

***OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON
'A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS WITHIN THE OIC COUNTRIES.'***

Jeddah 25 November 2021: During its 18th Regular Session, the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) held a thematic debate on the subject of “*A Human Rights-Based Approach to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Within the OIC Countries*” on Tuesday, 23rd November 2021. Inaugural statements of the Thematic Debate were made by the IPHRC Chairperson, Dr. Saeed Alghfeli, and the OIC Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, (delivered on his behalf by his Chef-de-Cabinet Dr. Mahamat Adoum Koulbou). Representatives of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Statistical, Economic, Social and Research Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), and the Chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) participated as key panelists. A large number of OIC Member and Observer States also actively participated in the discussion.

Besides making valid observations on the links between human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the participants made valuable recommendations for functional integration of human rights as a guiding framework to improve the outcomes of sustainable development policies. The Commission welcomed the steps taken and resolve expressed by all OIC Member States, during the debate, to adopt a human rights-based approach to their sustainable development policies and programs through institution-building and citizens' empowerment in accordance with their obligations under respective international and regional human rights instruments. Based on the comprehensive discussion, the Commission adopted the following as the Outcome Document of its Thematic Debate on the subject:

Guided by the divine injunctions given in the Noble Quran; Islamic teachings of protecting rights, assuring justice in all aspects of human life and serving the public interest; as well as by the core values of equality and human dignity, which are fundamental human rights principles enshrined in the Cairo Declaration of OIC on Human Rights, International Bill of Rights, Agenda 2030, Declaration on the Right to Development (DRtD) and other universal human rights instruments;

Recalled that the advent of Islam heralded an unprecedented era of human rights based on equality, equity and non-discrimination, where all individuals were exalted to claimants of codified rights in all spheres of their lives. Islamic concept of development is also a moral and spiritual imperative, without any distinction of class, color, caste or sex. It provides for substantive equality, equity and distributive justice according to the needs and circumstances of every segment of human society, as well as assuring their sustainability in the future including to the environmental concerns and the corresponding responsibility of humans;

Further recalled that the OIC Charter recognizes the strategic importance of preserving and promoting the lofty Islamic values of justice, human dignity and fundamental freedoms for ensuring sustainable development and prosperity of all Member States. Cognizant of their interdependence, the OIC's Ten-Year Program of Action 2015- 2025 calls for utilizing these principles to revitalize Islam's pioneering role in the world and ensure sustainable development, progress and prosperity for the peoples of the OIC Member States;

Affirmed that human rights and the SDGs are mutually reinforcing. SDGs should be seen as an operational plan for realizing all human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. Sustainable development promotes human rights while human rights respecting societies provide enabling environment for achieving the SDGs;

Highlighted that the primary aim of the SDGs is to “realize the human rights of all” with an emphasis on the responsibility of all States to respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights obligations and fundamental freedoms for all, while the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds must be respected. Over 90 percent of the goals and targets of the SDGs correspond to specific human rights obligations. Hence, progress on SDGs should be regarded as progress on human rights obligations as well;

Underlined the crucial need for adopting a holistic approach to sustainable development initiatives, which takes into account the multidimensional aspects of social, economic and ecological development. Hence, the need for developing inclusive policies that consider everybody's needs, concerns, knowledge, enterprise and skills to ensure equitable distribution of resources for just and inclusive societies;

Expressed concerns that the Covid-19 Pandemic has thwarted the global progress towards achieving the SDGs, with real threats of reversing the achieved progress. Remarkably, there is an imminent threat that human rights could become the actual causality of the ongoing pandemic with receding freedoms and further marginalization of the persons in vulnerable situation, including women and girl child, elderly, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, minorities and people living under occupation or in armed conflict situations;

Further expressed concerns that the recovery efforts from the pandemic remain slow and uneven with glaring inequalities and deficiencies. The pandemic has disproportionately affected the world's poorest and persons in vulnerable situation, which has deepened economic and social disparities and exposed inadequate health and social protection systems and inequitable distribution of vaccines within and among the countries;

Underlined that the pandemic clearly proved that the world needs structural changes to efficiently eradicate poverty beyond the ambitious political narratives that fail to inspire real action. Accordingly, the post-Covid-19 phase should not be guided by the simple need to address the damages inflicted by the pandemic but to transform the structures that could not protect the poor during the crisis. Human rights must be the guiding norm in shaping the post-pandemic response, both for the public health emergency and the broader impact on people's lives and livelihoods;

Noted that developing countries, including many OIC Member States, as part of a globalized world, are confronted with unprecedented challenges in the climatic, technological, political, security, and demographic arena. In this regard, the main challenges confronting the achievement of SDGs in Member States of the OIC are paucity of funds, COVID-19 pandemic, qualified manpower, weak infrastructure and instability. Member States are urged to cooperate with each other in eliminating these obstacles to ensure broad-based sustainable development for all;

Stressed that when led by human rights values, sustainable development initiatives help to establish inclusive societies where multiple social groups, especially vulnerable ones, are involved

in decision-making processes. Civil society and local communities should be encouraged to engage in public affairs for effective implementation and ownership of sustainable development initiatives;

Highlighted the importance of using indicators and disaggregated data for measuring the disparities at the national, regional and international levels against the implementation of the SDGs programs with a view to taking corrective measures to remove obstacles and ensure development at all levels without discrimination;

Emphasized the importance of principles of accountability, participation and non-discrimination as crucial mechanisms to improve the implementation and effectiveness of SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind. To this end, human rights mechanisms and institutions at the national, regional and global levels can make systematic and invaluable contributions for follow-up and review of the progress in achieving SDGs;

Noted with pride that OIC countries were at the forefront of formulating the SDGs and have also made significant efforts in realizing them. However, many of them still face tremendous challenges to overcome complicated and multi-dimensional socio-economic issues, especially those facing conflicts and weak infrastructure of institutions. These realities across many OIC countries indicate the need to concentrate on actions that operationalize structural synergies and linkages between SDGs and human rights, with the goal to ensure socially and economically equitable societies that are inclusive in nature and enable sustainable development;

Urged all governments to strengthen their legal frameworks with human dignity at the heart of their policies to address existing structural disadvantages and inequalities. Member States must prioritize the goal on eliminating poverty as a milestone to realize the human dignity of every person as enshrined in the UDHR. In order to have real progress on this goal, people living in poverty must be meaningfully engaged in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives;

Identified some of the critical underlying obstacles to addressing and achieving the SDGs from a human rights perspective as: (i) regressive and discriminatory socio-cultural mindset, norms and laws that restrict equal access to opportunities, resources and power, particularly against women and girls; (ii) chronic under-investment in social sectors of health and education; (iii) asymmetry in awareness and access to information; (iv) addressing rampant corruption; and (v) exclusion and non-participatory planning, decision making and resource allocation. Member States were urged to address these concerns, on priority;

Reaffirmed that discrimination against persons in vulnerable situation is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace, which are prerequisite for achieving SDGs. Accordingly **urged** the Member States to adopt, implement and periodically review legislations to ensure their effectiveness in eliminating all forms of discrimination in their economic and social policies;

Recognized the vital role and contribution of all civil society actors, media, human rights institutions, and other non-governmental and community-based organizations in realizing all human rights, especially empowerment of the persons in vulnerable situation, including women and girls and their full integration into the development process.

Cognizant of prevailing low literacy rates in Member States, the Commission identified investment in the right to education as one of the most potent ways to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. Member States should endeavor to allocate at least five percent of their respective GDP to education with positive discrimination for skill-oriented vocational training to the persons in vulnerable situation, including science and technology, to enable all to actively participate in economic, social and cultural development, on equal footing.

Encouraged the OIC Member States to utilize all available human rights mechanisms and their expertise in the planning, execution, and the Follow-Up and Review processes of SDGs to help in strengthening national legislation, institutional infrastructures and action plans aimed at promoting a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.

Highlighted the important link between international cooperation and realization of SDGs by developing countries, which is aptly captured in the Right to Development. Accordingly, urged all countries to adopt, on priority, a legally binding instrument on the Right to Development, which will meaningfully contribute to achieving SDGs by all countries in a timely fashion.

Supported all international initiatives such as G20 Debt Relief initiative adopted by Riyadh Declaration to suspend debt of poor countries during the Covid 19 pandemic that help low-income developing countries in facing disasters and crises as well as the ability to achieve basic human rights and SDGs;

Urged all OIC States to undertake coordinated and accelerated actions to implement, monitor and review the progress on SDGs from a human rights approach, which can be done by:

- a. Building high-level political commitment and ownership for the OIC and international transformative initiatives on creating sound policy frameworks at national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and all-inclusive recovery and development strategies to support accelerated investments in poverty eradication programs;
- b. Collecting and collating disaggregated data by investing in national statistical capacity to systematically analyze and use data to guide governments in preparing and implementing informed policies, plans and impact assessment studies for the sustainable development of their societies;
- c. Building the capacity of NHRIs and civil society to ensure accountability in the implementation of SDGs; particularly, by developing SDGs indicators grounded in human rights norms and disaggregated data to guide the policymakers towards informed policy choices and ensure better monitoring and evaluation;
- d. Encouraging platforms for the sharing of experiences and best practices, including at the regional level, to support interested States and relevant stakeholders in driving the integrated implementation of human rights and the SDGs.

Further urged OIC countries to utilize the existing reporting mechanisms in the UN system to guide the implementation of SDGs, which can help build strong accountability structures at the national level through a human rights-based approach. Member States are also encouraged to keep IPHRC informed on the progress of implementing SDGs.

Thanked the SESRIC for providing statistical data about the state of SDGs in Member States. Also **requested** the SESRIC to develop benchmarks for human rights indicators to be used in the

evaluation and monitoring of SDGs in OIC countries. In this regard, encouraged OIC General Secretariat and Islamic Development Bank to explore ways and means to cooperate with SESRIC and make use of its capacity building programs to support Member States efforts aligning their developmental policies with their human rights obligations.

Encouraged all OIC Member States to cooperate and assist one another, and to enhance collaboration with the UN and other relevant international and regional mechanisms, including IPHRC, SESRIC, and NHRIs, to share best practices, develop programs of technical assistance and capacity-building support, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the States concerned to direct their development policies towards achieving the SDGs through a human rights-based approach.

Emphasized the international community's collective responsibility to create a conducive socio-economic environment for the enjoyment of human rights by all persons worldwide. Accordingly, **called upon** the international community to translate the global focus on human rights protection and SDGs, which has been a central issue for international cooperation, into concrete, measurable actions on the ground to effectively address the core issue of poverty, including by providing the developing countries with the necessary development and technical assistance, while refraining from interfering in other countries' internal affairs. The principle of "leaving no one behind", being one of the most transformative elements of the SDGs, must guide the efforts to eradicate poverty at the national and global levels.

Underscored that the natural resources of many OIC Member States, particularly in Africa, which are still under the control of foreign companies and institutions, depriving the people of those States of the opportunities to benefit and develop their national economies; Hence **called** for early restoration of their sovereignty over own natural resources.

Reaffirmed that sustainable development remains a priority area for the OIC-IPHRC, and undertook to continue to work for its comprehensive understanding, better implementation, and realization at national, regional, and international levels to ensure the institutional foundation for full enjoyment of human rights both by the individuals and peoples in all Member States without discrimination on any grounds.
