

**Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the  
human rights situation in the Philippines  
30 June 2020  
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Thank you Madam President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Iceland Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We share the High Commissioner's concern outlined in the report over killings committed in the context of the so-called "war on drugs" as well as that of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and trade unionists. Indications that these violations are widespread, of a systematic character and on a large scale are of a particular concern. Urgent steps must be taken to ensure full accountability.

Madam President,

We reiterate our concerns regarding reports of ongoing threats to freedom of expression and media freedom, with legal charges and prosecutions being brought against journalists and senior politicians critical of the Government, as well as actions to shut down media outlets. The recent convictions of journalists Maria Ressa and Reynaldo Santos are particularly worrying.

Madam President,

As outlined in the report, the Philippines have taken important steps on universal access to tertiary education, access to health and protection of children in situations of armed conflict. We appreciate that they have presented further information on their approach and their efforts to address concerns outlined in the report. We encourage the Government to deepen its cooperation with OHCHR to implement the recommendations outlined in the report and look forward to continuing our dialogue.

I thank you.

**Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the  
situation of Rohingya people  
30 June 2020  
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Madam President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and my own country Denmark.

As conflict continues in Rakhine and Chin States, we call on all parties to end all violence and seek political solutions.

We note Myanmar's report to the ICJ. We urge the Government to make it public and continue implementing the provisional measures.

The Presidential directives on combating hate speech, preventing genocidal acts and evidence preservation are important steps in addressing the atrocities committed in Rakhine State, but they must be followed-up and implemented. We reiterate the need for full implementation of the Rakhine Advisory Commission's recommendations, and call for accountability for all crimes committed.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh and stress the need for regional cooperation and concrete actions by Myanmar to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees.

Madam High Commissioner, how can the Council best support inclusive elections and prevent further discrimination of the Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar?

I thank you.

**Oral update by the High Commissioner on the  
human rights impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic  
30 June 2020**

**Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame High Commissioner,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and my own country Sweden.

The Coronavirus knows no borders. A global pandemic needs a global response, that reaffirms our strong support for multilateralism and international institutions. National and global action must be joint and coordinated and address the needs of all individuals. But the crisis can never be taken as an excuse for undue restrictions of democracy or human rights.

The global trend of democratic backsliding and weakened respect for human rights in many parts of the world risks being further compounded by the pandemic.

Any emergency measures adopted by States must be strictly in line with international law: prescribed by law, necessary, non-discriminatory, time-bound and proportionate to the evaluated risk. We are particularly concerned about negative impacts on civil society, human rights defenders and gender equality and women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as possible disinformation campaigns and abuse of surveillance technology. Free, independent and pluralistic media, both online and offline, is necessary to keep the public informed.

We welcome the Presidential Statement adopted by this Council and thank the High Commissioner and her Office for showing leadership in putting human rights, democracy and the rule of law at the heart of the global response. These efforts make a crucial contribution to the monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and abuses in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, for which there must be accountability.

I thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner  
on her annual report  
30 June 2020  
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Thank you Mde President,

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic Countries; Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country Norway.

We thank the High Commissioner for her oral update and for OHCHR's efforts to protect and promote human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the Secretary General's Call to Action and his COVID-19 response "We are all in this together" are both timely and relevant tools in these challenging times.

We are deeply concerned about the restrictions, attacks, and other challenges facing human rights defenders, civil society, health workers, journalists and other media workers. All actions taken to address COVID-19 must be in line with international law.

Open and participatory decision-making processes make societies more resilient. Freedom of expression, association and assembly [online and offline] and meaningful participation are key components of democracy, and also vital enablers of other human rights. Therefore, it is in our interest that these human rights, and the persons defending them, are safeguarded and empowered. A strong civil society and a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders should be a priority for all countries, also when responding to a crisis.

Particular attention should be paid to the multiple and intersecting risks facing WHRDs, including discrimination and violence.

Mde High Commissioner,

What can OHCHR do to further support States in developing and maintaining a robust civil society, also in time of crises [so that societies are more prepared in the face of the ongoing crisis and those yet to come]?

I thank you.

**Panel I on the rights of the child through a healthy environment**  
**1 July 2020**  
**Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Estonia.

We thank the distinguished panellists for their insightful interventions on this highly relevant topic.

Safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is the basis of our very existence. For too long has this, however, been taken for granted. Environmental damage affects us all, but has particular consequences for children with lasting effects throughout their lives.

Environmental degradation directly hampers many human rights and thus also the rights enshrined in the convention on the rights of child, the most widely ratified human rights instrument. This implies that States need to address the human rights violations in the convention on the rights of the child caused by environmental damage. If not they will fail in their implementation of the convention.

The fact that children worldwide have become key advocates for environmental rights and are exercising their right to participate in defending a healthy environment by demanding immediate climate action clearly shows that there is an urgent need for states to step up their efforts in this regard, including by providing a safe and empowering context for environmental human rights defenders.

Prevention is key in promoting and protecting all human rights, but it is even more so concerning those that are realized through a healthy environment. It is high time to act and act together, engaging all stakeholders, including children, in preserving a healthy environment, as it is our duty to provide children with a safe childhood here and now.

We agree that states must urgently act to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child related to environmental damage, pollution and toxic substances, including by meeting their human rights obligations and responsibilities contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Paris Agreement and other international human rights and environmental instruments.

Let us join our efforts in minimizing our environmental footsteps to ensure every child a safe and fostering childhood with full respect for their human rights.

Thank you!

**Panel II on the rights of the child through a healthy environment**  
**1 July 2020**  
**Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Iceland.

Our group spoke this morning to the importance of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The impact on us and our children is clear and has been highlighted by our panelists and we are thankful for their contribution.

We also spoke to the importance of acting and acting together. This should include children and young people and recognizing their contribution to a healthy environment.

Madame President,

A concrete measure for action for today's discussion was adopted in 1998 in the form of the Aarhus convention. It still carries a valuable message. It underlined the right of everyone to receive information on the environment and decisions taken that may affect it. But it also importantly sets out the right to participate in such decision-making on environmental issues.

This is a valuable commitment when it comes to our children and young persons. In our countries we have taken various measures based on those principles to include children and young people in conversations on environmental and climate change but we recognize that we need to do more.

The question to the panelists we would therefore have is how do we best communicate effectively to children and young people on environmental and climate change and how do we ensure their meaningful participation in decisions affecting their future?

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons,  
especially women and children**

**3 July 2020**

**Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

The Nordic-Baltic countries highly appreciate the work the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Giammarinaro, has conducted during her six years of tenure. We thank her for her dedicated efforts to ensure a human rights-based approach to combating trafficking in persons. We also thank the Special Rapporteur for her latest report in which she analyses protection gaps in the legal and policy framework to prevent and combat trafficking.

Human trafficking is a severe violation of human rights. We need a gender sensitive and human rights-based approach to prevent and combat this crime and protect the rights of victims.

The risks faced by vulnerable groups have become even more obvious during the ongoing pandemic. We are therefore grateful for the Special Rapporteur's recent and insightful COVID-19 position paper regarding the impact of the pandemic on trafficked persons. We all need to enhance our efforts to protect those in vulnerable situations, especially women and children, from exploitation.

Madame Special Rapporteur,

Involving businesses and their suppliers in the fight against human trafficking and exploitation is key. In your report, you mention that you last year facilitated a platform for dialogue among multi-stakeholder initiatives and trade unions. What are the key takeaways from this dialogue?

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special representative on Children and  
Armed Conflict  
2 July 2020  
Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame Special Representative,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Estonia.

We would like to thank you for your report and hard work in the field (of children and armed conflict). We welcome your attention to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its optional protocol, celebrating 20 the anniversary this year. The best interests of the child should always be the primary consideration and children associated with armed groups should be treated first and foremost as children with rights protection needs, and victims of human rights violations and abuses.

We are deeply concerned about the high number of child casualties, increase in the denial of humanitarian access to children, and attacks against schools and hospitals, as also discussed last week in the frames of the Security Council open debate.

We are alarmed by the high number of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, particularly girls. Despite all efforts, the cases too often remain unreported, among others due to stigma, and the impunity persists.

The vulnerable situation of children in armed conflict has been further exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We reiterate our strong support to the SG's call for a global ceasefire, aimed to protect persons in the most vulnerable situations.

The Nordic and Baltic countries welcome strengthening of the synergies between Geneva and New York. In this regard, we agree with your recommendations to the Human Rights Council, to include recommendations on the protection of children affected by armed conflict when considering country-specific or thematic resolutions, and in States parties' reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Madame Special Representative, would you have further recommendations on how to enhance the cooperation and synergies between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative on  
Violence against children  
2 July 2020  
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Iceland. We thank the Special Representative for her valuable work and express our support for her mandate.

The fact underlined by the Special Representative, that violence against children remains hidden and pervasive, is a terrible truth. The number of children that have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect is staggering. Every such instance constitutes a violation or abuse of the rights of the child. Behind each number is a child that is not only affected in the short-term but may become scarred for life from what they see or experience.

We therefore thank the Special Representative for bringing attention to the impact of violence on children's mental health and their long-term well-being. It underlines the importance of mainstreaming our response and ensuring that we make every effort to prevent bullying and violence against children and the mental health trauma they may be exposed to; but also that we provide care to those that experience violence or are exposed to it throughout their life. This is particularly relevant today as measures to limit the spread of Covid-19 come with heightened risk to children, underlining the importance of the continuity of child-centered services (such as child protection programmes).

In that regard, could we ask the Special Representative, what are the key factors to consider when designing enabling and effective strategies to protect children's mental health and well-being?

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on education**  
**3 July 2020**  
**Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Estonia.

As we deal with a global pandemic, UNESCO data shows that 91.3% of the world's students have been affected by school closures, and more than 1.5 billion children have faced challenges in continuing school in normal terms. This hinders children from enjoying their right to education, without discrimination, and could lead to educational gaps and damage the prospects of a better future for many children. School closures impact girls more severely as they are exposed to domestic and sexual and gender-based violence, and they are less likely than boys to ever return to school as they may be expected to take on unpaid care work. The Nordic-Baltic countries are firm advocates of quality education for all children and acknowledge that in all education-related decisions, the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration.

This global pandemic has brought e-education and digital distance learning solutions to the centre of our attention. We recognize the concerns of the special rapporteur, *inter alia*, that online distance learning tools may exacerbate existing inequalities. We also recognize that, in 2020, about 826 million students kept out of the classroom by the COVID-19 pandemic do not have access to a household computer and 706 million have no internet at home.

However, these facts do not undermine the importance of online learning but merely highlight the problem deriving from the lack of access to information and communications technologies. We must work to diminish the digital divides that exist between and within societies, including the gender digital divide, so that all children can benefit from the digital transformation, leaving no one behind. But it is also true that technology alone is not enough. We must make sure that teachers and learners have the necessary skills to use the technology and that there is relevant online content available that makes the learning process interesting and engaging.

Finally, we invite all the countries to support UNESCO's Global Education Coalition that offers direct support in providing inclusive hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech distance learning solutions.

Thank you!

**Interactive Dialogue with the Working group on discrimination against women and girls**

**6 July 2020**

**Statement by Latvia on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Madam President,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and my own country Latvia.

We thank the Working Group for the unrelenting work and for the latest report.

All women and girls should be able to feel safe, secure and fearless throughout their lives. They must have equal rights and opportunities to freely make choices and decisions without limitations, including about their own bodies. To get there, we need men and boys to be engaged, to show solidarity and to participate in the process of change.

Regrettably, extensive discrimination against women and girls continues to exist. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the consequences of the pandemic on women and girls, making it a crisis in its own right. The risk of sexual and gender-based violence has increased during lockdowns. The need to balance professional and personal life risks jeopardizing women's economic independence, especially when taking into account women's unpaid care and disproportionate domestic workloads.

We should continue to tackle socially constructed stereotypes, customs and norms that give rise to a variety of legal, economic and political constraints on the advancement of women's full and equal participation in society. The intersection of different and multiple dimensions along gender further shapes the forms of discrimination that women face through their life. In addition, elimination of discrimination against women calls for changes in all policies to make them more gender responsive and gender transformative. It is imperative to take necessary legislative measures to ensure the full realisation of all women and girls' rights, to adopt and implement national policies aimed at achieving gender equality, and to enforce relevant laws.

In the context of women's rights in the workplace, would the Working Group have further recommendations on how to recast economic policies and frameworks, including national budgets and tax policies, to focus on human well-being, as mentioned in the report's recommendations?

I thank you!

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Extreme  
Poverty and human rights  
6 July 2020**

**Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Madam President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

First, we would like to welcome the new Special Rapporteur, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, to the Human Rights Council, and express our full support to his challenging mission at the times of a major global economic recession, provoked by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and climate change are leading to increasing food insecurity, internal displacement, and growth of inequalities. They have the worst impact on people living in poverty, on those marginalized, socially excluded or with low levels of qualifications, especially women and girls. People living in poverty rarely have access to accountability and are excluded from participating meaningfully in political processes. The Nordic – Baltic countries are committed to a human rights-based approach to combating extreme poverty to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the Agenda 2030.

Consequences of poverty as an urban phenomenon increases the risk of spreading diseases such as the COVID-19, and persons working in the informal sector are likely to bear the most severe impacts, and their right to health is especially challenged. In combating extreme poverty, universal social protection is a comprehensive tool. By guaranteeing access to it for all, poverty reduction can be possible.

Dr Special Rapporteur,

How do you plan to build your programme of work in the post-COVID-19 situation?

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women**

**7 July 2020**

**Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Madam President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

Let me begin by reaffirming our determination to combat all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. COVID-19 has firmly underlined that we must continue this fight as women and girls across the globe have experienced increased violence during the pandemic

The report by the Special Rapporteur paints a bleak picture of what gender-based risks women journalists face in their work owing to the fact of being women and at the intersection of other identities, such as race and ethnicity. Violence against women journalists, including emerging forms of online and offline violence constitute not only a threat to women, but also to democracy, freedom of expression and access to information.

The efficient prevention of violence against women journalists requires a systematic, coordinated, multi-agency effort. This response must be fully founded on a set of integrated human rights based policies and promote transformative change.

Madam Special Rapporteur,

What best practices of reporting and support mechanisms and platforms have you observed, and what can we learn from these?

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on violence and  
discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity  
7 July 2020  
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Mdm. President,

I have the honour to deliver this intervention on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

We thank the Independent Expert for his report and reiterate our strong support to his mandate and work. We condemn the continued existence of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity globally. We are of the firm belief that every individual has the right to be who they are and love who they want. This should not be a matter of controversy.

We welcome your focus on so-called “conversion therapy”, a disturbing practice that aims “to effect a change from non-heterosexual to heterosexual and from trans or gender diverse to cisgender”. The report provides critical information and analysis about this practice. We are concerned that it persists in all regions of the world, including our own.

It is a sad fact, that some still believe that sexual and gender diversity and expression is a disorder that can be corrected. And that human rights are not ensured for all. We remain committed to combat all violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and reject any practice that result in the violation of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender-diverse persons.

Mr. Madrigal-Borloz,

Could you elaborate on your recommendations by exemplifying measures taken by Member States to address the human rights concerns arising from “conversion therapy”?

Thank you.

**Panel discussion on the impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights**

**8 July 2020**

**Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Mme President,

I have the honour to deliver this intervention on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and my own country Denmark.

We thank the panelists for their presentations.

To seize the opportunities and address the challenges of new and emerging digital technologies, an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach is necessary. As developers and providers, tech companies are especially important partners in this process.

Existing problems of discrimination, surveillance and suppression are often worsened by digital technologies, and they must be met by a strong human-rights-based-approach to technologies by all parties, although states remain primary duty bearers. Furthermore, we must promote the digital resilience of all individuals, incl. women and girls and indigenous peoples, to mitigate these effects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these human rights challenges. Internet shutdowns have breached individuals' access to essential information; surveillance and tracing devices have posed a risk to the right to privacy; and mis- and disinformation, especially on social media, has put marginalized groups in serious risks of stigmatization and violence due to ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity etc.

Prof. Soh,

*In your view, how has COVID-19 affected the challenges related to human rights and digital technologies?*

## **Panel discussion on climate change and persons with disabilities**

**8 July 2020**

### **Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Madame Chair, Distinguished Panelists,

I have the honor of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries – Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

We would like to thank all the panelists for their insightful remarks and the OHCHR for the highly important analytical study on the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change.

Climate change is an existential threat that spares no country, and impacts all persons on the planet. However – as the report and the discussion today clearly point out – persons with disabilities often face negative and severe impacts of climate change in a disproportionate way.

Especially women and girls with disabilities, as well as persons with disabilities that belong to minorities, face multiple and intersecting discrimination aggravated by climate change. Extreme conditions often place women with disabilities at even higher risk of being sexually exploited or physically abused. Access to quality and affordable health services – including SRHR – is even more difficult in times of humanitarian disasters.

To combat climate change we need a societal transformation, in which it is key to also respect, protect and fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities. The rights to education, adequate housing, health, water and sanitation and other economic and social rights, as well as civil and political rights such as freedom of information, need to be ensured in a comprehensive way for all persons with disabilities in order for not to leave no one behind and for climate actions to be truly effective.

The Nordic-Baltic countries are strongly committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities are - not just heard - but closely involved in all planning, decision-making and implementation processes affecting them. It is therefore paramount, that persons with disabilities and DPOs are fully included in all climate actions.

Where are the biggest gaps as regards full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in global processes against the climate change? How could the newly adopted UN Disability Inclusive Strategy help in narrowing these gaps?

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur  
on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions  
9 July 2020  
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Thank you Madam President,

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic Countries; Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and my own country Iceland.

Allow me at the outset to thank the Special Rapporteur for her important work and her latest report that contributes to the discussion on the use of drones. While bearing in mind that armed drones are not illegal weapons and their use in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law is permitted, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary killings are never acceptable.

Madam President,

The Nordic countries continue to express our deep concern over intentional state killings of human rights defenders, journalists and dissidents, including those who have sought safety abroad. Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions are abhorrent and represent a violation of the inherent right to life.

We reiterate the imperative for accountability for such killings and the need for all investigations be thorough, credible, transparent, and prompt, and that prosecutions must uphold internationally recognized fair trial and due process norms and standards.

Madam Rapporteur, in the face of impunity it can be difficult for victims' families or others affected to raise their voices over suspected extrajudicial killings. What can the international community do to support these individuals so they can seek justice and accountability at home?

I thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur  
on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association  
10 July 2020  
Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Thank you President.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Sweden and my own country Lithuania.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his valuable work and express our full support for his mandate.

We firmly believe that the fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and of association, both online and offline, are indispensable pillars of democratic governance and open societies.

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the mandate, we are pleased to note the important achievements during last decade, including setting out progressive standards, providing practical assistance and engaging with civil society.

We are deeply concerned by the shrinking civil society space in some parts of the world both before and during Covid-19.

As rightly pointed out in your report, the effectiveness of measures to defeat the pandemic depends on the ability to secure people's participation and trust. Regrettably, many governments around the world choose to use the crisis to silence independent voices and increase their own power. We urge governments to follow your recommendation to collaborate with civil society to counter the negative effects of the pandemic.

Could you please elaborate on possible steps that are needed to maintain and strengthen the openness of civic space?

Thank you.

**Panel I discussion on rights of women and girls**  
**13 July 2020**  
**Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Mdm. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries: Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Denmark. We appreciate the focus on the need for accountability for women and girls in humanitarian settings at this Council.

This year, 168 million people are in need of humanitarian protection and assistance. This is the highest number in decades. While humanitarian emergencies affect entire communities at a time, the consequences are most severely felt by women and girls.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of this. While countries across the world are confronted by a health emergency, a ‘shadow pandemic’ of grave social and economic consequences is rolling out, affecting women and girls disproportionately. Hence, the crisis is very much associated with a sharp rise in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence as societies are torn apart, and protective structures broken down. The severity of consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is multiplied when affecting countries, regions or groups of people already suffering from other ongoing humanitarian crises.

We must not turn a blind eye to this. It is our responsibility to acknowledge the dire consequences of humanitarian conflicts and humanitarian emergencies for the enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls. We are fully committed to ensuring accountability for all women and girls in humanitarian settings.

I thank you.

**Panel II discussion on rights of women and girls**  
**14 July 2020**  
**Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic & Baltic countries**

Ms/Mr Chairperson

I have the pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, and my own country Norway.

COVID-19 exacerbates existing gender inequalities. (Women and girls bear the brunt of unpaid care work, and women constitute the majority of those working in the health care sector and in the informal sector, with less access to social protection. More girls than boys drop out of school, there's an increase in child, early and forced marriage.) The ongoing pandemic and crisis response shows the necessity and urgency of protection and promoting all women's and girl's rights.

Gender equality must be a central element when we build back better. The response must address the structural discrimination women and girls face. We must eliminate sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices. We must secure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. We must promote transformative change in order to lay the foundation for a "better normal". This can only happen if women and girls can participate fully at all levels of decision making.

The pandemic postponed the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing platform for action. Today's panel underscores that we can never postpone the fight for gender equality.

(Our countries are committed to continue our efforts to promote women's rights.) We would like to ask the panel what they consider as the most effective way of **mobilizing new** actors for this cause and how can states most **effectively incorporate** gender perspectives in our immediate and long-term response to the pandemic.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur  
On the human rights situation in Belarus  
13 July 2020  
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Thank you Madam President,

I have the honor of speaking on behalf of the Nordic Countries: Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

The Nordic Countries thank the Special Rapporteur for her important work and her latest report. We strongly support her mandate and regret the lack of cooperation by the Government of Belarus to the requests made by the Council, including not allowing the Rapporteur access to the country.

We express our deep concern for the continuous difficult circumstances for civil society and political persecution in the country, including persecution of independent trade unions. We regret that human rights, such as freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom of opinion and expression continued to be violated throughout the reporting period. Since June 18 alone, more than 200 political activists, opposition candidates, human rights defenders, journalists and other members of civil society have been arrested during peaceful demonstrations. We are deeply concerned about the arbitrary arrests, harassment and detention that now take place in the lead-up to presidential elections to be held on 9<sup>th</sup> August. This is particularly disappointing considering certain signs of growing cooperation by Belarus during the last few years with, inter alia, the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

We strongly urge Belarus to take concrete tangible steps towards a safe and enabling environment for the civil society, and particularly to ensure the integrity and fairness of the ongoing electoral process, and the legitimacy of its outcome. We also stress the importance of OSCE/ODIHR election observation of the electoral process.

We reiterate the need for Belarus to abolish death penalty. We welcome the establishment of the Working Group for studying the abolition of death penalty, but stress that this must be followed by action.

Madam Special Rapporteur,  
what immediate measures can be taken to end the criminal and administrative sanctions to persons organizing, calling for or participating in peaceful assemblies, especially prior to elections?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur  
On the human rights situation in Syrian Arab Republic  
14 July 2020  
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Mr President,

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

We welcome the report by the Commission of Inquiry but are alarmed by the picture of the suffering of the Syrian people it presents. The atrocities documented in Idlib show a blatant disregard for international law by all parties, especially the regime. We condemn the unacceptable attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and are particularly appalled by the deliberate attacks of pro-regime forces on medical personnel and facilities. International law, including humanitarian law, and human rights must be respected at all times.

We must all insist on accountability for crimes committed. We reaffirm our strong support for the Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism.

We are relieved by the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2533, but regret that the Council has decided to further limit the scope of the existing mechanism. We are gravely concerned about the potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, a dire economy, and the reported looming famine. All parties, in particular the Syrian regime and its allies, must cease all hostilities and ensure protection of civilians and humanitarian access.

There is no military solution to the conflict. We reiterate our full support for Special Envoy Pedersen and a political settlement in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254. We urge the Syrian regime and its allies to engage genuinely in the UN-facilitated process.

Let me finally ask if the Commission could share any updates on the use of torture and arbitrary detention in Syria?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry  
On the human rights situation in Burundi  
15 July 2020  
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Madam President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country Norway.

We thank the Commission of Inquiry and are concerned by the reports of continued serious violations and abuses of human rights.

The government of Burundi has a responsibility to protect human rights and ensure that state or non-state actors in Burundi cannot act with impunity. The role and the actions of the Imbonerakure are noted with particular concern. We support the recommendations of the Commission of inquiry's report and trust that the government will do its utmost to investigate the cases documented.

We are also concerned about reports of violence against members of the political opposition during the election campaign and the lack of independence and impartiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission.

We reaffirm our support of the Burundian people and their aspirations for a more democratic, prosperous and peaceful future. We urge the government and other political stakeholders to engage in a constructive and inclusive dialogue.

We have high expectations to the new government's efforts to establish a climate of trust and political tolerance, and we urge the government to cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry, OHCHR and the AU human rights observers.

In light of new government, what are the COI's views on the future cooperation with the Burundian State and how can we be of assistance?

I thank you

**Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert  
On the human rights situation in Sudan  
15 July 2020  
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Mdm. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country Norway. We thank the Independent Expert for his update.

The 2019 revolution was a watershed. Since then, Sudan has taken commendable steps to promote and protect human rights, such as criminalizing female genital mutilation and revoking other laws violating human rights. We welcome positive developments holding those responsible for past and recent crimes accountable, including in cooperation with the ICC.

We actively support the opening of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with sub-offices throughout the country. We call for the establishment of all the institutions and governance structures embedded in the Constitutional Declaration, as well as the harmonization of national law to ensure adherence to all human rights treaties to which Sudan is a state party.

We remain concerned by reports of continuing violence against civilians, particularly women and children, especially in the conflict zones of Jebel Marra. We call on the Government and the rebel movements to ensure the protection of all civilians with a special attention to those in the most vulnerable situations. We count on all UN entities [, including UNITAMS, the future UN mission in Sudan,] to integrate the protection of human rights [throughout their activities].

To break with Sudan's authoritarian past and continue on the path to democracy, all human rights must be ensured for all, including human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents. Public debate, not arrests and detention, is indispensable for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and must therefore be the way forward.

How can technical assistance to Sudan be designed and implemented in order to improve the protection of civilians?

Thank you.