



# Economic and Social Council

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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-fifth session

### Summary record (partial)\* of the 1st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 12 February 2024, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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\* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Opening of the session**

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventy-fifth session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
2. The celebrations to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had served as a reminder of the importance of respect for human dignity. That respect could be ensured only if economic, social and cultural rights were considered not as mere aspirations but as legal standards that needed to underlie policy choices; if the international community embraced a human rights economy and adopted approaches focused on the well-being, dignity and rights of people and the planet; and if the rights to education, universal health coverage, food, water, housing, social security, participation in cultural life and a healthy environment were enjoyed by everyone. Gender equality required particular attention. The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, the fact that 2 billion people lived in conflict regions where resources were diverted away from rights-based sustainable development, the outdated, dysfunctional and unjust global financial architecture, and the need to place human rights at the centre of all policies to tackle the world drugs problem were just some of the areas in which the Committee's work could make a real difference.
3. On 5 February 2024, South Sudan had acceded to the Covenant and the Optional Protocol and had declared its acceptance of article 10 of the Optional Protocol on inter-State communications. In so doing, it had become the 172nd State party to the Covenant.

### **Statement by the representative of the Secretary-General**

4. **Ms. Favretto** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that 2024 was a critical year for human rights and for the work of the Committee in particular. It was important to build on the progress achieved in 2023, including at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023 and during the year-long campaign to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As States discussed accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and prepared for the Summit of the Future, it was clear that the Committee's guidance was crucial.
5. The world was at a moment of extraordinary crisis: progress on human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals was in grave danger; the number of people living in severe poverty had risen for the first time in a generation; inequalities were deepening more than ever; there was a triple planetary crisis, and the economic system required a profound transformation. In 2023, the High Commissioner for Human Rights had launched the vision of a human rights economy, which aimed to anchor budgets, taxation and other aspects of economic and social policymaking firmly in human rights norms and standards. It recognized economic, social and cultural rights as part of the legal framework and acknowledged that economic growth on its own would not redress existing structural injustices or save the planet. It called for new human rights-based metrics and strengthened data collection and analysis, to make existing patterns of discrimination visible. The human rights economy was gaining growing support among Member States, had been acknowledged in a Human Rights Council resolution for the first time in 2023 and would be one of the strategic directions in the new Office Management Plan that would guide human rights work over the coming four years.
6. The High Commissioner had presented plans to expand the work of OHCHR on economic, social and cultural rights. Priority areas included reinforcing support for States' efforts to address structural inequalities and giving advice on macroeconomic and fiscal policies, the incorporation of Covenant rights into domestic law and the anchoring of economic and social policies in obligations under the Covenant.
7. Through its country and regional offices, OHCHR had initiated over 70 seeding-change projects, which covered a wide range of economic, social and cultural rights and Sustainable Development Goals. The Committee's recommendations had often

proved to be key entry points for country engagement, as evidenced by activities in, for example, Cameroon, Jordan, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Timor-Leste and Zambia.

8. The Secretary-General of the United Nations had repeatedly called for an overhaul of the international financial system. At an intersessional meeting of the Human Rights Council held on 18 January 2024, growing support had been expressed for placing human rights at the heart of the international financial, debt and tax architecture. That would require a massive increase in the resources available for developing countries to invest in human rights; a transformation of the economic paradigm of international financial institutions; and an end to conditionalities in their loans and projects that disregarded and undermined States' ability to meet their human rights obligations. Institutions' policy and practice had to be updated to consider the impact of financial operations, loans and investments on human rights and inequality. Moreover, there was a need to tackle the high cost of debt and to develop a more effective process for restructuring unsustainable sovereign debt that took into account States' international human rights obligations. Lastly, global tax rules should be reformed to tackle rampant abuse and increase the resources that governments could mobilize domestically.

9. Recommendations from international human rights mechanisms, in particular the Committee, played a key role in reminding States and other stakeholders that the 2030 Agenda was a human rights agenda and that human rights needed to be integrated in development strategies, policies and programmes. In the aftermath of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group had launched six transitions linked directly to articles of the Covenant, including in the areas of food systems, social protection and jobs, education, energy access and affordability, and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. In the coming years, United Nations country teams would focus their support on those transformative entry points, in order to maximize their catalytic and multiplier effects across the Sustainable Development Goals. OHCHR would make it a priority to highlight the wealth of analyses and recommendations from the human rights mechanisms that spoke to the six transitions, while ensuring that the latter were adequately integrated in countries' sustainable development cooperation frameworks.

10. OHCHR continued to support the strengthening of the treaty bodies. However, budgetary constraints, coupled with the ongoing liquidity crisis, would have an adverse impact on the bodies' proper functioning. At an informal briefing in November 2023, the High Commissioner had underscored the urgency for States to provide the resources needed to overcome those challenges, stressing that OHCHR had reached the point where it had to align its deliverables with existing capacity.

11. The shared strategic goal for 2024 was to mobilize States' support for the strengthening and further harmonization of the work of the treaty bodies. Decisions made by States during the year on the main pillars of the treaty body strengthening process would determine the future trajectory of the treaty body system. The process would culminate in the adoption of the biennial resolution by the General Assembly in December 2024.

12. As of 22 January 2024, the United Nations Office at Geneva had ceased servicing hybrid or virtual meetings using any platform, system or tool. OHCHR realized how disruptive the sudden announcement had been to the work of the Committee, which it thanked for its understanding.

#### **Adoption of the agenda (E/C.12/75/1)**

13. *The agenda was adopted.*

*The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 10.30 a.m.*