24th session of the Human Rights Council

Address by Ms. Flavia Pansieri

United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Introduction to thematic reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner under items 2 and 3

Geneva, 13 September 2013
Mr. President,
Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to introduce to the present session of the Council the reports prepared by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner and which fall under agenda items 2 and 3 of the agenda.

I wish to start with the report of OHCHR on the public consultation on the promotion and protection of the human rights of older persons (A/HRC/24/25) which summarizes the discussions of the public consultation on the human rights of older persons held by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in compliance with Human Rights Council Resolution 21/23. The consultation focused on the main challenges to the enjoyment of the human rights of older persons and good practices in the protection and promotion of their human rights, and included a one-day meeting that took place in Geneva on 15 April 2013, and written contributions from various stakeholders. Issues under discussion included examples of specific protection against age discrimination and ageism, the existence of bodies with a mandate to protect the rights of older persons and to combat age discrimination, and challenges and good practices in the areas of the economic and social rights of older persons and of the protection of older persons against violence, neglect and abuse.

The report of our Office on the implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (A/HRC/24/24) summarizes views by States, national human rights institutions and other relevant stakeholders on the possible target sectors, focus areas or thematic human rights issues for the third phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. The feedback received shows a diversity of approaches and priorities among the respondents, often reflecting national and regional contexts; some global patterns and general conclusions are presented at the end of the report. A majority of the respondents has emphasized the need to continue prioritizing human rights education with the target sectors already identified in the previous phases, i.e. the formal education system – primary, secondary and higher education – as well as training for civil servants, law enforcement officials and the military.

Turning now to the consolidated report of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the right to development (A/HRC/24/27): the report contains a brief overview of the activities relating to the promotion and realization of the right to development. It also provides detailed information on advocacy, outreach and communications work by the Office. In addition, it recounts events and initiatives in support of relevant Council mechanisms and the mainstreaming of the right to development in the global partnership for development. The report recalls that the year 2013 marks the twentieth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna which adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action reaffirming the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights. The report concludes that the post-2015 development process is an important opportunity in making the right to development a reality for everyone and freeing the entire human race from want.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Moving on to the report on the Proceedings of the workshop held on 5 April 2013 on the various aspects relating to the impact of the application of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights by the affected populations in the States targeted (A/HRC/24/20): in
summing up the discussion held during the workshop, the Chairperson concluded that unilateral coercive measures were regarded by States or a group of States that resorted to them as an instrument of their foreign policy. Among various discussions, some maintained that such measures could undercut the enjoyment of such human rights as the rights to food, to health and to education. Several participants saw a need for an independent assessment of the impact on human rights of unilateral coercive measures, and for jurisdictions to uphold human rights and accountability in this context. The report proposes a set of proposals discussed during the workshop, to be considered by the Human Rights Council in accordance with political feasibility and financial possibility.

Excellences,
The summary of information from States Members of the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders on best practices in the application of traditional values while promoting and protecting human rights and upholding human dignity (A/HRC/24/22) summarizes divided viewpoints received from all relevant stakeholders. Several respondents found that some traditional values were closely related to human dignity and human rights, provided the basis for universal rights, and supported their promotion and protection. On the other hand, some respondents were of the view that traditional values could be invoked to justify the status quo and undermine the rights of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

The report of the Secretary-General report on the question of the death penalty (A/HRC/24/18) concludes that the international community as a whole is moving towards the abolition of the death penalty in law or in practice. More than 150 of the 193 Member States of the United Nations have abolished the death penalty or introduced a moratorium, either in law or in practice. Nevertheless, a small number of States have continued to use it and in many instances, international standards guaranteeing the protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty were not fully respected. It recommends that States should amend national laws on extradition and deportation to specifically prohibit the enforced transfer of persons to States where there is a genuine risk that the death penalty may be imposed in violation of internationally recognized standards. The lack of data on the number of executions or individuals on death row is a serious impediment to international and national debates that may lead to the abolition of capital punishment. The report further notes that there is also an urgent need to examine the effects of the capital punishment system in its entirety, including the social, economic and psychological impact on the children of those executed or under death sentence.

The report of the High Commissioner for on the rights of indigenous peoples (A/HRC/24/26) focuses on some illustrative examples of the OHCHR activities and initiatives undertaken at Headquarters and by field presences that contribute to the full application of the rights of indigenous peoples. These do not aim to offer an exhaustive overview of the work of OHCHR on indigenous peoples’ rights, but rather to provide some examples of the action taken at country, regional and headquarters levels. The report also provides an overview of the recent developments within United Nations human rights mechanisms insofar as their work pertains to indigenous peoples. It concludes that OHCHR increased its efforts to give practical guidance on the content of the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to various key stakeholders ranging from Parliamentarians to national human rights institutions. The United Nations Indigenous Peoples Partnership (UNIPP) initiative has also prompted United Nations partners to come together coherently, guided by the principles set forth in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. OHCHR has worked closely with the indigenous experts and United Nations agencies involved to ensure that all UNIPP country programmes are not merely about indigenous peoples, but also designed and
implemented with their participation, and implemented in true partnership with indigenous peoples and States.

Mr. President,

The report of the Secretary-General entitled Human rights in the administration of justice: analysis of the international legal and institutional framework for the protection of all persons deprived of their liberty (A/HRC/24/28) provides an analysis of the applicable international legal and institutional framework for the protection of all persons deprived of their liberty. Moreover it identifies major challenges in this regard, such as judicial oversight of deprivation of liberty, overuse of detention, in particular pre-trial detention and detention of migrants, overcrowding, deaths and serious injury in detention, and the protection of specific groups deprived of their liberty. It concludes that, while a comprehensive framework for the protection of all persons deprived of their liberty exists, the main challenges lie in the implementation of relevant norms and standards at the domestic level.

The OHCHR report on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/24/23) illustrates that the critical role played by journalists and other media professionals is being seriously undermined by the violence that many experience, in contravention of applicable law. It describes initiatives taken by Member States, UN agencies and other organisations for the safety of journalists as well as the protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The compilation of good practices contained in the report includes key elements of a framework for a safe and enabling environment in which journalists and other media professionals may carry out their work unhindered, including a range of political, legislative, accountability, protection and awareness-raising measures. The report notes that it is incumbent on States to ensure the safety of journalists through the implementation and enforcement of the existing norms and standards. It emphasises that the prevailing impunity for violence against journalists must be actively addressed.

The OHCHR report on the outcome of the panel discussion on common challenges facing States in their efforts to secure democracy and rule of law (A/HRC/24/54) provides a summary of the panel discussion on common challenges States are facing in their efforts to secure democracy and the rule of law from a human rights perspective, as well as on lessons learned and best practices in the engagement of the State with the international community to support such processes. The panel was held on 11 June 2013, at the twenty-third session of the Human Rights Council.

I wish to draw your attention to the report of the Secretary-General on alleged reprisals and how to address the issue of intimidation and reprisals against those who seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms (A/HRC/24/29). In addition to cases and follow-up information regarding previously mentioned incidents, the report highlights relevant developments relating to the issue of reprisals and intimidation, which illustrate that this topic attracts ever growing attention, in particular as a result of the Human Rights Council panel held in September 2012, which featured strong statements from many stakeholders, governmental, non-governmental, as well as from within the UN. As every year, the report also contains concluding remarks and recommendations, which stress that, regrettably, the issue of reprisals and intimidation remains of concern and suggest that the observations which resulted from last year’s panel could serve as a road map for further action. This report will be considered during the general debate on item 5 on 18 September.
Distinguished delegates,

I am pleased to bring to your attention the Report of the twentieth meeting of special rapporteurs/representatives, independent experts and chairpersons of working groups of the special procedures (A/HRC/24/55), which was held in Vienna from 24 to 28 June 2013 in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which had firmly anchored the system of special procedures in the international human rights protection system. The report gives an overview of the issues touched upon during the meeting including working methods and thematic issues and of the consultations held with various stakeholders, including regional human rights mechanisms, UNODC, national human rights institutions and civil society. This report will be considered during the general debate on item 5 on 18 September.

The report of the Office on the attacks and discrimination against persons with albinism (A/HRC/24/57) highlights that in some communities, erroneous beliefs and myths influenced by superstition put the security and life of persons with albinism at risk. OHCHR has received information from various countries on cases of killings and dismembering of persons with albinism for ritual purposes. It has also collected information on the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination persons with albinism face worldwide. The report concludes that states should adopt specific measures to protect and preserve the rights to life, and to security of persons with albinism, as well as their right not to be subject to torture and ill-treatment, and ensure their access to adequate health care, employment, education and justice.

The annual report of the OHCHR on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review (A/HRC/24/56) displays an overview of contributions and expenditures as at 31 May of this year, and a description of the activities funded since the establishment of the Fund in 2009. The Fund provides valuable support for States wishing to implement their pledges and commitments made at the universal periodic review.

Finally, I would like to refer to the Note by the Secretary-General transmitting to the Human Rights Council the study of the World Health Organization on mortality of children under 5 years of age as a human rights concern (HRC/24/60). The study introduces the definition of under-five mortality and provides an overview of its scale, its causes and underlying determinants, as well as the key interventions needed to avert child mortality and morbidity. It identifies the applicable international legal framework and makes recommendations to the Council to move forward in operationalizing a human rights based approach to under-five mortality.

This concludes my introduction of thematic reports under items 2 and 3.

Thank you for your attention.