of vaccine nationalism.

108. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remained a key priority. Her Government remained committed to eradicating harmful policies and practices that limited the participation of women and girls in all aspects of life and the enjoyment of their incontrovertible rights.

109. Human rights were central to the achievement of sustainable development. Zimbabwe aspired to achieve that goal and remained dedicated to advancing the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens. The politicization of human rights and of the work of the treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders merely catered to narrow, self-serving interests and distracted from the key issue of promoting and protecting the unalienable rights of citizens.

110. Equally important was the right to development, which was essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and to the aspirations of developing countries. Her delegation called for the unconditional removal of unilateral coercive measures, one of the greatest threats to development, so as to help people recover from the pandemic. In General Assembly resolution [74/306](#) on a comprehensive and coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Assembly had taken a clear position on the undesirability of unilateral coercive measures and their negative impact on the ability of affected Member States to respond effectively to the pandemic and to build back better. While her Government had achieved notable successes in the fight against COVID-19 in spite of such punitive, unwarranted, unjustified and illegal measures, it could have achieved so much more. Zimbabwe was grateful to those countries that had facilitated its access to vaccines, enabling it to achieve one of the highest vaccination rates in Africa.

111. Despite having recently commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, States still had a long way to go in the fight against the scourge of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Continued efforts were needed to stamp out racism, which had no place in the contemporary world. Her delegation supported the growing calls for reparation and restitution to Africa and people of African descent for the past wrongs of the transatlantic slave trade, which was essential for healing.

112. **Ms. Leendertse** (Germany) said that, while the work of the Committee served as a reminder of the terrible human rights abuses suffered by people around

the world, it was also a positive symbol of the goal of making human rights a reality for all.

113. Her delegation called for respect for and protection of the human rights of persons living in Afghanistan, including women and girls, children and members of minority groups. Furthermore, the safety of journalists and human rights defenders, whose work was vital for an inclusive society, was paramount.

114. Germany was committed to promoting human rights as an integral part of its foreign policy, both within international forums and in its grass-roots projects. During its two-year term as a member of the Security Council, it had pressed for closer links between the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. The fact that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and a record number of civil society briefers had been invited to Security Council meetings demonstrated that peace, security and human rights belonged together. Her country was likewise convinced that the International Peace Commission should brief the Human Rights Council.

115. In the belief that there could be no peace and reconciliation without accountability, Germany was engaged in the Alliance against Impunity and in the Alliance for Multilateralism. It supported the mechanisms against impunity in Syria, where grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, especially against children, prevailed. During her country's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Union had adopted a new human rights sanctions regime, whose listings highlighted that the most severe human rights violations would have consequences for the perpetrators. In that context, Germany wished to reiterate its grave concern about the human rights situation in China, particularly in Xinjiang.

116. While Germany was committed to advancing gender equality and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls at the national and international levels, it accepted that it still had a long way to go in many respects. In 2021, her Government had adopted a new national plan on women and peace and security, and it was making great efforts to mainstream women and peace and security in its foreign policy, including the commitment to preserving sexual and reproductive health and rights.

117. In line with its commitment to combating sexual and gender-based violence, Germany was particularly concerned by the situation of Rohingya women and girls. Germany fully supported the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and called for full accountability, including adequate child protection

and psychosocial reintegration programmes for girls and for boys who had been forced to participate in armed conflict.

118. In 2021, her Government had launched a strategy for including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex issues in its foreign and development cooperation policies, which would contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to the goal of leaving no one behind.

119. Moreover, as part of its commitment to upholding human rights along global supply chains, her Government had recently adopted a law on supply chain due diligence. The international community should take action to ensure respect for human rights in that context, and efforts to develop an instrument to support such action should be enhanced.

120. In 2021, her Government had spent more than \$20 million on some 250 human rights projects worldwide and had provided voluntary contributions to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). All Member States should agree to financing the human rights pillar through regular contributions, which would allow it to fully realize its preventive potential.

121. **Ms. Eneström** (Sweden) said that, in many parts of the world, defending human rights came with great and unacceptable risks. Democratic space was shrinking, not least for civil society. Human rights defenders, journalists and media actors were being intimidated, harassed and exposed to violence. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons, environmental defenders and trade union representatives were being denied their rights and representation and were also being silenced, arbitrarily arrested or even killed.

122. Her Government was continuing its global initiative, “Drive for Democracy”, a core aspect of which was upholding the right to freedom of opinion, expression and information online and offline. Seven years ago, it had launched its feminist foreign policy in order to ensure that women and girls in all their diversity fully enjoyed human rights. As long as the human rights of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, were considered less important than those of men and boys, the whole world stood to lose. Every person should have the right to decide freely over their own body, sexuality and reproduction, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. Comprehensive sexuality education was necessary for making informed choices. Sweden would never stay quiet as long as there were women and girls suffering from unsafe abortions

or harmful practices such as female genital mutilation or child, early and forced marriage.

123. Human rights were universal and applied to all, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. However, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons continued to suffer human rights violations and abuses in every part of the world, with transgender and gender diverse persons being especially exposed to violence, discrimination and stigmatization. Seventy countries still criminalized consensual same-sex relationships – and some States even applied the death penalty. The task of promoting gender equality and the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons and combating racism and different forms of discrimination should fall to all, not just to those at risk.

124. To combat antisemitism, the Prime Minister would host the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism later in October 2021.

125. In challenging times, when human rights were increasingly under pressure, international cooperation and a strong multilateral human rights system were more important than ever. As Chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2021, Sweden had made the protection and promotion of human rights, which was at the core of the comprehensive concept of security of the OSCE, a priority. Lastly, standing up for human rights also meant holding to account those responsible for violations and abuses, including through the International Criminal Court.

126. **Ms. Gebrekidan** (Eritrea) said that, despite the efforts of the international community, poverty remained at unacceptable levels in both developing and wealthy nations, with social protection policies failing to guarantee the social and economic rights of the most vulnerable groups. Until States embarked on a groundbreaking reform of the existing economic and political world order, took real action against poverty and addressed inequality at its root, the Committee’s work would continue to have a minimal impact on the cause of human rights.

127. It was clear that the Committee’s discussions were focused on civil and political rights over social, cultural and economic rights, thereby hindering efforts to meaningfully address challenges to human dignity, politicizing the discussion and neglecting the responsibility of States to uphold the fundamental rights of their peoples. A balanced promotion of both sets of rights was needed to achieve a dignified life for all. To that end, accountable and transparent institutions were

needed that could provide a strong foundation for the realization of social and economic rights.

128. Furthermore, discussions were becoming increasingly political and less constructive. The Committee was becoming a platform for finger-pointing and double standards, where certain States who considered themselves to have higher moral standards measured the progress of others against their own values, all the while ignoring their own systemic challenges. The lecturing needed to stop and States needed to cooperate earnestly and engage with one another respectfully.

129. The COVID-19 pandemic had served as a reminder of the damage to society wrought by the dominant economic system – a system that prioritized profit over human life, had tested States' solidarity and had called into question their capacity to cooperate when responding to the global health emergency. While there had been strong solidarity and cooperation among certain States, others had demonstrated a disheartening level of vaccine nationalism, undermining international initiatives to promote equitable access to vaccines for all. Global responsibilities needed to be underscored to ensure the safety and well-being of all during the pandemic.

130. Unilateral coercive measures continued to be imposed on developing States with blatant disregard for their right to development and for the suffering of their populations, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and key principles of international law. The immediate and unconditional lifting of such measures was critical to advancing human rights in an inclusive and sustained manner.

131. Recognizing its responsibility to meet the social, cultural and economic needs of its population, Eritrea anchored its development policy in social justice and self-reliance. Despite decades of external challenges and impediments, her Government remained focused on establishing sustainable and accountable institutions in a participatory development process and endeavoured to provide quality health-care services and equitable access to education and other social services for all, including the poor and most vulnerable. Progress had been made towards the development goals and in many governmental sectors.

132. Lastly, endorsed by the Group of African States, Eritrea had submitted its candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2022–2024.

133. **Mr. López Lavado** (Andorra) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated inequalities and had jeopardized the progress made towards the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. His country was committed to stepping up its efforts through human rights-centred recovery programmes to ensure that no one was left behind. As such programmes needed to reflect the connection between the Goals and human rights and labour standards, Andorra welcomed the Secretary-General's initiatives envisaging a new social contract focused on human rights and results delivered on the ground.

134. The shared commitment to and common goal of building back better, greener, more equal and more inclusive could not be realized if access to vaccines remained inequitable. Existing international mechanisms should be enhanced to promote universal access to vaccines. In some cases, measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 had been used to stifle the voices of civil society. The transformation of the world would not be possible without the full and meaningful participation of civil society and the private sector.

135. Andorra was concerned that 267 million young people, two thirds of whom were young women, were not in education, employment or training. Efforts must be redoubled to advance the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and close the gender gap. Andorra supported all actions taken to counter the deeply alarming rise in violence against women, the so-called "shadow pandemic". The creation of a safe environment for women and girls was a matter of urgency. Furthermore, it welcomed the initiatives on education and entrepreneurship to empower women and girls and to eliminate stereotypes, and acknowledged the commitments undertaken during the Generation Equality Forum to make progress towards gender equality. The advancement of women and gender equality could not be taken for granted. As had been recently demonstrated, notably in Afghanistan, the human rights of millions of women could shift rapidly. As a member of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for 2021, Andorra hoped that the Entity's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 would guide the common efforts to promote gender equality at the national, regional and global levels.

136. Access to the Internet was a fundamental human right, with new technologies providing opportunities for the development of individuals and countries. Efforts needed to be focused on closing the digital divide and granting Internet access to the remaining 3.8 billion people, and on preserving and promoting respect for human rights online and offline.

137. Andorra supported the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, with special consideration given to the rights contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which were a national and international priority. It commended the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to which it made regular voluntary contributions, and of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. They could count on Andorra's full support in the implementation of their mandates. Andorra noted the Secretary-General's intention to nominate a Special Envoy for Future Generations in order to guarantee the meaningful participation and contribution of youth in the United Nations. As any decision would have a direct impact on the future of young people, it was essential that they had a say in the deliberations.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

138. **Ms. Nour Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the United States political agenda continued to take precedence over the humanitarian agenda. Unilateral coercive measures imposed against the Syrian people and the peoples of other countries had been renewed, and additional measures, including the so-called Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, had been imposed on specious pretexts. It would have been more accurate to call that Act the "Caesar Act for the suffocation of civilians in Syria". She questioned whether preventing the delivery of life-saving medicines and devices during the COVID-19 pandemic protected civilians. Furthermore, obstructing the rebuilding of infrastructure destroyed by terrorists did not serve Syrians but rather made their lives worse and prevented the return of displaced persons. Setting fire to grain harvests and stealing oil did not protect civilians but rather deprived them of food, cooking and heating fuel and electricity. The clear goal of that Act was to pressure the Syrian people by threatening their ability to provide for themselves, suffocating them in a scene reminiscent of the brutality that had choked George Floyd and others in the United States.

139. Syria had repeatedly condemned the butchery of the air strikes of the "international coalition" led by the United States against civilians. That air campaign had had a severe impact on children, especially in Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr, and had exacerbated Da'esh violations against them. In March of 2019, the United States-led "international coalition" had destroyed towns and villages near the city of Hajin and the town of Baghuz in the Governorate of Dayr al-Zawr, displacing tens of thousands of families with impunity. When that

"coalition" had destroyed a centre for the deaf in Raqqah, countries that boasted of their support for human rights had remained silent. In another incident, on the night of 20 March 2017, coalition forces had attacked a school in Mansurah in the Governorate of Raqqah without taking the precautions necessary to avoid or reduce harm to the civilian population. Over 150 civilians staying in the school had been killed, including 21 children, all but one of whom was under the age of 11, and 8 women, one of whom was in the final stages of pregnancy. Not a single delegation had asked for the creation of an independent and impartial mechanism to investigate those crimes. She wondered whether human rights were in fact subject to political considerations. The United States had spent trillions of dollars in its "war of terror" in Afghanistan. After two decades, the question remained: where were the results of those huge sums?

140. **Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) said that, in the face of numerous challenges, the international community called for strengthened solidarity and cooperation. The representative of the United States had, however, moved against that trend once again, ignoring the calls of Member States and abusing the platform of the Committee to attack and smear China in order to provoke confrontation and poison the atmosphere of the meeting. China rejected that behaviour and the unwarranted accusations levelled by Germany.

141. The United States had used trumped-up charges and lies to make unreasonable accusations against China. The allegation of "genocide" in Xinjiang was the lie of the century, concocted by the previous United States Administration. The current Administration had continued that thinly veiled political conspiracy. A lie repeated a thousand times was still a lie.

142. Many iron-clad facts had shown that the allegations of the United States were groundless and politically motivated and were intended to destabilize China and hobble its development. The international community should turn its attention to the human rights situation in the United States. The United States claimed to be a defender of democracy and human rights but was in fact their greatest saboteur. If the United States truly cared about human rights, it should reflect on its crimes against human rights and face its historical stains instead of selectively ignoring the blood and tears shed by Native Americans and the exploitation and slavery of African Americans. If it truly cared about human rights, it should take concrete action to eliminate growing racial discrimination and allow its people to breathe freely instead of allowing the proliferation of white supremacy, discrimination, anti-Asian hate,

Islamophobia and other extremist ideologies that had led to countless tragedies.

143. If the United States cared about human rights, it should protect people's right to life and health, rather than sit idly by while nearly 700,000 people died of COVID-19. The United States had even politicized the pandemic to divert attention from its domestic problems, undercutting global cooperation. If it cared about human rights, it should stop committing war crimes, launching wars, massacring civilians, dropping bombs and firing bullets at innocent women and children. It should abolish unilateral sanctions and end human-made humanitarian disasters instead of abusing such sanctions on the pretext of democracy and human rights, suppressing foreign companies, undermining international economic and treaty relations, harming the interests of other States and systematically violating basic human rights. It should abandon double standards. His delegation questioned why there had been no scrutiny of the deaths of indigenous children in Canadian boarding schools, why soldiers had not been held accountable for indiscriminately killing Afghan civilians and why widespread discrimination against Muslims in European countries had been met with silence.

144. The United States should cease its arrogance and bigotry and avoid stubbornly doubling down on its mistakes. The world needed dialogue, not confrontation. China hoped that the United States would mend its ways, return to the track of dialogue and take concrete and positive action to promote and protect human rights.

145. **Mr. Alvarado Garrigo** (Cuba) said that Cuba categorically rejected the insinuations of the United States. The United States had neither the mandate nor the moral authority to judge Cuba in any way, and certainly not on human rights. It was responsible for some of the most brutal and well-documented human rights violations in history, including extrajudicial executions, kidnapping, torture and the detention of foreign nationals without explanation or reparation. It funded known efforts to subvert the legitimately established constitutional order of other countries, and it imposed coercive unilateral measures that had serious consequences for human rights. It applied double standards and manipulated the question of human rights against countries of the South, launching smear campaigns against them while maintaining complicit silence on violations committed by its allies. The hostile economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba constituted a massive, flagrant and systematic violation of the rights of an entire people and was rejected by the overwhelming majority of the international community. It was also a violation of the Charter of the United

Nations and international law. Nevertheless, under cover of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States had recently ratcheted up the economic blockade to an unprecedented level. The goal of its policy of blockade, aggression and destabilization was not to improve the human rights situation in Cuba but to overturn the economic and social model freely chosen by the Cuban people. It should be obvious after more than six decades that that policy would not work. The Cuban people would continue to hold fiercely to their independence and the path they had freely chosen.

146. **Mr. Pilipenko** (Belarus) said that it was unacceptable to refer to a sovereign State as a regime. States should respect the civilized principles of equal and respectful dialogue.

147. The United States would not succeed in deceiving the Committee. In Belarus, human rights were being employed as a guise to artificially stir up protests and incite radicals to engage in criminal activity, posing a threat to society and the State. The resources of information companies were being used to spread disinformation and blatant lies and to sponsor terrorism and extremism. The United States had described the protests in Belarus as peaceful, but that was a complete lie, as evidenced by many photos and videos. A law enforcement official had been shot in Minsk the previous week by a citizen of Belarus who had succumbed to incitement. The reaction to that incident by the forces endorsed by the United States had been particularly terrible. They had chanted that it was a pity that only one person had been killed and had sought to glorify the murderer, who had ruthlessly recorded his actions.

148. Against the backdrop of the efforts of his Government to promote a broad-based national dialogue, such incidents revealed that the primary motive of certain States was to overthrow the Government and, ultimately, change the geopolitical orientation of the country, which was a strategic ally of the Russian Federation and China in the centre of Europe. Indeed, the representatives of some neighbouring countries had reproached Belarus for its partnerships with those countries.

149. The sixth All-Belarusian People's Assembly had taken place in February 2021; 17 September had been designated National Unity Day; and work was under way to amend the Constitution to address issues including the death penalty and the establishment of a human rights ombudsperson. That would be of no interest to the countries that had spoken about Belarus, however; they were interested only in destabilizing the situation within the country and sowing social discord.

150. Belarus was always ready to engage in equal and respectful dialogue on all matters with all constructive partners.

151. **Mr. Kassaye** (Ethiopia), addressing comments made by the representative of the United States, said that, following the law enforcement operation carried out against the Tigray People's Liberation Front to restore law and order in the Tigray region, his Government had launched investigations into the allegations of serious human rights violations and had taken necessary measures to ensure accountability. In addition to investigations by the military and federal and regional prosecutors, a joint investigation was under way by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and OHCHR, whose findings would be made public soon. In addition, federal and military prosecutors had pressed charges and had taken legal action against individuals suspected of committing human rights violations.

152. It should be recalled that the Government had signed a memorandum of understanding with United Nations agencies to expedite the provision of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected people in the Tigray region in the aftermath of the law enforcement operation. The Government was working in coordination with various humanitarian organizations, including United Nations agencies, and was delivering food and non-food assistance to those in need in the Tigray and adjacent regions. However, in violation of the memorandum of understanding, international humanitarian law and the law of the land, some personnel of those agencies had not observed the principles of impartiality and independence when discharging their duties and had diverted humanitarian assistance, violated agreed security arrangements, transferred communications equipment for the use of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, disseminated misinformation and politicized humanitarian assistance.

153. After such repeated disregard for international humanitarian law and the law of the land and after repeated pleas to refrain from meddling in the country's internal affairs, the Government had been forced to take action concerning those United Nations humanitarian personnel. The Government had also requested the United Nations to expeditiously replace the expelled personnel. While the Government remained committed to the provision of humanitarian assistance, it called upon all agencies operating in Ethiopia to adhere to the principles of impartiality, independence, neutrality and respect for sovereignty. Ethiopia remained firmly committed to constructively engaging with all relevant stakeholders and to fulfilling its obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

154. **Mr. Kim Nam Hyok** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his delegation totally rejected the accusations made against his country by the United States. The "human rights issue" touted by the United States was a political trick designed to destroy the ideology and social system of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and a vivid manifestation of deep-rooted hostility towards the country. The international community should instead turn its attention to the serious human rights situation in the United States. The deep-rooted racism and racial discrimination, police brutality, gun-related crime, forced slave labour, torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment in detention facilities, as well as the political pressure and military action, which infringed on the sovereignty of other States, were the tip of the iceberg when it came to human rights violations by the United States. Tragically, however, its human rights situation had never become the subject of a proper debate in the international arena. The United States must face an international investigation on its human rights violations. If the United States persisted in clinging to its futile human rights campaign against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it would face a miserable outcome.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.