

GENEVA (28 September 2020) – The Coordination Committee of Special Procedures is gravely concerned about the impact of the UN funding crisis on the functioning of the system of independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council. The Committee calls upon States to take urgent action to address the situation, including through financial contributions to the regular budget, to ensure the mandate holders can effectively carry out their work.

“Special Procedures, which include the [56 mandates](#) that cover international human rights, such as violations of the rights of communities and populations historically subjected to discrimination, have had many positive achievements in the last 50 years since the appointment of the first mandate holder,” said the Committee members, who are themselves among the mandate holders appointed by the Human Rights Council.

“Special Procedures are often viewed as the most accessible UN human rights mechanism and are often characterized as the eyes and ears of the Human Rights Council as they receive information daily from people all around the world.”

Adequate financing of the Special Procedures has been an issue of concern for several years. At this time, Member States have only paid about 60 percent of their commitments to the United Nations regular budget. As a result, some of the work of the Special Procedures is not taking place, such as making country visits to engage State representatives and other stakeholders, meeting with victims of human rights violations and making concrete recommendations to assist States in fulfilling their human rights obligations. The Committee said mandate holders were unable to present reports at UN headquarters in person, depriving them of opportunities to maintain and strengthen ongoing dialogues with delegations, civil society and UN representatives. These essential activities have not been suspended solely for public health reasons, the Committee added.

The Committee said that Special Procedures mandates have made exceptional efforts, both professional and personal, to continue their work despite many challenges experienced during the pandemic. There is a clear expectation that States will support their work, including meetings in person, country visits and other activities undertaken to promote their [mandates](#), as well as all the costs involved in working online during the pandemic.

“As in every area of human rights, the COVID-19 pandemic must not be used as a justification for States to fail to fund the very mandates that they have chosen to

establish,” the Committee said. “Moreover, the experts, who work as unpaid volunteers, have now incurred additional personal costs, including to ensure access to the Internet and essential technology, as well as for the care of children and other relatives, as they endeavor to fulfil their obligations to report to UN bodies, continue their outreach to victims, and engage in ongoing urgent matters.

“While Special Procedures mandate holders have gone above and beyond their normal duties to support victims of human rights violations, States cannot claim that they are adequately supporting them unless they fully comply with their financial commitments to the UN’s regular budget,” the Committee said. “We consider it a serious neglect of State responsibility that, in many cases, the budgetary limitations mean that mandate holders must fund their mandated work themselves during the UN financial crisis, receiving no support for expenses associated with the current online working conditions.”

The Coordination Committee expressed serious concern that the lack of urgent action to address the situation may create a protection gap, as the Special Procedures mandate holders have no further capacity to continue working in such unacceptable conditions. New technologies and virtual means cannot replace working methods that have been developed over years and make the added value of the special procedures system.

The call by the Coordination Committee takes place while the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly are in session in Geneva and New York respectively. The Coordination Committee urges participants at both events to heed this call during these important deliberations, and to take practical and urgent steps to address the UN financial crisis immediately.

The current members of the Coordination Committee are: Anita Ramasastry (Chairperson), Victor Madrigal-Borloz, Javaid Rehman, Leigh Toomey and Clément Voule.

ENDS

Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are

Human rights experts warn of damaging impact on Special Procedures from UN funding crisis

independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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