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**Statement by H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem KHAN**

**President of the Human Rights Council**

At the opening of the twenty-sixth session

of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee

Monday, 16 August 2021, 11 a.m.

Palais des Nations, Salle XX

Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Advisory Committee,

Mr. Tistounet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour to address you again in my capacity as President of the Human Rights Council and to warmly welcome you all to this twenty-sixth session of the Advisory Committee.

At the outset, I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Thiam of Senegal, a valued member of the Advisory Committee. His important contributions to the work of the Committee will not be forgotten.

Distinguished members,

Allow me to thank each of you for your continued work to promote and protect human rights in these challenging times. As we all know nearly one-and-a-half years has passed since the onset of the pandemic, which has posed and continues to pose unprecedented challenges to the full enjoyment of all human rights. But, I have the honour to say, the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms have worked tirelessly to meet the human rights challenges of COVID-19.

Indeed, the Council has adapted its working methods to ensure that action on human rights issues can continue. For example, the 46th Council session, convened in March, was held entirely virtually for the first time. At this session a record number of dignitaries participated via pre-recorded video messages at the High-Level Segment and 30 resolutions and one decision were adopted via a new electronic voting system. In addition, the session had important outcomes regarding the connection between the pandemic and human rights. In this regard, I wish to highlight the Council’s adoption of a resolution on the human rights implications of the lack of affordable, timely, equitable and universal access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and the deepening inequalities between States. This resolution importantly mandates that the High Commissioner submit a report to the Council on this subject at its 49th session in March 2022 and, at the same session, convene a half-day panel discussion on the matter.

At the its 47th session in June and July, the Council again adapted its working methods to ensure that action on human rights issues would continue despite the pandemic. This resulted in a session that was virtual, with the exception of an in-person voting process, during which 25 resolutions and 2 decisions were adopted.

Distinguished members,

Your Committee has provided valuable expertise, research-based advice and studies to the Council, which continue to inform Council discussions across a variety of issues. If I may, I will highlight two issues directly relevant to the work of the Advisory Committee that were also considered at the Council sessions convened thus far this year.

At the 46th session in March, the Council adopted a resolution on the negative impact of the non-repatriation of funds of illicit origin to the countries of origin on the enjoyment of human rights. This resolution mandates that the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt conduct a new study, in connection with previous relevant studies conducted by the mandate holder and the Advisory Committee, on a proposed non-binding set of practical guidelines for efficient asset recovery aiming at curbing the illicit transfer of funds and mitigating its negative effects on the enjoyment of human rights. In the same resolution, the Council also mandates a one-day intersessional seminar on the negative impact of the non-repatriation of funds of illicit origin to the countries of origin on the enjoyment of human rights, with the participation of States, the Advisory Committee and other relevant stakeholders.

I would like to also draw your attention to the Council’s recent action on the negative impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights, another topic on which your Committee has worked diligently. In this regard, I would like to highlight resolution 47/7 adopted at the Council’s 47th session, which mandates an intersessional panel discussion on challenges and good practices in the prevention of corruption, and the impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and requests the Office of the High Commissioner to liaise in this regard with, *inter alia*,the Advisory Committee.

Distinguished members,

I wish to offer my heartfelt thanks for the Committee’s successful completion of its work on four important topics this year, namely the reports on: the possible impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies on human rights; the current levels of representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms; the negative effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of all human rights; and the appropriate ways and means of assessing the situation regarding racial equality in the world, while identifying possible gaps and overlaps.

The Council regularly relies on your work and reports for independent analysis and recommendations, and, I have the honour to state, we have already begun to see the impact of your work.

Indeed, in its resolution 47/23, adopted in July, the Council welcomed the work of your Committee and took note of your report on new and emerging technologies. The resolution mandates that the Office of the High Commissioner convene two expert consultations to discuss the relationship between human rights and technical standard-setting processes for new and emerging digital technologies and the practical application of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to the activities of technology companies. And, in this context, the resolution mandates that the Office of the High Commissioner seek input from and take into account the relevant work already done by a number of stakeholders, including the Advisory Committee.

With regard to your report on current levels of representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms, I am pleased to note that this week you will hold a discussion with H.E. Ms. Margarida Izata, Permanent Representative of Angola, who continues, in her capacity as Gender Focal Point this year, to advise me and the Council on ways to increase the participation of women in all Council-related activities and also on any cases of sexual and gender-based harassment in the Council. I am hopeful that your discussions with Ambassador Izata will lead to concrete steps in follow-up to the recommendations contained in your report and for achieving gender balance in the work of the Council.

Finally, I must say, your report on racial equality is very timely. Since the convening of an urgent debate in June 2020 on the current racially inspired human rights violations, the Council has placed this issue high on its agenda. Indeed, the Council received oral updates from the High Commissioner in September 2020 as well as in March 2021 on police brutality against Africans and people of African descent. And, in June 2021, the Council considered her report on systemic racism, violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies. I have the further honour to inform you that, at the end of its 47th session, the Council adopted resolution 47/21 which mandates the establishment of an international independent expert mechanism in to further transformative change for racial justice and equality in the context of law enforcement globally, especially where relating to the legacies of colonialism and the Transatlantic slave trade in enslaved Africans.

Against this backdrop and in the context of your wonderful work, I would like to emphasise that I very much look forward to the presentation of the Advisory Committee’s four reports submitted this year during an interactive dialogue at the upcoming 48th session of the Council in September.

Distinguished Experts,Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me now to turn to the programme of work for the September session, which will be quite active and will feature four full weeks of meetings. At this session, the Council will hold no less than 35 interactive dialogues, including on reports and oral updates to be presented by the High Commissioner, special procedure mandate holders, experts of its subsidiary mechanisms and experts of its commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions.

The Council will also hold six panel discussions, including as regards the rights of indigenous peoples; unilateral coercive measures and human rights; the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training; promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests; deepening inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; and the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Council and its mechanisms.

Distinguished Members,

This August session of the Advisory Committee is unprecedented given that you have completed the work on the mandates entrusted to you by the Council and since 2020 have received no new mandates. In this context, I will reiterate what I said when I last addressed your Committee: there is a growing need for better visibility for your work. In particular, we must show the added-value of your Committee, including how your work positively contributes to improving the life of rights holders on the ground and how your Committee continues to remain relevant in fulfilling its role as the Council’s think-tank. It is my sincere hope that your discussions and reflections this week can look at how to overcome the hurdles in this regard.

As I conclude my remarks, let me reiterate my appreciation for your Committee and thank you all for continuing the work in order to fulfil the mandate of the Committee. Your commitment towards the promotion and protection of human rights is very much valued.

I wish you a very fruitful session.

Thank you.

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