**Fifth intersessional meeting of the Human Rights Council on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda**

**Overcoming multiple crises:**

**Realising the 2030 Agenda through a human rights-enhancing economy**

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**Thursday, 19 January 2023**

**TALKING POINTS**

* **Challenges | Political and socio-economic situation in Tunisia**
* Over a decade after the Revolution, Tunisia faces **a challenging socio-economic situation and is going through a political and insititutional transition.**
* The **COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine war** with rising basic commodities and energy prices have **exacerbated pre-existing structural challenges and socio-economic inequalities, dampening growth rates** (+2,6% GDP for the first 3 trimesters of 2022), and leading to **high inflation** (10,1% in Dec 2022), a **high unemployment rate** (15,3% in T3 2022) and rising debt-levels (80.2% of GDP in 2022). The **poverty rate** at USD 6.85/person/day increased to around 19% in 2022 and is only expected to return to pre-Covid levels in 2024.
* Tunisia is currently negotiating an **IMF program to be able to acces external financing and start the implementation of macro-economic reforms.**
* **Opportunities and** **UNCT priorities**

In this context, the UNCT Tunisia has been working to **promote and protect human rights and reduce the existing vulnerabilities** in Tunisia to leave no one behind (LNOB). To achieve the highest impacts considering the increasing economic challenges, the guiding compass of the UNCT in Tunisia has been to:

* + **Support the country’s achievements of the SDGs** by working across agencies to deliver as “One UN.” For example, the country team has analyzed SDG financing opportunities and worked on the improvement of statistical data to track SDG achievements. It has also supported Tunisia to report on its progress through the VNR 2019 and 2021.
  + **Advocate for the integration of a human-rights based approach (HRBA)** in budgetary matters and support social and economic policies to help achieve the SDGs. For example, UNICEF has worked with the government to integrate a child perspective in the design, implementation and evaluation of budgets. OHCHR has worked with CSOs and municipalities to integrate HRBA in their participatory budgeting mainly to advance Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR).
  + **Advocate for the alignment** of the government’s new development plan 2023-2025 **with the SDGs**. In fact, the plan’s 6 axes[[1]](#footnote-2) connect to all 17 SDGs and highlight the importance of human capital, green and inclusive development, social cohesion and reduced inequalities.
  + **Forge strong partnerships with local actors** to further Human Rights in the implementation of economic and social reforms, and specifically with the vibrant civil society in Tunisia as a key vehicle to generate positive change.
* **Delivery on SDG 6 and 17 through concrete examples from UNCT Tunisia**

1. **SDG 6 | Clean water and sanitation**

***Climate Change and Water crisis in Tunisia***

With the looming [water crisis](https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/07/water-crisis-threatens-millions-thirst-tunisia) in the country, the President has called on the government to treat the **water situation as an emergency**. For more than thirty years, the country has been under **acute water stress, which has been exacerbated by climate change**. Around 95% of surface water resources have already been mobilized. In addition, groundwater is overexploited, especially in central Tunisia. The report on the exploitation of groundwater indicates a groundwater exploitation rate exceeding 100 %. The water availability will probably not cover future needs, given the projected increases in consumption and the degradation of resources related to the impacts of climate change. The country team in Tunisia has been working to support Tunisia on SDG 6:

* In July 2022, OHCHR Tunisia supported the visit of the **Special Rapporteur (SR) on the rights to water and sanitation.** During the visit, he met with the authorities and an extensive network of civil society, community organizations and rights holders. At the end of his mission, he published his preliminary findings and recommendations for the **final report, which will be presented to the HRC at its 54th session in September 2023.**
* The visit and inputs to the report pointed to **human rights challenges occurring in this area**, from phosphate companies polluting communities’ water with chemical waste to hundreds of schools in the governorates that either do not have access to clean water or are not connected to water channels altogether.
* Other **UN agencies also provide support to ensure Tunisians’ right to water and sanitation and make progress on SDG 6:**

For example, **FAO** has supported the government to improve water productivity and has worked on the use of treated wastewater for agricultural purposes. **UNDP** and **UNICEF**, jointly with the RCO, have undertaken an analysis of climate change impacts on water management. UNICEF has applied a WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool to assess climate and water scarcity risks, and **UNIDO** has looked at circular economy solutions for industrial water use.

1. **SDG 17 | Means of implementation and partnerships for the goals**

***Supporting Tunisia in implementing its socio-economic reforms***

In the framework of the upcoming **socio-economic reforms**, the UNCT is offering support **in social protection**, contributing to **leaving no-one behind** and preserving **minimum standards of the population’s ESCR.** In fact, the Tunisian government is currently working to **enhance its social protection system to make it more shock-resilient and prepare it for future subsidy reforms,** and the UNCT is contributing:

* + With the help of UNICEF, around **420,000 children** aged 6-18 **of the poorest and most vulnerable households** (benefitting from the AMEN Social program) **receive a monthly allowance of around 10 USD**, in addition to the **cash support for 0-5 year olds** that already got instiutionalized in a decree-law at the beginning of 2022. Currently, around **900,0000 households in Tunisia, representing around 20% of the population, benefit from the AMEN social program**. It is estimated that 70% of Tunisia’s population would need to receive temporary cash transfers as a compensation if the government followed through with the phase-out of subsidies of basic food items.About 60% of Tunisian households are already registered in the contributory schemes. However, identifying the households in need and administering the allowance will be a challenge, in particular those not registered in the formal social security system.
  + While a draft law for a national social protection floor was submitted by the Government to the Parliament in December 2019, designed by the Ministries of Finance, Social Affairs and Development Cooperation and Planning, it has not yet been passed.
  + In this current period of transition, the UN system will continue to contribute its broad **experience on cash transfers and establishing social protection floors and contributory social protection schemes**, thanks to agencies such as UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, ILO and the WB.
* The OHCHR supports this transition with advocacy work. In the context of the IMF negotiations with the Government of Tunisia, OHCHR Tunisia submitted to the IMF and the World Bank **a human rights and LNOB-based advocacy paper** developed closely with the RCO. The paper outlined **recommendations** for the future agreement **to respect and enhance priority human rights standards,** including *the use of maximum available resources* to achieve the population’s *economic, social and cultural rights*, the *prevention from rights’ retrogression,* and *non-discrimination*.
* **Closure / Conclusion**

The UN system supports Tunisia in its efforts to make progress on the SDGs, its development objectives and planned reforms. The integrated human-rights based approach thereby offers an avenue for SDG advancement by fostering human-rights based economic structures that are socially inclusive and respectful of the economic, social and cultural rights and the environment to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

1. The six strategic axes identified by the Tunisian state in the new development plan are: 1) Human capital as the foundation of sustainable and comprehensive development, 2) The knowledge economy as an engine for innovation, 3) A competitive and diversified economy that supports private initiative, 4) Green economy and climate change, 5) Social justice as the basis of social cohesion and 6) Fair regional development and inclusive territorial development.

   <http://www.mdici.gov.tn/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Presentation_plan_confe%CC%81rence_presse.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)