HRC61 Side Event

Mental Health: From Rights to Reality

Concept Note

Date & venue **Monday, 23rd of March 2026 – 14:00-15:00, Room: XII - *Palais des Nations***

Background

Mental health is a fundamental human rights concern and essential to realize the right to health. More than one in ten persons globally are current or potential users of mental health services at any given time. Yet access to appropriate, rights-based mental health care remains alarmingly limited.

To address this disparity, the Human Rights Council adopted a series of resolutions on a triennial basis. Pursuant to resolution 52/12, OHCHR to prepare a comprehensive report that was presented to the 58th session (A/HRC/58/38) that provided an analysis of the main obstacles and challenges in applying a human rights-based approach to mental health. The report also contains recommendations for the integration of a human rights-based approach to mental health.

Advancing mental health from a human rights perspective requires sustained attention not only to normative standards but also to how these are translated into law, policy and practice across diverse contexts.

Across regions, mental health continues to raise complex human rights questions relating to access to care, autonomy and informed consent, stigma and discrimination, ill-treatment, participation, accountability and the broader determinants necessary for the enjoyment of human rights. These issues assume particular urgency in emergency settings, where exposure to violence, displacement, loss, together with the disruption of services and erosion of social support systems, profoundly affect mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. A human rights approach therefore requires attention to legal frameworks, institutional practice, structural barriers and lived experience.

International human rights law provides a comprehensive framework for addressing these questions, including availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of services; equality and non-discrimination; participation; transparency and accountability; and attention to underlying determinants. At the same time, gaps remain between normative commitments and implementation in practice across many settings.

Against this backdrop, the side event will provide a platform to examine mental health from a human rights perspective across settings, with particular attention to bridging standards and practice.

Objectives

This side event will serve as an opportunity to examine contemporary human rights challenges relating to mental health across settings and in diverse institutional and operational contexts. Specifically, the event will:

- Strengthened shared understanding of mental health as a human rights issue across settings
- Examine cross-cutting challenges across law, policy and practice
- Identify emerging priorities requiring greater coherence
- Promote collaboration among Member States, UN entities, civil society, and other stakeholders to enable coherent, coordinated, and rights-based responses to mental health

Format

A 60-minute moderated panel discussion, including an interactive Q&A session

- Moderator: Mr. Khaled Hassine, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Speakers:
    - HE Ms. Joana Fisher, Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal
    - HE Ms. Cecilia Ishitani, Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil
    - Ms. Veronica Filippeschi, Senior Thematic Adviser, Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)
    - Dr. Odile Frank, American Psychological Association (APA), United for Global Mental Health and European Federation of Psychologists' Associations
    - Dr. Rohini Haar, UC Berkeley School of Public Health

The Side Event is open to the participation of Member States and other relevant stakeholders, including United Nations entities, representatives of subregional and regional organisations, international human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions, civil society organisations, health experts, and relevant stakeholders from across the world. Participants are encouraged to intervene in an interactive way, through questions, comments and sharing of experiences, promising practices and challenges as well as suggested recommendations on the way forward, with a view to stimulating a constructive debate. The Side Event is being held in English only.

Background documents

- Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Mental health and human rights (2025) (A/HRC/58/38)
- Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the consultation on human rights and mental health held in Geneva on 15 November 2021 (A/HRC/49/29)
- Report of High Commissioner for Human Rights on the consultation on human rights and mental health held in Geneva on 14 and 15 May 2018 (A/HRC/39/36)
- Report of the High Commissioner on mental health and human rights (2017) (A/HRC/34/32)
- OHCHR/WHO Mental Health, Human Rights, and Legislation: guidance and practice (2023)

- Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. The burnout economy: poverty and mental health (2024) (A/79/162)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health on the global agenda for mental health that is human rights-based (2020) (A/HRC/44/48)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health on the role of the determinants of health in advancing the right to mental health (2019) (A/HRC/41/34)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (2018) (A/73/161)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health on mental health (2017) (A/HRC/35/21)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (2020) (A/HRC/43/49)
- Human Rights Council resolution 52/12 on Mental health and human rights (2023)
- Human Rights Council resolution 43/13 on Mental health and human rights (2020)
- Human Rights Council Resolution 36/13 on Mental health and human rights (2017)
- Human Rights Council Resolution 32/18 on Mental health and human rights (2016)

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