

# Joint civil society statement on the outcomes of UNGA 75 Third Committee

As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, civil society discuss various outcomes at this session of the Third Committee, despite additional challenges associated with the session being held mostly online.

We welcome the **joint statement on reprisals** led by the United Kingdom and joined by a cross-regional group of countries, calling on all States and the UN to prevent, respond to, and ensure accountability for cases of intimidation and reprisals against those who engage or seek to engage with the UN. We welcome in particular the increased number of States joining this year (75 compared to 71 last year).

One highlight of this session was a powerful **joint statement on China** by a cross-regional group of 39 Member States. This statement represents a strong public rebuke of the Chinese government's widespread human rights violations in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Tibet, and is further proof that a growing number of governments are braving Beijing's threats of retaliation and voicing alarm. The joint statement endorsed an appeal from 50 UN human rights experts for the creation of a UN mechanism for monitoring human rights in China. It also urged China to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights unfettered access to Xinjiang. We hope the Chinese government will heed the message of this statement and end the abuses, including in Xinjiang, Hong Kong.

We welcome a resolution on the **right to privacy in the digital age**. The resolution contends with many new and emerging challenges for the right to privacy worldwide, with strong language on biometric technologies and encryption, as well as recommendations on artificial intelligence. The resolution has also crucially strengthened the link between privacy, equality and non-discrimination and once again expressed concern about threats and harassment faced by those defending human rights. We urge all States to take heed of these developments and implement the resolution to its full extent at the national level.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution on **Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions** by a vote. The resolution aims to uphold the right to life, liberty and security for everyone and acknowledges that impunity continues to be a major factor in the continuation of these executions. We support the additional reference to human rights defenders and the fact that this session's resolution once again

highlighted the targeting of specific groups of persons including killings of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, killings of members of indigenous communities, killings of persons related to their activities as human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists or demonstrators, or because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We welcome the successful rejection of an oral amendment proposed by a group of States attempting to remove the reference to particularly targeted groups by a vote.

We welcome support by an overwhelming majority of States for the resolution on a **moratorium on the use of the death penalty** proposed by Mexico and Switzerland (on behalf of an Inter-Regional Task Force of States). A total of 120 UN Member States voted in favor of the text - including for the first time Djibouti, Lebanon and South Korea - while 39 voted against and 24 abstained. The text reiterates calls made in previous resolutions, most prominently for a halt of executions with the view to abolishing the death penalty. It also includes additions on the importance of civil society in public debate on the issue, the role of UN treaty bodies, the discriminatory application of the death penalty on women and the need to ensure that children, families and legal representatives are provided with adequate information about a pending execution.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution on **Inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities**, urging non-discrimination, accessibility and inclusion in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including for women and girls with disabilities. In particular, we welcome the request for the Secretary-General to report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities, and on the implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

We deeply regret the 30 amendments were proposed by Russia and the United States across various **resolutions relevant to gender**. At the heart of these amendments were attempts to break consensus, weaken references to sexual and reproductive health, and delete references to UNFPA and WHO in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are concerned by constant attempts to limit access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls, particularly as access to these services have been diverted in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also disconcerting to see persistent attempts to erode progress achieved through extensive negotiations among Member States, particularly in regard to rollover resolutions.

We welcome the adoption by consensus of the resolution on **Child, Early and Forced Marriage** (CEFM). The resolution included updates related to the impacts of COVID-19 and response measures

on girls and root causes and efforts to end CEFM. The resolution acknowledged that adolescent girls are most affected by the CEFM and called for transformative, participatory and adequately funded COVID-19 response measures, including uninterrupted access and funding for sexual and reproductive health-care services; adolescent-centered services; and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Unfortunately, the resolution did not reference multiple and intersecting forms of violence and discrimination or include survivor-centered approaches. Further, we deeply regret the presentation of 8 amendments by the US and Russia, which suggest a deprioritization of this issue, especially as we have seen a surge in cases in the context of COVID-19 and associated response measures.

We commend the support of a majority of Member States for the resolution on **Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls**, presented by France and the Netherlands, which was adopted by a vote. Although we are encouraged by the rejection of 10 amendments presented by Russia and the US, we deeply regret the attempt to break global consensus on an issue widely recognized as a gross human rights violation and a public health issue, particularly as this year's text addresses increased violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. While ultimately no delegation voted against the resolution, it is discouraging that the balance reached on sensitive issues following weeks of negotiations was called to a vote.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution on **Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation** presented by Burkina Faso (on behalf of African Group) and the resolution on **Intensifying efforts to end obstetric fistula** presented by Senegal (on behalf of African Group). These resolutions were technical rollovers (with no substantive changes to the respective 2018 texts) ultimately adopted by consensus. While we are deeply disappointed by the amendments presented by the US to delete references related to sexual and reproductive health in both texts and to delete references to UNFPA and WHO in an attempt to disregard their leadership and contributions in efforts to end obstetric fistula, we are encouraged that the majority of Member States stood behind these essential references and rejected the amendments.

We welcome the passage of the resolution on **Women and girls and the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)** presented by Spain that underscores the fundamental role of women and girls in pandemic responses, and calls for a gender responsive action to the pandemic. The text sends a powerful message to promote and protect the human rights of all women and girls and to end all forms of discrimination. While the resolution was adopted by consensus, we regret the

six amendments presented by Russia and the US aimed at debilitating and reversing long-standing global agreements regarding women's sexual and reproductive health, as well as the fundamental importance of the outcome documents and reviews related to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the ICPD.

We note the adoption without a vote of the resolution on **Strengthening national and international rapid response to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on women and girls** presented by Egypt (on behalf of Algeria, China, Saudi Arabia, and Zambia). We also commend the rejection of two amendments presented by the US to delete reference to the essential role played by the WHO and weaken the reference to sexual and reproductive health. However, we regret that the text falls short in addressing the impact of the pandemic on women and girls from a human rights perspective. The text fails to comprehensively address the sexual and reproductive health needs of all women and girls, turning a blind eye to the impact of lockdowns and quarantine measures on continued access to these essential services. We are disappointed that language from the General Assembly omnibus resolution on COVID-19 adopted by consensus barely two months ago on sexual and reproductive health in the pandemic was not included in the text.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution on **Trafficking in women and girls** presented by the Philippines. While a technical rollover, we welcome additional references to COVID-19. The resolution calls on governments to establish or enhance preventive measures to address underlying causes, as well as risk factors that increase vulnerability to human trafficking - including poverty, gender inequality and stereotypes - and to allocate resources to programmes for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of human trafficking, including sexual and reproductive health-care services. While the resolution was adopted by consensus, we regret the attempt by the US to delete the reference to sexual and reproductive health-care services, which are essential for survivors, particularly given the same resolution in 2018 passed by consensus without any amendments presented.

We welcome the overwhelming cross-regional support to the resolution on the **human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran**. This resolution recognises ongoing systemic and systematic human rights violations in the country, urging the Iranian authorities to hold those responsible to account. We remain deeply concerned by impunity for deliberate use of unwarranted lethal force by security forces during the November 2019 protests, mass arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment and unfair trials in relation to the protests, and the intimidation and silencing of victims' families. Other violations remain unaddressed, including the death

penalty, discrimination against women and girls and ethnic and religious minorities, and the repression of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. These serious violations warrant continued scrutiny by the UN Secretary-General mandated by this resolution. We urge Member States to support the resolution when considered in the upcoming Plenary session.

The cross-regional support demonstrated by the adoption of the resolution on the **situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic** sends a strong message to the Syrian government, Russia and other parties to the conflict responsible for war crimes. The resolution underscores the essential role of cross-border aid mechanisms in bringing life saving humanitarian assistance, especially in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, urging the Security Council to reauthorize the use of border crossings of Bab al-Salam and al-Ya'rubiyah. We welcome the condemnation of the government's human rights violations, including use of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, denial of humanitarian access, arbitrary arrest of civilians, detention, torture and killing of detainees, as well as violations by anti-government groups. We welcome continued calls for accountability for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and urge Member States to follow through on the resolution, and work within the Security Council and the General Assembly to ensure cross-border humanitarian assistance resumes.

We welcome the passage, by overwhelming support, of the resolution on the **Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar**. The resolution highlights the urgency of addressing root causes of human rights abuses and the critical need for accountability for violations of international law against the Rohingya and ethnic minorities in Chin, Shan, and Kachin states. With strong language on humanitarian access, statelessness, systematic and institutionalized discrimination, accountability for sexual and gender-based violence, the need for credible and transparent justice processes, and the need for free and inclusive elections, the resolution sends a timely message on the need for action by the Myanmar government, the UN Secretariat and Security Council.

The resolution on **Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea** was adopted by consensus, with Belarus, China, DPRK, Russia, Syria and Venezuela disassociating. We welcome the condemnation of ongoing widespread and systematic violations of human rights in the DPRK and the importance of following up on recommendations contained in the 2014 report of the Commission of Inquiry. The resolution urges the Security Council to engage on the situation in DPRK and consider referring it to the International Criminal Court.

We welcome the adoption by consensus of the resolution on the **Human rights treaty body system**. We regret that States were not able to 'welcome' the report of the co-facilitators of the 2020 review of the treaty body system. We urge all States to follow through with their reaffirmation of the formula contained in resolution 68/268, and allocate the corresponding financial and human resources in the Fifth Committee that the treaty bodies require to function effectively.

The slender **opportunities for civil society to engage with the Third Committee** became even fewer during Covid-19 times as in-person restrictions did away with encounters with States delegates and UN officials at UNHQ. Given this, it was deeply disappointing that more States did not extend an invitation to civil society organisations to join online informals and defend the presence of civil society as observers. Keeping abreast of the timing of informals was also challenging as this information was not included in the UN Journal as is generally the case. These additional challenges were particularly disappointing, given that well before the start of the Third Committee session in April, **14 civil society organisations called on UN agencies, mechanisms, and bodies** to ensure that, in adapting their work to social distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, they not limit the meaningful inclusion of civil society voices in UN discussions.

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