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**Statement by
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CHAIR

COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

75th session of the General Assembly
Third Committee

Agenda item 72: Promotion and protection of human rights

a) Implementation of human rights instruments

15 October 2020
New York



Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates
Colleagues and friends

The past year has been extraordinary for the Committee against Torture (CAT) as well as for the whole United Nations. The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the risk of ill-treatment and torture worldwide, and thereby highlighting the need for a well-functioning and sufficiently funded treaty body system. But at the same time, the pandemic has posed significant challenges to the work of the Committee in a time of increased risk of torture and ill-treatment for the most vulnerable.

As explained in the CAT Annual Report, the first and immediate consequence was in the fact that while the sixty-seventh and sixty-eighth sessions could be held in-situ in 2019, the April-May 2020 session had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 related health-risks and travel restrictions.

Regarding its activities, the Committee has faced a number of serious obstacles to conducting online work such as the time difference between the locations of members of the Committee, the need for a secure and well-functioning online platform, connectivity for all Committee members and other entities, regardless of their location, and proper interpretation in the working languages at all time. These issues have not been fully resolved despite the efforts of the Secretariat and bearing in mind the liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations.

Owing to these obstacles, the Committee has not been in a position to carry out public activities such as the consideration of country dialogues, and individual communications, which require extensive and confidential exchanges between Committee members with interpretation.

CAT has addressed the increased risk of torture and ill-treatment during the pandemic in a joint statement with the other UN Anti-Torture mechanisms (Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, Special Rapporteur on Torture, Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture) on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June. Further, the increased risk was highlighted at a webinar, entitled “Combatting torture and ill-treatment in the Covid-19 context: Testimonies from the ground”, organized by OHCHR and the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT).

Reacting to the limitations posed by the pandemic, the Committee decided to prolong its Bureau until the next in-person session so as to enable proper consultations and elections. Exceptionally, it decided that its 3 new members - Mr. Huawen LIU (China), Mr. Erdogan ISCAN (Turkey), and Ms. Ilvija PUCE (Latvia) - make their solemn declarations in writing and posting them on the CAT webpage so as to enable their full participation to the CAT work.

In order to address any protection gap, CAT has continued some crucial activities namely the discussions and adoption of its List of Issues (LOI) and Lists of Issues Prior Reporting (LOIPR), including with specific reference to COVID-19, the processing of States reports as United Nations documents to be considered once the situation will enable a proper dialogue, the follow-up to its Concluding Observations, the preparation of the work under article 20 (confidential inquiries), the registration of individual complaints and the issuance of interim measures of protection.

Under its reporting procedure under article 19, as reflected in its Annual Report, CAT took measures for focusing the dialogue with States

parties via a proper coordination with other treaty bodies when drafting its LOIPR and limiting the number of questions as well when drafting its concluding observations. CAT has continued to strengthen its follow-up to Concluding Observations procedure.

The necessity to protect those cooperating with CAT from reprisals remains a priority and CAT has since the beginning been at the forefront by issuing specific detailed guidelines, endorsing the San José guidelines, appointing a rapporteur for reprisals, and having a public webpage on CAT activities on reprisals.

Looking at what lies ahead, CAT is still very much engaged in the processes to secure a well-functioning treaty body system. In order to address challenges which are common to most treaty bodies, such as the backlog of individual complaints, non-reporting and late reporting by many States, the harmonization of working methods as well as the implications of COVID-19, CAT has been actively engaged in both the Treaty Bodies Chairpersons Meetings, the 2020 Treaty Body Review Process, the newly created Treaty Bodies Working Group on the COVID-19 as well as providing substantive inputs to the co-facilitators of the 2020 Treaty Body review. We have been pleased to see that many components of the Chairpersons' position paper are included in the co-facilitators' report to the PGA, such as a fixed calendar, reviews in the regions, additional meeting time and necessary financial and human resources.

Let me conclude by stressing that the success of the CAT monitoring of the Convention is directly linked to the dialogue and cooperation with the States. Let me also pay tribute to the Convention Against Torture Initiative (CTI), a State led initiative for the full

ratification of the Convention and its implementation as well as well to National Human Rights Institutions, National Preventive Mechanisms and civil society, particularly the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) coordinating NGOs inputs to CAT work.

Lastly and as you know, CAT work cannot be undertaken without the technical and substantive support of OHCHR via both the Secretariat of CAT, the Petitions Section and the Capacity building Programme. In that regard, and as recommended by all Chairs of treaty bodies, it is necessary and urgent to increase the human and financial resources not only to enable the daily work of CAT but also to enable a fully functioning and efficient treaty body system both at headquarters and in the field with a direct and concrete impact for the benefit of all.
