HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

At a time when human rights face unprecedented backlash due to populism, polarisation, authoritarianism, intolerance and corporate greed, and multilateralism is being constantly undermined, International Human Rights Day offers an opportunity to reinforce yet again universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with common standards agreed by humanity.

Throughout its many years of existence, the UN Special Procedures system – comprising highly committed experts who dedicate their time, expertise and energy pro bono for the cause of human rights – has been defending human rights against threats from States and non-state actors alike.

Today, Special Procedures mandate holders come together to reaffirm our resolute commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our founding document that has underpinned the work of current and former mandate holders for so many years. We do so at a time when multilateralism and the human rights ecosystem are under threat. In the face of these threats, we will continue to:

- **Uphold our independence as we respond to the expectations and calls of all those in need**

Special Procedures are independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address the most urgent and important human rights issues. Sensitive to the voices and experiences of victims, their families and civil society and in dialogue with States and other independent human rights mechanisms, we continuously expose human rights violations and their perpetrators, highlight inequalities and injustices, unpack double-standards, unveil complicities, identify obstacles, and recommend constructive and inclusive ways forward to prevent and remedy human rights violations and advance accountability.

- **Call for the full implementation and better understanding of human rights standards and provide dedicated technical advice**

Special Procedures interpret human rights obligations and standards, propose new understandings guided by the principle of progressivity to keep up with novel emerging challenges, contribute to the evolution of international human rights law and advance its implementation. Working in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, we provide technical assistance to States and engage UN agencies, regional and national human rights institutions, businesses and other actors to advance human rights. We help countries draft national laws and policies, providing them with an analysis of particular situations on the ground in the light of applicable human rights treaties. We remain a strong reference point and resource for national, regional and international courts. Our work has shaped courts' articulation of the State obligations to, among others, protect human rights in the context of the planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, toxic pollution and economic inequality.

- **Promote positive changes in people's lives through full implementation of our prevention and protection mandates**

Special Procedures listen carefully to victims, human rights defenders, social movements and civil society organisations to implement our prevention and protection mandates. We strengthen accountability for human rights violations and international crimes. We provide support to survivors and their families as well as to victims, advising them, receiving and vetting their complaints before acting upon them.

During 2025, we have been instrumental in getting human rights defenders released from prison, freed from arbitrary detention and off the death penalty all around the world. We have been able to protect human rights and sustainable development, helping States make better decisions in relation to projects that would lead to people losing their territories or places to live, pray and/or earn livelihood or would harm their health, cultures, education and the environment, with negative impacts for our planet's life-supporting systems. We have stood firmly next to civil society fighting against false narratives and corporate greed.

- **Remain steadfast in our advocacy for stronger human rights protection and democratic processes around the world**

Special Procedures have advocated for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights of people in situations of marginalisation or vulnerability such as children, women, minorities, LGBTIQ+ persons, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities including albinism and persons affected by leprosy, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants and peasants. We have stressed the importance of ensuring civic space, free media, effective participation in decision-making, protection of peaceful protest, independent judiciary, freedom from torture and fair democratic elections to sustain the rule of law and good governance. We have also demanded more stable financing for humanitarian responses, the Sustainable Development Goals and the reform of the international financial architecture to ensure that no one is left behind. We have been at the forefront in showing interlinkages between the three UN pillars of peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.

- **Proclaim inconvenient truths**

Special Procedures have consistently shown the courage to speak truth to power and have denounced speech and actions that dehumanise people, spread misinformation and disinformation and incite hate and violence. At a time when the rule of law has come under threat, we have repeatedly affirmed the indivisibility, interdependence and universality of human rights.

These are only a few examples of impact that Special Procedures mandate holders, coming from different parts of the world, from different backgrounds and cultures, have had individually or collectively. Such impact has been possible despite the very limited resources available. Labelled by the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as the "crown jewel" of the international human rights system, we have consistently and successfully pushed the boundaries for the furtherance of human rights. Yet, this system, as successful as it may be, is under pressure, facing manifold threats every day, be they political, institutional or financial. As the UN and the Human Right Council are going through important moments of reflections, we stress that these processes must create more – not fewer – spaces for dialogue, recognizing that human rights protection is essential for the realisation of dignity, peace, security, rights-based sustainable development and planetary well-being. Any efficiency

initiatives must have the people and communities that we serve at the centre, thus strengthening Special Procedures, not undermining a system that has stood the test of time.

More than ever, States and others must act now to protect and reinforce Special Procedures as a crucial, responsive, agile and cost-effective channel through which human rights concerns are heard and as independent voices that can stand for all human rights everywhere, even in the face of personal attacks, threats and sanctions.

As the world commemorates Human Rights Day, we reaffirm our commitment to work relentlessly, without any fear or favour, to make human rights a reality for all, fully rooted in international law.