

THE HUMAN RIGHTS GENEVA PLATFORM



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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

# 2020 Annual Conference

## CONCEPT NOTE PLENARY PANEL 1

COVID-19 responses by global and regional human rights systems

Maison de la Paix (Pétale 5), Thursday 15 October 2020,  
9:45 – 11:15

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Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

The Geneva Academy, a Joint Centre of



The COVID-19 pandemic has had deep effects on the substance and procedure of human rights mechanisms' work, both at the global and regional level. This panel will focus on how the mechanisms of the global human rights system - Human Rights Council, Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies – and regional systems responded to the COVID crisis in order to strengthen human rights protection.

The UN human rights system responded quickly to the COVID-19 crisis, described by the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) as a 'colossal test of leadership' requiring coordinated action. For example, in April 2020, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) issued a [statement](#) in which it described the deep negative impacts of the crisis on the enjoyment of ESCR, especially the rights to health, social security, work, food, housing and education, and called States to take measures to prevent, or at least to mitigate, these impacts. The Committee on ESCR underlined that "No one should be left behind in taking the measures necessary to combat this pandemic", and it called upon States to ensure that the extraordinary mobilization of resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic provides the impetus for long-term resource mobilization towards the full and equal enjoyment of ESCR, to make sure that the world is better prepared for future pandemics and disasters. In July 2020, in a [contribution](#) sent to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York, the CEDAW Committee called for joint action in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic: 'Merely expressing human rights concerns in such an unprecedented situation is not enough. [...] If COVID-19 teaches us only one lesson, this should be that solidarity is neither optional nor is it an act of charity. [...] In their response to the crisis, States [...] must be guided by its principles of non-discrimination and gender equality, as well as by the principle of 'Leave no one behind' of the SDGs. Ultimately, States should emerge from the COVID-19 crisis with increased solidarity, by adhering to human rights norms, promoting inclusive governance, social justice and peace.'

Regional human rights systems were also quick to react. As example, in March 2020 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) established a Rapid and Integrated Responses Coordination ([SACROI Covid-19](#)) – a specialist task force with the aim of monitoring responses from States, and identifying urgent cases for precautionary measures. Since then, the IACHR has received a vast number of requests for precautionary measures, designed to ensure a rapid response in serious and urgent situations during the crisis. In April 2020, the IACHR also adopted Resolution 1/2020 '[Pandemic and Human Rights in the Americas](#)', outlining wide-ranging policy recommendations for States and a series of statements on the protection of the most vulnerable.

These timely initiatives deserve further reflection: how can human rights mechanisms monitor post-pandemic recovery programs to ensure they combat inequalities that were made evident during the crisis? How can they contribute to "building back better"? This session will also take the right to food as an example of the impact that COVID-19 is having on the exercise and realization of human rights. How can human rights mechanisms inform the SDG process, given that e.g. SDG 2 pledges to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition? In 2019, 690 million people were facing hunger every day, and COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing insecurities and weaknesses of the food systems. How can human rights mechanisms hold States accountable in this situation for the realization of the right to food?

From a procedural perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many activities to transition to an online setting and/or to review their working methods. Human rights mechanisms, both at the global and regional level, were not exempted from this transition. Questions to be addressed in this regard include: What were the changes in work modalities put in place and what lessons can be learned from the use of digital communications during the crisis, for example on-line sessions? What was the role played by the regional systems? Which are the impacts of the crisis on civil society participation and which aspects have to be taken into account to mitigate restrictions to such participation?

## PANELISTS

- **Nada Al-Nashif**, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- **Sandra Liebenberg**, H.F. Oppenheimer Chair in Human Rights Law and Distinguished Professor, University of Stellenbosch and Member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- **Ana María Suárez Franco**, Permanent Representative in Geneva, FIAN International
- **Mikiko Otani**, Member of the Committee of the Rights of the Child and Member of the Inter-Committee Working Group on COVID-19

## MODERATOR

- **Christophe Golay**, Senior Research Fellow and Strategic Adviser on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva Academy

## PARTNERS

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