



Economic and Social Council

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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-first session

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

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 14 February 2022, at 11 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Abdel-Moneim

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* Reissued for technical reasons on 24 February 2022.
** No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventy-first session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
2. **Ms. Lee** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that she was pleased to see that the majority of the Committee members had been able to attend the current session in person, despite the fact that, owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, arrangements for the current session had been confirmed at a late date. She hoped that it would be possible to plan with more certainty for the remainder of 2022 and beyond. She wished to note that, thanks to significant investment by the United Nations, meeting rooms had been equipped with digital technology that integrated interpretation and webcasting on the same digital platform; the result was a major achievement.
3. Recalling that issues at the core of the Committee's mandate were also at the heart of the efforts of the United Nations, which had called for a renewed social contract anchored in human rights, she said that recent global shocks and trends included dramatically increasing inequality, the debt crisis, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee, which recently had provided meaningful guidance to States on how to overcome pandemic-related challenges, had emphasized that the obligations stemming from the Covenant should underpin the global recovery process. She had been pleased to note that the Committee's 2019 statement on the pledge to "leave no one behind", as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, set out concrete recommendations to give effect to that pledge. She looked forward to seeing more efforts by the Committee to indicate the practical measures that States parties should take to tackle major crises in accordance with their human rights obligations.
4. She trusted that the online regional consultation for Europe held the previous week had provided the Committee with useful inputs for a future general comment on sustainable development; both that consultation process and the ongoing work on the draft general comment on land and economic, social and cultural rights were considered critical activities.
5. In November 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had met with the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies to discuss, inter alia, the treaty body strengthening process. The Chairs had outlined their treaty bodies' respective proposals on the development of a predictable calendar of review cycles that would maximize synergies and complementarity among treaty bodies and ensure full reporting compliance; the ongoing harmonization of working methods; and the digital transition, including the use of new technological developments to increase the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the treaty body system. The High Commissioner had urged the Chairs to formulate a consolidated proposal that was bold and creative, demonstrating the engagement of all the treaty bodies, in order to further strengthen and streamline the system and attract the necessary support from the Member States. She was prepared to support the treaty bodies, if and when consensus was reached, to advance a consolidated proposal. Noting that the Secretariat was calling for contributions to the Secretary-General's next report on the status of the treaty body system, she said that the treaty bodies should seize that opportunity to put forward a costed proposal for the consideration of the Member States. She commended the Committee for its openness to the proposals introduced thus far and encouraged the members to continue their consultations in an inclusive manner and to arrive at a position that would enable the Chair to represent the Committee's views at the thirty-fourth meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies.
6. **The Chair** said it was hoped that the Committee would soon be able to hold sessions where not just the members, but also delegations of States parties and representatives of non-governmental organizations, would attend in person. The Committee's position on the treaty body strengthening process had not changed; it looked forward to a consensus on the way forward being reached by all the treaty bodies, not only for the sake of the system, but also for the sake of victims of human rights violations.

7. He wished to draw attention to several issues that had arisen in meetings he had attended on behalf of the Committee since its previous session. First, it was becoming clear that the Committee's general comments needed to be revisited. In particular, general comment No. 14 (2000), on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, urgently needed reviewing with a view to possible amendment, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for health systems worldwide. The Committee's methods of work should also be reviewed so as to ensure that they were adequately suited to the fulfilment of the requirements under the Covenant.

8. Noting that there were several research units at OHCHR that were studying sustainable development and economic, social and cultural rights, he said it would be to the Committee's benefit to interact with them. He had also been informed that a resolution on economic, social and cultural rights was being drafted in preparation for an upcoming session of the Human Rights Council; the Committee's experience would be useful and should be taken into consideration in such processes. In addition, although the Committee was serviced by OHCHR, it was formally attached to the Economic and Social Council; he believed it would be advisable to strengthen the Committee's relationship with the Council. Lastly, recalling that the Committee had used the additional meeting time previously granted to reduce its backlog, he suggested that the Committee should consider making a new request for additional meeting time, not only to continue reducing its backlog, but also to move forward with its predictable review calendar. It would be important to seek the High Commissioner's assistance in making such a request.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11.35 a.m.