



General Assembly

Distr.: General
31 December 2021

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Forty-ninth session

28 February–1 April 2022

Agenda items 2 and 3

Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Meeting on the role of poverty alleviation in promoting and protecting human rights

Summary report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 43/21. It contains a summary of the meeting on the role of poverty alleviation in promoting and protecting human rights, held on 26 February 2021, at the forty-sixth session of the Council.



I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to its resolution 43/21, the Human Rights Council held a meeting on the role of poverty alleviation in promoting and protecting human rights, on 26 February 2021, at its forty-sixth session. The present report contains a summary of the meeting.
2. The objectives of the meeting were to: highlight the threat posed by poverty to the enjoyment of all human rights, in particular in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and the necessity of enhancing the role of poverty alleviation in promoting and protecting all human rights; identify the priorities and gaps existing in poverty alleviation related to the promotion and protection of human rights and technical cooperation in that regard; enable a constructive dialogue among States to share good practices and experience with regard to the role of poverty alleviation in the promotion and protection of all human rights; understand how to better use the universal periodic review process and other United Nations human rights mechanisms to promote the role of poverty alleviation in the promotion and protection of all human rights and to provide technical cooperation in that regard; and provide a platform for States to share information on technical cooperation, match those in need with those willing to provide technical assistance and facilitate partnerships and capacity-building at the bilateral, regional and global levels in a feasible, sustainable and effective manner.
3. The meeting was chaired by the President of the Human Rights Council. The Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Peggy Hicks, made the opening statement. The discussants comprised the Deputy Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, Kung Phoak, the Director-General of the General Affairs Department and Spokesperson of the National Administration of Rural Revitalization of China, Su Guoxia, the Director of the Demographic, Health and Social Statistics Division and Head of Research and Innovation at Statistics Sierra Leone, Sonnia-Magba Bu-Buakei Jabbi, and the Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Máximo Torero.
4. Following the opening statement, the discussants made initial presentations by video message, which were followed by an interactive discussion divided into two segments. The discussion included interventions by representatives of States and non-governmental organizations, with comments and questions from participants. It concluded with final responses from the discussants.¹
5. The meeting was broadcasted live on United Nations Web TV.²

II. Opening of the meeting

6. In the opening statement, Ms. Hicks highlighted that freedom from poverty was a vital step in making what was envisioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a reality for all. Poverty alleviation supported rights, just as respect for rights paved the way for eliminating poverty. Global efforts aimed at poverty alleviation had resulted in a decline in the number of people living in extreme poverty, from 1.9 billion to 836 million between 1990 and 2015. Although the pace of poverty eradication had already slowed prior to the pandemic, its onset had led to an outright reversal, with those living in extreme poverty growing for the first time since 1998. The damage extended well beyond fragile and low-income countries, and several middle-income countries were increasingly affected.
7. Ms. Hicks underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed and exacerbated long-standing inequalities and patterns of discrimination in the enjoyment of human rights. Within countries, the poor and marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as older persons,

¹ Statements received are available from <https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/46session/Pages/Statements.aspx?SessionId=41&MeetingDate=26/02/2021%2000%3a00%3a00>.

² The video recording of the meeting is available at <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1r/k1rj271nyh>.

women and girls, minorities and indigenous peoples, were bearing the brunt of the burden. They suffered most from food insecurity and lack of access to health care, water and sanitation, education, decent work and social security.

8. The Secretary-General had called for human rights to be at the centre of COVID-19 responses and had proposed a new social contract between Governments, people, civil society, businesses and other stakeholders, based on equal rights and opportunities for all. He had also called for a New Global Deal, which would redress inequalities among countries by ensuring that power, wealth and opportunities were shared more broadly and fairly at the international level. Premised on international cooperation and solidarity, pursuing the right to development could help to achieve those goals, given that it vested in States a duty to cooperate for development, human rights, peace and disarmament and to eliminate obstacles to development and she called for the fair distribution of the benefits of development.

9. Faced with collapsing trade, falling remittances, capital flight, currency depreciation and lack of sufficient international development assistance, poor countries were often forced to choose between providing basic services for their people and debt servicing. Reduced fiscal and policy spaces were limiting their ability to undertake the investments necessary to ensure the enjoyment of minimum essential levels of rights. All countries needed to make maximum use of available resources, including through international cooperation, to create the necessary fiscal space to invest in access to fundamental rights, such as those to water and sanitation, health, work and social security. Investing in a strong rights-based recovery that put people at the centre was also essential to facilitating a transition to sustainable development and carbon neutrality. Ms. Hicks stressed the need for a new allocation of special drawing rights for low-income and middle-income countries in need of liquidity, debt cancellation or restructuring or at a standstill and a renewed commitment to achieving development assistance targets.

10. COVID-19 vaccines should be treated as a global public good. States should support initiatives to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines between countries, such as the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, and to secure non-discriminatory affordable access within their borders. A sustainable pathway to ending poverty required the full, free, active and meaningful participation of those most affected by poverty, such as minorities, migrants and women. Effective participation hinged on safe and open spaces for those whose protection required more targeted efforts.

11. Through its 92 field presences worldwide, OHCHR had stepped up its cooperation with States, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, national human rights institutions and civil society to provide advice on human rights-based responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office had developed a checklist for a human rights-based approach to conducting socioeconomic impact assessments and country responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and a set of indicators to assess the impact of the pandemic on human rights with a view to mitigating it. The Office played a key role in reviewing the integration of human rights in socioeconomic response plans for 109 countries in support of the Development Coordination Office and United Nations country teams. Through its surge initiative, OHCHR carried out analyses of international and national economic policies and measures. Ms. Hicks recalled that OHCHR was committed to further expanding its work on economic, social and cultural rights and supporting a rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a continued focus on the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized people.

III. Summary of the meeting

A. Contributions of discussants

12. In his video message, Mr. Phoak underlined the importance of the intrinsic and reinforcing links between poverty reduction and human rights, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, poverty in the ASEAN region had been steadily declining, with a growing middle class and increasing access to education. However, before 2018, the rural poverty rate was higher than the urban poverty rate, with 18 per cent of the

rural population living below the poverty line. There was a high level of informal employment in the region, in particular among the lower middle-income member States, with most women earning less than their male counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic had caused some people in the region to slide back into poverty, and most of whom were living and working in cities that were heavily affected by shutdowns and restrictions on freedom of movement.

13. Mr. Phoak stressed that the discourse on reducing poverty could not be divorced from that on promoting and protecting human rights. The development road map of ASEAN reflected the synergy between the duty to realize the human rights of all its peoples and its commitment to end poverty. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025, which was its 10-year development road map, articulated the commitment of ASEAN to consolidating itself as a community. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 reflected its agenda to achieve inclusive and sustainable development in the region. To translate those high-level political commitments into action, ASEAN had adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach to poverty eradication. Its development agenda affirmed the linkages between poverty alleviation strategies and other cross-sectoral and interpillar issues, such as promoting social protection, ensuring food security, addressing the effects of disasters and climate change and advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Recently, the region had adopted a comprehensive recovery framework and action plan to guide its actions to recover from the pandemic.

14. Mr. Phoak highlighted that ASEAN continued to fulfil the role of a regional platform to accelerate poverty reduction and promote human rights. Government officials and partners regularly met to discuss the progress of development cooperation initiatives in areas of mutual interest. Such platforms included the collaboration of the 10 ASEAN member States with ASEAN dialogue partners, such as China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Multi-stakeholder platforms were also utilized to engage with various groups of people and organizations on key issues. Moreover, Mr. Phoak explained that ASEAN had implemented various initiatives, such as the complementarities road map, 2020–2025, launched at the thirty-fifth ASEAN summit, held in November 2019, which served as a guide for regional efforts in promoting the synergy between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. ASEAN had further established the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue, which worked to enhance capacity of regional practitioners and institutions on sustainable development. In terms of building knowledge, ASEAN would issue the inaugural publication of *ASEAN Development Outlook*, a report containing an examination of the experiences of ASEAN in driving development and the outlook for realizing an inclusive and sustainable ASEAN Community.

15. Achieving sustainable development, eradicating poverty and realizing human rights were only possible with the engagement of all stakeholders and strengthened partnerships. ASEAN consistently worked in close collaboration with its partners to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. Mr. Phoak described the annual ASEAN-China-United Nations Development Programme symposium on the Sustainable Development Goals as a hallmark platform for exchanging knowledge and best practices. Another pioneering initiative was the annual ASEAN regional forum on the Sustainable Development Goals with national development planning agencies. Preparations were under way to convene the ASEAN development forum. The high-level forum would bring together leaders and ministers within and beyond the region to exchange views on strategic development issues. Strategic policy recommendations from the forum would inform the highest policymaking mechanisms of ASEAN, such as its Leaders' Summit. Mr. Phoak concluded by stressing that there was a need to work together to surpass the global crisis and continue the progress made towards ending poverty.

16. In her video message, Ms. Su shared a short video, entitled “The Blooming Sunflower – Su Xiaoli”, about a woman who, in 2017, commenced building poverty alleviation workshops with free technical training and the distribution of embroidery materials to rural women embroiderers. Her company received ¥1 million (\$153,000), from the East-West Poverty Alleviation Fund.

17. Ms. Su emphasized that China was committed to taking a people-centred approach that prioritized people's rights to subsistence and development and protected and promoted

human rights through poverty reduction. In 2012, China had commenced its strategy to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2020, making the elimination of absolute poverty its primary task. China had prioritized the protection of the right to subsistence by ensuring stable access for the rural poor to food, clothing, compulsory education, primary health care, safe housing and safe drinking water. The per capita net income of poor households had increased, from ¥3,416 in 2015 to ¥10,740 in 2020. Medical clinics now covered every poor village. China had improved the conditions of 108,000 disadvantaged schools, provided tap water to more than 80 per cent of its rural population and safe housing to an additional 11.57 million poor households and had also relocated more than 9.6 million poor people to more inhabitable areas.

18. Ms. Su explained that China had improved the productive skills and capacities of the poor. Technical training was provided to more than 70 per cent of poor households, providing training to more than 900,000 business leaders. China had reduced poverty through measures like made-to-order production, land transfers, management services for agricultural production, exporting labour services, helping the poor to find employment in their hometowns or in nearby areas, joint stock cooperation and asset leasing. It developed e-commerce businesses by facilitating Internet access for more poor people, which had resulted in a growing number of poor residents selling their products online.

19. Ms. Su explained that China had pursued inclusive development by protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, including women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and minorities. China had adopted an action plan for providing women with vocational training and loans to start their businesses. Older persons living in poverty received monthly payments from the basic endowment insurance schemes. Local governments had implemented measures in favour of persons with disabilities, including social security, serious disease insurance, dilapidated house renovation and barrier-free facilities reconstruction. China had intensified its support for regions with ethnic minorities. In the previous five years, the central Government had invested over ¥240 billion in special poverty alleviation funds. In ethnic minority communities, China had encouraged the development of livestock and aquaculture farming and the promotion of cultural and tourism industries, to facilitate income generation, and the promotion, inheritance and protection of ethnic cultures.

20. Through foreign aid, project cooperation, technology transfer and think-tank exchanges, China had strengthened cooperation with the international community. It had established a high-level forum on global poverty reduction and development, the China-ASEAN Forum on Social Development and Poverty Reduction and the Poverty Reduction and Development Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. China had signed memorandums of understanding on poverty reduction cooperation with Asian, European, African and Latin American countries and had implemented the East Asia poverty reduction cooperation pilot project in six poverty-stricken villages in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and Myanmar. The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation had carried out the Smiling Children School Feeding Programme in Ethiopia and the Sudan and had provided scholarships to students from universities and degree colleges in Myanmar.

21. In February 2021, the Chinese national conference on poverty eradication had declared that absolute poverty had been eradicated in China. The Government would implement the fourteenth five-year plan for national economic and social development, 2021–2025, shifting the focus from tackling poverty to all-round rural revitalization. The monitoring and assistance mechanism to prevent people from falling into poverty would be further improved. Ms. Su stressed that China was willing to work with people from all countries to address challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, to advance poverty reduction and to better protect and promote human rights.

22. In his video message, Mr. Jabbi quoted Richard Morgan and David Stewart, chairs of the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, who had noted that: "Children are significantly more likely to live in poverty than adults. The impact of poverty on children can be devastating and lifelong, with implications for future generations and society as a whole." Mr. Jabbi explained that reducing both multidimensional and monetary child poverty promoted and protected the rights of the child. A child was considered to be poor if he or she either lived in a household that survived on less than \$1.90 per day or was deprived of

nutrition, health, water, sanitation, education, information or shelter, which all constituted rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

23. Statistics Sierra Leone, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund, the Government of Sierra Leone and development partners, had conducted multiple indicator cluster surveys, in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2017. The data from the 2010 and 2017 surveys had been used to estimate the levels of multidimensional child poverty in Sierra Leone in 2016 (incidence of 77 per cent) and 2019 (incidence of 66 per cent), respectively. Data from the integrated household survey conducted in Sierra Leone in 2018 had been used to estimate monetary child poverty in Sierra Leone in 2018 (incidence of 60 per cent). Between 2010 and 2017, multidimensional child poverty fell by 11 percentage points, in spite of the Ebola virus disease epidemic between 2013 and 2017. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, through its Multidimensional Poverty Index, showed that Sierra Leone had experienced the fastest progress made of 75 countries measured, during the Ebola crisis, with regard to every indicator and that the progress was swift and equitable.

24. Mr. Jabbi emphasized that, even though no response was perfect, the Multidimensional Poverty Index might encourage and empower Sierra Leone to fight and end poverty during such difficult times. The COVID-19 pandemic needed not to stop or to slow down the progress that had already been made towards poverty alleviation and the promotion and protection of global human rights. He observed that, if Sierra Leone could demonstrate such resilience during the Ebola epidemic, the world could do likewise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emphasizing that the pandemic was no excuse for slowing progress, he underlined that there was a need to continue along the pre-pandemic trajectory towards poverty alleviation and the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

25. Mr. Jabbi considered that the existing incidence of child poverty was unacceptable and that change would require a holistic approach, with interventions, policies and programmes focusing on enhancing equitable access to social services, child-friendly budgets and plans, safe environment and spaces, social justice and social protection. In that regard, he identified three main policy areas. The first area was investing in early childhood through access to quality health care, adequate nutrition programmes, child grants for poor households and expanding early childhood development and related activities. The second was empowering families and creating an enabling environment for children through the exploration of a policy of social shelter and increasing the number of safe, low-cost shelters, income support for the most vulnerable households and a protective environment for children. The third area was adolescent empowerment and giving adolescents a voice by improving access to quality education and vocational training, amplifying the voices of children and adolescents, monitoring expenditure, strengthening district-level plans and budgets, building child-responsive budgets and institutionalizing mobile technologies to support participation and the right of children to be heard. Mr. Jabbi concluded by quoting Nelson Mandela: "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

26. In his video message, Mr. Torero argued that the social and economic exclusion that poor people experienced barred them from benefiting from and contributing to development processes, violated their right to lead dignified and fulfilling lives and hampered efforts to reach sustainable growth. Leaving no one behind not only entailed reaching the poorest of the poor, but also required combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and among countries. Persistent forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination, were a major cause of people being left behind. FAO recognized the critical importance of ending poverty, which was one of its three global goals, together with eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and fostering the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources. The recognition of the interdependence of those three fundamental agendas could enable the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

27. Despite significant progress, poverty was still far from being eradicated, with 689 million people still living in extreme poverty in 2017. Specific action was needed, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In 2019, 619 million people were undernourished, 2 billion people experienced food insecurity and 3 billion people lacked access to healthy lives. The COVID-19 pandemic had further exacerbated social and economic inequalities and had shed light on weaknesses in many contemporary food systems,

in particular in terms of systems resilience, natural resources management and delivering affordable, nutritious diets to all. An additional 80 to 150 million people could go hungry due to the pandemic. Those challenges were occurring in a context of increasing globalization and urban population growth, demographic shifts, climate change and natural resource degradation.

28. Transformative systems-oriented approaches that took into account the different needs of rural and urban populations in eradicating poverty were key to the full realization of human rights. Inclusive food systems transformation was central to poverty alleviation and realizing human rights. Agriculture remained the sector with the greatest potential for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction for countries with a high contribution of agriculture to gross domestic product growth and a high share of poor people in rural sectors.

29. The rural poor faced disadvantages and barriers that limited their ability to participate in food systems transformations. They usually had low levels of agricultural productivity, high exposure to risks, with few formal mechanisms to manage them, and low levels of access to information, services and productive assets, and they faced pervasive multiple market failure, with women facing specific constraints. Those factors formed the basis of inequality. Excluded households and communities were responsible for a large share of the world's natural resources. Indigenous peoples managed or had tenure rights over a quarter of the world's land surface and about 40 per cent of all protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes. The behaviour and investment decisions of hundreds of millions of small-scale producers would affect land use, forests and climate action. It was necessary to address the barriers, constraints and market failures that they faced in responding to incentives around climate action and environmental sustainability.

30. The COVID-19 pandemic was worsening exclusion and inequality, heightening the imperative and challenge of pursuing an inclusive food systems transformation. Inequality reduced the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction, such that eventual economic recovery and transformation of food systems might potentially leave the poor worse-off. Inclusive food systems transformation required positioning human rights at the centre. That entailed promoting the participation of all individuals and communities in the development of policies aimed at transforming food systems, investing in rural infrastructure and human capital development, including universal access to education, health, social protection and skills development, addressing historic inequalities in access to, and secure tenure of, land and water and taking action to protect the integrity of indigenous food systems. A multisectoral approach was at the centre of the hand-in-hand initiative launched in 2019, which was aimed at reducing poverty by improving the agricultural potential of countries by investing in innovative, inclusive and productive value chains and building human capital.

31. Mr. Torero stressed that the fight against poverty must be a joint effort, with the public sector working in partnership with civil society and the private sector. Human rights not only implied helping people to satisfy their immediate needs, but also entailed developing their ability to rely on themselves and become agents of change.

B. Interactive discussion

32. The European Union considered that the concept of mutually beneficial cooperation lacked recognition under international human rights law. It supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and noted that the fight against poverty was central to its values of promoting participation and a human rights-based approach. It adopted policies, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and its related action plan, to stem the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The European Union and its member States were the world's largest providers of official development assistance. It supported the Secretary-General's call to action on human rights and his leadership in putting human rights at the core of the response to the pandemic. The European Union asked discussants how to ensure that poverty eradication programmes were fully participatory, placed individuals at the centre and not discriminatory against persons of ethnic or religious minority groups or other minority groups.

33. Speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, Cameroon considered it important to take stock of progress made and challenges with regard to the nexus between poverty and human rights, including through the work of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review process on efforts to reduce poverty. Nearly 49 million Africans could be plunged into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic, despite the efforts of African countries that had adopted programmes of socioeconomic support, modernization and job creation. Some countries developed successful models to boost productivity, improve resilience, raise incomes and promote social protection. Investment in human capital offered high rates of return and effective insurance against future challenges. However, challenges related to food, climate, energy and financial crises undermined the impact of such efforts. Persistent inequalities required new ideas and means of social and political mobilization for the achievement of development, which was the key to poverty reduction.

34. Brunei Darussalam, on behalf of ASEAN, reaffirmed that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions was the greatest global challenge and was indispensable to sustainable development. The ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 served as guidelines for initiatives to alleviate poverty and to narrow the development gap through mutual assistance and cooperation, including the framework action plan on rural development and poverty eradication, 2016–2020, the initiative for the third ASEAN integration work plan and the master plan on ASEAN connectivity, 2025. The COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat of a relapse into poverty for many. ASEAN and the United Nations worked closely to align the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 to help to improve the well-being of the peoples of the region. ASEAN would continue to work with other States and international organizations to accelerate poverty eradication worldwide for the promotion and protection of human rights and the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals.

35. Norway, on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries, expressed concern that the concept of “mutually beneficial cooperation” placed undue emphasis on non-interference at the expense of open and honest dialogue. All human rights were mutually interdependent and reinforcing. The pandemic had exposed inequalities and had highlighted violations of the social and economic rights of those living in poverty. People living in poverty were more likely to suffer discrimination, to become victims of modern slavery and to be arbitrarily arrested, tortured and killed. Independent courts and the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and to organize were essential. The Nordic and Baltic countries had good experiences with building societies based on human rights, gender equality, democracy and the rule of law and maintaining low levels of inequality, facilitating trust in Governments and between persons. Human rights must be the foundation for sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation.

36. Mauritania considered multilateralism as essential in promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights, in particular in the fight for poverty reduction. Ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all required freeing every human being from poverty and realizing the inalienable human right to development. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated inequalities within and between countries. People in vulnerable situations were the most affected. The poorest countries faced challenges in their ability to ensure respect for economic and social rights, including external debt, collapsing trade, declining remittances and limited international aid. On behalf of the Group of Five for the Sahel, Mauritania called for immediate cancellation of the debt of the Group’s member States and for support for the various national plans, to help them to overcome the effects of the multidimensional crisis and to resolutely pursue development and reduce poverty.

37. Germany considered development and poverty alleviation as very important, but not as preconditions for guaranteeing and ensuring human rights. Low levels of development never justified the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights. Sustainable development must include respect for, and protection and fulfilment of, all human rights, and human rights for all must be ensured. Measures to reduce poverty must reach all people living in poverty equally and the furthest behind first. The concept of mutually beneficial cooperation risked prioritizing benefits to Governments, rather than to the individuals who

held those rights. It was the primary responsibility of each State to ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights for its entire population. Germany posed a question concerning safeguards for the protection and promotion of human rights, especially of marginalized individuals and those belonging to ethnic, religious or other minority groups, in poverty alleviation measures.

38. Australia was committed to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, as a universal, global approach to reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and ensuring peace and prosperity. It emphasized the need for countries to respect, protect and promote human rights. As outlined in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, while development facilitated the enjoyment of all human rights, lack of development could not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic represented a profound challenge to development, had caused food insecurity and poverty and had intensified risks for people in vulnerable situations, including women, girls, older persons and people with disabilities. In the development strategy of Australia, partnerships for recovery, it had set out how it would tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Indo-Pacific region, with particular emphasis placed on support for those in the most vulnerable situations. Existing Council mechanisms provided the appropriate avenues for ongoing discussions on those issues.

39. Armenia considered poverty as a major scourge facing humanity. In international solidarity, the eradication of poverty was proclaimed as the first Sustainable Development Goal. Nevertheless, up to 1 billion people, and one in seven children, in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development region lived in poverty. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, humanity needed solidarity, political will and cooperation, now more than ever. Tackling the pandemic of poverty and inequality should be a priority. It was important to combat marginalization due to extreme poverty, in particular with regard to the rights to health and to work and all civil and political rights. Armenia supported a multilateral, cooperative international architecture with the effective and functional capacities of concerted response mechanisms. Governments should ensure fair and equal opportunities for all citizens. Armenia prioritized policies to tackle inequality, uphold social protection, embrace participatory governance and rule of law and enhance opportunities for women, young people and persons with disabilities in the labour market.

40. Libya supported the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on the need for international cooperation to reduce poverty in the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, by activating social and economic support programmes, creating job opportunities and taking the measures necessary to enhance social protection and support the purchasing power of families, through tax cuts, stopping electricity bills and distributing foodstuffs to the most vulnerable groups. Joint action between countries, international organizations and civil society should be taken to exchange information and scientific knowledge through cooperation at the national, regional and global levels. Libya welcomed international cooperation efforts to combat the pandemic and reduce poverty through tangible steps in the field of development to stimulate productivity and increase income. That contributed to the human rights situation in general and enhanced opportunities to achieve development, which remained the cornerstone of poverty reduction.

41. Senegal recalled that around 850 million people still lived in poverty, a persistent scourge that required special attention. In Sub-Saharan Africa, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts made to protect and support persons living in poverty were at risk of being undermined. Those persons were disproportionately affected by climate change, famine, conflict and barriers to access to basic social services. Physical distancing and other response measures had created considerable economic and social shocks around the world. Senegal had reacted to the pandemic early on by taking measures to limit its spread and adopting an economic and social resilience programme to protect lives and livelihoods. It had created a response and solidarity fund to provide aid and assistance to those most affected. Supported by its development partners, Senegal had set up several projects on sectoral policy strategies for poverty reduction within its Emerging Senegal Plan. It appealed for broad vaccination coverage, with accessible and affordable vaccines for all.

42. The Russian Federation noted that it had quickly adapted the work of emergency services and hospitals at the onset of the pandemic. It had introduced incentive payments to health workers dealing with COVID-19 patients. Employees of governmental and non-

governmental organizations and volunteers who took care of persons with disabilities, the elderly and orphans received payments. The Russian Federation provided targeted assistance to socially vulnerable groups. It modernized its social safety net by digitizing most of its services. It had adopted large-scale measures to support the economy, ensuring the sustainable work of strategic enterprises, providing loans for wages at zero interest and reducing insurance premiums from salaries. It had launched a loan programme for the resumption of business activities with the cancellation of the principal debt and deferred payments and had increased benefits for people who had lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Russian Federation consistently took into account the interests of citizens and businesses and complied with its international human rights obligations.

43. Saudi Arabia indicated that it had acted fast to combat poverty in its response in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing \$33 billion of aid to 156 countries. It had supported United Nations entities, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme, the Arab Gulf Programme for Development, the Arab Fund for Technical Assistance to African Countries, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme. Domestically, Saudi Arabia had launched many initiatives to address and eliminate poverty, including the citizen account programme, aimed at reducing burdens on citizens and providing material support to low-income and middle-income families, assisting with housing projects, implementing cash assistance programmes for food and subsidizing electricity. COVID-19 patients were treated free of charge regardless of their residency status. It had also launched initiatives to support the private sector, covering 60 per cent of salaries, subsidizing social security, exempting people from government fees and helping students in need.

44. Iraq stressed the importance of strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation through investment in education and health care and in tackling unemployment. It was important to increase the participation of women in the labour market and opportunities for small businesses. Terrorism, armed conflict, political instability and climate change had caused internal displacement and migration, diminished job opportunities, especially in rural areas, and affected indicators of poverty, namely, health, education and standard of living. The COVID-19 pandemic had greatly affected the health and economic situation, especially for people with a limited income. It required increasing international solidarity, not just by providing medical aid, but also by supporting the economy of affected countries. Iraq had adopted the national strategy for poverty reduction, 2018–2022, and had developed plans for economic recovery, especially for vulnerable groups, allocating continuous monthly subsidies for the elderly, persons with disabilities and widows, providing free health care for all and launching emergency financial grants to informal workers affected by physical distancing measures.

45. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela noted that, now more than ever, it was important to accelerate international cooperation in the field of human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic required a collective response to save lives, with emphasis placed on those most in need. International cooperation must be enhanced to facilitate access to medicines, treatments and vaccines and to implement policies to alleviate poverty in all its dimensions. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Peoples' Trade Agreement was centred on the principles of solidarity, genuine cooperation and complementarity among peoples and was focused on the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela regretted that some powers had imposed unilateral coercive measures that had increased inequality and social exclusion. Despite illegal sanctions, it had continued to develop humanitarian social policies for the social inclusion of historically excluded sectors, breaking the cycles of poverty and extreme poverty in the country.

46. South Africa expressed alarm that extreme poverty was back to levels not seen in a generation. As stated by Nelson Mandela: "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. ... Overcoming poverty is ... the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom." Economic, social and cultural rights were justiciable in South Africa. Its Government had developed multidimensional policies to eradicate poverty, including establishing that 40 per cent of public procurement should go to women-owned businesses, young people and persons with

disabilities. South Africa called for a new partnership based on solidarity and mutual respect to address historic injustices that had contributed to poverty, through enhanced cooperation in international trade and investment, the alleviation and restructuring of external debt and official development assistance. Vaccines must be treated as a global public good.

47. Pakistan emphasized that, while the COVID-19 pandemic did not discriminate between communities and countries, its impact was disproportionately negative for developing countries. The pandemic had undermined the capacities of developing countries to make progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. International solidarity should be translated into specific steps to halt and reverse the devastating impact of the pandemic. People should be empowered to enjoy the right to development and economic, social and cultural rights. It was necessary to shore up financing for the universal provision of affordable vaccines in a timely manner, adequate debt relief and liquidity support. The lockdown policy of Pakistan had helped to contain the transmission of the virus, saved lives and provided livelihoods. Its Compassion Programme had disbursed 175 billion rupees as emergency cash transfers, mostly to women, minorities, transgender citizens and daily wage earners. An economic relief package of \$8 billion had been launched for small and medium-sized businesses and small-holder farmers.

48. For Egypt, social justice was a top priority. Especially since the launch of its economic reform programme in 2016, its approach to social protection had shifted from a relief-based approach, limited to helping the most vulnerable groups, to a human rights-based approach aimed at enhancing the economic and social rights of citizens. Its sustainable development strategy, Vision 2030, was focused on the pursuit of comprehensive development by building a just society characterized by equality and equitable distribution of the benefits of development. In its Vision 2030, the strategic vision of Egypt for social justice was translated into three goals, namely, promoting societal integration, achieving equality of rights and opportunities and achieving protection for the most vulnerable groups. The provision of technical assistance to Governments to develop the infrastructure needed to fulfil their international obligations in the field of human rights was essential and should take into account national priorities, based on the principles of understanding, equality and mutual respect.

49. The Lao People's Democratic Republic remarked that poverty inhibited the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, especially in the least developed countries, and undermined economic and social rights. The eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions was indispensable to sustainable development. The Lao People's Democratic Republic accorded the highest priority to poverty alleviation by addressing its root causes. The poverty rate had decreased, from 46 per cent in 1996 to 18.3 per cent in 2019. Agriculture was the country's main economic sector, although over 8,000 square kilometres were contaminated by unexploded ordnance, impeding socioeconomic development and posing threats to its people. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the path of the Lao People's Democratic Republic towards graduating from least developed country status. It called upon the international community to step up efforts to end poverty by mobilizing resources to assist developing and least developed countries and to help to ensure the full and effective enjoyment of human rights.

50. Nepal recalled that the COVID-19 crisis had caused job losses and business closures and had shrunk economies, pushing people into poverty worldwide. The decline in remittances affected poverty alleviation and the expansion of economic activities in countries of origin, including Nepal. In the wake of the pandemic, Nepal had introduced relief packages to the poor and people in need. It aimed to end poverty by 2043. It was committed to achieving the goal of zero hunger by ensuring food and nutrition for all. The Prime Minister's employment programme and agricultural modernization project were flagship programmes aimed at generating employment within the country. Returning migrant workers received incentives for engaging in self-employment or entrepreneurial activities. Social security schemes and citizen housing programmes were targeted at addressing poverty and improving quality of life. International cooperation and solidarity remained critical in its efforts to alleviate poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 while leaving no one behind.

51. Uruguay regretted the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fight against poverty and inequality, including the increase in the poverty rate among women, jeopardizing years of progress on gender equality. Uruguay was convinced that the development agenda was also a human rights agenda. Achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty required redoubling efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights. Uruguay had adopted long-term strategies that allowed it to achieve legal, institutional and programmatic advances with tangible results in terms of reducing poverty and inequality and increasing social inclusion, access to, and the quality of, the health system, sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. Uruguay reiterated the importance of strengthening cooperation to curb the impact of the crisis on poverty, inequality and human rights. It requested discussants to elaborate on how the human rights-based approach to international development cooperation could be strengthened.

52. Mexico recalled that the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had increased poverty and extreme poverty and had deteriorated the enjoyment of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Its welfare policy was aimed at leaving no one behind, and Mexico considered everyone to be rights holders. Strategies were designed to empower each individual in the full exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms. Ongoing social programmes were focused on improving the living conditions of the elderly, people with disabilities, children of working mothers, young people, peasant women, indigenous peoples and Mexican people of African descent. By granting support, it sought to promote inclusion and gender equality and eliminate discrimination against historically segregated persons and groups. Mexico considered international cooperation and technical assistance as extremely valuable tools to promote development, alleviate poverty, strengthen national capacities in terms of the protection and promotion of, and respect for, human rights and ensure that no one was left behind.

53. Azerbaijan had implemented policies on poverty reduction and economic development. It had made substantial progress in increasing levels of education, promoting gender equality and environmental protection, reducing child and maternity mortality rates, strengthening the fight against communicable and other diseases and expanding participation in global partnerships for prosperity. Azerbaijan had reduced absolute poverty rates, from 49 per cent in 2001 to 4.5 per cent by 2020. It had focused on making the non-oil sector dynamic and sustainable, converting “black gold” into human capital. Long-lasting peace, security, stability and social cohesion were major prerequisites for development. The de-occupation of territories of Azerbaijan had paved the way for displaced persons to exercise their right to safe and dignified return to their places of origin. Azerbaijan believed that the full implementation of the trilateral statement signed by Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Armenia would bring peace and development to Armenia, Azerbaijan and the entire region.

54. Viet Nam placed the highest priority on sustainable poverty reduction, addressing the root causes of poverty through concerted policies, in particular for rural, remote and ethnic minority regions. Between 2016 and 2020, it had spent 21 per cent of the State budget on social security, the highest figure among ASEAN countries. Its policies had helped to achieve one of the highest human development index growth rates globally. In 2020, Viet Nam had stood out for its excellent control of the pandemic and keeping the loss of human lives and economic losses to a minimum. It had set the dual goal of fighting the pandemic and ensuring socioeconomic development and social welfare through comprehensive and sustainable policies, including the launch of a \$2.6 billion social assistance package and raising the income-based poverty thresholds. Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere required pursuing broad-based economic growth, investing in people and insuring the poor and vulnerable against ever-changing risks.

55. The International Service for Human Rights lamented that policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were not adapted to the realities of people in poverty. People should be empowered to know and claim their rights. The objective of development could not simply be economic growth, but rather the full enjoyment of all human rights. Attacks against human rights defenders, especially defenders of economic, social and cultural rights, violated the right to defend rights and put the goal of inclusive development at risk. Many development initiatives had led to human rights violations, and in many economically developed countries,

human rights were not realized. That called into question the causal link between development, including poverty alleviation, and the realization of human rights. The International Service for Human Rights inquired about key policy elements for ensuring positive correlations between the decrease in the level of extreme poverty and the increase in the protection and promotion of human rights.

56. Make Mothers Matter recalled that about 1 billion children were multidimensionally poor, with their rights to food, clean water, health care or education violated. Children were more likely to live in poverty than adults and were more vulnerable to its impact. Governments should prioritize addressing child poverty and breaking the intergenerational aspect of poverty. Make Mothers Matter welcomed the development of a European child guarantee policy which would ensure access for every child to health, housing, nutrition, education and childcare. Child poverty alleviation could not be disassociated from support to parents and caregivers, especially single parents. In Europe, around two fifths of single parent households, mostly lone mothers, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Caring for and educating children was unpaid yet essential work that must be recognized and supported for its contributions to all society by developing policies, structures and services to provide enough time, money and skills for parents.

57. Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23), also on behalf of 11 non-governmental organizations, considered the COVID-19 pandemic to be a complex and global political, social, economic, cultural phenomenon that compromised the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It advocated for equal access to treatment for COVID-19 and the universal distribution of vaccines. Global problems, including climate change, the foreign debt of impoverished countries and military expenditure, required renewed commitments to multilateralism and international cooperation to promote the health and social protection of citizens, peace and access to medicines and vaccines. Intellectual property rights, including patents, industrial designs and copyrights, should not bar the availability, production or distribution of medical products against the virus that causes COVID-19, including vaccines, for all humanity. The association asked discussants to elaborate on the relationship between health and poverty alleviation and the role of the right to development in recovery plans for the future of humanity.

58. Action Canada for Population and Development, also on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative and the Coalition of African Lesbians, regretted that the multiple international resolutions and States' policies to combat poverty had often taken a neoliberal leaning that insisted on economic growth at all costs. During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world's biggest companies increased their profits substantially. Poverty and economic violence could not be eradicated when the tools and mechanisms developed did not tackle the root causes of poverty, which were historical, colonial, neocolonial, racialized and gendered. Economic violence was a lethal form of abuse, with poverty being both a cause and a consequence of economic violence. The current economic order of neoliberal capitalism brought about oppressive societal, economic and political systems that devastated entire populations. It argued that poverty could only be alleviated by acknowledging the inherent truth that the neocolonial international system exacerbated poverty.

59. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association stated that one in five people in Middle Eastern countries were extremely poor, while two thirds were vulnerable to falling into extreme or multidimensional poverty within the next few decades. Since 2013, extreme and multidimensional poverty had increased in the region due to conflicts and wars. The region was currently ranked the third highest in multidimensional poverty, after Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, with 6.7 per cent of people living under the \$1.9 per day poverty line. All barriers and restrictions against humanitarian organizations should be removed so that they could reach out to vulnerable communities and provide them with assistance and humanitarian aid. It proposed establishing an observatory committee in the Arab region similar to those established in China and Latin America to follow up on and monitor poverty eradication efforts.

60. The International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic and Other Minorities, also on behalf of the International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, considered that existing challenges to eradicate world poverty, including the debt crisis and the inequitable international financial architecture, were

aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerating climate emergency. The World Bank definition of poverty underestimated existing poverty, given that it was based on an extremely low standard of living that did not enable living a life with dignity. More realistic measures of poverty should be based on the satisfaction of basic needs. The focus on means to reduce poverty should move from economic growth only, to the reduction of inequalities and the redistribution of wealth. A global fund for social protection should be welcomed and supported. Eradicating poverty would require building back better and differently through systemic reform and just economic reconstruction.

61. The following States and international and non-governmental organizations were unable to make statements owing to lack of time: Tunisia, Botswana, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Belgium, Indonesia, Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, United Nations Development Programme, Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, Elizka Relief Foundation, China Foundation for Human Rights Development, Instituto Brasileiro de Analises Sociais e Economicas, Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health, Geo Expertise Association, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and The Palestinian Return Centre.

IV. Concluding remarks by discussants

62. Ms. Su noted with appreciation the exchanges of knowledge and learning among States and international organizations in the pursuit of human rights and poverty alleviation. The sharing of national practices was useful in advancing the cause of poverty alleviation. She stressed the desire of China to cooperate with relevant States and international organizations to further implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government would continue to cooperate and share experiences in that area with relevant countries, including on how to promote rural development and help people to better realize their right to development.

63. Mr. Jabbi reiterated that, in eradicating child poverty, States must also promote the human rights of children, as well as adults, because children lived in households run by adults. Alleviating child poverty entailed promoting the rights of both children and adults.

64. Mr. Torero recalled that 150 million people were falling back into extreme poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic and 2.6 million children were declining into chronic malnourishment. He emphasized that the situation of, and the relationship between, health and poverty were critical. There had been a 10 per cent increase in education poverty, indicating that a large number of people did not have access to schools. He emphasized that there was a need to take into account the opportunity to rebuild. He also stressed that there was a need for significant stimulus packages and investments to resolve the problems that the world had already been facing before the pandemic. Mr. Torero also emphasized that the issue of poverty could not be resolved without also resolving the issue of inequality, which was related to infrastructure, institutions and governance.
