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Chair: Mr. Marschik (Austria)
later: Ms. Monica (Vice-Chair). (Bangladesh)

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

Agenda item 71: Promotion and protection of human rights (continued)

(a) Implementation of human rights instruments (continued) (A/78/40, A/78/44, A/78/48, A/78/55, A/78/56, A/78/240, A/78/263, A/78/271, A/78/281, A/78/324 and A/78/354)

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(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (continued) (A/78/204, A/78/212, A/78/223, A/78/244, A/78/278, A/78/297, A/78/299, A/78/316, A/78/326, A/78/327, A/78/338, A/78/340, A/78/358, A/78/375, A/78/511, A/78/526 and A/78/527)

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (continued) (A/78/36)

1. **Ms. Shaheed** (Special Rapporteur on the right to education), introducing her report (see A/78/364), said that the teaching profession was too often undervalued and undercompensated, which had resulted in a global shortage of teachers. That in turn had led to overcrowded classrooms, heavy workloads and a lowering of the skill level required for teaching. States, in fulfilment of the obligation to provide compulsory and free primary education for all, must ensure sufficient numbers of trained teachers and favourable working conditions, even in the context of emergencies, conflicts or displacement.

2. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador) said that equal access to free, quality education, delivered by well-trained teachers, was critical to human development, democracy and peace. El Salvador recognized the

importance of the 4 As framework for interpreting the normative content of the right to education. Her Government provided public education at all levels and had carried out comprehensive educational reform. Her delegation asked the Special Rapporteur whether she could share good practices followed by countries that made the teaching profession more attractive to young people.

3. **Mr. Lang** (United States of America) said that his Government was investing billions of dollars to expand historically Black colleges and universities, which primarily served tribal and other racial and ethnic minority students, and to ensure high-quality science, technology, engineering and mathematics education for students of all backgrounds. The United States was also using development assistance to improve learning outcomes in other countries. All Member States should provide every child, without discrimination, with the opportunity for a quality education. He asked the Special Rapporteur what she thought were the greatest barriers facing students in the current global context.

4. **Ms. Vlokhoven** (Luxembourg) said that the report had correctly identified inclusion and non-discrimination as key elements in realizing the right to education. Despite efforts by States to ensure inclusive, equitable quality education, gaps persisted, in particular when it came to working conditions. She asked how States were addressing the current teacher shortage and ensuring professional development. She also would like to know what concrete measures could be taken to assist teachers in conflict situations.

5. **Mr. Valido Martínez** (Cuba) said that the right to education was enshrined in his country's Constitution. The high levels of literacy and general education achieved by Cuba would not have been possible without the significant efforts and dedication of teachers. Teachers also played an important role in the country's "Yo, sí puedo" (Yes, I can) programme, which promoted literacy in more than 30 countries globally. However, the efforts of Cuba to advance education were not immune to the effects of the economic blockade imposed by the United States for more than 60 years. He asked the Special Rapporteur to share her opinion regarding the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the right to education.

6. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that her country promoted human resource development in the education profession and fully recognized the pivotal role of teachers in raising responsible citizens. Functional educational institutions required well-equipped staff with the requisite skills, qualifications and training, as well as competitive remuneration. The President of

Maldives had recently raised the pay of teachers, which had improved their well-being. In addition, Maldives had eliminated gender disparities in primary and secondary education and had made efforts to digitalize learning environments and promote hybrid education, which permitted girls to enroll in education from remote islands. In accordance with the national gender equality action plan, gender equality concepts were incorporated into curricula.

7. **Ms. Alaoui** (Morocco) said that her country had adopted a strategy to reform the education system with a view to fostering equity, inclusivity and quality. According to the report, rapid technological development presented both advantages and disadvantages for education. The Special Rapporteur had also mentioned the changing nature of the role of teachers, who were tasked with helping students to learn critical thinking skills. She asked the Special Rapporteur to share good practices regarding the use of technology to address the dangers of disinformation.

8. **Mr. Guerra** (Portugal) said that the teacher shortage was a major challenge for many countries, including his own. The Secretary-General had stressed that efforts should be made to make the teaching profession more attractive to young people. He asked whether the Special Rapporteur had observed any successful approaches in that regard.

9. **Ms. Mihail** (Romania) said that her delegation was concerned about the impact of armed conflict on education and encouraged the international community to find ways of reinvigorating the Safe Schools Declaration. Romania had facilitated access to online and in-person education for Ukrainian refugee children, including in their native language. It had also worked with United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations to provide training for Romanian teachers of Ukrainian refugees and for Ukrainian teachers working in Romania. She asked how States could improve the social and emotional well-being of teachers from refugee and internally displaced populations and teachers working in the context of armed conflicts.

10. **Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) said that his country continued to invest in educational facilities and services, increase the number and quality of teachers, decrease illiteracy rates, boost enrolment figures and narrow the educational gap between cities and rural areas. Efforts were needed to overcome the obstacles to decent education created by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and he would be interested in hearing her views on increasing international solidarity to address those obstacles. He also asked the Special Rapporteur to share her views on reducing educational

inequalities among countries, on facilitating access to technology in developing countries and on increasing the number of scholarships for students in those countries.

11. **Ms. Keogh** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that education should be seen not as a cost, but as a wise investment. As teachers played a key role in upholding gender equality and were at the heart of the recovery of the education sector, the European Union welcomed the recommendations regarding improvements to their working conditions and training. In 2023, the European Union had launched the Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa, which was aimed at supporting national education reforms and fostering collaboration between African and European countries, and in 2022, had implemented a project on empowering independent teachers' associations in Uzbekistan. She asked what steps States could take to develop human rights-compliant and inclusive teacher training.

12. **Ms. Wainwel** (Cameroon) said that, regrettably, social and economic conditions often affected access to education and the rights and well-being of teachers. Although progress had been made to improve the working conditions of teachers in Cameroon, challenges related to the economic situation and security remained. The Special Rapporteur had highlighted that teachers sometimes lived below the poverty line, even in developed countries. Her delegation was interested to know what could be done by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address the adverse impact of austerity measures on the well-being of teachers.

13. **Ms. Napolitano** (Italy), speaking as a youth delegate, said that education was a driver of sustainable societies and of peace and was key to countering discrimination and violence. As stated in the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education, young people were not passive beneficiaries of, but partners in, education. Teachers were fundamental to ensuring every aspect of quality education, especially in the context of present and looming crises. She asked how Member States could design policies that reconciled the aspirations of young people for educational transformation and the key role of teachers in building inclusive and resilient educational systems.

14. **Mr. Kariuki** (Kenya) said that many teachers struggled with socioeconomic challenges, including inadequate teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of access to digital tools and professional development opportunities and poor compensation. In some cases, teachers were not

involved in shaping education policy or pedagogy, even though they could provide important input in that regard. Teachers must be valued, trusted and sufficiently supported by policymakers. He asked how States could include teachers in the design of educational systems and whether the skills of retired teachers could be leveraged to reduce the global teacher shortage.

15. **Mr. Zumilla** (Malaysia) said that quality education provided individuals with the knowledge and skills needed for their full participation in society. Malaysia was committed to achieving inclusive, equitable and quality education, with a focus on enhancing lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 emphasized the principles of access, quality, equity, unity and efficiency. He asked the Special Rapporteur to share best practices for addressing the major challenges faced by the education sector.

16. **Ms. Matos Menéndez** (Dominican Republic) said that fulfilment of the right to education depended on the ability of teachers to carry out their duties effectively. It was important to promote gender parity and diversity in the teaching profession to ensure that the educational system was able to respond to the different needs. The digitalization of education posed immense challenges, in particular when it came to providing relevant professional training for teachers. She asked how international cooperation could be strengthened to tackle the challenges faced by teachers in diverse regional and cultural contexts.

17. **Ms. Meizura** (Indonesia) said that her country was committed to enhancing the digital competencies of teachers as it had noted that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital gap had hampered the delivery of meaningful education. Since 2021, Indonesia had conducted training programmes for more than 500,000 teachers across the country and had allocated more than 20 per cent of the State budget to education. Indonesia, which had the fourth-largest education system globally, understood that there was no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges faced by States. She asked how the international community could strengthen support for countries pursuing quality education within their own specific contexts.

18. **Mr. Abdullah** (Bangladesh) said that his country had implemented initiatives to help teachers to deliver quality education. In 2015, it had declared a new pay scale for teachers, which had doubled salaries. Special investment programmes had been adopted to improve the quality and efficiency of secondary schools through information and communications technology, vocational programmes, teacher training and

improvements to examinations. He asked the Special Rapporteur how she planned to engage with States and other stakeholders on the issue of bridging the digital divide.

19. Bangladesh was host to over 1 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. In order to provide education to Rohingya children in the camps, Bangladesh had established 6,000 learning centres and had piloted a culturally relevant curriculum, but qualified teachers and funding were lacking. He asked the Special Rapporteur how she could support refugee hosting countries.

20. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that Russians and Russian-speaking people, including children, were facing unprecedented linguistic and ethnic discrimination in Western countries. In the Baltic countries, the Russian-speaking population was almost entirely deprived of Russian-language education. In Ukraine, the nationalist Ukrainian authorities that had come to power following the unconstitutional coup d'état in 2014 had not only unleashed a civil war against the south-east of the country, but had also begun to eradicate the Russian language from education. In 2017, Ukraine had enacted a law that provided that Ukrainian educational institutions must transition to teaching solely in the State language of Ukrainian.

21. **Mr. Wang Zixu** (China) said that his country had been implementing a strategy to revitalize the country through science and education. China took a people-centred approach to advancing education as a strategic priority, and its development of the world's largest free compulsory education system was a historical achievement. In some developed countries, higher education resources were skewed towards the rich while lower income groups were deprived of equal education opportunities, causing dissatisfaction. He asked the Special Rapporteur to share constructive proposals for the elimination of inequalities in education.

22. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that teachers in the Syrian Arab Republic faced tremendous obstacles that prevented them from fulfilling their duties. Owing to the deterioration of the economic situation and the imposition of unilateral coercive measures against his country, Syrian teachers were paid no more than \$20 a month. His Government could not repair schools affected by terrorism because that was considered "rebuilding", a right that Syria was deprived of by the United States and its allies in the European Union.

23. **Mr. Shaked** (Israel) said that a recent report from the civil society organizations United Nations Watch and the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural

Tolerance in School Education showed that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to hire teachers who openly incited racism, hatred and violence. In order to create a terrorist, one simply needed to indoctrinate children into the view that it was legitimate to intentionally harm innocent people. The horrifying images of Hamas terrorists waging an onslaught on his people spoke for themselves. Such incitement would lead only to more bloodshed. He asked the Special Rapporteur what measures UNRWA and other agencies should take to combat incitement and hate in education.

24. **Mr. Prytula** (Ukraine) said that, since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the entire education process had felt the damage. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 75 per cent of Ukrainian schoolchildren suffered from stress and 26 per cent had post-traumatic stress disorder. Only one third of children enrolled in primary and secondary school in Ukraine were attending school entirely in person. Students living under occupation were forced to forget their language and history and were compelled to sing odes to the dictatorship of the occupiers. Russia had destroyed more than 10 per cent of the educational infrastructure of Ukraine.

25. **Ms. Dabo N'diaye** (Mali) said that her delegation was interested in hearing concrete recommendations on how countries such as hers could ensure quality education for all in the context of a fragile security situation. Mali called upon the international community to increase their investment in support of education in developing countries and countries in crisis.

26. **Mr. del Valle Blanco** (Observer for the International Youth Organization for Ibero-America) said that equality of educational opportunity was critical. The new youth agenda adopted by his organization highlighted the importance of education in the building of a prosperous future. Educational systems should be strengthened through investment in digital infrastructure and teacher training, and efforts should be made to promote digital skills and lifelong learning among young people. In addition, international cooperation was key for addressing school attrition. He asked the Special Rapporteur what steps could be taken to boost digital skills and teacher training.

27. **Ms. Gray** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that empowering educators was a high priority for UNESCO. The role of teachers should no longer be limited to disseminating skills and knowledge; rather, teachers must also act as policymakers, producers of knowledge,

and guides in the understanding of complex realities. Two weeks previously, UNESCO had announced that the global teacher shortage stood at 44 million. To address that issue, the Organization had joined forces with key partners to ensure that teachers were motivated, empowered, well-trained, professionally qualified and supported through well-resourced and effectively governed systems. She asked the Special Rapporteur how policymakers could support the reskilling of educators.

28. **Ms. Shaheed** (Special Rapporteur on the right to education) said that the teaching profession could be made more attractive to younger generations by ensuring that teachers were well compensated. In addition, teachers needed to be given learning opportunities and the tools needed for responding to rapid technological change, including digital devices. Teachers also needed support so that they could handle the socioeconomic and emotional issues that arose in situations of conflict or natural disasters.

29. In order to ensure the continuous adaptation of the education system, an ongoing robust dialogue was required that included genuine participation from all stakeholders, including teachers and young people. Young people were often unhappy with the education available to them and expressed the view that they were not being prepared for modern challenges, but those views were not being heard. To mark the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of her mandate, she would be holding an event in December to solicit the views of young people on the right to education.

30. She could not share best practices from country visits as she would be undertaking her first such visit the following month. However, she noted that the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies had formulated responses to phenomena such as emotional trauma stemming from emergencies, including armed conflict. The impact of unilateral coercive measures and austerity on education needed to be examined carefully. Austerity measures in particular often led to reduced salaries and, in turn, a decline in the number of teachers.

31. Digital tools were not a panacea; while they had the potential to help, they also posed problems. For example, digital tools used in education had in some cases been used for data mining and had violated children's right to privacy. Moreover, digitalization could exacerbate inequalities not only between countries, but within countries, particularly between urban and rural areas. Teachers working for low wages could not afford technological devices or the electricity to run them, but they were expected to be conversant

with those technologies and to teach children how to use them.

32. To the 4 As outlined in her report, she wished to add a fifth: accountability. The international community, as well as national policymakers, should work together to chart the path forward in that regard.

33. While she was pleased to hear that some countries had increased investment in education, the funds allocated elsewhere were insufficient to ensure accessible, quality education for all children in all areas. It should also be noted that learning did not end at university, as the right to education existed at all stages of life. All educational institutions and materials must promote peace, well-being and a human rights perspective.

34. **Ms. Xanthaki** (Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights), introducing her report (see [A/78/213](#)), said that her aim had been to inform the General Assembly about the extent to which international organizations integrated cultural rights into their sustainable development policies, so that States could ensure that their opinions and priorities as members of those organizations remained consistent with their obligations to fulfil those rights. Real development was impossible if individuals and groups were prevented from developing their own ways of life. Culture was more than an enabler; it was intrinsic to sustainable economic, social and environmental development. To achieve gender equality, communities perceiving women as inferior must develop in a way that valued women and men as equals. Achieving economic growth required development measures that were not alien to local values or people's understanding of the world. Maintaining peace and justice required education that did not promote narratives of hatred, genocide or the dehumanization of other identities.

35. Despite acknowledgements by both the Secretary-General and the General Assembly of the importance of culture to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and the commitments set out by States in the final declaration adopted at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, also known as "Mondiacult 2022", culture remained sidelined in development policies. As part of efforts to protect cultural heritage in sustainable development processes, international development and trade organizations must foster full respect for the identities and natural resource-based livelihoods of local communities, by asking them which of their practices needed protection. The inclusion of cultural rights in human rights impact assessments required clear and consistent consultation with and input from cultural

experts, not just economists, as well as the free, prior and informed consent of those affected. Sustainable development policies must be framed in terms of cultural rights and the protection of cultural resources. New policies must avoid piecemeal approaches to ensure comprehensive action on the cultural dimension of sustainable development, and existing instruments must be reinterpreted in a manner consistent with current needs and understandings on cultural rights.

36. Some international organizations remained reluctant to discuss how their policies might hinder cultural development. States working with the World Trade Organization and IMF must consider and respect local values and aspirations in development policymaking. To avoid being viewed as imposed and hostile, such policies must reflect the priorities and wishes of the people they aimed to help. Despite repeated references to culture in the lead-up to the recent Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the cultural dimension of sustainable development remained invisible. States should reflect on their visions of international organizations as vehicles to sustainable development, so as to ensure that the identities and ways of life of both individuals and groups were allowed to develop and flourish. Only then would no one be left behind.

37. **Ms. Wainwel** (Cameroon) said that failures on cultural rights could be seen not only within international development and trade organizations, but also at the United Nations itself. Cultural rights were often overlooked in the resolutions, presentations and reports of the Third Committee, despite the inclusion of the cultural dimension in its official name. She wondered how the Committee's work and that of the Human Rights Council compared with that of the organizations referenced by the Special Rapporteur in her report and what steps the mandate holder could take to increase interest in cultural rights in those two bodies. The goal of leaving no one behind could not be achieved without full respect for the cultural rights of all. To be truly sustainable, development must be self-determined, community-driven and aligned with the aspirations, traditions, customs, systems and world views of the individuals and groups involved. She requested further information on adopting and implementing a rights-based approach so as to strengthen the connection between development and cultural rights. Lastly, she wondered what approach the Special Rapporteur would recommend for ensuring the integration of cultural rights into the final document of the Summit of the Future.

38. **Ms. Greffine** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that, in her

report, the Special Rapporteur had recommended that States, as members of international organizations, should use human rights indicators in the monitoring and review of progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and for international governance purposes. She asked the Special Rapporteur to share good practices on how cultural rights indicators could be used in that respect. She wondered what could be done to promote the inclusion of cultural rights impact assessments in all phases of international development projects, and how the Special Rapporteur envisaged the scope, content and outcome of such assessments.

39. **Ms. Tokarska** (Ukraine) said that, since the onset of the aggression by the Russian Federation against her country in 2014, Ukrainian culture and heritage had been systematically destroyed, damaged or threatened throughout the country, in acts that were considered war crimes and had been described by the Minister of Culture of Ukraine as “cultural genocide”. According to UNESCO, between February 2022 and September 2023, 291 sites had been verified as damaged. The Russian destruction of the Kakhovka Dam had not only affected the environment, but had also destroyed cultural heritage that could no longer be passed on to future generations. Such destruction was an attempt to erase her country’s identity and part of its history. Ukrainian public and private cultural institutions played a significant role in dismantling the post-colonial Russian narrative and imperial legacy. Cultural institutions in Ukraine had taken on a new role as humanitarian hubs, information centres, temporary shelters for internally displaced persons and centres providing therapy and support for the families of internally displaced persons or soldiers who died in service and for injured or disabled veterans. She enquired about the best way to preserve a country’s culture during wartime.

40. **Mr. Valido Martínez** (Cuba) said that cultural rights were recognized in his country’s Constitution and were considered in all social and cultural planning. Cuba had integrated culture as a cross-cutting element in its national development plan and had adopted a cultural development plan for the period up to 2030, aimed at encouraging citizen participation by developing artistic, literary and critical capacity and protecting national identity and heritage. Nevertheless, efforts to promote cultural rights and sustainable development had been undermined by the economic, commercial and financial blockade that had been imposed by the United States against Cuba for more than six decades, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and which impeded cultural development and the exercise of those rights in Cuba. His delegation

requested that the Special Rapporteur examine the impact of the application of unilateral coercive measures such as the blockade on the enjoyment of cultural rights.

41. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that, although cultural rights were a significant component of the development process, they were not always properly taken into account by States in the development of strategies and projects. For decades, the realization of cultural, economic and social rights had been hampered internationally by the artificial divide between those rights and civil and political rights, which were traditionally prioritized by Western countries.

42. In April and July 2023, the Paralympic Committee of Russia had appealed to the Special Rapporteur regarding the flagrant violation of the rights of Russian athletes with disabilities by the International Paralympic Committee. Although the decision to suspend the membership of the Russian Federation in the International Paralympic Committee had been overturned by the Committee’s Appeals Tribunal, Russian Paralympians were still barred from participating in international competitions, which represented discrimination on the basis of nationality.

43. Influential forces in the West were waging an aggressive campaign to cancel Russian culture and break cultural ties with his country. In Ukraine, whose representative had just shared disinformation, that was leading to a complete ban on Russian literature, media and television.

44. **Ms. Brzeski** (United States of America) said that the unique religious, cultural and linguistic identity of every individual should be cherished and preserved. Repressive Governments all too often undermined or abused those rights, threatening individuals and jeopardizing entire cultures. Cultural rights should not be sacrificed in the name of economic development or national security. Ongoing violations of cultural rights and freedom of religion or belief and systemic racism, discrimination, violence and xenophobia were being perpetrated against marginalized communities around the world. Governments must stop destroying cultural heritage sites, cemeteries and places of worship, suppressing languages, forcibly assimilating children and restricting access to livelihoods and education. She asked how survivors of such attacks could find peace, truth and justice.

45. **Mr. Zumilla** (Malaysia) said that the enshrinement of cultural rights in international human rights instruments had resulted in their codification in international human rights law. It was therefore disheartening that the promotion and protection of those

rights remained lacklustre. In view of the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of human rights, cultural rights must be treated on an equal footing with other human rights. As a multicultural, multiracial and multireligious country, Malaysia recognized the immense value of cultural diversity in nation-building. The customs and cultures practiced freely by his country's various ethnic groups further enriched its cultural values. The Special Rapporteur's suggestions on the way forward on cultural rights would be taken into account by his delegation during negotiations on the draft covenant on the right to development recently transmitted by the Human Rights Council to the General Assembly. He asked whether the Special Rapporteur could share examples of best practice in the promotion and protection of cultural rights that could be emulated by both States and international development and trade organizations.

46. **Ms. Sonkar** (India) said that her country was a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multireligious country of continental proportions, anchored in the principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law. India not only respected but celebrated its diversity. Its Constitution guaranteed civil and political rights and provided for the progressive realization of the economic, social and cultural rights of all citizens residing in India, including with regard to language. The national education policy for 2020 was an example of ongoing efforts to ensure the protection and promotion of cultural rights in policies and programmes aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ultimate objective of the policy was to ensure equitable access to quality education for all, with a special emphasis on language, arts and culture. Attempts to politicize development issues were highly objectionable.

47. **Mr. Wang Zixu** (China) said that his country was committed to ramping up cultural industries and cultural development through continuous improvements to public cultural services so as to ensure the full enjoyment of cultural rights of its people. China had over 3,000 free public libraries and nearly 46,000 cultural centres, and was improving its media services. As a unified and multi-ethnic country, China cherished and prioritized the protection and preservation of the cultures of its 56 ethnic minorities, all of which had items featured in the national catalogue of intangible cultural heritage. Over a quarter of the roughly 3,000 nationally recognized custodians of intangible heritage were from ethnic minorities. His delegation strongly rejected the disinformation and lies about China contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur, requesting that she stick to impartial and objective facts,

stay strictly within the confines of her mandate and the code of conduct and stop stirring up controversy and sowing divisions.

48. **Ms. Dabo N'diaye** (Mali) said that, given her country's rich cultural traditions, her delegation agreed that cultural rights should be integrated into key issues. Environment was critical to all endeavours and approaches, in particular in a multilateral and intercultural context. She wondered what guidelines the Special Rapporteur planned to follow in efforts to reach shared objectives.

49. **Ms. Gebrekidan** (Eritrea) said that the sidelining of cultural rights in development efforts was unfortunate, given the important nexus between promotion those rights and achieving sustainable development. The various recommendations provided by the Special Rapporteur in her report were therefore welcomed. The diversity of cultural backgrounds led to challenges in adequately reflecting cultural rights in outcomes and discussions within the multilateral system. She asked how the attitudes of cultural superiority displayed by some regions and countries within the system in general and in the Third Committee more specifically could be avoided.

50. **Ms. Rando Ibáñez** (Observer for the International Youth Organization for Ibero-America) said that, as reaffirmed many times within the United Nations system, cultural diversity was a source of mutual enrichment. The enjoyment by all of the rights to participate in and benefit from culture and science was essential to promoting tolerance and enhancing social cohesion. While culture served to build identity and social structures, continually evolving technology and globalization could distance young people from their culture and traditions. Promoting the cultural rights of all fostered pluralism and contributed to greater knowledge-sharing and a better understanding of one's own heritage. One of the pillars of her organization's new youth agenda was to support and guarantee cultural rights for young people, with a view to strengthening their capacities to nurture cultural values and develop various forms of artistic and creative expression, thereby ensuring open access to culture as a mechanism for social cohesion. She asked how workstreams should be structured to facilitate cooperation in cultural matters and the dissemination of cultural expression by young people in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

51. **Ms. Zadra** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that the declaration issued at Mondiacult 2022 had marked a turning point by upscaling international

commitments on cultural rights. In November 2023, to support the advancement of those commitments, UNESCO would present the results of a global consultation on the implementation of the 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist, accompanied by a guide for the development of related legislation, which had been prepared jointly with the International Labour Organization. A training package on culture and human rights had been developed with several United Nations entities, and an open dialogue had been established concerning new types of cooperation agreements on the return and restitution of cultural property. More effective and systematic recognition of the rights and values of Indigenous Peoples in processes under the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage would be sought through consultations with experts in January 2024. The next milestone would be the 2025 World Forum on Cultural Policies and its global report. She asked how UNESCO could work with the Special Rapporteur to improve the monitoring of the impact of conventions on culture on rights-related recommendations.

52. **Ms. Xanthaki** (Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights) said that, although Mondiacult 2022 had indeed been an important moment, culture and cultural rights had still been disregarded at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit. In one-on-one discussions, States appeared to understand the importance of including cultural rights in development policies, and it was gradually becoming clearer that cultural development was a dimension of sustainable development. However, multilateral discussions on sustainable development continued to ignore cultural rights. Some 40 States had recently submitted voluntary reports on their implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in which they addressed social cohesion, diversity, ways of life and livelihoods, but did not frame them as cultural rights. States' human rights obligations followed them through all aspects of their conduct. It was necessary to avoid compartmentalizing human rights by visibly including culture in development and fiscal policies.

53. The Committee, and indeed all United Nations bodies, must adopt a right-to-development approach and recall the indivisibility of human rights, to ensure that sustainable development not only did not violate cultural rights, but actively included a cultural dimension. More collaboration among entities, both within and external to the United Nations, would help to promote a better understanding of inclusive sustainable development, which had yet to be achieved. A next step could be for the Special Rapporteur to meet with

UNESCO committees to ensure that they understood that the purpose of their work was to promote and protect both culture and cultural rights. States also had an important role to play, as seen in the invitation extended by the Permanent Delegation of Austria to UNESCO for her to participate in a meeting of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which had resulted in the issuance of a joint statement on the work of that Committee. As for avoiding polarization, it was necessary to get back to human rights and to ensure that dialogue was true and that identities were not dehumanized, whether in the room or in the outside world.

54. With regard to human rights impact assessments, the absence of indicators on culture and cultural rights might explain why the cultural dimension, despite widespread agreement on its importance, was left aside in discussions on sustainable development, which tended to be focused on specific targets and goals. Discussions on indicators could address whether the cultural sector was permitted to share its innovative and creative work, and could contain a focus on the rights of vulnerable groups to maintain and develop their ways of life and on whether the State had advanced projects on culture. One international development organization, for example, had indicated that it had both funds and a willingness to implement cultural development projects, but that States preferred to support economic development. Discussions on such matters would be very interesting, but establishing indicators required expertise. Meanwhile, the lack of pressure on the World Bank and other organizations to conduct human rights impact assessments before, during and after projects was astonishing, as was the lack of pressure on States to address any issues found when such assessments were carried out.

55. On the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes, she had done a lot of work in that regard, and the matter remained of interest to her. Lastly, she hoped that the positive comments made during the meeting would be incorporated into future discussions and decision-making and that, going forward, sustainable development would include cultural development.

56. **Ms. Miti-Drummond** (Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism), introducing her report on climate change and persons with albinism (see [A/78/167](#)), said that persons with albinism were at a much higher risk of developing skin cancer from exposure to ultraviolet radiation compared with the general population. With levels of ultraviolet rays rising globally, that risk would increase even more. Yet in countries with harsh, hot and tropical climates,

persons with albinism were unable to afford the sunscreen and protective clothing that could effectively prevent skin cancer.

57. Persons with albinism were often unable to prepare effectively for climate-related disasters and extreme weather events and, like other persons with disabilities, were disproportionately affected by such disasters, the impact of which often led to ecological grief or anxiety. Food scarcity and the loss of livelihoods due to climate change particularly affected persons with albinism who, owing to a lack of proper education, often worked low-income jobs that exposed them to regular sun damage. The forcible displacement of persons with albinism due to natural disasters also exacerbated existing disparities that children with albinism faced when accessing education.

58. In the aftermath of climate disasters, protection for persons with albinism against attacks and killings could be non-existent, and even more dangerous were beliefs that the presence of persons with albinism within a community was to blame for famine or drought, or that killing persons with albinism and using their body parts in rituals could bring better harvests and weather conditions. There had been reports of increased attacks against persons with albinism owing to heightened poverty resulting from climate change, and a misbelief that selling the body parts of a person with albinism could bring wealth.

59. It was necessary to include persons with albinism in national, regional and global responses to the threat of climate change. They were often forgotten or excluded from disaster planning, management and responses and, in some countries, were not even considered to be part of the disability community. The representation of persons with albinism in climate change dialogue could ensure that data on how they were affected were collected as part of wider policy discussions.

60. **Ms. Greffine** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that persons with albinism, particularly women and girls, faced challenges related to discrimination and socioeconomic status. The European Union continued to strongly oppose all forms of discrimination, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Effective disaster risk reduction required ensuring that no one was left behind and integrating a human rights-based approach, including a disability-inclusive focus, at all stages of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The European Union would continue to formulate human rights-based, gender-responsive and child-

sensitive policies that promoted gender equality and non-discrimination.

61. Strong social protection systems were essential during disasters and emergencies, especially for persons with albinism. Barriers to their access to education and secure employment, such as stigma and discrimination, could be addressed through strong preventive mechanisms and initiatives, including national emergency plans, improved social assistance services and the implementation of culturally mindful community-based measures. She asked how Member States could raise awareness of the specific needs of persons with albinism in the context of climate change-related challenges.

62. **Ms. Tambwe** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the claim made in the report that persons with albinism in the United Republic of Tanzania were blamed for famine and drought was baseless. Drought was caused by atmospheric conditions, such as climate change, oceanic temperature, change in jet streams and change in landscape, and the causes of famine were complex and often interlinked with other events. Persons with albinism had no hand in such issues.

63. The report alleged that drought and unprecedented weather patterns had precipitated food insecurity for persons with albinism, forcing them to work long hours under a blistering sun and in unbearable heat. Food insecurity did not affect persons with albinism only, and her Government had taken several measures to address the issue. A task force had been established and special court sessions had been held to address killings of persons with albinism. Awareness-raising campaigns held on such issues across the country had been fruitful.

64. **Mr. Wang** Zixu (China) said that persons with albinism were equal members of society and deserved recognition and care. All Governments should take tangible measures to improve the recognition, protection and enjoyment of the legitimate rights of persons with albinism, to eliminate discrimination and violations against them in their own countries and to ensure their equal inclusion in society. The international community should make joint efforts to increase communication and education so as to prevent prejudice against albinism, and to share good practices for safeguarding the rights and dignity of persons with albinism. The Chinese Government had designated albinism as a rare disease in 2018, had supported medical study of the condition and had provided access to medical resources for persons with albinism.

65. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation recognized the importance of the Independent Expert's mandate and noted the dangers

involved in carrying it out. The report referred to the importance of protecting persons with albinism from harmful traditional practices such as ritual attacks and killings and trafficking in body parts for purposes of witchcraft. Addressing such practices required addressing the regressive culture and ideology behind them, as well as an understanding of the situation of persons with albinism, who lived in constant fear of being killed.

66. The Government of Tanzania was one of only a few that had participated in events organized by the Independent Expert. At the same time, the report referred to an article published by ENACT Observer that made accusations against that Government. He asked what steps had been taken to verify that information. He also asked why the report referred to articles of such nature, given that the Government of Tanzania was clearly prepared to expand its cooperation with the Independent Expert. He was raising the issue because his own country suffered from similar treatment.

67. **Ms. Miti-Drummond** (Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism) said that awareness could be raised on the situation of persons with albinism in relation to climate change by including those persons in discussions on the subject. There were very little data and research in that regard, partly because persons with albinism remained invisible. It was important that country-specific data were collected so that Governments could understand the country-specific situation of persons with albinism, the impact of climate change on them, their needs and how they could be best supported. In that regard, it was essential to ensure the genuine inclusion of persons with albinism in climate change disaster management, responses and long-term strategies. Many island States, which were those most affected by climate change, had among the world's highest incidence of persons with albinism, and those persons should therefore be included in strategies on climate change and relocation in those countries. In some cases, when people were relocated, the first step was to cut down trees to build housing. However, given the serious concerns of skin cancer for persons with albinism, cutting down trees would continue to negatively affect them instead of supporting them. Persons with albinism were not the only people affected by climate change, but they were disproportionately affected, particularly because they were not included in discussions.

68. Increasing ultraviolet rays and heat were impacting persons with albinism not only in Africa but in countries all over the world. Sunscreen and protective gear were essential for persons with albinism, yet, in some countries, sunscreen cost a third of the minimum

wage, and persons with albinism were often among those living in poverty. Sunscreen continued to be viewed as a cosmetic product, and was not included on the World Health Organization (WHO) Model List of Essential Medicines. Free access to sunscreen for persons with albinism who could not afford it was therefore needed.

69. Good practices for bringing an end to attacks against persons with albinism included the multisectoral African Union Plan of Action to End Attacks and Other Human Rights Violations Targeting Persons with Albinism in Africa (2021–2031), which focused on justice, education and the need for awareness-raising to tackle myths and misrepresentations regarding persons with albinism. States needed deliberate plans of action to combat myths that the presence of persons with albinism caused natural disasters.

70. She called on Governments to enact legislation for the provision of sunscreen for persons with albinism, as Panama had done. Countries such as Kenya, Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania also provided access to free sunscreen. She encouraged initiatives to develop sunscreen locally to reduce its cost, education on the impact of climate change, awareness-raising on climate change and albinism, and funding for issues regarding climate change and disabilities, including albinism.

71. Persons with albinism were more than capable of engaging in advocacy, including climate change advocacy, themselves. In some countries, for example, organizations of persons with albinism were involved in planting trees to help with the effects of climate change. She encouraged States to include persons with albinism in finding innovative solutions for climate change.

72. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

73. **Mr. Radovic** (Serbia) said that Serbia had been the first Member State to incorporate the principle of leaving no one behind into its legislation and strategies. To mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, his Government had launched a campaign to promote and strengthen the values contained therein and to advance good practices in respecting and promoting human rights. Serbia continuously submitted reports on the implementation of international human rights agreements and norms and had recently acceded to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

74. In addressing the problems encountered by the non-Albanian population of the southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, Serbia had faced challenges in

ensuring physical security and the respect and promotion of human rights, particularly those of minority communities and vulnerable persons, including internally displaced persons. Serbia had the highest number of internally displaced persons in Europe.

75. Serbia had established new institutional mechanisms for coordination and cooperation in the field of human rights, including a council for development and cooperation with civil society and a council for gender equality. As a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, Serbia paid special attention to the rights of minorities, particularly the right to use minority languages and scripts, and the rights to education, employment and participation in political life.

76. As a result of its unique geographical position, Serbia remained on many migration routes and, owing to its experience of the suffering endured by forcibly displaced persons, had developed good practices for addressing the current refugee and migrant crises. His delegation actively supported efforts to address the question of forced displacement as a global humanitarian problem and advocated for the consistent application of international norms and regulations on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The protection of human rights and freedoms should remain a common goal of all Member States, so as to inspire new generations to work together to achieve a more just and equitable world.

77. *Ms. Monica (Bangladesh), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

78. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her country condemned the bombing of the Ahli Arab Hospital in the Gaza Strip by Israeli forces, which had led to hundreds of deaths and injuries. Her delegation called for all parties to protect civilians and refrain from targeting them. The international community needed to make joint efforts to end hostilities immediately, to respect international humanitarian law and to avoid further escalation and tension in the region.

79. Morocco placed particular importance on harmonizing national legislation with international human rights instruments. The Constitution affirmed the commitment of Morocco to those instruments, underscored the primacy of the international conventions ratified by Morocco over domestic legislation and reaffirmed the country's choice to build a democratic State founded on participation, pluralism, good governance, moderation, peaceful coexistence and dialogue. Between 2022 and 2023, Morocco had submitted three periodic human rights reports.

80. A draft amendment to the Family Code, aiming to promote issues related to women and families and developed through collaboration between the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, the public prosecutor's office and other relevant bodies and stakeholders, would be submitted for the King's consideration within six months, before being submitted to Parliament for adoption.

81. **Mr. Hassani** (Algeria) said that, in order to address human rights situations in a spirit of constructive international dialogue and cooperation, the principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity must be respected. The Palestinian people had the right to peace, dignity and self-determination under international human rights instruments, just like all other peoples. Their tragic situation in the besieged and bombed Gaza Strip was contrary to the most basic humanitarian and international law. Algeria called for an end to the assault on the people and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, for immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access and for an end to the forced transfer of Palestinian people. The international community must provide an urgent response to assist the oppressed and persecuted population, put an end to the aggression and revive the peace process to enable the Palestinian people to establish an independent State within the 1967 borders.

82. The Constitution of Algeria, approved by referendum in 2020, had allowed for the establishment of the Constitutional Court, the National Observatory of Civil Society and the High Council for Youth. It also enshrined the equal rights and responsibilities of all citizens, aimed to remove barriers to the effective participation of all and promoted women's rights.

83. The Human Rights Council had been set up to assess human rights situations in countries in an integrated and holistic manner that would create a climate of trust and confidence. Algeria reiterated the importance of respecting its national jurisdiction and avoiding double standards in human rights matters. Member States should receive technical cooperation and human rights capacity-building in line with their requirements and expectations. Coordination and integration of national, regional and international mechanisms for the realization of human rights also needed to be strengthened.

84. **Mr. Manyanga** (Zimbabwe) said that the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights was an individual and collective imperative. No country had arrived at the full respect of rights and freedoms, and countries were at different junctures in that journey. Solidarity and unity were key to encouraging those that

were furthest behind and assisting them in addressing identified gaps.

85. In that regard, the nobility of the principal institutions in promoting and protecting human rights should not be sacrificed for political expedience. Those that were guilty of doing so were as liable as those accused of violating human rights. Compromising the impartiality, non-selectivity and universality of the human rights treaty bodies undermined their credibility. Fairness and impartiality, like justice, should not only be achieved but be seen to be achieved, and Zimbabwe upheld the foundational principles of the work of the treaty bodies. All human rights, including economic rights, should be respected and protected equally.

86. The promotion and protection of human rights should not be the preserve of a few select States that took it upon themselves to police others. Dialogue was the most constructive way forward to assist those lagging behind in achieving ideal human rights standards and was a tried and tested approach that produced lasting solutions. No self-serving, targeted mechanisms had produced tangible results. Country-specific mechanisms did not enjoy the support of the targeted country, and were divisive and confrontational and generated animosity. Zimbabwe was committed to existing peer-review mechanisms, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism and the universal periodic review.

87. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that the devastating human rights situation of Myanmar was well known, and the fundamental rights of its people were being widely and systematically violated by the illegal military junta. The illegal coup by the military had denied the people of Myanmar the democratic right to elect their own Government and had been followed by flagrant disregard for other human rights. People who had exercised their rights to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly had been brutally shot by the military and security forces.

88. The military junta had murdered more than 4,100 civilians since the coup, and democracy activists had been arbitrarily executed following secret sham military trials. There were currently no rule of law or legal safeguards to guarantee the rights enshrined in the international human rights conventions to which Myanmar was party. The military junta was not merely committing human rights violations, but crimes against humanity and war crimes through indiscriminate air strikes against the civilian population, brutal mass killings and wholesale burning of civilian homes.

89. The people of Myanmar would not enjoy their human rights, including the right to development, while

the illegal military junta continued its coup. The junta had no legitimacy to govern the people of Myanmar, and its mismanagement of the economy and destruction of the business environment had left nearly half the population in poverty. The repatriation of the Rohingya from Bangladesh would never happen sustainably under the inhumane military junta, and their safe return and harmonious reintegration into Myanmar depended on how quickly Myanmar could return to democracy, peace, stability and the protection of human rights by the rule of law. His delegation called for all Member States, particularly the members of the Security Council, to take decisive action individually or collectively to end the illegal military junta and establish a federal, democratic union with effective, inclusive and accountable institutions. Attacks against civilian areas anywhere were unacceptable and must end. His delegation joined others in mourning the loss of innocent civilians in the Middle East.

90. **Ms. Al Jarad** (Oman) said that her country placed human beings, regardless of gender, race or affiliation, at the centre of its development efforts, in line with its Oman Vision 2040 initiative. Oman had contributed to the establishment of the Human Rights Council and worked assiduously to spread human rights principles globally. Governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, had expressed approval of Omani human rights programmes.

91. Oman was concerned about violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories. After 75 years of violations and systematic practices by the Israeli occupying forces, which violated the most basic rights of the Palestinian people, the international community must stand against those grave violations, which included mass killing and the use of starvation as a deterrent. The Committee had a great responsibility towards the Palestinian people and other peoples under occupation. Oman called upon the international community to reject and end those violations.

92. **Archbishop Caccia** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the natural foundation of human rights appeared all the more solid when it was considered that their roots lay in the dignity that was inherent in human life, equal in all persons and given by God. In that sense, States and Governments did not confer human rights but had a duty to promote and protect them, particularly by respecting the inherent dignity of each person.

93. The failure to respect and safeguard any member of the human family undermined the foundations of

human society. The right to life was at the heart of respect for the equal value of every person, without which no other rights could be exercised or enjoyed. In an address made in January 2023, Pope Francis had appealed for the rights of those who were weakest to be safeguarded and for the throwaway culture affecting older persons, disabled persons, the sick and the unborn to be combated. The partial protection of human rights implied a failure to recognize them, since they entailed the fulfilment of the essential needs of the person.

94. Respect for dignity could not exist without guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, and the reason and conscience with which every human being was endowed could only develop in conditions that allowed them to pursue the truth. The true litmus test for the protection of human rights was the degree to which people in a country enjoyed freedom of religion or belief, and Governments had the duty to protect that right.

95. The duties incumbent upon each human being were inextricably linked to the notion of human rights. The right of one person corresponded to a duty on the part of all others to recognize and respect the right in question. It was a contradiction to affirm rights without acknowledging corresponding responsibilities, and those who did so built with one hand and destroyed with the other.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

96. **Ms. Nabeta** (Uganda), responding to statements made by the representatives of the United States and Australia regarding the Anti-Homosexuality Act, said that her Government remained steadfast in its commitment to uphold, promote and protect human rights, so long as the enjoyment of individual rights did not infringe upon the rights of others and did not contravene the Constitution or existing legislation. Recently, a deliberate, well-orchestrated and widespread campaign to promote homosexuality among youth, particularly in schools, had gained the attention of the entire country. Schoolchildren had become wary of attending boarding schools, which impacted their educational prospects. The issue of homosexuality and its potential adverse impact on community values, particularly the protection of children's rights, had become a matter of public concern.

97. The public had called upon their political leaders to pronounce themselves on ongoing acts and had called for the immediate and urgent protection of children and other vulnerable persons from social exploitation. A bill introduced by a member of the Ugandan opposition party had been debated in Parliament and had passed into law on 2 May 2023, informed primarily by the

public outcry across all sections of the population against the rampant recruitment of children into homosexuality. Notably, the United States was the country in which the highest number of bills against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons had been introduced.

98. Strong cultural and religious institutions continued to moderate the social and political fabric of Uganda. Their role in maintaining, guiding and protecting well-established traditions and values remained key, and they had had a decisive influence on debates about homosexuality and the Anti-Homosexuality Act. In Uganda, all persons were equal before the law, and no one had been discriminated against based on sexual orientation, despite laws that predated the country's independence. What would never be condoned was the deliberate promotion of any sexual orientation, heterosexual and homosexual alike. Activism for or the promotion and public display of private matters was inconsistent with Ugandan culture, customs, morals and laws and was not permitted.

99. Various institutional safeguards protected the constitutional rights and freedoms of all Ugandans, who were able to seek redress in the event of grievances, and all persons were protected from discrimination under the Equal Opportunities Commission Act. No one allegedly identified or suspected of being a homosexual was punished under the Anti-Homosexuality Act, and the Act would not reverse positive progress made in the fight against HIV/AIDS or discriminate against any person seeking health care or other services on the grounds of being a homosexual.

100. Uganda encouraged partners to look at all the circumstances that had led to the Anti-Homosexuality Act, rather than cherry-picking, and to share the concerns of the people of Uganda for the young people to whom there was a duty and responsibility to provide protection, care and a safe environment in which to grow. Her delegation implored all partners to respect the internal processes of Uganda and allow the country's democratic structures to work.

101. **Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) said that China absolutely opposed and rejected the unfounded accusations made by the representatives of the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries. No matter what political show they put on in the Committee and how desperately they manoeuvred other countries, their lies and political schemes to destabilize and use Xinjiang to contain China could not deceive the world, and any unbiased person could see the basic fact that Xinjiang was enjoying social stability, economic prosperity and religious harmony. The so-called assessment of human

rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region was full of lies and had been rejected by the Human Rights Council. Attempts to obstruct the development of China through human rights issues would not succeed, and the great rejuvenation of China could not be interrupted by external forces. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, Chinese people of all ethnic groups were forging ahead on the path of modernization, contributing greatly to peace, development and human rights for all.

102. Attacking China under the pretext of human rights did not hide those countries' own deplorable track records. In the United Kingdom, racism had flourished in recent years, senior Cabinet officials had openly discredited the international refugee convention, and the army had wantonly targeted and shot Afghan people. The United States was known for its genocide of Native Americans and was where gun violence claimed tens of thousands of lives annually, where family separation resulting from the detention of immigrant children was a daily tragedy and where hypocrisy and double standards on issues regarding Israel and the State of Palestine had provoked the rage of Muslim countries. In the name of freedom of speech, some European countries condoned the desecration of Islamic holy texts, which fuelled Islamophobia. Japan was irresponsibly discharging contaminated nuclear water into the sea, jeopardizing international public health and destroying the planet.

103. The hypocrisy of those countries was the greatest obstacle to the progress of international human rights, and their incitement of confrontation had no support. Those countries were creating division and confrontation and forcing Member States to take sides, deliberately undermining their unity and the fundamental interests of the international community. In the Third Committee, over 100 countries had spoken out against politicizing human rights issues and using them to interfere in the internal affairs of China. China was firm and unswerving in following its path to modernization.

104. **Mr. Kim Nam Hyok** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his delegation totally rejected and condemned the provocative remarks made by the representative of South Korea as grave political provocation and a reckless hostile act against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. South Korea was eager to abuse the platform for its impure and sinister plots, and the so-called forced repatriation it touted was totally fabricated and nothing but a political trick aimed at tarnishing the image of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In his country, a people-first policy was embedded in all sectors of social life,

and so-called human rights issues did not and could never exist.

105. It was ridiculous and absurd for South Korea, the world's worst human rights wasteland and a colonial territory rampant with fascist dictatorship and corruption, to talk about human rights in other States. In South Korea, the majority of people were unable to enjoy their social, political, economic and cultural rights under the notorious security law and, due to anti-people policies, the social and economic crisis was worsening and the right to life was seriously threatened. The number of people in extreme poverty had risen to more than 2 million, the rate of suicide was the worst in the world, and numerous women and ordinary people were victims of murder, kidnapping, drug crime, sexual violence and human trafficking. Along with the United States, South Korea was a heinous human rights abuser that was gravely threatening the rights to life and development of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by carrying out aggressive nuclear war exercises and military provocation against them.

106. Human rights and national sovereignty were one and the same, and, in the face of hostile and realistic security threats, any sovereign State had the legitimate and indisputable right to strengthen its self-defence capabilities to protect its national sovereignty and the life and safety of its people. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea would never tolerate any hostile act encroaching on its sovereignty and dignity and would make every effort to defend the people's system and their rights.

107. The so-called abduction issue referred to in the groundless claims made by the representative of Japan had already been resolved in a complete and irreversible manner thanks to the sincere efforts of his Government. As the worst war criminal State in the world, Japan had no right to talk about the issues of other countries. In the past century, Japan had committed crimes against humanity such as the forcible drafting and abduction of 8.4 million Koreans, the genocide of 1 million of them and the military sexual slavery of 200,000 Korean women and girls. His delegation once again urged Japan to end its politically motivated campaign against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and to give priority to taking concrete steps towards officially apologizing for its past crimes and providing due compensation.

108. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that it was ironic that the Committee was hosted by the most brutal violator of human rights, which was only interested in supporting an Israeli regime that attacked hospitals full of sick civilians seeking refuge. It was

heartbreaking to see the situation of innocent Palestinians deteriorating every day. The representative of the United States should observe the protests on the streets of New York against the brutal occupation by the Israeli apartheid regime. When that apartheid regime invited Member States to stand with it while introducing itself as peace-seeking, it was not illogical to doubt the real meaning of peace. It was time to undo the legacy of exceptionalism, discrimination and securitization, perpetuated by the continued existence of the facility at Guantanamo Bay, of which the closure remained a priority.

109. In the United States, it made no difference whether a person was in prison chains or in the chains of racial discrimination. Dead bodies piled up at the feet of the dictatorships of the United States and the European Union, and their imposition of illegal unilateral coercive measures was a flagrant manifestation of sacrificing humanity. It was not surprising that the States members of the European Union were sharing the burden of making accusations against Iran and other countries, since the Union existed thanks to the dictatorial method of forcing members to follow the poisonous recipe it had prepared. The anti-sovereignist European Union had no source from which to draft its statements but unprofessional and dubious media outlets. The countries of the European Union were celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but did not look at the principles and articles that emphasized the importance of friendly relations between nations and could not rid themselves of the historical racism that ran in their blood. Statements by the States members of the European Union were filled with false positions against independent Member States of the United Nations, with which they aimed to overload the Organization with their bond of unity and impose their so-called human rights values. France was well known for its high rate of domestic and sexual violence and for violating girls' right to education by prohibiting them from attending school in Islamic dress codes.

110. Responding to comments made by France, Canada, Australia and other countries, she said that, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, any laws, including the laws on the hijab, passed through a thorough process that considered Islamic values, cultural backgrounds, the legal context and the reality, needs and demands of citizens. Men and women received the same level of protection under the Constitution and were therefore equal before the law. Iran was fully aware of its commitments and obligations under international law and adhered to the promotion and protection of the human rights of all its people, including women and

girls. Her delegation urged the representatives of France, Canada, Australia and other countries that had raised illegitimate issues about the way Iran legislated to review the Charter of the United Nations as a cornerstone of the Committee and to refrain from politicizing the platform.

111. **Ms. Tokarska** (Ukraine) said that, when claiming that Ukraine had banned the Russian language and culture, the representative of the Russian Federation had failed to mention the violations committed by his own Government. Throughout history, the Russian Federation had tried its best to erase and destroy Ukraine, its culture and anything associated with it. Nevertheless, Ukraine still existed and was a democracy where, unlike the Russian Federation, people had the rights to choose their language, to have a voice and to culture.

112. Since the start of the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, Indigenous Peoples had had to hide anything that made them visible, Crimean Tatars continued to be falsely accused by Russian courts and sentenced to imprisonment for their heritage, and representatives of Indigenous Peoples had been investigated and prosecuted as extremists and terrorists. When the full-scale war had begun in 2022, people in the occupied territories of Ukraine had had to hide their ethnic clothes, flags and books and poetry written in Ukrainian to avoid being killed by the Russian army. Claims by the Russian Federation that it had arrived in a Ukrainian city to protect Russian-speaking citizens often meant that it was there to kill Ukrainians, starting with persons, including children, with Ukrainian flags in their homes. So-called Russian peace led only to the death of Ukrainians and other people around the world. Russian culture meant torture, rape, bullets, missiles and mines. So-called Russian hospitality meant death.

113. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his country was deeply shocked by the tragedy resulting from the missile strike on and destruction of the Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip, in which hundreds of people had died or been injured. His delegation wished to express its heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims, the people of Gaza, the long-suffering people of the State of Palestine and its Government.

114. At the Committee's 25th meeting, his delegation had called on Member States to engage in equal, mutually respectful and constructive dialogue to promote human rights. In response, the delegations of the United States and other countries had used the Committee to spread disinformation regarding a number of sovereign States, including the Russian Federation. Those States did not accept the aggressive and deceitful

policy of the West and were pursuing their own independent foreign policy.

115. The unfounded accusations made by the United States were no longer believed since they were at odds with that State's actions. Unlike its Western colleagues, the Russian Federation had attempted to take steps within the Security Council to prevent the tragedy that had occurred at the Ahli Hospital. On 13 October 2023, his delegation had proposed a short, purely humanitarian draft resolution on a ceasefire, setting out specific urgent measures to stop the violence and suffering of civilians and to prevent an imminent humanitarian catastrophe. Given the need for urgent action in response to the extremely tense situation, no political elements or assessments had been included in the text. During the voting on 16 October, a number of States had voted in favour of the draft resolution, but the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Japan had voted against it. The Council had therefore been unable to take the natural and logical decision to adopt the draft resolution, which was an absolute humanitarian imperative and a moral duty of the international community in the current circumstances. Culpability for the death of hundreds of people at the Ahli Hospital lay in part with those States that had blocked the adoption of the draft resolution.

116. On 18 October 2023, Brazil had submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which had been supported by most States. It was again only the United States that had voted against it. He wondered how many people must die and how many innocent women and children must suffer before the United States stopped obstructing the provision of humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict and the saving of lives. After those votes, the claims of the United States of being committed to protecting human rights rang hollow. His delegation called on the United States to come to its senses and to stop kindling conflict, covering up crimes and turning a blind eye to suffering.

117. **Mr. Shaked** (Israel) said that his country was digging the graves of the 1,400 mothers, fathers, sons and daughters of Israel who had been murdered by a fundamentalist ideology of evil and hate, some of whom had been burnt alive, tied up and tortured in front of their loved ones. In such dark times, there could be no doubt that Hamas was the embodiment of evil.

118. The Palestinian representative had expressed fears about the fate of Palestinians in Gaza. Israel shared those fears. That was why the Israel Defense Forces had warned civilians to leave northern Gaza and had targeted only terrorist organizations seeking the demise of Israel.

Such was the fundamental difference between Israel and Hamas, which, in its vicious fanaticism, felt stronger as it bathed in the blood of its people and had ordered civilians to stay in their homes and be killed, in a blatant display of barbarism towards its own people.

119. His delegation invited Palestinians, who suffered most from the heinous actions of Hamas, to condemn that terrorist organization and any others in their midst. If they wished to live freely, they should rid themselves of the terrorist organization that sought to control them and use them as pawns. Hate would not prevail, because the people of Israel stood in its way.

120. **Ms. Song Hye Ryoung** (Republic of Korea) said that the statement made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had included a groundless accusation against her Government. The serious human rights violations and abuses suffered by the North Koreans who had been forcibly repatriated had been documented in the 2014 report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and in numerous testimonies of defectors from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Her delegation urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respect the human rights of such escapees who had been forcibly repatriated.

121. Her delegation called upon all Member States to uphold the principle of non-refoulement and to cooperate to ensure that North Korean escapees in third countries were not forcibly returned and were able to move safely and without delay. There were 4,777 wartime abductees and 516 post-war abductees recognized in her country's legislation who, along with their families, continued to suffer greatly. Her delegation urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to uphold the human rights of those abductees and to return them to their families as soon as possible, and called for the immediate repatriation of citizens of the Republic of Korea and prisoners of war detained in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The National Security Act was necessary to protect the basic order of a liberal democracy in the face of an unreserved security threat from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

122. Her Government supported efforts to improve the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and urged that State to improve the human rights situation of its people instead of concentrating on its illicit nuclear weapon and missile development programmes. Her delegation was particularly concerned that such programmes were being funded through human rights violations such as forced labour.

123. **Mr. Ono** (Japan) said that the historical claims and figures referred to by the representative of North Korea were groundless and based on factual errors. The claims made by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the issue of abductions were based on erroneous information. As his delegation had previously mentioned, the abduction issue was a time-sensitive human rights issue that could not be neglected. His delegation urged North Korea to implement the Stockholm Agreement and return all abductees to Japan as quickly as possible. North Korea should listen to the voices of the international community, including as expressed in General Assembly resolution [77/226](#) on the situation of human rights in North Korea, and of the victims and their families.

124. Responding to comments made by the representative of China, he said that his Government had always provided the international community with transparent and detailed explanations, based on scientific evidence, regarding the discharge of treated water into the sea. Such efforts had undergone review by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which was authorized to establish, adopt and apply international safety standards in the field of nuclear energy. His Government would never allow the discharge of water that would endanger human health or the marine environment and would continue to strictly abide by relevant international law while giving due consideration to international practice.

125. **Mr. Kim** Nam Hyok (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his delegation totally rejected and condemned all accusations made by South Korea as a politically motivated campaign and a plot to deceive the international community and cover up its own serious human rights abuses. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly urged South Korea to stop its political provocation under the pretext of human rights and its application of double standards, break its bad habit of bringing up non-existent issues of other States, and give priority to cleaning up its own dire human rights situation.

126. Regarding the comments made by the representative of Japan, the so-called abduction issue no longer existed as it had been completely and irreversibly resolved. Compensation for the past war crimes of Japan was a pressing international and political issue that should be settled without delay. Even if Japan denied it, history could not be changed, and crimes against humanity had no statutory limitations. Japan had a legal and moral obligation to provide a sincere apology and compensation to all victims of its past war crimes.

127. **Ms. Song** Hye Ryoung (Republic of Korea) said that she would not repeat her first response to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Her delegation urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to improve the human rights situation of its people instead of concentrating on its nuclear weapons and missile development programme.

128. **Mr. Ono** (Japan) said that he would not repeat his delegation's position. The Pyongyang Declaration of September 2002 stated that both sides had decided that they would discuss the issue of property and claims concretely during normalization talks, pursuant to the basic principle that when the bilateral relationship was normalized, both Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would mutually waive all their property and claims and those of their nationals that had arisen from causes that had occurred before 15 August 1945. Japan urged North Korea to take concrete action to resolve outstanding issues of concern, including abductions and nuclear missiles, in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration.

129. **Mr. Yang** Xiaokun (China) said that his delegation was pleased to hear Japan raise the important issue of contaminated water from Fukushima. However, Japan had again made a pale and insincere attempt to defend itself. He asked whether it was true that the contaminated water contained a large amount of harmful nuclides, whether Japan had failed to conduct a full assessment of disposal options other than sea discharge, as required by IAEA, whether the people of Japan and neighbouring countries strongly opposed the discharge of the water into the sea, and whether the IAEA report did not in fact constitute a recommendation or endorsement of the discharge. He wondered why, if the nuclear contaminated water was safe, it had to be discharged into the sea. China urged Japan to immediately rectify its mistake, to stop minimizing or covering up the danger of discharging the contaminated water into the sea and to provide the international community with a sincere and credible explanation.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.