

REPORT OF THE 46th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

22 FEBRUARY – 24 MARCH 2021



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LIVELIHOOD
FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) is the United Nations' body responsible for the promotion, protection and support of human rights around the globe. It serves as an avenue where civil society and states can raise issues that require worldwide attention. At the end of every session, the HRC adopts resolutions on numerous subjects which acts as guidelines for human rights implementation around the world. As an organisation in consultative status to the United Nations' Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), the Right Livelihood Foundation has been attending HRC sessions since 2018, inviting Laureates to sit at the heart of decision-making processes and ensuring that their fights receive global attention.

This present report relates to the 46th session of the HRC, which began on February 22 and was concluded on March 24, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and health regulations, it was the first entirely virtual session. The present report seeks to summarise relevant debates around topics directly related to the work of numerous Right Livelihood Laureates which occurred during the session. It is divided in four sections, based on the type of debate at hand. First, **plenary meetings** include two types of debates: General Debates and Interactive Dialogues. The former is an open-ended form of discussion during which participants can raise any issue related the various items on the Council's agenda. The latter is a form of debate which allows states and civil society to exchange views with the UN Special Procedures on a specific topic decided by the mandate-holder. The second section of this report refers to relevant **side events** organised either by States or civil society organisations on a variety of topics. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, very few side events could be organised and were all in the form of webinars. The report therefore focuses on the single event that the Foundation co-sponsored. The third and last session of the report summarises **Universal Periodic Review's (UPR) outcomes**. The UPR is a process through which State's human rights obligations are assessed through peer-review. Following the review by the Working Group, a report containing all recommendations made by States is prepared. The State under review then makes public which recommendations it accepts or rejects. At the HRC session, states and civil society can make comments related to the UPR process and the report at hand, before its adoption. During the 46th session, Ales Bialiatski, 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate, delivered a statement on Belarus' UPR. The last and fourth session refers to relevant **resolutions** that were adopted during the Council which can be of interest to one or more Right Livelihood Laureates.

This report is not exhaustive in nature, as it does not report on every debate that took place throughout the session, but only those relevant to the work of Right Livelihood Laureates. It highlights the recurring topics from each debate and when possible, which countries mentioned the specific issue. As civil society space decreases and what happens in Geneva seems as distant as ever, this report can be seen as a useful summary to check which issues are being taken in consideration by States.

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PLENARY DEBATES AND INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES

Opening of the Council and High-Level Segment

Geneva, February 24 – 26, 2021

Newly elected **President H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan** of Fiji opened the 46th session, noting that this would be the first entirely digital regular session, with all the challenges that this could bring.

She then yielded the floor to **UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres**. He stressed that COVID-19 has deepened inequalities and created new fractures. The disease has taken a disproportionate toll on women, refugees, older persons, migrants and indigenous peoples. The virus is also infecting civil and political rights and restricting civic space. He regretted that pandemic-related restrictions are being used to weaken opposition voices and suppress criticism and said that we need to do even more to bring to life the Human Rights Call to Action that he presented last year. He then focused on racism and gender inequality, stressing that the rot of racism eats away institutions, social structures and everyday life. He called on all States to step up for minority communities and push for policies that respect human rights. He then condemned that gender inequality has been exacerbated by the pandemic and said that a male-dominated culture will yield to male-dominated responses. However, the crisis showed how fundamental women leadership is.

In her opening address, **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Michelle Bachelet** also stressed that the pandemic ripped off the mask of deadly reality of discrimination, deep inequalities and chronic under-funding for essential services and rights, all largely ignored by many policy-makers. It demonstrated how severely the neglect of human rights endangers societies. She said that to combat the pandemic, we need to acknowledge and repair the fractures that have undermined the resilience of our societies. Recovery means prioritising the reconstruction or reinforcement of systems to deliver the right to health and the right to social protection, as well as eliminating all forms of discrimination. She called on all countries to invest in stronger support for human rights, as well as for genuinely free and independent civil society organisations.

From February 22th to February 23th, 130 dignitaries addressed the Council, some of them representing countries where Right Livelihood Laureates work, including laureates at risk. Below is a summary of a few relevant addressees:

Afghanistan

H.E. Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan reaffirmed his country's unwavering commitment to protect, promote and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms. He stressed that while Human Rights are accepted almost everywhere, the challenge is now to move from discourse to practice. He underlined that the most fundamental right is the right to peace, but after 40 years of violence, the toll on Afghanis' livelihoods and lives has been immense. He condemned the recent wave of violence which targets people and civic institutions, from human rights and civil society organisations to the media. He stressed that the government of Afghanistan fully respects and cherishes the

independence and the impartial conduct of its National Human Rights Commission and is committed to increase its financial contribution to it, without restrictions. He also announced that Afghanistan is willing and committed to serve and continue to build on its legacy of constructive engagement with the Human Rights Council and seeks support for another term in 2023-2025.

Morocco

H.E. Mr. Mustafa al Ramid, Minister in charge of Human Rights and of relationships with the parliament began by praising Morocco's approach to the pandemic. Turning to the UN human rights mechanisms, he underlined that the country has continued to implement its obligations with Treaty Bodies, in particular with CEDAW. He also announced that the kingdom has decided to run for HRC membership for 2023-2025, and that the nomination enjoys the support of the African Union, the Arab League and a number of other countries. He then denounced the tragic conditions under which "Moroccan citizens" are living in Tindouf and took the opportunity to recall that the Moroccan intervention in Western Sahara at the Guerguerat crossing was peaceful and sought to restore the normal functioning of civil and commercial movement.

Germany

H.E. Mr. Heiko Maas, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs started his speech by saying how the world witnesses every day that human rights cannot be taken for granted: journalists and activists who voice criticism in many places are being detained, discrimination based on gender or ethnicity is still prevalent, human rights are violated every day in armed conflicts. He then stressed that the quest for human rights should start at home, for all, including in Germany. The country has passed a number of new legislations to step up efforts to counter racism, antisemitism and xenophobia; it has decided to increase its voluntary contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner and will continue to speak up about violations, such as those committed in Xinjiang, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Venezuela, Belarus and Russia. He then stated that protecting human rights means putting those who suffer at the center, which is why Germany has launched a programme sponsoring short-term stays for threatened Human Rights Defenders in Germany.

Palestine

H.E. Mr. Riad al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that Israel has used the pandemic to strengthen the basis of its occupation, through a lack of access to fundamental rights for Palestinians, in complete impunity. Despite being disappointed concerning the lack of accountability, he urged the international community and the Human Rights Council to support the Palestinian people in their attempt to recover their rights. He also expressed appreciation over the International Criminal Court's ruling which has confirmed its jurisdiction over the Occupied Palestinian Territories and announced that the State of Palestine will be seeking the launch of an investigation by the prosecutor general over the war crimes which continue to be perpetrated against the Palestinian people.

Brazil

H.E. Mr **Ernesto Henrique Fraga Araujo, Minister for Foreign Affairs** started by highlighting the particular challenges that COVID-19 impose on the world. **Ms. Damares Alves, Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights** then focused on the Brazilian approach including the government's actions towards indigenous peoples. He stressed that indigenous peoples and isolated communities could benefit from more than 700,000 basic food baskets so that they could remain in their communities, far from the contaminated areas. He also said that the government is taking care of the Amazon and its people, with the "Embrace the Marajo" program, which is a new model for sustainable development in the Amazon. Lastly, reiterated Brazil's firm commitment in the defense of democracy, freedom, family and life from its conception.

Uganda

H.E. Mr. **Sam Kutesa, Minister for Foreign Affairs** first applauded the deliberate actions of the government to build a strong and robust legal framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. He then provided an explanation for the arrest of Presidential candidates. He also stressed that Uganda believes in free media, but that during the elections, some individuals and groups began using social media platforms as a tool to distribute vile messages, incubating hate online, which is why the government decided to temporarily shut down the internet. Turning to migration, he said that during the pandemic, Uganda made a deliberate decision to keep the asylum space open and that addressing systemic racism and other forms of discrimination, including against migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, was essential.

China

H.E. Mr. **Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs** said that coronavirus is a common enemy, against which solidarity and cooperation is the only option. Vaccines should be a public good, which is why China will be providing vaccines to 53 countries in need for free. He also condemned global inequalities in access to vaccines and called for more attention to the demand for them in developing countries. He also stressed that we should uphold both universality and particularity in human rights and that the right to health and environmental rights should be given more prominence. China also opposes using human rights as an excuse for political affairs, such as what some states claims about Xinjiang, and assured that freedom of religion and belief is protected in the region. He said that the doors to Xinjiang are always open and welcomes a visit of the High Commissioner. About Hong Kong, he states that China facilitated a turnaround from turbulence to law and order and that nearly 70% of Hong Kong's residents feel more secure since the new laws took effect.

Sweden

H.E. Ms. **Ann Christin Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs** stressed that in many parts of the world, democratic space is shrinking, and that disinformation is a serious threat to democracy. She deplored that some states use the situation as a pretext to undermine the rule of law. She highlighted the "Drive

for democracy” an initiative which Sweden’s launched two years ago to promote and strengthen human rights. She also underlined Sweden’s continued commitment to women’s rights and the fight against racism in all its forms.

Thailand

H.E. Mr Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs started by stating that now more than ever is the time to recommit our core values to the promotion and protection of human rights. He called on states to strengthen their efforts to find and strike the right balance between enhancing economic resilience, ensuring social inclusion and promoting active political and social engagement.

India

H.E. Dr. S. Jainshankar, Minister for External Affairs stressed that India has always played an active role in the global promotion and protection of human rights through an approach based on India’s own experience as an inclusive and pluralistic society. He said that violation and gaps in implementation of human rights should be addressed in a fair manner, with due respect for the principles of non-interference and national sovereignty. According to him, the human rights agenda continues to face several challenges, most of all from terrorism, which is why the country has been on the forefront of the global action against it.

Belarus

H.E. Mr. Vladimir Makej, Minister for Foreign Affairs deplored that, while the Universal Declaration and other documents require states to strive to expand international cooperation and dialogue based on mutual respect, in many cases human rights approaches not only fail to unite the international community, but continue to divide it. Human Rights have become a pretext for the so-called “mature democracies” to make arbitrary accusations against other States in order to politically discredit their authorities. He stressed that Human Rights should not be interpreted in a one-sided way as each State makes every effort to achieve agreed international standards. As such, Belarus is a young, independent state that is developing in an evolutionary way, yet, in his words “no other country in Europe is under such strong pressure from Western countries.”

Guatemala

H.E. Mr. Pedro Brolo Vila, Minister for Foreign Affairs said that Guatemala has faced the pandemic with the conviction that the state must prioritise human life. He then added that the government is carrying out an evaluation of public management, in order to have efficient and effective mechanisms in the executive branch and to strengthen the institutional framework in the field of human rights.

European Union

H.E. Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy stated that in many places, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the erosion of the democratic

fabric, calling upon all to do more for human rights. He said that the repression against peaceful protesters in Russia was unacceptable and condemned the authorities' decision to sentence opposition leader Mr. Alexei Navalny. He also deplored the widespread detentions and disproportionate use of force against protesters. Mr. Borrell also welcomed the attention given by the HRC to the worsening human rights situation in Belarus, for which the European Union expects a complete and transparent investigation into all alleged violations and abuses. Lastly, the EU called on China to comply with its national and international human rights obligations.

Saudi Arabia

H.E. Mr. Awwad bin Saleh Al-Awwad, Head of the Human Rights Commission first underlined that Saudi Arabia has undertaken ninety major human rights reforms in recent years, including advancements in the field of women's rights and the suspension of death penalty for minors. Saudi Arabia is therefore moving forward in the field of promotion and protection of human rights but rejects the politicisation of human rights issues.

Egypt

H.E. Mr. Alaa Roushdy, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that Egypt continues its efforts to realise civil and political rights, including the right to life, physical integrity, right to litigation and protection against discrimination. He then shared Egypt's best practices during the pandemic, saying that the country was the first country to formulate a policy paper dealing with the repercussions of COVID-19 on women and girls.

Russian Federation

H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs first deplored that despite the pandemic, some Western countries refuse to reconsider their actions and abandon their coercive and unlawful methods of intimidation and pressure. He also noted that the global media is becoming a place for pursuing narrow and self-serving geopolitical goals through fake and aggressive campaigns, looking at undermining internal stability in sovereign states and fueling violence. He therefore expressed great concern over the non-transparent policies of social network platforms which are used to manipulate public opinion.

United States of America

H.E. Mr. Anthony J. Blinken reaffirmed America's commitment to respect and defend the human rights of all people, everywhere, and that democracy and human rights are at the center of the USA's foreign policy. For this reason, the US will seek election at the Human Rights Council for the 2022-2024 term. Nevertheless, he noted that the Council is not perfect and urged it to look at how it conducts its business, including a disproportionate focus on Israel. Mr. Blinken also said that they will continue to call out abuses in places like Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Iran and reiterated their call for the

Russian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Navalny and hundreds of other Russian citizens wrongfully detained for exercising their fundamental rights.

Iran

H.E. Mr. Ali Bagheri Kani, Deputy of International Affairs and the Judiciary and Secretary of the High Council for Human Rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran said that fundamental rights include the right to health, to food, to access to humanitarian aid and peaceful nuclear technologies. He then stated that such rights have been violated by the sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries, which claim to defend the rights of people. He regretted that international human rights mechanisms have failed to guarantee the minimal rights of the Iranian nations and that it was disgusting that countries which accuse Iran of human rights violations are the same which violate the rights of Iranians.

Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's report on Nicaragua

Geneva, February 24, 2021

Presenting the [report](#), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet deplored that indigenous communities continue to face invasions of their land and violent attacks by colonisers. She further condemned the recent adoption of various laws curtailing the right to freedom of association and assembly, which clearly shows the Nicaraguan government's willingness to restrict civic space and democracy. Ms. Bachelet underscored that political participation of minorities is fundamental to help resolving the crisis and called on the government once more to grant her access to the country.

Speaking as a country concerned, **Nicaragua** firmly rejected the High Commissioner's report, saying it is unilateral, biased and lacking objectivity. The government considers that the operation of some organisations has lost independence and that Nicaragua needs a local solution to the crisis.

During the ensuing debate, 27 states took the floor, including 4 joint statements. Two positions could be identified. Numerous countries, including **Canada, Mexico, the Nordic and Baltic countries, the European Union, Switzerland and Ecuador** expressed great concern over the situation in Nicaragua, especially on the restrictions of civic space and the continued denial of access to the mandate of the High Commissioner. **Belgium and France** were especially alarmed by the increased violence against indigenous peoples and people of African descent. Other countries, such as the **Russian Federation, Venezuela, Belarus and Cuba** supported Nicaragua in rejecting the High Commissioner's report and stressed that country specific resolutions should not be adopted without the consent of the concerned state.

The **Right Livelihood Foundation, CEJIL and CEJUDHCAN** took the floor to denounce crimes against indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants in the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, which have significantly worsened throughout 2020. We condemned that Nicaragua failed to implement law 445/2003 and the ruling of the Inter-American Court demanding the removal of irregular settlers, instead colluding with business interests and encouraging land-grabbing. We called the Council to urge Nicaragua to uphold its human rights obligations, in particular by ensuring the protection of

indigenous peoples and their defenders and ensure that accountability is provided to perpetrators of these crimes.

In her concluding remarks, **Deputy High Commissioner Ms. Nada al-Nashif** stressed that communications with Nicaragua continues to be a struggle. In relation to the upcoming 2021 elections, she mentioned that until the government does not enact electoral and legal reform, it is hard to see how elections could be credible, transparent and fair.

Enhanced interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's report on Belarus

Geneva, February 25, 2021

Presenting the [report](#), **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Michelle Bachelet** expressed deep concern at the increasing reprisals against journalists, human rights defenders and organisations, including Right Livelihood Laureate "Viasna". She called for an immediate end to the policy of systematic intimidation and reprisals used by the Belarusian authorities against those peacefully asking for democracy, and raised specific recommendations addressing key systemic issues, including the independence of the judiciary.

Belarus took the floor as the concerned country, and reiterated its non-recognition of [Resolution 45/01](#) adopted by the Human Rights Council on September 18, 2020. It argued against the credibility of the High Commissioner's report and deplored that it was carried out without the consent of the State, therefore representing a violation of the principle of non-interference.

During the debate 55 States took the floor. **Denmark (on behalf of 42 states)** expressed serious concern at the use of torture by the Belarusian authorities against prisoners and urged them to stop the persecution of a peaceful and democratic movement. It also called on Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release those arbitrarily detained in connection to the protests. **Canada and Lithuania** were appalled by the recent mass raids targeting journalists and activists and called for accountability. **The EU, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg** and others, urged Belarus to stop reprisals against peaceful protesters and denounced an unprecedented human rights crisis in the country. **France** stressed that it would continue to advocate for further scrutiny on Belarus by the Human Rights Council. On the other hand, **China, Iran, the Russian Federation, Venezuela and Cuba** argued that the situation does not require the Council's attention as the report interferes with the internal affairs of Belarus and violates national sovereignty.

During the Interactive Dialogue, the **Right Livelihood Foundation and Viasna**, 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate, condemned the refusal of Belarus to grant access to OHCHR and praised the role of all internal observers who reported on the violation occurring in the country. The Foundation underscored the fundamental role played by Viasna, which members have observed peaceful assemblies and documented evidence of torture of detained protesters. We condemned that Marfa Rabkova, Andrei Chapiuk, Tatiana Lasitsa and Leonid Sudalenka remain in detention for their human rights work and expressed deep concern by the recent intensification of repressions, including the recent raid of Viasna's offices and Ales Bialiatski's house. We thus urged Belarus to implement all the

recommendations of the report, immediately and unconditionally release all those detained in connection with the protests and drop all charges against them.

In her concluding remarks, **Deputy High Commissioner Ms. Nada al-Nashif** deplored that no information was provided by Belarus on criminal cases and that investigations were not transparent. She stressed that accountability for human rights violations is critical to prevent further violations and to provide a sustainable solution to the crisis. Lastly, she argued that the Council stands ready to support an inclusive national dialogue in Belarus.

UN High Commissioner's Oral Update followed by General Debate on item 2: Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary General

Geneva, February 25 – March 1, 2021

In her oral update, **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet**, emphasised the difficult decisions that governments have to take to address the multiple challenges of COVID-19 and stressed that the best way to approach such dilemmas is to involve the public, who increasingly manifest a rightful demand to have a role in shaping policy. She then addressed multiple country situations, including some of interest for Right Livelihood Laureates.

In the **Russian Federation** she regretted the new legal provisions which further limit fundamental freedoms and the way restrictive laws are harshly enforced.

In **Turkey**, she denounced reprisals against people seeking justice and accountability, including some victims of enforced disappearances. She was particularly concerned about the previous week's raids and mass arrests, including of opposition members, under terrorism-related charges.

She welcomed the cessation of hostilities in the **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict zone and criminal proceedings launched by Azerbaijan into the activities of some members of the armed forces.

She expressed concern about the measures taken by several **European countries** which are restricting the work of organisations that protect migrants' rights and deliver them life-saving assistance. She stressed once again that civil society and independent monitoring are fundamental to the health of all societies and encouraged all Member States to ensure that the trend of shrinking civic space is reversed.

In **India**, she stressed that the farmers protests highlight the importance of ensuring that laws and policies are based on meaningful consultations with those concerned. She also expressed concern over the charges of sedition launched against journalists and activists for reporting or commenting on the protests and attempts to curb freedom of expression on social media.

Moving to the **Americas**, some countries including **Guatemala** have seen growing movements of social protests, which all broadly focus on inadequate access to economic and social rights, discrimination, impunity and allegations of corruption. In several countries, demonstrations have been met with excessive use of force. She encouraged all States to take measures to prevent further deterioration of this situation.

In **Brazil**, she expressed concern at the reduced enforcement of environmental laws during the pandemic, which has led to increased illegal mining and logging, with a particularly damaging impact on indigenous peoples.

Recalling that it has now been a decade since the “Arab Spring” she regretted that many countries in the region continue to suffer very serious inequalities and that repressive policies have been strengthened towards civil society. She also remained concerned about continuing restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly in **Egypt**, including those directed against human rights defenders.

She welcomed the release of Women Human Rights Defenders Loujain al-Hathloul in **Saudi Arabia** but regretted that others continue to be unjustly detained. She urged the authorities to establish a legislative framework to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

In **Iran** she expressed concern at the persistent impunity for human rights violations, including some that occurred in the contexts of protests in 2018 and 2019.

In **Uganda**, she condemned the stigmatisation of LGBTI individuals, which falsely scapegoats them for the spread of COVID-19 and resulted in arbitrary arrests and detentions and raids and closure of LGBTI shelters.

During the ensuing debate, 111 members and observers took the floor including 12 joint statements. Numerous countries shared the High Commissioner’s concern about several acts of discriminations in many regions. The **European Union** for example, also mentioned a number of country situations of concern, including the high number of attacks and killings of Human Rights Defenders in *Guatemala* and reiterated its continuous support for the fight against corruption and impunity. **Azerbaijan**, on behalf of the **non-aligned movement**, shared the High Commissioner’s concerns but also stressed the importance of upholding the universality and impartiality principles when it comes to human rights. Some countries including the **Democratic People’s Republic of Korea** also stressed that Western countries continue to consider themselves as reference points for democracy, using it as an excuse to interfere into internal affairs of other countries. On a similar line, **Belarus** called for the High Commissioner to pay closer attention to those countries and less to developing countries.

During the following General Debate, **Aminatou Haidar**, 2019 Right Livelihood Laureate, delivered a statement denouncing the recent escalation of violence in Western Sahara. She expressed grave concern over the breaking of the ceasefire by the Moroccan authorities in November 2020 and the continuous reprisals targeting Sahrawi’s activists. She urged the High Commissioner to organise a technical mission to Western Sahara with utmost urgency and for the UN to carry out their responsibility towards the decolonisation of Western Sahara.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Geneva, March 2, 2021

Mr. Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, started by presenting his annual [report](#), which analyses four different themes: (1) COVID-19 and hunger crises; (2) Food systems and global governance; (3) Seeds and farmers rights; (4) The right to food in armed conflicts. His introductory

statement focused on the first two topics. Regarding COVID-19, he stressed that it is also a global hunger crisis, with the number of hungry people doubling in 2020. Most States have accepted that the pandemic is a human rights crisis, but most of them have been reluctant to consider the related hunger crisis as a human rights issue. He therefore recommends States to widen their horizons and develop an international plan based on human rights to overcome the hunger crisis. On food systems and global governance, he noted that the current system must be transformed because of the global climate issues. He then announced that dignity, self-determination and accountability will be the focus of his next report, so that people can understand better how food is governed.

During the debate 52 states took the floor, including 3 joint statements. Speakers, including **Guatemala, Ecuador, Paraguay, Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay** said that COVID-19 had a negative impact on inequalities, which affected access to food and livelihoods. **India** noted that it is supporting migrant workers families with targeted policies and delivering food to population most at risk. **Guatemala** said that they are giving priority to fighting malnutrition and protecting land and resources, so that no one is left behind.

In his interim remarks and concluding remarks, **Mr Fakri** stressed that countries must work together because hunger is not a national problem. They need to find ways to cooperate and work together. He said that unilateral actions and embargoes are deeply concerning and brutal. Regarding climate change, he welcomed that many countries are now talking about the right to food when discussing climate change.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the environment

Geneva, March 3 – 4, 2021

Introducing his [report](#), **Mr. David Boyd**, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment said that it focuses on the situation of clean water. He noted that over 3 billion people are affected by water shortages and that climate change has been exacerbating the situation of water pollution, water scarcity and water-related disasters, which affect health, development and human rights. He called on states to apply an approach to conserve and protect water based on 6 key steps: (1) collect information on water quality; (2) conduct legal mapping initiative about regulations and policies; (3) develop water plans; (4) implement water-related laws and regulations; (5) build financial and institutional capacity for marginalised groups; (6) reduce pollution.

During the interactive dialogue 67 statements were delivered by states, including 5 joint statements. States welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur and recognised the link between access to water and human rights. **Switzerland** recognised that water management is an issue of power, poverty and inequality. The **United States** strongly supported the water-related goals and stressed that international cooperation is needed, especially to help the most vulnerable. The **Russian Federation** called for Ukraine to be punished for closing the supply of clean water to part of Russia.

In his closing remarks, **Mr. Boyd** stressed that investing in renewable energy and environmental laws is key for water protection.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)

Geneva, March 5 – 8, 2021

Ms. Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders started by presenting her annual [report](#), which focused on death threats and killings of HRDs. She deplored that in 2019 only, at least 1323 defenders have been killed in 64 countries, almost a third of all UN member states. She condemned the terrible surge of attacks and killings of HRDs In Afghanistan, including members of the National Human Rights Commission. She stressed that killing of human rights defenders is a red line which States and non-state actors should not cross. Impunity for killing remains a key driver for more murders, states should not only ensure accountability but also applaud the vital contribution that HRDs make to help build just societies. Nevertheless, she regretted that many states are failing in their obligations to prevent such killings, even when murders are clearly signaled in advance.

During the debate, 65 members and observers of the Council took the floor, including 3 joint statements. Numerous states, including the **EU** and the **Nordic and Baltic States** highlighted that impunity for the killings of human rights defenders is unacceptable and expressed profound concern over the increasing murder rates, as killings of HRDs represent the most direct attack on civil society. Echoing such thoughts, **Canada** underlined that too often, HRDs are killed after protesting against the negative consequences of commercial enterprises on people's rights, businesses must therefore also act when threats against HRDs are made. The **Marshall Islands** also expressed grave concern over the killings and targeting of HRDs and pointed out that most of them target environmental human rights defenders. The **United States of America** on the other hand stressed their alarm over the application of security laws to target HRDs in Saudi Arabia and pointed out that in Nicaragua, the Ortega regime has forced thousands of opposition activists, human rights defenders and journalists into exile for fear of reprisals. **Egypt** stressed that protecting and promoting human rights is the fundamental responsibility of states, and those working in the field of Human Rights should be partner of governments, not going against the laws. Being a HRD does not grant immunity in case of legal violations. **Russia** on the other hand, specified that international law does not have a clear definition of "threat" which make some recommendations included in the report interpretable as interference in the internal affairs of States.

In her interim and concluding remarks, **Ms. Lawlor** stressed that there are reasons to believe that the number of killings of Women Human Rights Defenders would increase, as they are particularly affected by cultural stereotypes and harmful norms. She also noted that states have a responsibility to ensure that HRDs exposing the truth in relation to the COVID-19 be protected. She concluded by saying that protecting HRDs is not rock science and that the public must be educated on their rights.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Geneva, March 9 2021

At the onset, **Mr. Javaid Rehman**, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, presented his annual [report](#), in which he remains concerned about the high number of arbitrarily detained individuals who are at serious risk of contracting COVID and called for their immediate release. He also condemned the country's continuing use of arbitrary charges to prolong the detention of activists, including 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate **Nasrin Sotoudeh**. The Special Rapporteur was also particularly alarmed at the continued harassment of Iranian Women Human Rights Defenders, many of whom remain arbitrarily imprisoned for peacefully protesting gender inequality and mandatory veiling. He urged the country to immediately introduce reforms to promote gender equality in law and practice.

Speaking as a country concerned, **Iran** criticised the mandate and report of the Special Rapporteur, which is allegedly not representative of the situation of human rights in Iran. No mention was made concerning arbitrarily detained human rights activists. During the Interactive Dialogue, 29 member and observer states took the floor, including 2 joint statements. Most of them, including the **European Union, the Nordic Countries, Canada and Israel** expressed concerns about the continuous use of the death penalty, especially against juvenile offenders and protesters. Concerns were also raised over the perduring discrimination against women, which remains in law and practice. Numerous countries, including the **EU, France and the US** called for an end of systematic unjustified proceedings against human rights defenders and for the release of Nasrin Sotoudeh.

During the Interactive Dialogue, the Right Livelihood Foundation delivered a statement on behalf of **Reza Khandan**, Nasrin Sotoudeh's husband, in which he brought the attention of the Council to her sentence and the following judicial harassment targeting their family. He called on the Council to stand up for Nasrin and all the other political prisoners languishing in prison for their activism by urging Iran to release them immediately and unconditionally. .

In his interim and concluding remarks, **Mr. Rehman** urged countries to bring up the human rights situation in their bilateral relations with Iran and invited the international community to share best practices on gender equality, to support Iran in improving its legislation and to urge Iran to ratify CEDAW.

General Debate under item 3: Promotion and protection of all Human Rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Geneva, March 9 – 10, 2021

Opening the debate was **Ms. Peggy Hicks**, director of the thematic engagement, special procedures and right to development division of the Office of the High Commissioner. She introduced nine reports of the Secretary General and the High Commissioner on a range of thematic issues, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic, social and cultural rights; the relationship between

the right to work and the enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities; the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and a report on missing persons.

During the debate 63 statements were delivered by members and observers, including 21 joint statements. Speakers mentioned a wide variety of topics, including the importance of access to water and of a safe, clean healthy and sustainable environment. Numerous countries continue to push for this to be recognised as a human right at the global level.

COVID-19 and its impact on human rights was once more a crucial topic of discussion. The **Non-Aligned Movement** stressed the importance of affordable, unhindered and equitable access to vaccines for all, emphasizing how fundamental cooperation is in this matter. They also underlined that the Human Rights Council should provide equal treatment to both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, since all Human Rights are unalienable. Something which **Egypt** also echoed expressing concern about the growing inequalities and violations of economic, social and cultural rights. Other countries, including the **European Union**, condemned the increasing violations of women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights and called on the Council to relentlessly defend these rights against the current pushback. The **United States of America** remained concerned about non-peaceful transitions of power around the world and that there are countries where the basis of government authority is not rooted in the will of the people. **Pakistan**, on behalf of the OIC, expressed alarm over the plight of the people living under illegal occupation who face forced destruction of their national institutions, culture and identity as well as denial of their right to self-determination. **Poland and Qatar, supported by 151 countries** delivered a statement on the occasion of world autism awareness day calling for greater access and opportunities for autistic persons.

Mozn Hassan, 2016 Right Livelihood Laureate, addressed the Council condemning continuing discrimination against women and the recent escalation of reprisal-intentioned policies used to silence Women Human Rights Defenders in Egypt.

Annual Debate on Racial Discrimination

Geneva, March 12, 2021

Moderator: H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan, President of the Human Rights Council

Opening statement: Ms. Nada al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner

Panelists:

- Prof. Rozena Maart, Director of the centre for critical research on race and identity at the university of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)
- Ms. Alicia Quevedos Canales, Specialist on afro-peruvian policies, ministry of culture (Peru)

- Mr. Pradip Pariyar, Executive chairperson of the Samanta Foundation and Young global Leader at the World Economic Forum (Nepal)
- Ms. Marie-Sarah Seeberger, Member of the World Jewish Congress, Jewish Diplomatic Corps (France)

In her opening statement, **Ms. Nada al-Nashif** focused on youth engagement with racial discrimination topics, from Friday for Future to Black Lives Matter, young people are increasingly at the forefront of activism. On similar lines, **Prof. Maart** said that youth always had an important role to play in combatting racial discrimination. When she was 16 years old, she saw 20,000 people protesting in the Soweto uprising, the youth then had an important role in explaining to everybody what had happened. Looking to the case of India, **Mr. Pradip** said that castes can still determine who you are, what your education and life will look like. 6 million people are still experiencing caste discrimination in the world. He noted that empowering youth is fundamental to fight against social discrimination. **Ms. Quevedos** on the other hand, focused on the importance of political representation in order to have better public policies. Lastly, **Ms. Seeberger** stressed that genocide is still a reality in certain parts of the world and that discrimination and antisemitism need to be eliminated with utmost urgency.

During the ensuing debate, 12 states delivered statements. All states agreed that the international community has to fight to eliminate all types of discrimination. The **United States of America** noted the increasing number of protests due to racism and that engagement and political participation are vital to fight against racism. **Argentina, on behalf of a group of countries** stressed the importance of adopting inclusive measures for Afro-descendants because of the specific challenges they face and reiterated their commitment to combatting discrimination.

General Debate on Item: 4, Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Geneva, March 12-15, 2021

The General debate on country situations which require the Council's attention was preceded by the presentation of the High Commissioner's [report](#) of the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Secretary General's oral update on the involvement of the UN in Myanmar.

During the debate, 79 statements were delivered by members and observers, including 10 joint statements. In general, numerous speakers expressed concern over the increasingly shrinking of civil society space across the world, as human rights defenders, protestors and journalists continue to face more hostile environments. Other States stressed that the promotion and protection of human rights must comply with the principles of State sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs of States.

Speakers discussed human rights violations taking place in, or involving the following countries and territories: Myanmar, European Union Member States, United Kingdom, Austria, Belgium, Germany,

France, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Poland, Russian Federation, China, Egypt, Belarus, Venezuela, Yemen, Philippines, Ethiopia, Libya, Turkey, South Sudan, Syria, Azerbaijan, Iran, Nicaragua, the United States, France, Uganda, Somalia, Israel, Bahrain, India, Burundi, Ukraine, Georgia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Denmark, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Guatemala, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Algeria, India, Indonesia, Croatia, Qatar, Chile, Chad, Benin, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Cameroon, Ghana, Uzbekistan, Honduras, Brazil, Nigeria, Poland, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Afghanistan, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Togo, Eritrea, Sudan, Pakistan, Cambodia and Ethiopia.

More specifically, **Sweden** called on Egypt to ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society and HRDs and on Saudi Arabia to release all political detainees. **Switzerland** on the other hand condemned the increase in numerous countries, including Guatemala, of attacks against human rights defenders. The **United States** also expressed concern about the situation of human rights in multiple countries, including Nicaragua. **Poland, on behalf of 45 states**, expressed alarm over the deteriorating situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Russian Federation. The United States also called for the unconditional release of Navalny. **Finland, on behalf of 31 countries** condemned the human rights situation in Egypt, highlighting the restrictions on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly, and the constrained space for civil society and political opposition. It also condemned the use of counterterrorism laws to punish peaceful critics.

The situation in Russia was also echoed by 2004 Right Livelihood Laureate **Human Rights Center "Memorial"**. It demanded that the Russian authorities stop the mass violations of human rights, ensure freedom of assembly, release all those wrongfully detained and jailed for taking part in protests, as well as immediately release Alexei Navalny and other political prisoners.

Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on oral updates on the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Geneva, March 22, 2021

The **High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet** opened the debate reiterating her concerns on the devastating impact of armed conflict on the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with incidents amounting to war crimes or crimes against humanity. She also denounced the widespread increase in hate speech inciting violence and hatred, which not only contravene national law but also international human rights law. Bachelet commended recent initiatives by the Congolese authorities to extend transitional justice to communities affected by violence, human rights violations and abuses.

Ms. Bintou Keita, SRSG and Head of the MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, denounced the dire security and humanitarian situation in conflict areas, where the civilian population continues to be targeted by armed groups. She reported that at least 2,487 civilians lost their lives during 2020 due to the activities of armed groups, 458 were killed by security and defense forces in

military operations, and 929 women and girls were victims of conflict-related sexual violence. She argues that “to strengthening the fight against impunity, a credible and holistic transitional justice process, a credible demobilisation, disarmament, community reintegration and stabilisation program, and the adoption of socio-economic policies are essential to curb violence and build sustainable peace and security”.

H.E. Mr. André Lite Asebea, Minister for Human Rights for the Democratic Republic of the Congo listed the DRC’s progress in the field of human rights from October 2020 to February 2021, including measures on the implementation of transitional justice and investigations on human rights violations.

Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, International Expert on the situation in Kasai presented developments in the framework of the fight against impunity, and transitional justice process, welcoming that the authorities have demonstrated willingness to address these this key issues. However, he denounced the extreme fragility of the humanitarian situation in Kasai due to the increase of criminal activities by certain armed groups.

During the following Interactive Dialogue, 22 States took the floor. **Sweden** (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries) condemned the dire security situation in the eastern DRC, the increased number of attacks against civilians, and urged all the parties involved to end violence, protect civilians and fight impunity. Likewise, **Belgium** denounced spikes in human rights violations due to the intensification of armed violence and argued that combatting violence against children and sexual violence must be the priority. **Italy** deplored the decades-long humanitarian and ethnic crisis in the country and urged accountability for the recent killing of Italian Ambassador Luca Attanasio. The **USA** condemned violence by both state and non-state actors, urged accountability and called for the prompt implementation of transitional justice processes. **Venezuela** condemned the sanctions imposed on the DRC as they violate its sovereignty and welcomed the country’s efforts in protecting and promoting human rights. Similarly, **Togo** and **China** applauded DRC efforts in the field of human rights and called on all parties to commit to achieve peace and development through dialogue and consultation of all parties, with the consent of the DRC government.

During the debate, we joined the Lutheran World Federation, the DRC’s National Survivors Network, the Mukwege Foundation and the Panzi Foundation, established by **Denis Mukwege (RLA 2013)**, to express deep concern at the continued perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC. We highlighted the importance of ending impunity, providing access to justice and holistic support for survivors. Lastly, we urged the creation of an effective and comprehensive justice and reconciliation mechanism, including with its components of truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition.

SIDE EVENTS

“Water sources have a woman’s face: Land, territory and Environment in Central America”

March 12, 2021

Organisers: International Network for Human Rights and Peace Brigades International

Co-Sponsors: Right Livelihood Foundation and Franciscans International

Moderator: Ms. Michelle Langrand, Journalist, Geneva Solutions

Panellists:

- David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Environment;
- Juana Esquivel, coordinator of the San Alonso Foundation, Honduras;
- Sandra Calel, member of the Verapacense Union of Peasant Organisations (UVOC), Guatemala;
- Lottie Cunningham Wren, president of the Center for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast (CEJUDHCAN), 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate, Nicaragua;
- Sandra Carolina Ascencio, member of the Central American Network for the Defense of Transboundary Waters (RED-CAT), El Salvador.

The event sought to shed light on the struggles of women human rights defenders in Central America working on land rights and indigenous issues.

Opening the event, **Ms. Langrand** mentioned the disastrous impact of the recent hurricanes in Central America and the disaster of extractive activities, which put the lives of indigenous and afro-descendants’ people at risk. She then yielded the floor to **Ms. Calel**, from Guatemala, who said that the hurricanes added up to the disaster of the pandemic as families lost access to education, health, their harvests but also their homes. Price of staple foods increased dramatically. A tragic situation which was further worsened by the current political crisis in the country, as there are no institutions to rely on.

The floor was then given to **Ms. Esquivel**, from Honduras, who also brought up political issues and corruption. She stated that the government in Honduras is failing to guarantee free, prior and informed consent before companies establish themselves in indigenous communities. On the contrary, the government criminalises indigenous and human rights defenders of displacing the companies. This therefore reduces greatly the possibilities to see the success of any criminal complaints coming from the indigenous communities.

Something which 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate **Lottie Cunningham Wren** could also relate to. She first said that while Nicaragua has one of the widest legislations for the rights of indigenous peoples, the government has not shown any political will to apply such laws. On the contrary, they have been evicting indigenous peoples from their land, which led to an enormous human rights crisis. No investigation is done around any of the crimes committed. Some communities are therefore trying to survive without homes, foods or means of subsistence.

Ms. Assencio, from El Salvador then brought attention to the transnational nature of environmental issues. She said that El Salvador relies on water which comes from Guatemala and Honduras, nevertheless, there are over 50 mining projects around such borders, which leads to contamination of water sources. She applauded the role of women in negotiating to find an agreement on how to deal

with cross border waters. Nevertheless, she condemned that in many cases the arguments made on the matter are ignored by the authorities because of their own, corrupted interests.

Looking at the broader, international, picture, **Mr Boyd** said that there are too many dangers to human rights defenders today, despite international instruments which seek to protect them. He regretted that, while the tools exist to protect them, action to implement them and ultimately protect environmental rights defenders is lacking. He also underlined the fundamental role played by women in such issues and called for more women empowerment policies.

UPR ADOPTIONS

Adoption of the Outcome of Belarus' Universal Periodic Review

Geneva, 12 March 2020

Speaking as a country concerned, **Mr. Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Representative of Belarus**, took the floor to praise Belarus' engagement and commitment to the UPR process, as well as the country's progress in the field of human rights since the last UPR cycle. Belarus took note of 266 recommendations, covering around 100 thematic issues. 155 recommendations were accepted, 18 were partially accepted and 33 were considered as already implemented or under implementation. Belarus declined all sets of "stereotypical recommendations that were driven by the political ambitions of certain countries" because of "factual distortion and incorrect statements", argued the Ambassador. He added that Belarus has all the necessary means to decide independently on its human rights development, without external interference, and reiterated his position against country specific resolutions without the acceptance of the concerned country.

During the debate, 13 States took the floor. **Ethiopia, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Venezuela**, among others, welcomed the constructive engagement of Belarus with the UPR process and praised the improvement of Belarus on the promotion and protection of socio-economic rights, such as education and healthcare. Other States, notably **Germany and the UK**, deplored the refusal of all recommendations addressing the current unprecedented human rights crisis, in particular those related to accountability for past and current human rights violations and the release of all political prisoners.

Their concerns were echoed by all NGOs who subsequently took the floor. Among them, 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate **Ales Bialiatski**, Chairman of Human Rights Center "Viasna", delivered a statement denouncing the Belarusian authorities violent crackdown on peaceful protesters. He highlighted that more than 30.000 people have been detained since August 2020 and 2.400 criminal cases have been opened on trumped-up charges. Mr Bialiatski echoed some of the recommendations refused by Belarus, in particular calling on the authorities to fully cooperate with the UN Special Procedures, to establish an accountability mechanism, and to release all political prisoners.

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Ambrazevich highlighted Belarus commitment to the implementation of recommendations related to socially oriented policies and in support of the vulnerable groups. Lastly, he reiterated that Belarus will not allow external political pressure to interfere with its domestic affairs.

RESOLUTIONS

30 Resolutions and one decision were adopted during the 46th session of the Human Rights Council. Among these, we identified 5 which can be of particular relevance to the work of one or more Laureates. The Right Livelihood Foundation briefed relevant States delegation for two of these resolutions, notably on Nicaragua and Belarus.

Human Rights and the environment (46/L.6)

The resolution was adopted without a vote. It requests the Special Rapporteur to, among others, continue to study the human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as well as to develop a dialogue with relevant stakeholders to enhance public awareness of such human rights obligations. Additionally, it calls upon all States to intensify their efforts to advance the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and to consider adopting and implementing national measures that respect and protect such rights.

Promotion and Protection of human rights in Nicaragua (46/L.8)

The resolution was adopted by vote, with 20 members in favour, 8 against and 18 abstentions. It is the first time that such resolution mentions the situation of indigenous peoples and their defenders. It expresses concern at the persisting restrictions on civic space and the repression of dissent in Nicaragua, including acts of intimidation and harassment towards human rights defenders, including women, indigenous, afro descendent and environmental HRDs. It urges the Government to engage in meaningful and inclusive consultations with civil society, to take effective measures to provide a safe environment for victims of human rights violations and to prevent and address the increasing violence committed against indigenous peoples.

The right to food (46/L.11)

The resolution was adopted without a vote. It expresses deep concerns that the total number of people estimated to be suffering from acute hunger has doubled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and stresses that promoting and protecting the right to food is the primary responsibility of States. It therefore calls upon states to consider reviewing any policy that could have a negative impact on the realisation of the right to food and calls upon all governments to cooperate with and assist the Special Rapporteur.

Situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath (46/L.19)

The resolution was adopted by vote, with 20 members in favour, 7 states against and 20 abstentions, after a lengthy debate and the refusal of 14 different amendments suggested by Belarus, the Russian Federation and China, which all seek to drastically weaken the language of such resolution. The resolution is a direct consequence of the urgent debate held during the 45th session of the Human Rights Council to discuss the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath. It expresses deep concern about the human rights situation in Belarus

and its deterioration since the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in particular about the reports of numerous acts of torture as well as imprisonment of protesters. The resolution then stresses the need for accountability of such actions, which until now have been enjoying complete impunity and requests the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor and report on the situation, carrying out a comprehensive examination of all alleged human rights violations with a view to contributing to accountability for perpetrators.

Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: the roles and responsibilities of police and other law enforcement officials (46/L.27)

The resolution was adopted by consensus. It emphasises that States must take persistent and effective measures to prevent and combat all acts of torture, including by becoming parties to the Convention against Torture. It also calls upon all States to take effective measures to ensure that the police and other law enforcement officials use force in conformity with international obligations. It urges all States to promote a culture of accountability for police and other law enforcement officials and to protect and assist all victims of acts of torture. It calls upon States to include education regarding the absolute prohibition of torture in police trainings and to establish, appoint, maintain or enhance mechanisms that monitor the condition of places of detention.

All the resolutions and decisions can be found [here](#)

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