

Annual High-Level Panel on Human Rights Mainstreaming
The state of play in the fight against racism and discrimination 20 years
after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action and the
exacerbating effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these efforts
22 February
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madam President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

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.

We welcome the High-Level Panel on the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action, and give our full support to the Secretary-General's efforts towards the total elimination of racism globally.

Racist attitudes and statements are still far too prevalent. All over the world, people are discriminated against, harassed, and assaulted because of the colour of their skin, their ethnicity or their religion.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination as well as systematic and structured racism. Persons belonging to religious, national or ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected due to discrimination related to education, employment, and access to health services.

Disinformation, hate speech and violence both online and offline, have increased during the pandemic. This has to end.

We, the Nordic and Baltic countries are committed to building back better, to continue to work against racism racial discrimination, and hate speech, to increase social cohesion, and the respect for human rights, the rule of law, accountability and democracy in our societies and globally.

Distinguished panelists,

In your view, what needs to be done to combat incitement to violence or hatred and disinformation and to promote safe digital spaces to enable everyone to use their voices online, without threats of violence or hatred?

I thank you.

**Biennial high-level panel discussion
on the question of the death penalty
23 February
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic States.

We thank the panellists for their presentations. We reiterate our firm and principled opposition to the death penalty at all times, under any circumstances.

The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman, degrading, and irrevocable punishment that violates the inalienable right to life. To avoid irreversible miscarriages of justice and arbitrary killing, the death penalty must never be applied. Evidence from around the world shows that the death penalty does not have a deterrent effect on crime.

We welcome the trend towards the universal abolition of the death penalty. However, death sentences continue to be imposed in violation of international law and standards, including the right to a fair trial and the principle of non-discrimination. All persons are entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination.

Executions of child offenders grossly violate human rights law. Numerous United Nations bodies and experts have made it clear time and time again that the imposition of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons below the age of 18 at the time of the offence is strictly prohibited under international human rights law.

We call upon those states that have not yet abolished the death penalty to join the international trend towards its global abolition, in law and practice.

We would like to ask the panel what measures that are needed to better inform states about the non-deterrent effect of the death penalty?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
The situation of human rights in Eritrea
24 February 2021
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for his update.

We are deeply concerned about Eritrean forces in Tigray and the reported serious human rights violations in the region, committed against civilians and Eritrean refugees, including arbitrary killings, SGBV, as well as forced returns of refugees. It is imperative that alleged human rights violations are independently investigated. We call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Eritrean forces from Tigray.

We remain concerned about persistent human rights violations and abuses in Eritrea, where the indefinite National Service, arbitrary detention, inhumane prison conditions, and restrictions on freedoms of expression and religion or belief are of great concern. We call upon the Government to ensure the respect for all human rights of all its citizens.

Finally, we urge the Government to strengthen its engagement with the Council's mechanisms, including by granting the Special Rapporteur full and unhindered access to the country.

Dr. Babiker,

How can the causes of the conflict in Tigray and the dire humanitarian best be addressed, taking into account the numerous reports of serious human rights violations and abuses?

Secondly, how can the international community support necessary efforts to improve the human rights situation in Eritrea?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on
The situation of human rights in Sri Lanka
24 February 2021
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries.

We welcome the Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Sri Lanka and share the concerns raised. Since 2015, Sri Lanka have taken important steps in strengthening democratic institutions, but recent negative developments threaten to undermine the gains achieved.

Progress in transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliation is lacking, and has in some cases been reversed. The country's minorities are increasingly marginalised. Sustainable development will only be achieved on the basis of human rights and through an inclusive process, where impunity, for past gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, is addressed, including through effective and independent institutions.

Of particular concern is the shrinking space for civil society. We urge Sri Lanka to review the Prevention of Terrorism Act to ensure its compliance with Sri Lankas international human rights and humanitarian law obligations, and to end all forms of surveillance and harassment of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and victims.

We also encourage Sri Lankan authorities to end the practice of forced cremation of Covid-19-fatalities.

We urge Sri Lanka to fully engage with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Procedures, and to implement the recommendations of the OHCHR report.

**Interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on
The situation of human rights in Nicaragua
25 February 2021
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic States. We thank the High Commissioner for her presentation and for of the report on the human rights situation in Nicaragua.

The OHCHR report has highlighted a continuation of gross human rights violations since April 2018 and a worsening repression of political opponents, demonstrators, journalists, and civil society. Meanwhile, Nicaraguan state authorities have continued to deny any responsibility and have not taken any significant steps towards implementing the recommendations made by international and regional human rights mechanisms to address outstanding concerns. This erodes public trust in state institutions. Impunity for human rights violations and abuses is widespread, denying victims' rights to justice, truth, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Given this situation, the Nordic and Baltic States urge the Government of Nicaragua to bring the repression to an immediate halt and to fulfil its obligations according to human rights law, including through ensuring the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, expression, information and association. We urge the government to resume its cooperation with international human right bodies to Nicaragua, including OHCHR and IACHR.

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Group of Eminent Experts on
The situation of human rights in Yemen
25 February 2021
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

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

We wish to thank the GEE for its work and for the oral update.

We are deeply concerned at the serious violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law disclosed by GEE's continued documentation, and by their devastating effect. All parties to the conflict have an obligation to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, and ensure safe humanitarian access, and we urge them to uphold that obligation.

Our countries supported the establishment of the GEE and will continue to support its mandate and work.

We also support UN Special Envoy Griffiths and we call on all parties to engage with the UN in its efforts for a nationwide ceasefire and political process. Only an inclusive political process, with full participation of women and youth, can resolve the conflict and bring sustainable peace to Yemen.

In your view, which further steps can the Council take to contribute to sustainable peace and to improve the human rights situation in Yemen?

[Is there anything we could do to increase accountability, beyond referring the situation to the ICC?]

Thank you.

General debate-Item 2
26 February 2021
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.

We thank the High Commissioner and her Office for leadership in putting human rights at the heart of the global response to Covid-19 pandemic. The current crisis, but also past pandemics have shown that it takes a coordinated global effort to roll back a global suffering and build back better.

We agree that the current global crisis has not only highlighted glaring disparities between people's enjoyment of their human rights, but has been a wake-up call to show us that we need to find new ways to fulfil our commitments not least the one on leaving no one behind.

The pandemic has put a magnifying glass on the human rights situation globally. Despite the many gains in past decades, it is sadly still the situation where women and girls bear the brunt of unpaid care work, face economic insecurity and lack of social security. The incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, are on the rise and many women struggle to have access to sexual and reproductive health services. The crisis has only exacerbated these pre-existing inequalities. We condemn all attempts to violate human rights with the pretext of fighting the pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic should not be used as a pretext or excuse to deny women and girls their rights but rather guide us to explore new transformative ways to ensure their enjoyment of human rights including universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls at all levels of decision-making is key to building back better. We welcome and strongly support OHCHR's actions to ensure a human rights-based and gender transformative approach to immediate, medium and long-term response and recovery plans. We also stress the need to ensure full funding from the UN regular budget to the OHCHR mandated activities. At the times of global crisis, a strong UN, with human rights at its centre, is imperative.

Thank you!

**Panel on the role of poverty alleviation in promoting and protecting
human rights**

26 February 2021

Statement by Norway 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, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

We are concerned that the vaguely defined concept of “mutually beneficial cooperation” seeks to place undue emphasis on non-interference at the expense of open and honest dialogue.

Eradicating poverty requires leaving no one behind. A human rights based approach to poverty eradication ensures the focus on – and involvement of – the most marginalised individuals, ensuring that all their human rights are respected.

All civil and political rights and social, economic, and cultural rights go hand in hand - they are mutually dependent and reinforcing. Deprivation of one human right negatively impacts the full enjoyment of other rights.

The pandemic has exposed inequalities and highlighted violations of social and economic rights of those living in poverty. Human beings who live in poverty are more likely to suffer discrimination, to be victims of modern slavery, to be arbitrarily arrested, tortured and killed.

Independent courts are necessary to uphold the rule of law and to ensure accountability for human rights violations. Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are essential to be able to stand up for one’s rights.

In the Nordic & Baltic countries, we have good experiences with building our societies on human rights, gender equality, democracy and the rule of law, and maintaining low levels of inequality. This facilitates trust – in the Government and between persons.

Our goal must be to enable individuals to live free and dignified lives. To fulfil their right to an adequate standard of living, including access to nutritious food, clothing and housing, health care, education and fair wages and decent working conditions, which the right to organize has been paramount. The right to decide over your own life, the right to decide over your own body

Over 90% of the SDGs correspond to human rights obligations. Human rights must be the foundation for sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation.

Thank you.

**Panel on the rights of children: The gaps and barriers affecting children:
following up on commitments through the Decade of Action and delivery
on the Sustainable Development Goals**

26 February 2021

Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

Distinguished panelists,

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 the panelists for their presentations and valuable insights.

The rights of the child are no doubt at the heart of the sustainable development goals. Therefore, to achieve these goals, we do need a child rights-based approach in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in all the programmes, policies and frameworks aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified human rights instrument but still significant gaps remain in the protection and promotion of the rights of the child at the global, regional and national levels. Poverty, challenges in accessing education, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including based on gender, are just a few of the barriers faced by many children every day. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated and added on to the list of barriers. Rising poverty, closed schools and lockdowns make children more vulnerable to violence, abuse or exploitation. As a result of COVID-19 one expects that an additional 13 million child marriages take place that otherwise would not have occurred between 2020-2030.

As stated in the Secretary General's Call to Action for Human Rights the promises made in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration were explicitly to future as well as current generations. We need to recognize children as rights holders and provide them with the right tools to claim all their human rights. We also need to enable the meaningful participation of children in defining their future and their contribution to achieving the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda.

What are the best practices for meaningful engagement of children in policy processes?

Thank you!

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material

1 March 2021

Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

We would like to welcome the new Special Rapporteur and thank her for her report.

We, the Nordic and Baltic countries, remain strongly committed to the fight against the sale and sexual exploitation of children. The last year has shown that although COVID-19 does not discriminate, its impacts does. The pandemic has only intensified the existing plight of the most vulnerable children. While the mandate has primarily focused on the risks to girls, we welcome the new focus on also addressing the invisibility of sexual exploitation of boys.

We note with concern the recent unprecedented spike in online sexual exploitation and abuse of children due to new and emerging forms of technology. We must ensure that the rights of the child, including the right to a life free from violence is protected. This underscores the need to develop new gender-responsive strategies to protect children online as well as addressing the demand side by ensuring that no perpetrator goes unpunished.

Special Rapporteur, how can we best address the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable children, both online and offline?

Thank you.

**Panel on the rights of children: securing a future for today's children and generations to come: building back better with children's rights upfront
1 March 2021**

Statement by Latvia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, Madam President.

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

We thank the panelists for their interventions and in particular appreciate the involvement of children in this meeting.

Our countries are fully committed to leaving no child behind and reaching those furthest behind first in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The realization of the rights of the child is a cornerstone for ensuring a sustainable future for all.

However, with less than a decade until 2030, we are still too far behind from realizing the SDGs. The ongoing pandemic has further complicated this by exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and affecting persons in the most vulnerable situations, including children, the hardest. Lockdown measures and school closures have had negative impacts on the enjoyment of the rights of the child, including the right to education, and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The pandemic has also heightened the risk of child labour and, in particular for girls, including, child, early or forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, and trafficking.

If we want to get back on track to achieve the SDGs, we must ensure that our recovery plans are targeted at removing these inequalities and advancing the rights of all children, and that children are involved in these processes.

This is why we would like to ask the panel – what are the key actions all governments must take to ensure that a child-rights based approach is at the forefront of building back better?

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion
or Belief**
4 March 2021
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you Madam President.

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

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his presentation and underline the importance of our collective efforts for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief, work that is as important now as ever with reports of rise in religiously motivated violence and discrimination.

Madam President,

We take note of the report, which we look forward to examine in detail.

It is crucial to tackle widespread discrimination, hatred and unfair and illegal treatment of Muslims in all parts of the world, including State policies that penalize or marginalize Muslims.

Let me underline the commitment of our countries against any form of violence, discrimination, intimidation or harassment, based on a person's beliefs or the perception thereof. As part of our efforts to build tolerant and inclusive societies we have implemented national policies to counter any such action.

Finally, Madame President, as the Rapporteur highlights, the term islamophobia has at times been unfairly misused, including to target legislators and human rights activists such as those supporting women's human rights and others. How can we work together to ensure that our efforts to tackle hate directed at Muslims do not jeopardize free speech and advocacy?

I thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights
3 March 2021
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

Madam Special Rapporteur,

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

We must promote all human rights, including the rights for each person – without discrimination – to access, participate and contribute to cultural life in society and to share in science.

Cultural rights are for all, irrespective of gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or ethnicity.

We are concerned by the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural rights, and the shrinking space for artistic freedom all over the world. Artistic freedom and creation are essential to freedom of expression.

We highly appreciate the clear message in your report, on strengthening the cultural and scientific sectors during and after the pandemic, stressing the need for a human rights approach to avoid long-lasting consequences for culture, and surveying the positive potential of cultures and cultural rights, including the right to independent science, to enhance rights-respecting solutions and build resilience.

We strongly support the recommendations and urge states and non-state actors to promote and guarantee cultural rights, without discrimination, in responding to the pandemic. The right to participate in cultural life and freedom of expression are key to long-term recovery and building back better.

Madam Special Rapporteur, how can we ensure that policy makers pay more attention to freedom of artistic expression?

Thank you!

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the rights of persons with disabilities
3 March 2021
Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honor of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank Special Rapporteur Quinn for his excellent report and give our full support to the points of departure for his mandate.

Gender equality, inclusion and intersectionality are highly important in all actions, including in the protection of the rights of all persons with disabilities. Cooperation between governmental actors and organizations of persons with disabilities is also key.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacts the promotion, protection and fulfillment of all rights of all persons with disabilities. We are particularly concerned about those in vulnerable situations, including many women and girls with disabilities. The pandemic has also shown us that we need increased efforts to ensure a truly disability-inclusive society.

This Council has a crucial role in ensuring that the rights of persons with disabilities are fully taken into consideration when finding human rights based solutions to new challenges, such as climate change, pandemics or digitalization.

As regards to these new challenges, where, in your opinion, is the protection gap the widest and would require immediate attention?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the situation of Human Rights Defenders
5 March 2021
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, Madame President.

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for her efforts for the protection of those who daily put their lives at risk to promote and protect human rights. It is the sad reality that human rights defenders too often are subject to violent attacks, harassment, death threats and killings.

We express our dismay that many of these threats that are made against women and LGBTI+ defenders are gendered.

Madam President,

As the Rapporteur highlights, these attacks rarely happen in a vacuum. They take place in a context of structural violence and inequality and they are often preceded by threats, including death threats.

States cannot feign ignorance or avoid addressing the structural issues that underpin such threats and attacks. Human rights defenders play a critical role in advancing human rights and States have a responsibility to ensure a safe and enabling environment for them. We need to act before smears and other abuse escalate into physical assaults and killings.

Madame President,

We would like to ask the Rapporteur what more the UN and Member States can do to step up efforts of early intervention in response to threats against human rights defenders to prevent attacks and killings?

I thank you.

Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Albinism
3 March 2021
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We would like to thank the Independent Expert for her report on the achievements, accomplishments, challenges and the way forward for her mandate after her tenure.

The Nordic-Baltic countries commend your important work on showcasing the multifaceted challenges faced by persons with albinism and for promoting the elimination of human rights violations and abuses against them.

Persons with albinism often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, particularly for women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, which your priority areas have also addressed. As you have consistently emphasized, such violations and abuses emanate largely from ignorance, prejudice and stigma. As such, we applaud your persistent efforts to tackle the root causes of such violations.

Finally, we welcome your ongoing work to raise awareness of the serious consequences that particular rituals and other harmful practices related to witchcraft represent to persons with albinism and their rights.

Mdm. Ero,

Could you please provide further details on how the international community can support your efforts?

Thank you.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

3 March 2021

Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame 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.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report, and for his tireless efforts to realize the right to water and sanitation as a human right.

Climate change brings with it more floods and severe droughts. Changes in water availability will also impact human health, water and food security. There is also a clear link between climate change and security, with increased scarcity of resources being a key driver of conflict. The effects of climate change will be felt most acutely by groups already in vulnerable situations including women and girls, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. We need to intensify our efforts to ensure that climate change does not act as a threat multiplier and avoid that climate change and environmental degradation exacerbates existing inequalities and discrimination. Better global water governance and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in planning policies at all levels is needed.

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on torture and other
cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
5 March 2021
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Madame President,

Mr. Special Rapporteur,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We are committed allies in your important work to eradicate torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment globally.

In your latest report, you evaluate the effectiveness of States' cooperation with the mandate and highlight the difficulties you as mandate-holder face in fulfilling your mandate.

We are concerned by your findings, which show that merely 10 per cent of the responses to the communications transmitted by the Special Rapporteur between 2016 and 2020 were satisfactory. Knowing that a great number of communications go unanswered, this number is even higher and more concerning. We appreciate your continued dedication to a constructive dialogue for the collaboration by states to ensure the prevention and prohibition of the use of torture and ill treatment.

What further measures can the Human Rights Council along with other relevant UN bodies take to ensure satisfying state cooperation?

And what are your reflections on the mandate's work to ensure full cooperation by the states concerned?

Thank you.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

4 March 2021

Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

Special Rapporteur, we thank you for your report and welcome the identification of gender mainstreaming and gendered effects of counter-terrorism, violent extremism and security laws as a fundamental aspect of your work.

You highlight how the counter-terrorism arena is often viewed as gender-neutral, yet it is dominated by male actors and informed by gendered stereotypes; an important recognition at the outset of this discussion.

While not agreeing with all views expressed in your report, we share your concerns about inter alia; targeting of women human rights defenders; sustained targeting of women and girls by non-State actors, including the widespread use of SGBV, rape and sexual slavery; and your finding that terrorism is particularly detrimental for women's and girls' rights.

We also share your concern about a lack of gender mainstreaming in countering terrorism and violent extremism practices. We believe that a gender-transformative approach is necessary to achieve sustainable results, as is the continued promotion of women's meaningful participation in prevention and counter-terrorism efforts.

Mdm. Aoláin,

You mention that national policies have resulted in “gendered security harms”, even when Governments have sought to incorporate a gender perspective.

How do States ensure that a gender perspective in security policies will function as intended?

Thank you.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
the right to privacy
5 March 2021
Statement by Latvia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Thank you, Madam President.

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

Prof. Cannataci,

We thank you for all your work during your tenure as the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy. [Your latest report on artificial intelligence and privacy, and children’s privacy, is timely. The reliance on information technologies has only risen during the pandemic, especially among school-children.]

AI solutions offer a wide range of benefits in all areas of human development. However, we must also be aware of the risks they may pose for the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to privacy and prohibition of discrimination. We echo your call for human-rights based AI use and development.

Ensuring children’s right to privacy is especially pertinent in the ‘digital age’. One year after the start of the pandemic, many children across the world continue their education online. Your report observes that the shift to online learning has amplified the existing power imbalances between children and other stakeholders, and that privacy is often set aside in favour of other considerations.

Prof. Cannataci,

What are the best means to ensure that children’s right to privacy is respected when using online education tools?

Thank you.

**Panel on the rights of persons with disabilities on the participation
in sport under article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with
Disabilities**

5 March 2021

Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, Madam 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 would like to thank the panelists for their presentations and valuable insights.

Estimations indicate that persons with disabilities make up approximately 15 percent of the world's population and yet they face multiple barriers to engaging in physical activity and sports.

The importance and benefits of physical activity for persons with disabilities are obvious – it may reduce the risk of diseases, disease-related symptoms, improve quality of life, self-esteem, social interaction and well-being in general.

The Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities explicitly recognises the right of persons with disabilities to participate in physical activity and sports on an equal basis with others and calls on States to enable their participation.

Our countries firmly believe that the human rights-based approach is key in developing inclusive and disability-specific physical activities and sports. It requires decisive actions in policies related to accessibility, awareness raising, data collection, financing and engagement with private sector.

We call on all states to live up to their obligations and commitments to protect persons with disabilities, in particular children, women and girls with disabilities, against discrimination and dismantle structural inequalities.

Could you elaborate on the possible specific actions that the states should take in countering gender-based structural exclusion of the persons with disabilities?

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-
General on violence against children
8 March 2021
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 would like to thank the Special Representative for her important work in promoting the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children and advancing the 2030 Agenda in this regard.

We are alarmed by the immediate and long-term negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's protection and well-being outlined in the report. Increased risk of children's exposure to violence at home, including gender-based violence, online sexual, exploitation and abuse, cyberbullying, poverty and impact on psychosocial well-being are particularly worrisome.

Our countries firmly believe that 'building back better' is an opportunity to reassess and improve policies related to child and social protection, as well as mental health services.

A child rights-based approach that promotes children participation and incentivizes child-led action, combined with political will to achieve the world free of violence, are key in building and sustaining safe and empowering environment for children.

Madam Special Representative, how could this Council contribute to enhancing child protection and participation during the pandemic and its aftermath?

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-
General for Children and Armed Conflict
8 March 2021
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.

We thank the Special Representative for her presentation and for a comprehensive report.

The Nordic and Baltic countries remain strong supporters of your mandate. We commend you and your office for upholding the tireless work on ending and preventing grave violations and strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including continued monitoring and reporting mechanism in accordance with the verification standards; despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic.

We are deeply concerned about the increased vulnerability for children living amid hostilities as well as the adverse effects of the pandemic, and the measures to contain it, have on these children. Reduction of family incomes and closing of schools have affected access to education and made children more susceptible to recruitment and use by parties to conflicts and increased sexual and gender-based violence against children. Reduced presence of protection and humanitarian actors in conflict-affected areas increase the risks of grave human rights violations committed against children. Travel restrictions and mitigation strategies have seriously affected humanitarian access. Attacks against hospitals and health workers have been particularly horrific considering the fragile state of health-care systems in many places.

Madame Special Representative, how can the Human Rights Council best contribute to end and prevent grave violations against children in conflict contexts, strengthen their protection, and – in particular – how could progress be achieved despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Thank you!

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
the Islamic Republic of Iran
8 March 2021
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Madame President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries.

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur but regret that it is only able to identify few positive elements, such as progress on equal access to education.

We note the Judiciary's Document on Judicial Security and encourage rapid implementation.

We are deeply concerned about several issues, including:

- the Iranian authorities' continued response to the protests in 2019, including the use of death penalty, the lack of fair trial, reports of torture and forced confessions.
- Use of capital punishment, including for child offenders.
- Discrimination against women and girls, including in civilian status laws, sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage.
- Continued discrimination and harassment of ethnic and religious minorities and LGBTIQ-persons.
- Detention of individuals who exercise their right to freedom of opinion, expression, association and peaceful assembly.
- Imprisonment and harassment of human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders and labor rights defenders.

Mr. Rehman, how can international partners best support the right to due process?

Thank you

Interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry for Burundi
11 March 2021
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

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

We thank the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi for their presentation. We urge the Government of Burundi to cooperate with the Commission, to grant them full and unhindered access to the country and provide all the information necessary to fulfill their mandate. We are pleased that the transfer of power after the General Elections in May 2020 was mostly peaceful and are encouraged by the Government's willingness to re-engage with the international community.

However, we remain deeply concerned about the continued human rights violations and abuses and the shrinking civic space in Burundi, impeding the enjoyment of human rights by all Burundians.

We reiterate our call upon the government to end human rights violations committed by the security forces and the Imbonerakure, including against members of the opposition, human rights defenders, civil society and journalists.

All instances of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and sexual- and gender-based violence must be promptly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice, to end impunity.

How can the Commission of Inquiry continue to effectively report human rights violations under the current conditions?

Thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry for South-Sudan
11 March 2021
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

I have the pleasure of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic Countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and Norway.

The recent formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity was a major step towards restoring peace in South Sudan. We remain, however, concerned about the slow pace in implementation and urge for accelerated efforts. We are also deeply concerned by the level of violence and the continued human rights violations and abuses, and the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, and grave human rights violations and abuses of children.

All major armed groups are responsible, but the Government of South Sudan has the primary responsibility to protect its population.

We commend recent efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence, including the newly established Gender Based Violence Court in Juba. We also welcome the endorsement by the Council of Ministers of a roadmap for implementing Chapter 5 of the agreement, including the establishment of the Hybrid Court.

Full and rapid establishment of the transitional justice mechanisms is an important step towards ending impunity and ensuring justice for victims. We commend the African Union for its support in this regard.

We appreciate the efforts by the Government of South Sudan to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms in the fulfilment of its mandate, and strongly urge the Government to continue its cooperation with the Commission to ensure accountability and bring perpetrators to justice.

Thank you.

General debate-Item 4
12 March 2021
Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries.

We welcome the update on the UN involvement in Myanmar and the leadership of the Secretary-General on the process of implementing the recommendations of the Rosenthal report. The Rosenthal report, as previous reports commissioned by the Secretary-General, is central to independently reviewing UN system response to the crisis in Myanmar.

We strongly support the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, which builds on the follow-up to the Rosenthal report, and aims to create an organizational culture which emphasizes prevention, protection and human rights. The Call to Action reminds us that human rights are the responsibility of every UN actor, at every level, every day.

We strongly condemn the recent coup in Myanmar. It is a severe violation of democratic principles and the rule of law. The situation has exacerbated insecurity for the Rohingya and other minorities. The military must immediately stop all excessive use of force against peaceful protestors resulting in injuries, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and killings, which are all serious human rights violations. The military must be held accountable for their actions, uphold its human rights obligations, release political leaders and civil society activists arbitrarily arrested, and restore the elected civilian government.

Especially at times like this, coordinated UN action is key. The UN must be fully equipped to respond to and effectively monitor the situation, and Member States must support and enable the UN to carry out its mandates.

How can the UN presence in Myanmar best contribute to the protection of human rights in the current situation?

Thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar
12 March 2021
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, Mr. Tom Andrews, for his important work and firmly support his mandate.

We strongly condemn the coup and are gravely concerned about the killings of peaceful protesters in Myanmar. We condemn the military's use of deadly violence, beatings, mass arbitrary detentions, intimidation and systematic repression of civil and political rights. This must be stopped immediately, and perpetrators brought to justice. All arrested political leaders and civic activists must be released and any internet and media restrictions and shutdowns lifted.

As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the crisis, we urge Myanmar to fully cooperate with all relevant UN mechanisms and mandates and to immediately grant them full and safe humanitarian access to the entire country, in particular to areas with internally displaced persons.

Our countries stand in solidarity with the people of Myanmar and support a peaceful return to respect for human rights, democratic governance and rule of law.

Mr. Special Rapporteur,

How could the Council best support your mandate in this challenging time?

Thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria
12 March 2021
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, President.

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

The conflict in Syria has raged for 10 years, proving that only a political solution in line with UNSCR 2254 can lead Syria towards sustainable peace.

The CoI-report documents systematic violations and abuses of human rights and IHL, especially by the regime and its allies, but also by non-state actors. We agree with the CoI that a nationwide and permanent ceasefire is needed to prevent increasing levels of inhumanity, and that justice and accountability are central to any durable peace.

We must continue to support the Syrian population. Safe, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian access remains vital. It is crucial that the Security Council extends and expands the resolution on cross-border access for humanitarian assistance in July. We must also continue to support refugees and IDPs. The obstacles to their safe, voluntary and dignified return remain.

We are deeply concerned by reports of continued arbitrary detention and torture by the regime.

Commissioners; we must not let the Syrian crisis be forgotten. What is - in your opinion – the best way to ensure that the rights of the Syrian people remain on the international agenda?

Thank you.

General debate-Item 5
17 March 2021

Statement by Latvia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, Madam President.

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

We thank the Special Procedures for presenting their annual communications report, and express our sincere appreciation and support to their work, which uninterruptedly continued under the difficult circumstances caused by the pandemic and the UN liquidity crisis.

The Special Procedures are an integral part of the UN human rights system, and independence is at the core of their work and, by extension, that of the Human Rights Council.

The Special Procedures system is by no means perfect and the mandate-holders have a crucial obligation to respect the Code of Conduct, the Manual of Operations and other rules and guidelines developed over the years. Equally, the Human Rights Council has an obligation to ensure that Special Procedures can continue their work in an independent and impartial manner, free from attacks, intimidation and undue influence. Any attempts to limit the independence of Special Procedures, as well as reprisals against those who cooperate with them, are unacceptable and detrimental to the work of this Council.

We urge all States to raise their concerns regarding the conduct of Special Procedures through the appropriate channels, such as the Internal Advisory Procedure.

The Nordic-Baltic countries have issued a standing invitation to all Special Procedures mandate holders. We call on all States that have not yet done so, especially members of this Council, to extend a standing invitation to the Special Procedures, and to fully and genuinely cooperate with them.

Thank you.

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on minority issues
15 March 2021
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, President.

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

We fully agree with the Special rapporteur that states should ensure that hate speech regulations are not used to suppress persons belonging to minorities, and equally important: Nor should such regulations be used to stifle the right to freedom of expression.

We have witnessed restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms and severe limitations of civic space to silence dissenting voices, under the pretext of security and counterterrorism. To address hate speech, we need free speech and open dialogue. It is essential to secure a safe and enabling space for human rights defenders advocating the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

President,

Certain political actors are using social media to manipulate information. We need a new generation of citizens with digital skills empowered to recognize, reject, and stand against misinformation and hate speech. All relevant actors must contribute to combating hate speech. We second the special rapporteur's idea of dialogue between tech companies and human rights organizations to ensure better protection of minority groups.

Finally:

How are the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights useful in following up social media companies' responsibility to prevent human rights violations and abuses in their value chains, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities?

Thank you!

General debate-Item 9
19 March 2021
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madame President,

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

Let me begin by re-affirming our firm commitment to combat all forms of racism.

The inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states, should be self-evident.

Yet, racism and discrimination continue to occur in all parts of the world, including in our own countries. Racism and discrimination are exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. This needs to be taken into account when responding to the pandemic.

Racism, and discrimination, in all its forms and manifestations are unacceptable. Wherever this exists, and however it is expressed.

The fight against racism needs to be persistent and relentless. Adequate and pervasive measures must be adopted. This includes fighting prejudices and combatting incitement to hatred and violence. This can only be achieved through strong Government leadership in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society.

We as States, have a responsibility to fulfil our commitments to ensure inclusive, tolerant, and equal societies.

I thank you

Interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the DRC

22 March 2021

Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Thank you, President.

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

The tragic and unacceptable attack on a WFP convoy in DRC which killed three people, including the Italian Ambassador, Luca Attanasio, was a clear reminder of the dire security situation in the eastern DRC and a clear illustration of the challenging context of actors working in the region. We are deeply concerned by the increased number of attacks – including massacres - against civilians leading to the death of innocent people. The number of human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, also remains high. Efforts must be increased to end violence, protect civilians and fight impunity. In addition to improving the security situation, it is paramount to address the root causes of this conflict and humanitarian crises, including the illicit exploitation of natural resources, as well as endemic poverty.

Madam High Commissioner, what further measures would in your view be required to improve the situation?

Four years have now passed since the murder of UN experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp in the DRC. We reiterate that their deaths must be fully and thoroughly investigated, with respect for due process, and those responsible held accountable. It is encouraging that the ongoing trial in the DRC has now resumed to hopefully a regular rhythm. It is also crucial that the Congolese authorities fully cooperate with the UN Follow-On Mechanism led by Mr. Petit.

Thank you.

**Interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on the human rights
situation in Mali
22 March 2021
Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Thank you, President

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries.

We thank the Independent Expert, Mr. Tine, for the comprehensive report.

We follow the ongoing transition process and urge Malian authorities to make it inclusive and transparent, and to initiate and implement the agreed reforms. We also urge the Malian authorities to hold free, fair and democratic elections within the set timeframe.

We are deeply concerned by the continued alarming reports on human rights violations and abuses. For Mali to progress to a more stable path, it is key to address the root causes of the security situation and strengthen the respect for human rights, also by Malian security and defence forces. To this end, it is important to combat impunity and enhance the Malian citizens' confidence in the state, including through increased state presence and state legitimacy. In this regard, implementation of the recommendations of the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali is crucial.

Let me assure you of our continued support to promoting human rights in Mali and allow me to ask the following question;

How do you assess that Malian authorities can contribute to citizens' enhanced confidence in the state, including through increased state presence, respect for human rights and fight against impunity, and how do you view role of the international community in this regard?

Thank you.

**High-level ID on human rights situation
in the Central African Republic
22 March 2021
Statement by Iceland on behalf of the Nordic countries**

Madame President,

I am honored to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries.

We thank the Independent Expert for his continued efforts to highlight human rights concerns in the Central African Republic. We remain thankful for OHCHR's continued support of the human rights mandate of MINUSCA and pay tribute to the peacekeepers that lost their lives in recent months.

We continue to follow with great concern the human rights and humanitarian situation in the CAR and are appalled by reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses by armed groups, as well as by national security forces. Attempts to destabilize and hinder the legitimate aspiration of the people of CAR to determine their own future in free and fair elections must end.

All allegations of violations and abuses, including of the very prevalent sexual and gender-based violence against women and children, must be thoroughly, impartially, and effectively investigated. Accountability for past and recent human rights violations and abuses and an effective process of transitional justice is the only way to bring peace and stability to the country.

Let me ask the panel, how can we support accountability in the aftermath of presidential elections?

I thank you.

**General debate-Item 10
22 March 2021**

Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries

Madam President,

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

We welcome the report by the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, and technical assistance achievements. We applaud the support by UNAMA, in cooperation with OHCHR, to the Government, to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and to civil society, aiming to further integrate human rights into peace and reconciliation processes and to victim centered justice.

Inclusive participation of all Afghans, including women, is essential for peace negotiations to result in permanent and sustainable peace.

The international donors' conference on Afghanistan in November 2020 emphasized that commitment to human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and gender equality are prerequisites for continued international support. The social and developmental gains of the last 20 years, in particular respect for human rights, especially for women, children and persons belonging to minorities, must be protected and built upon.

We are concerned about the prevailing high number of civilian victims, in particular women and children, and increasing number of terrorist attacks targeting civil society and call on the Government to strengthen accountability.

Furthermore, we appeal to authorities to take measures to eliminate violence against women and girls, prevent torture and to establish an official moratorium on the death penalty.

Thank you.