

27 FEBRUARY 2023 - 4 APRIL 2023

GICJ FULL SESSION REPORT

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THE 52nd REGULAR SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

27th February – 4th April 2023

GICJ FULL SESSION REPORT

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Introduction

The 52nd session of the Human Rights Council was held from February 27th to April 4th 2022 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. During the four weeks the Council reiterated its mandate to promote and protect human rights around the world. During this session the Council held 7 panel discussions, 40 interactive dialogues, 13 Universal Periodic Review Outcomes and adopted 43 resolutions.

The Council held meetings on pressing human rights situations and followed-up on the mandated reports by groups of experts and special rapporteurs. Of special attention were the situations taking place in Ukraine, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Palestine and Syria.

The Human Rights Council also held adoptions for the UPR outcomes drafted in countries such as Bahrain, Ecuador, Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, Finland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, India, Algeria, Philippines, Brazil, the Netherlands, South Africa and Poland. Finally, specific countries were discussed under item 10 for capacity building and technical assistance, such as Haiti, Libya, Mali and South Sudan.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) participated actively in the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council. Jointly with other NGOs, such as the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), Meezaan Center for Human Rights, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration and International-lawyers.Org, our members delivered 20 joint oral statements. GICJ submitted three written statements to the OHCHR, on issues in Iraq, the 20th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq. GICJ also followed many of the meetings and produced over twenty reports related to discussions during the session.

GICJ reiterates that the participation of civil society in the Human Rights Council is crucial for the improvement of human rights everywhere. NGOs publicly monitor and surveil government actions and their call-out power gives a voice to the victims of human rights abuses. Moreover, NGOs represent individuals on the field and articulate the interests of minorities, victims, stakeholders, local populations, workers, and much more. They bring informed, contextualised perspectives to the table contributing to create solutions tailored to the needs of the population.

GICJ's Participation

During the 52nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) counted with a team of 22 interns and volunteers both online and onsite. The team covered by the end of the session more than **30 discussions**, delivered **23 discussion reports**, and submitted **1 written statement**. Several colleagues delivered an amount of **22 oral statements** during the session, while 7 resolution articles were written.

List of Agenda Items

1. Opening of Session High-Level Segment
2. Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General
3. Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development
4. Human rights situations that require the Council's attention
5. Human rights bodies and mechanisms
6. Universal Periodic Review
7. Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
8. follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action
9. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: followup to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action
10. Agenda item 10: Technical assistance and capacity-building

Opening Statements

The 27th of February 2023 the president of the council Mr. Václav Bálek opened the session by reminding states that cooperation is essential for the functioning of the Council. He then gave the floor to the President of UN General Assembly, Mr. Csaba Kőrösi. He recalled that in this year 2023 we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the festivities are overshadowed by the many crises that the world is still experiencing today. Mr Kőrösi expressed his concerned about the steady decline in protection of human rights.



Mr. António Guterres, UN Secretary General, began his speech by outlining the various rights contained in the 1948 Declaration before noting that the Declaration is under attack from all sides, notably with the invasion of Ukraine by Russian armed forces. He called for a revitalisation of the

Declaration, a reaffirmation of the rights it contains and a link to a new generation of rights.

The floor was then given to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Volker Türk. He stated that human rights are the common language of humanity, and that it is therefore essential to overcome the polarisations that the world is experiencing. Mr. Türk expressed the importance of a new global consensus around human rights to put the world



back on track for the promise of lasting peace, justice for all and greater solidarity. Finally, he recalled the importance of dialogue between States, even in cases of disagreement.

Finally, the Director of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ignazio Cassis, addressed the Council. He began by listing the many violations committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, such as massacres, the existence of detention and torture camps and the displacement of children. To

avoid this, he gave some guidelines to follow, including the need to document the violations committed in the world, to bring the perpetrators to account, to strengthen multilateralism and focus it on peace.



The President of the Council finally took the floor to declare the 52nd Session open, beginning with the high-level segment containing speeches from Presidents, Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers from around the world.

Oral Statements

During the 52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) delivered 20 oral statements in collaboration with the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, and Meezaan Center for Human Rights.

1. GICJ denounce Israeli atrocities in occupied Palestinian territory



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice.

03 March 2023

Statement of the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD) and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Delivered by Kiyana Newell / GICJ

Thank you President

First, we would like to thank the High Commissioner for his report.

After decades of the illegal occupation of Palestine, the Israeli policies of apartheid have become increasingly apparent. Israeli security forces continue to carry out unlawful killings, arbitrary executions of civilians, and placing the most strenuous restrictions on freedom of movement. Most insidiously of all, transferring more land and property to illegal settlements contrary to international law.

These violations are thoroughly documented – yet the international community in this room continues to fall far short of its obligations to stand up for the Palestinian people.

The lack of accountability and double standards even by the UN compounds the suffering of Palestinian people. The international community is allowing Israeli forces to continually commit these crimes.

In recent weeks – flying of the Palestinian flag has been attacked, it has been forcefully removed from public spaces – falsely described as a symbol of terrorism. The erasure of a population, its people, and its place on the map are coordinated actions that can no longer be tolerated by so-called peace-loving nations.

We need to consider who is causing the real terror in Palestine. Who is the real threat. Who are the real victims. And which states in this room allow it to continue.

EAFORD and Geneva International Centre for Justice strongly denounce Israeli atrocities. States can no longer be complicit in shielding Israel from accountability. Palestine needs international protection. The Human Rights Council must give its fullest support to the people of Palestine.

2. GICJ condemn the unlawful expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice.

3 March 2023

Statement of Meezan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice

Delivered by Juanita Beltran / GICJ

Thank you Mr President,

In light of the devastating human rights violations reported in the High Commissioner's report, we would like to raise particular awareness about the unlawful expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ongoing now for over 55 years, followed by violations of international humanitarian law.

The right to freedom of movement and self-determination of millions of Palestinians is being infringed by the expansion plans of the Israeli government, imposing illegally discriminatory conditions on Palestinian development. 9,500 settlements will be approved in the West Bank. If no sanctions are imposed, claims behind the expansion on grounds of safety threats will only perpetuate settlers destroying Palestinian property and leaving room for impunity.

As detailed by the High Commissioner in his report, consequences of such oppressive occupation is also seen in the destruction of the offices of human rights organisations by Israeli security forces. The continued harassment against human rights defenders and journalists diminishes their ability to communicate about killings, torture and unlawful detainments committed by Israel to the world. Meezan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice strongly condemn the incessant human rights violations by the state of Israel. We appeal to the international community to ensure accountability for these illegal settlements.

Thank you.

3. GICJ condemn the impunity granted to Israeli security forces



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice.

3 March 2023

Statement of Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration

Delivered by Isabel Garcia Aguilar / GICJ

Thank you Mr President,

The situation in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem is deteriorating day after day and the number of Palestinians who have been killed by the hand of the Israeli security forces or settlers keeps growing. A record number of at least 55 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces in 2023, a record to be ashamed of.

Between January 2017 and October 2022, the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces was up to 559 with only 79 investigations open, in the end only 3 led to a conviction.

Arguments from the State of Israel concerning provocations can not justify the killings, nor the lack of investigations into the killings, of innocent civilians like the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May last year.

Israeli security forces continue to openly violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law, without redress and sanction. This can no longer be tolerated by the international community.

Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration and Geneva International Centre for Justice firmly condemn the impunity granted to Israeli security forces. We call on the Human Rights Council support mechanisms that achieve justice and accountability for the dead and for all Palestinians.

Thank you.

4. GICJ strongly condemns the disproportionate repression against Afghan women



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Item 2: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

Association Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Delivered by Maeva Giambrone / GICJ

Thank you president,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report.

Once again, this year, we can only deplore the new measures adopted by the Taliban regime against the rights of Afghan women. Since December 2022, women have been banned from attending universities and working for national and international NGOs. They are also banned from most jobs outside of their homes.

After their coup in 2021, the Taliban have claimed that women's rights were protected by Sharia law. However, Afghan women and girls are increasingly denied their basic rights, which could be qualified as a crime against humanity as mentioned in the report of the Special Rapporteur. They are excluded from the public and political life of the country. A real gender apartheid has been established using religion as a pretext.

We respect and support the women and girls who continue to protest, peacefully, for their rights. Ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Hazara, are also persecuted and severely affected by Taliban policies. In 2022, attacks against minorities were reported as mentioned in the report by the Special Rapporteur.

Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice supports Afghan women in their fight. We strongly condemn the measures adopted by the Taliban and the disproportionate repression they have resorted to against these women. We denounce the numerous human rights violations committed by the Taliban. States must continue their efforts to force them to respect international law.

5. GICJ ask the South Sudanese government to strengthen peace-building mechanisms



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Item 2: Enhanced interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in South Sudan, which includes participation of the High Commissioner.

7 March 2023

Statement of International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and Geneva International Centre for Justice

Delivered by Kiyana Newell / GICJ

Thank you,

We thank the Commission on Human Rights for their report. We remain concerned about the trajectory of the country's level of violence and insecurity as we enter 2023. The report indicated that the violence felt like armed conflict and that it was usually targeted at civilians in the Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity States.

Due to the delay in implementing the peace agreement, more than 20,000 people have been displaced, and at least 166 civilians have been killed since August. The perpetual humanitarian crisis has recently worsened, affecting the most vulnerable individuals and resulting in multiple crises at a time.

Over 74 percent of the population require humanitarian assistance, and of the newly displaced, many of them are women and children. Food insecurity has also steadily increased, causing chronic malnutrition in over half of the population and one-third of children.

In addition, we are alarmed by the reports of thousands of women and children experiencing abduction, sexual violence, murder, and forced conscription by militias.

EAFORD and the Geneva International Centre for Justice remain deeply troubled by these unceasing human rights violations. For this reason, we ask the South Sudanese government and the International Community to recommit to their obligations to strengthen peace-building mechanisms and to put an end to these human rights violations.

Thank You.

6. GICJ call on the Government of South Sudan to uphold their international obligations



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 2 : Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan

7 March 2023

Statement of Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Delivered by Maeva Giambrone / GICJ

Thank you president,

We thank the Commission on Human Rights for its report.

In 2022, and for many years, there have been reports of repeated sexual violence against Southern Sudanese women. In the report, the Commission describes cases of rape and group rape. In addition, county governors and commissioners are suspected of being complicit in or even supervising systematic rapes.

Similarly, in South Sudan, children suffer from violence and insecurity. The report highlights that children are beaten, abducted and raped. In addition to being deprived of their fundamental rights, they are often recruited by armed forces and groups. South Sudan has pledged to stop these practices, contrary to international humanitarian law, but child recruitment continues.

At the end of 2022, girls were held against their will in a training centre in Maridi and subjected to sexual violence.

The failure to investigate these violations gives the perpetrators full impunity and constitutes further violations of South Sudan's obligations.

Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) call on the Government of South Sudan to uphold their international obligations. We urge them to implement the transitional justice mechanisms provided for in the Revitalized Agreement, including the Hybrid Court for Southern Sudan as soon as possible.

There is an urgent need to end the culture of impunity by investigating those responsible for extrajudicial killings, sexual violence or acts of repression.

7. 13 NGOs Urge OHCHR to Fully Implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action



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Item 2: General debate on the oral update by the High Commissioner

8 March 2023

Delivered by Frizia Rounak /GICJ

Joint statement by International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN), International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic & Other Minorities, Global Action on Aging, Habitat International Coalition, Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, Union of Arab Jurists, International-Lawyers.Org, International Organization for the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, Meezan Center for Human Rights, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Mr President,

I am speaking on behalf of 13 NGOs. We welcome this opportunity to express our expectation that the new High Commissioner will provide leadership in faithfully implementing the UN resolutions on combating racism.

We recall that both the general assembly and the Council have stressed the importance of fully integrating the matter of combating racism into the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as Vienna +30.

Both Civil Society and Member States have repeatedly expressed their concern over the failure by the OHCHR to give justice to the Durban Declaration of programme of Action.

At its 51st session the Council requested the UN secretariat and OHCHR to implement fully what the General Assembly had asked them to do already in 2020 for the 20th anniversary of the DDPA, including a public outreach campaign and increasing efforts to promote the true nature of the text of the DDPA.

The Council also requested the OHCHR to publish the adopted Programme of activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent in brochure format, for wide dissemination. We have waited since the first year of the International Decade for the OHCHR to publish the Programme of the Decade and would expect that now finally in the 9th year of the Decade it will be done, in particular as a specific budget has been provided for it.

8. GICJ denounces the war crimes committed in Myanmar



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Item 2: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

Mr.

Original: Arabic

Delivered by Islam Almadhoun / GICJ

¹Crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar

Mr. President, We would first like to thank the High Commissioner for his report and the efforts of his office in documenting the violations that occur in Myanmar. The Rohingya Muslims seek justice and a safe and dignified return to their homes with their security guaranteed and their full citizenship and return of their land. Therefore, addressing the root causes of human rights violations that have been

going on since Decades in Myanmar are more important than ever, especially with the increasing brutality of the army and security forces Myanmar through airstrikes, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, killings, and displacement forced, and burned their villages.

The military authorities recently used the death penalty against four advocates. Democracy in the country represents a new crime added to the series of continuing violations. As the High Commissioner knows, 600,000 Rohingya remain in the Reich State, and 135,000 have been detained. Some of them are in camps, and they all live under an apartheid regime and oppression applied by the military authorities. They rarely get international attention. In addition, the Myanmar military has intensified its abusive policies, further restricting basic human rights, including the claim of Rohingya Muslims and their affiliated persons to ethnic minorities to obtain permission to travel within and outside Rakhine State, and to arrest those alleged to be violating them. This discriminatory policy, in addition to the humiliating searches of individuals.

The Maonah Organization and the Geneva International Center for Justice, stressing that the impunity of the military has led to the increasing commission of these crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide against the Rohingya Muslims and people belonging to ethnic minorities, so we call for the establishment of a court to prosecute the military in the course of Myanmar's independent investigative mechanism collects evidence and prepares cases, and we call for recommending a referral to the Security Council The situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court .

9. GICJ call on the international community to strongly condemn the involvement of Iran in Yemen



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Item 3: General debate on the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

17 March 2023
Statement of Association Ma'onah for Human rights and Immigration and Geneva
International Centre for Justice

Delivered by Sasha Granelli / GICJ

Thank you President,

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains a key issue as 21.6 million people require humanitarian assistance in 2023. This assistance faces multiple challenges due to access constraints and the dangerous security environment maintained by the continuing involvement of Iran in supporting the Houthi militia.

Iran's continued provision of lethal aid to the Houthi militia is a case in point, demonstrating its influence and liability for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Houthi Militia.

We support any comprehensive agreement for a just peace which stops the war in Yemen. This is necessary. But we draw the Council's attention to the fact that any bilateral or regional agreement with Iran should not be used to escape its responsibility of the violation of the principles of the UN Charter and international humanitarian law.

Iran, as a member state of the United Nations, must be held accountable in accordance with international law for its involvement in several crimes, in Yemen.

Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration and Geneva International Centre for Justice call on the international community to strongly condemn the involvement of Iran and to encourage States to refer the situation in Yemen to the International Criminal Court to open a comprehensive international criminal investigation into war crimes, crimes against humanity and other grave violations by Iran and its militia.

Thank you.

10. GICJ condemns the consequences of the illegal invasion in Iraq 20 years ago



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General Debate Item 3

17th March 2023

Statement of International-Lawyers.Org

Delivered by Martin Browne / GICJ

Thank you

It was the first time I heard my Dad swear. As the invasion of Iraq started in March 2003 - 20 years to the day. What was called “shock and awe” was awful, and shocking.

The invasion was illegal - states broke the foundational prohibition against the Use of Force - ripped international law, cloaked in false justifications, pretending there was an underlying humanitarianism. It was a House of Cards for which there has been no accountability or justice. Those countries that invaded Iraq are still seated at the Security Council, still controlling foreign territory, and still seeking to exploit the resources of sovereign nations.

For Iraq itself, the consequences of the illegal invasion include the incomprehensible loss of over 1 million individual human lives. The country has suffered to this day under control of armed

militias, unconstrained sectarian violence and power struggles exacerbated by foreign intervention. To this day, thousands of those forcibly disappeared in these conflicts have not been found.

Yet, in the USA and UK - the impact of war has left almost no mark. The violations of 2003 are barely remembered and no-one has been prosecuted for the breaches of international law that took place.

The NGOs cosponsoring this statement urge the Council to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the previous and ongoing human rights violations in Iraq. The impact of the invasion of Iraq was profound and long-lasting. As a reminder that it happened at all, we have these neat, round-number anniversaries, and the graves.

11. GICJ urge Ethiopia to investigate and ensure justice to victims of violations of human rights



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Item 4 : International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia

21 March 2023

Statement of International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Delivered by Tamir Boldbaatar / GICJ

Thank you Mr. President,

We thank the Commission on Human Rights for its report and update on the crisis.

Since November 2020, violations such as extrajudicial killings, rape, sexual violence, and starvation of the civilian have been committed in Ethiopia. Tigrayan forces killed civilians and damaged or destroyed civilian infrastructure and property in Kobo and Chenna in August and September 2021. Killings were accompanied by additional acts of violence and brutality, such as beatings and rapes of women. The effect of rape and sexual violence on survivors has been enormous, they face devastating long-term impacts on their physical and mental health.

Conflict has led to displacement, lack of essential services for populations. There is a dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection for 20 million people suffering in the country.

EAFORD and Geneva International Centre for Justice urge Ethiopia to investigate and bring to justice members of its forces who have committed serious violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law. The described violations amount to crimes against humanity and we strongly condemn the brutal abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. The Ethiopian Government urgently needs to commit to peace negotiations in order to bring an end to the conflict. Thank you.

12. GICJ voiced concerns on the stark repression against indigenous people and human rights defenders



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Agenda item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention
Interactive dialogue on the oral update of the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

21st March 2023

Statement of Meezan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice

Delivered by Juanita Beltran / GICJ

Thank you.

We welcome the independent fact-finding mission on the human rights in Venezuela. We remain however concerned about the situation affecting indigenous communities and human rights defenders.

The threats indigenous communities and other minorities face in the gold mining areas is unacceptable. Many of them are coerced into sexual abuse through threats of violence, restrictions on their freedom of movement and torture. The indigenous population has to fight against the exploitative interests of both the state and criminal groups. As a response the government militarized indigenous territories resulting in massive abuses of power and human rights violations. Consequently, several indigenous leaders have been targeted. This constant invasion to their territories and natural resources violates both domestic and international instruments on indigenous people's rights.

Furthermore, Human Rights Defenders are under attack. The draft law on control and financing of non-governmental and related organizations possess an imminent threat to freedom of expression through permitting their permanent surveillance. This legislation would grant the state the right to arbitrarily arrest and sanction human rights defenders on grounds of threats to national sovereignty.

Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice encourage the state of Venezuela to reconsider passing this draft law as the consequences of this could result in a further deepening of the humanitarian crisis the country has been in for years now.

I Thank you.

13. GICJ condemn the unlawful use of enforced disappearance in Iran and Yemen



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Item 4: General debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention, report by the High Commissioner on DPRK

22 March 2023

Statement of Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration and Geneva International Centre for Justice

Delivered by Sasha Granelli / GICJ

Thank you President,

The practice of enforced disappearance is a crime under international law and it's the Council responsibility to condemn and sanction it.

The expansion of this continuous violation of human rights in several States remains a key issue such as in Iran, where the government uses it to unfairly and disproportionately repress the growing number of peaceful protesters fighting for their human rights. Authorities are arbitrarily arresting people across the country in total impunity. Enforced disappearances are not a new phenomenon in Iran history and are widespread in other countries.

This influence is a terrible fact in states like Yemen where militias financed and trained by Iran have forcibly disappeared thousands of people in Yemen. These violations are faced by journalists, human rights activists but also civilians in order to silence criticism and protest. Most of them are

detained in unofficial centres where they are tortured, deprived of any freedom and even die in detention leaving their families in total ignorance of their fate.

Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) condemn the expansion of this practice and call for the release of those arbitrarily detained and disappeared. We urge the international community and this Council to take serious steps against the expansion of this crime and ensure accountability for all the victims and families.

14. Twenty years of destruction of Iraq as a result of the American invasion



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Joint of International-Lawyers.Org, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Migration and Geneva International Centre for Justice.

Statement at GD-Item 4

Delivered by Naji Haraj / GICJ

Mr. President,

These days, the world remembers the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and the subsequent occupation. Twenty years of killing, torturing and destroying Iraqi society. There are no accurate statistics of the victims, as this was not permitted, but it is certain that more than a million Iraqis have lost their lives as a result of this, and that hundreds of thousands have suffered horrific forms of torture and inhumane treatment.

The country's infrastructure was also destroyed, the health and education systems collapsed, and the state was administered by an abhorrent sectarian system of government.

There has been a widespread and systematic violation of all the basic rights of the Iraqi people, the first of which is the right to life. Innocent people were arbitrarily imprisoned in prisons and detention centres, and we still receive daily documents documenting the death of detainees as a result of torture and ill-treatment.

The invasion of Iraq is a blatant and reprehensible act of aggression that undermined the concept of the supremacy of international law and violated all principles of international humanitarian law. Despite the passage of two decades, the planners and perpetrators of the invasion have not faced any formal judicial accountability.

From here, the Human Rights Council should take over the disastrous consequences of the invasion and seek to send an independent international fact-finding mission to Iraq to investigate it.

Thank you

15. GICJ is concerned about the human rights of minorities and children in Finland



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Agenda item 6: Universal Periodic Review – Finland Statement of Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice

Delivered by Juanita Beltran / GICJ

Thank you, President.

We commend the report of the Working Group and thank Finland for participating in the Universal Periodic Review. However, we remain deeply concerned about issues regarding women, minorities and children's rights.

Although Finland has undertaken significant steps to ensure justice, the Sami people are still targets of discrimination and marginalization. One of the main issues that Sami people have faced is the denial of their traditional land rights. The Finnish government has historically implemented policies, which have interfered with the traditional way of life of the Sami's people. For instance, threats on construction of railway networks. With the new reform on the Sámi Parliament Act, which its purpose is to promote the right of self-determination for these people, Finland has failed to find common ground on matters of the eligibility criteria for voting and running elections to the Sami Parliament. In matters of education the Finnish government should consider the idea of implementing within the educational system incentives for students to learn about the Sami culture and avoid a future marginalization.

Additionally, we remain concerned about the situation of the Finnish children detained in northern Syria. These children have been held in Syrian camps due to alleged links of their parents with Daesh. The dire conditions in which they currently are living are deplorable. These camps are overcrowded, unhygienic and lack clean drinking water. As a result, they suffer from serious malnutrition and other diseases. A country like Finland which has the legal resources to take action in the matter and repatriate these children should not be facing serious violations of the Convention on the rights of the child. Finland has violated several articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice remain deeply concerned about the human rights of minorities and children in Finland.

Therefore, we join along with other states to the following recommendations:

- 1) Finland ratifies the ILO convention 169 on indigenous people's rights.
- 2) Guarantee the right to freedom and life through repatriation of the children in Northern Syria and
- 3) Reform the Sami Parliament Act to ensure a fair eligibility criterion for voting elections

We believe that it is imperative to cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms in order to tackle these challenges. Therefore we look forward to the implementation of the UPR outcome in Finland and further developments on this matter.

I thank you.

16. GICJ commends the Kingdom of the Netherlands to take further action regarding climate change



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 6: Universal periodic review of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Date: 28 March 2023

Statement of EAFORD and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Delivered by Kiyana Newell / GICJ

Thank you, vice President.

We welcome the report of the Working group, and we thank The Kingdom of the Netherlands for participating in the Universal Periodic Review.

We commend the Kingdom of the Netherlands for supporting the promotion of the full protection of its kingdom, including the Caribbean from the negative effects of climate change, and considering fiscal policy creation and implementation, with keeping in mind vulnerable groups as states have recommended.

We also commend the State's objective to eliminate differences in human rights protection and welfare levels between the European and the Caribbean Netherlands.

However, there is still much to be done regarding climate change in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The reports of islands not receiving enough financial or general support in this regard is alarming. Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable groups and currently there are little safety nets to circumvent the impact of climate change to those in the Caribbean.

The International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) wants the Kingdom of the Netherlands to take further action regarding climate change as soon as possible in order to protect everyone under climate change.

Furthermore, we recommend the full implementation of effective measures to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change including the least socioeconomic resilient groups in the Dutch Caribbean. The support for climate change cannot wait and the impact of it is deadly for those who need support the most.

I Thank You.

17. GICJ urge the Council to act on the resolution to end Israeli policies and occupation



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Item 7: General Debate on the Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

29th March 2023

Statement of Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration

Delivered by Sasha Granelli / GICJ

Thank you Mr Vice-President,

We welcome the High Commissioner's reports. We were appalled that only one state responded to the request for information about accountability measures taken.

Given the High Commissioner's concerns about the independence, impartiality and transparency of the scant few investigations taken by the Israeli occupation authorities we urge all states present today, to take immediate steps to address the failure to take accountability measures for the innumerable human rights violations since 2008.

75 years after the UN Partition Plan for Palestine, civil society gathers again today to strongly denounce the suffering of the Palestinian people and ask when the next step towards resolution can be taken.

Each of the NGOs speaking today has highlighted human rights abuses, each of which compounds the suffering of an occupied oppressed people, each of which goes un-investigated and unaddressed domestically.

We welcome the investigations being carried out by the Commission of Inquiry on the OPT and Israel. Will states provide support for the OPT Investigations, will states condemn attacks against human rights defenders and UN mandate holders?

Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration and Geneva International Centre for Justice urge the Human Rights Council and every State to finally act on the numerous UN resolutions in order to end the Israeli brutal policies and occupation.

Thank you.

18. GICJ condemn the illegal expansion and repression of human rights against Palestinians and Syrians



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Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

Report of the Secretary-General on human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan

Report of the High Commissioner on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan A/HRC/49/85

29 March 2023

Delivered by Juanita Beltran / GICJ

Thank you.

We welcome the report of the High Commissioner on Israeli settlements. We would like to draw attention to the suppression of peaceful protests as well as the accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law.

The occupying power has continuously committed the most serious transgressions of international law, being the violation of the rights to life, safety, and freedom of movement. The excessive use of force and further escalation of hostilities is taking the lives of thousands of civilians and compounding a complex humanitarian emergency that must be addressed now.

Peaceful protests by Palestinians supported by local activists against evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and which spread to other parts of Jerusalem were violently suppressed. Israeli police have even

allowed armed Israelis beyond the previous imposed checkpoints fueling confrontation and intentionally escalating violence.

The lack of accountability has created a general climate of impunity applied so far to continuous attacks by Israeli security forces in the context of unlawful deaths, demonstrations, and investigation of these acts in the occupied settlements.

Meezaan Center for Human Rights and Geneva International Centre for Justice strongly condemn the illegal expansion and further repression of human rights against Palestinians and Syrians by Israeli forces. We call for an immediate end to all practices that jeopardize the right to protest, life, safety and freedom of movement.

19. GICJ reiterate the necessity to identify existing racialized challenges and barriers



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 9: Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance General Debate

Statement of International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)

Delivered by Mutua K. Kobia

Thank you President,

We are deeply appalled that the scourge of racism and racial discrimination continues to plague the world today. Systemic and institutionalized racism, various forms of discrimination as well as identifying and addressing invisible challenges and barriers needs much more serious attention. Furthermore, we strongly recommend effective inclusion of victims and affected communities as they are paramount in achieving accountability and redress.

Furthermore, we encourage the inclusion of experts in civil, political, social and cultural fields as noted in the DDPA as well as the need for and incorporation of special measures to combat racism and racial discrimination.

Mr. President, As we re-emphasize the importance of Item 9 on the agenda of the HRC we would also like to draw attention to the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. In this regard, we recall the reaffirmation of the full and effective implementation of the DDPA which is the primary document for the recognition of the rights of People of African Descent. In light of this, we express concern that the Forum is unable to base its work on the full implementation of the DDPA.

In conclusion, EAFORD and Geneva International Centre for Justice, reiterate the paramount necessity to identify existing racialized challenges and barriers that come in various forms including legal hurdles and other types of human rights violations. Finally, we note that the history of justifying and enabling colonial domination together with neo-colonial mind-sets enables the evil of racism to persist.

20. GICJ stresses the importance of good faith implementation of UN resolutions by the UN and OHCHR



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Item 9: General debate on Xenophobia, Racism, Racial Discrimination and Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Joint statement with International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN), Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration

Delivered by Frizia Rounak /GICJ

Mr President,

As we are approaching the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration we wish to stress the importance of good faith implementation of UN resolutions by the UN secretariat and the OHCHR.

Both after the 10th anniversary and the 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Human Rights Council has felt the need to address the failure by the OHCHR to support these anniversaries. In October 2022 the OHCHR was requested by the Council to fully implement what the General Assembly had requested it to do for 2021, namely a public information campaign and by increasing efforts to promote the true nature of the DDPA.

And of the specific DDPA outreach programme which the Council decided on in 2021 very little has been seen, in particular with regard to correcting disinformation on the real content of the DDPA.

Despite repeated calls from member states and civil society the OHCHR have so far refused to publish the General Assembly adopted Programme of Activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent in view of the OHCHR difference with the two opening paragraphs of the Programme. At its 51st session the Council made a formal request to the OHCHR to publish the Decade programme in an easily accessible brochure format for wide dissemination. We are still waiting for this request by the Council to be implemented.

21. GICJ urges the international community to aid the Commission of Inquiry in Ukraine



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Agenda item 10: Technical assistance and capacity-building - Interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on the findings of OHCHR report on the situation of human rights in Ukraine 31 March 2023

Statement of Meezan Center for Human Rights

Delivered by Bethany Morley / GICJ

Thank you President and we would like to thank the High Commissioner for his report.

The commission of enquiry found that acts in Ukraine may amount to crimes against humanity. The scale and severity of the war between the two countries has become extremely apparent.

It has been over a year since the invasion, yet the aggression of the war is continuing to increase; arbitrary executions; thousands more subjected to forced deportation, sexual violence, and torture; and ill-treatment of children, besides the destruction of the whole cities.

Time and time again, States, the international community and UN Mechanisms watch the most vulnerable suffer at the hands of aggression. As we have learnt from past invasions, being silent is being complicit. Those in this room cannot continue to be silent in the continuing of this destructive war.

We need immediate collective efforts to stop the war. Every day millions of people are suffering from the continuation of conflicts and wars around the world, how many times are we going to watch people suffer before we achieve Peace?

Meezan Center for Human Rights and GICJ give our fullest support to the victims of the continuing war. The Russian Federation and Ukraine must sit together and negotiate a peace plan. We urge the international community to aid in funding the commission of inquiry to allow for the mandate to be carried out effectively.

22. GICJ calls for support on capacity building and technical cooperation



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Item 10: General Debate

2nd April 2023

Statement of the International Organization for The Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and Geneva International Centre for Justice.

Delivered by Martin Browne / GICJ

Thank you,

We welcome the Report of the Board of Trustees and all the work that goes into technical cooperation missions worldwide.

We note the frustrations raised by the Board about some aspects, including sharing of best practice across teams - and the need for greater capacity within the OHCHR to better link analysis with programmatic action - to close protection gaps. It is vital that States are open to taking the next

steps - to increase the effectiveness of technical cooperation. It is vital that States participating today - fund this vital work properly.

Capacity Building underpins why we are all here - to ensure universality of the promotion and protection of human rights - in every single country, to elevate these concerns above politics wherever we can.

EAFORD and Geneva International Centre for Justice agree with the Board's conclusion and call on all decisions on policy and programming to include the voices of marginalised peoples left behind or ignored by other politically-driven processes in certain member states.

The Funds would benefit from expanding on how NGOs in Geneva and in the field can assist further in the development of a networked and effective multilateralism to respond to severe challenges in countries covered by the fund such as Yemen, but also those not currently included such as Iraq.

Technical cooperation plays a vital role in protecting civil society particularly by ensuring free assembly and free expression. Civil Society works best when it works free from fear. Our collective work in this room is enhanced when NGOs can go about their vital protection work unhindered.

Written Statements

Iraq: The Struggle to Combat Enforced Disappearance

Joint Statement

Agenda item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Executive Summary

Enforced disappearances have been a widespread issue in Iraq since the 2003 United States of America invasion. The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) estimates that between a quarter of a million and one million people are missing in Iraq. The reasons behind the disappearances vary, though they all result from the decades of war, conflict, sectarianism, and suffering that have plagued the country.

The Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior both play a crucial role in enforced disappearances by conducting widespread campaigns of arrest and detention across Iraq. Most of those arrested are not registered, families are not informed of their whereabouts, and in many cases, even the local authorities do not receive sufficient information.

Over time, and after many years of CSO's and international bodies urging the United Nations to provide more recognition to enforced disappearances in Iraq, the Human Rights Council and treaty body mechanisms of the United Nations have started to pay more attention. However, despite efforts to curb these atrocities in Iraq, cases of enforced disappearance only seem to be escalating, and efforts must be increased to put an end to this injustice.

GICJ's Discussion Reports

GICJ participated in several meetings during the Human Rights Council 52. In total GICJ delivered 23 reports, where the meetings were summarized and discussed. By the end of every article GICJ stated its critical positions to each meeting. By clicking in each of the following links you can access the corresponding article.

1. Commemoration the 35th Anniversary of the Declaration of the Right to Development and Prioritising the Challenges Ahead



By Kiyana Newell / GICJ

"The Right to Development is not about enriching the few and exploitation of the many but rather advancing equity and justice for all", said High Commissioner of Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk.

During the Full Day High-Level Meeting on the 28th of February and the 1st of March 2023, delegations and panellists welcomed the 35th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development. High Level Panellists Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Mr. Volker Türk, and Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus gave opening statements regarding the challenges of implementing the Right to Development. They highlighted the full importance of international cooperation in realising this right. The international community faces substantial inequalities, the economic impacts of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, and hindered efforts combating human-induced climate change outcomes.

During the interactive dialogue, the delegates from South Africa, Maldives, and Botswana amongst others stressed the importance of the international community fully realising the Right to Development

and specified efforts to ensure it within their countries. Furthermore, the delegate from South Africa insisted on the legally binding nature of the right to address worldly challenges. Additionally, the delegates from the Maldives and Botswana discussed their policy implementations to help fast recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) commends the efforts made by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and member states to better establish the Right to Development and also create policy changes to protect individuals from economic shocks. Regardless, we note with concern that despite the efforts made, there is still much to be done in fully realising and implementing the Right to Development. Therefore, GICJ calls for action in addressing inequalities and improved participation from member states.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

2. Nicaragua's deterioration of the human rights situation scrutinized by experts



By Juanita Beltrán and Isabel García / GICJ

On the 3rd and 7th of March 2023, the Human Rights Council entertained two important meetings regarding the human rights situation in Nicaragua. On the one hand, the High Commissioner delivered an oral update, which stressed the systematic violation of human rights to political opponents of the government of Nicaragua. The High Commissioner exposed the different testimonies of violations of economic, social and cultural rights that millions of Nicaraguans face. On the other hand, the group of experts highlighted major conclusions from their mandate. In the report, the group of experts detailed the illegal actions perpetrated by the current government of Nicaragua that have occurred since the presidential elections in 2018. Extrajudicial killings, an evident systemic violation of civil and political

rights, crimes against humanity and accountability for those crimes were some of the topics that the group of experts highlighted in their report.

Geneva International Centre for Justice stands in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua. We strongly condemn the systematic human rights violation exposed both in the Oral Update of the High Commissioner and the Group of Experts. Furthermore, we encourage Nicaragua to cooperate with the UN mechanisms and the work of the experts to repair the victims and reestablish peace in the country.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

3. Civilian Government is the Best Chance for Sudan



By Natalia Venegas / GICJ

On the 3rd of March 2022, at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, an interactive Dialogue took place on the High Commissioner's updated report on Sudan.

The High Commissioner on Human Rights pointed out that signing the agreement on the 5th of December 2022 was the first act of restoring civilian rule and the transition to democracy for Sudan. He also showed concern over using emergency legislation in violation of human rights.

The High Commissioner travelled to Sudan last November for his first country visit as High Commissioner. He witnessed a country at a critical juncture. There was pain born from decades of conflict, but there was also hope for change. The signing of the political framework agreement on the 5th of December 2022 was an important step towards the restoration of civilian rule and the transition to democracy.

The High Commissioner pointed out that people in Sudan look forward to safely returning to their lands. He also pointed out that women have been at the front of peaceful protest and civil society action during the transitional government. Moreover, they have been victims of hate speech and harassment both online and offline. The High Commissioner also noted that the cost of essential services, food and fuel has increased. In addition, the population is under enormous pressure because of the increased imposition of taxes and fees, including school fees.

The signing of the political framework agreement on the 5th of December 2022 was also a first, important step towards the restoration of civilian rule and the transition to democracy. Mr Türk urged that solid commitments to human rights and justice be enshrined in the final agreement. All those responsible for human rights violations and abuses must be held accountable. A review of emergency legislation was needed to ensure that any amendments were entirely in line with international human rights law.

The representative of Sudan highlighted that women's rights have always been a priority for the country and that the constitutional document has provided positive discrimination for women. They have been given 40% of the seats in the registrative Council to guarantee their representation. They have also been working to access the CEDAW and implement Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Sudan called on the Human Rights Council to reconsider the diversity of mechanisms in the country - multiplicity led to duplication of efforts and overlap of jurisdiction. Sudan would continue to work as part of this Council to achieve the purposes for which it had been established.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) urges the Sudanese government to continue implementing and guaranteeing women's rights as critical players in the democratic process. Furthermore, to maintain the well-being of its citizens, Sudan must guarantee security to allow them to return to their lands safely, as well as access to education, food, and essential goods.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

4. In light of a deadly 2021 and 2022, human rights violations by Israel in the OPT show not the slightest sign of a slowdown

By Farah Caïdi

2022 saw the highest number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the past 17 years. 2023 is closely following the same trend. In his report, the High Commissioner for human rights warned of lethal force

being regularly used by Israeli Security Forces as an initial measure rather than a last resort measure, regardless of the level of threats they face.

Additionally, 2022 marked the highest number of Palestinians in administrative detention in 15 years. Being held in administrative detention means being denied access to a proper defence, trial, and legal detention conditions.

Settlements' implementations are on the rise, further dividing and fragmenting Palestinian Occupied Territory. These settlers' outposts, encouraged by the Israeli government, are only fueling settlers' violence against Palestinians.

Finally, Palestinian civil society is more than ever threatened by Israel. With the aim of instilling fear and breaking their influence, human rights organisations especially suffer from Israeli reprisals, thus impacting the whole society. Many of them have warned about this alarming trend.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the work of the High Commissioner and calls for accountability to be the priority when coming to examine the Israel/Palestine question.

The present report's recommendations to achieve accountability clearly converge with other UN mechanisms' conclusions. The *Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel* identified "forced displacement, threats of forced displacement, demolitions, settlement construction and expansion, settler violence, and the blockade of Gaza as contributing factors to recurring cycles of violence". The Commission emphasised that **impunity and perpetual occupation are the root causes of escalating tensions and violence. Therefore, the cycle of violence can only be broken when impunity is no more.**

[Click here to read the full article](#)

5. The de facto authority measures leading to a graveyard of unimplemented international norms



By Tamir Boldbaatar and Sasha Granelli

At the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council on March 6th 2023, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Benett raised multiple concerns about the violations of women and girls rights in the country, additionally over the discrimination against minorities. The Special Rapporteur also pointed out the negative impact of the economic crisis on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, which has worsened by the humanitarian aid challenges to access Afghan people.

Since the last report from the Special Rapporteur on September 9th, 2022, human rights violations have deteriorated in Afghanistan and women's rights have completely disappeared. Women and girls have been totally evicted from society. They are being excluded from school and university, they face multiple interdiction to work and remain highly discriminated against, and are subjected to gender persecution.

Moreover, violence continues to be spread throughout Afghan society, especially against religious minorities. The political and economic crisis made poverty grow, and the violations of the rule of law left Afghan people without any legal protection.

International investigations have resumed on the crimes committed in Afghanistan, which like the Special Rapporteur said, is a good start. However, the international community needs to do more in order to protect Afghan people and to ensure the respect of human rights by the de facto authority.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), in line with the Special Rapporteur, strongly condemn all the human rights violations perpetrated against Afghani people by the de facto authorities. Maeva Giambrone of GICJ spoke at the Human Rights Council during the Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. In its joint statement with Meezaan Center for Human Rights, Geneva International Centre for Justice condemned the measures adopted and the disproportionate repression they have resorted to against these women and appealed to the international community to continue their efforts to force the Taliban to respect international law.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

6. Intolerance, impunity and humanitarian neglect at the centre of South Sudan challenges to achieve durable peace and reconciliation



By Aimara Pujadas Clavel /GICJ

On the 7th of March 2023, at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Andrew Clapham, on behalf of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, presented the annual report of the Commission.

Based on investigations undertaken in the country the report identified widespread attacks against civilians, systematic sexual violence against women and girls, unlawful detentions, the ongoing presence of child soldiers, and State-sponsored extrajudicial killings.

During the interactive dialogue concerns were raised about the current atmosphere of fear, repression and humanitarian crisis in the country, with senior public officials and military officers allegedly being

responsible for crimes against people demanding civic rights and yet enjoying impunity for their gross human rights violations.

Calls were made for the government to guarantee human rights protection, as well as foment the necessary dialogue with civic actors to achieve durable peace.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) encourages the South Sudanese government to provide assistance to people in need, particularly children who suffer the devastating effects of the ongoing instability. The government should guarantee human rights protection, and initiate dialogue with civic actors to achieve durable peace.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

7. Rights of the Child in a Digital Environment and Addressing the Digital Divide



By Kiyana Newell / GICJ

“We know that this rapid progress in technology doesn’t come without risks...” said the High Commissioner of Human Rights.

On March 10th 2023, during the Annual full-day meeting on the Rights of the Child, Panellists such as Mr. Philip Jaffé, and delegates discussed obstacles to protecting children’s rights in the digital environment. For the first time in history, children like Marina and Nidhi were able to speak about their experiences as a child in the digital environment. As panellists at the Human Rights Council, they addressed member states and the High Commissioner alike about their concerns and asked what efforts are being made to circumvent harms they may experience as well as the lack of internet access they and their peers’ face .

In this digital age, children are more connected than ever before. But with new opportunities to express themselves online, there are risks that expose children to harassment, exploitation, breaches of privacy, addiction, and bullying among other harms. Another challenge children face is access to technology such as computers, phones, and tablets, especially in lesser developed countries. Access is necessary for children's ability to receive information and a good education.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the opportunities made for children in the digital environment. Additionally, we welcome the interest and commitment to children's safety in the digital environment of the Human Rights Council, specifically for not allowing videos or pictures to be taken of the children panellist during the full-day meeting. However, we are concerned about the trajectory of the digital environment regarding the rights of children and the increasing digital divide. Due to these new challenges posed by the internet, we call on member states to create and implement policy changes to regulate the harms experienced by children.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

8. Human Rights Implications of New Technologies in Counterterrorism



By Danya Al-Thani / GICJ

On the 14th of March 2023, the Special Rapporteur on Counterterrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, presented a report that primarily discussed the human rights implications of new technologies developed and utilised against terrorism and extremism. She also wished to provide technical assistance in the development of legislation to promote human rights alongside the usage of new technologies in counterterrorism.

She maintained that new technologies had played a key role in enhancing security. However, the development of new technologies, such as unmanned vehicles and biometric technologies, have undermined human rights and also weakened collective security. While adopting the new technologies, many countries have failed to establish related legislation associated with advocating human rights. For example, technology has been used to promote xenophobic behaviours on social media and propounded extremist ideology.

The report holds that policymakers have failed to establish effective regulations on counter-terrorism practices. As a result, various trends in counterterrorist policies have jeopardised the rule of law and the processes of protecting human rights. This includes the use of high-risk technologies, a lack of adequate human rights analysis as well as the use of new innovations in diverse security contexts.

She argues that authorities have increased their use of artificial intelligence to control citizens through coercion. Similarly, surveillance by cyber technologies has been linked to the violation of human rights. There have been concerns over the use of biometric data in the occupied Palestinian territories and Somalia as well as the use of drones to conduct constant surveillance.

The adoption of laws to protect individual and community rights in relation to technology and unmanned vehicles are recommended. She also recommends the implementation of oversight initiatives.

In her report, she also summarised the work she has undertaken as a Special Rapporteur. She has been focused on promoting community engagement, especially in counter-terrorism initiatives, civil society practices as well as human rights. She has also provided technical assistance in the development of legislation in countries including New Zealand, China, the Netherlands, Thailand and Turkey. In February 2023, she visited Guantanamo Bay concerning secret detention in the context of countering terrorism by the government of the United States of America. Further visits are scheduled to take place in spring 2023.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) calls for a cease-and-desist policy on the transfer of autonomous weapons systems to states with a history of human rights violations. We also urge a moratorium on the transfer of surveillance technology and the establishment of a global regulatory framework for their use.

GICJ stresses the need for international cooperation to tackle the human rights challenges arising from new technologies in the context of counter-terrorism and countering extremism. Additionally, GICJ urges the international community to prioritise fighting against terrorist acts that impede the realisation

of human rights, which threaten global stability and undermine human rights. States must ensure that those detained under counterterrorism measures are treated fairly and that fundamental rights are protected at all times.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

9. A call to action for protection against discrimination and violence: Insights from the 52nd session of the HRC



By Frizia Rounak / GICJ

From the 13th to the 15th of March 2023, at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), an Interactive dialogue took place with the Special Rapporteur (SR), Nazila Ghanea, on the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). In her report and presentation at the Council, Ghanea emphasised that FoRB is a universal right and not limited to the Western world. Her mandate consists of three dimensions. First, to advance FoRB for everyone, second to prohibit any discrimination based on religion or belief, and third to deny human rights in the name of religion or belief.

The report highlights that the manifestation of FoRB is not subject to derogation or limitations on the grounds of national security. Ghanea's report concludes with recommendations addressed to states, international organisations, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organisations, and faith-based actors.

During the interactive dialogue, various countries and their representatives shared their views and concerns on the subject. For example Qatar's profound concern regarding the incidents of the Quran

being burned in many countries, the EU's commitment to maintaining an open, transparent, and regular dialogue with religious associations or communities, and Pakistan's request for the SR's views on ongoing discussions to bridge the existing gaps.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) remains concerned about the alarming rise in religious discrimination and violence across the globe. We call for a global commitment to protect the right to FoRB and to put an end to discriminatory practices. States are urged to uphold the right to religious freedom, refrain from policies that suppress religious practices, and address human rights challenges related to countering terrorism and extremism. GICJ urges states to prosecute perpetrators of inciting discrimination and hate and prioritise fighting all forms of religiously motivated violence. Furthermore, states must ensure counter-terrorism measures do not violate human rights, and promote a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

10. Concerns over the prevalence of torture in all states



By Maeva Giambrone / GICJ

On the 14th of March 2023, the 26th meeting of the 52nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council considered the report of Ms. Alice Jill Edwards, Special Rapporteur on torture (A/HRC/52/30) during an interactive dialogue.

Ms. Jill Edwards opened the interactive dialogue by presenting the findings of her latest report, which focused on the good practices in national criminalisation, investigation, prosecution and sentencing for torture offences. Her report also presented positive state practices that should be encouraged and maintained. For example, at least 105 countries have adopted an explicit criminal offence of torture.

The Special Rapporteur underlined that any obstacle to impartial and prompt investigation, such as a lack of will, is unacceptable. The national duty to investigate is alarmingly insufficient. The Special Rapporteur pointed at a “glaring gap” between the promise and reality of the international prohibition of torture and recalled that every State has a duty to criminalise and investigate crimes of torture in national law, prosecute or extradite suspects, and sentence offenders with penalties that reflect the gravity of the offence.

Various delegations stressed the importance of establishing independent special procedures since the majority of crimes of torture are committed or at least facilitated by public officials. It is, therefore, essential that these victims and witnesses are heard in order to start their healing process. However, concerns were raised about the many reasons why victims are reluctant to report, especially the lack of trust in the judicial system. Delegations also raised the importance of applying the Mendez Principles during interrogations to reduce the risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Many civil society groups welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur and urged states to criminalise torture in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention while providing for adequate incrimination. In addition, NGOs encouraged states to use non-coercive interrogation techniques as provided for in the Mendez Principles.

The Special Rapporteur concluded the discussion by urging states to end impunity for those who commit acts of torture and respect their duty to investigate. In order to do that, Ms Jill Edwards emphasised that states need to address structural obstacles:

- By applying zero tolerance for the political aspect
- By applying the most important principles of fairness, speed and transparency
- By changing their practice by implementing important tools such as the Istanbul Protocol and the Mendez Principles to obtain information in the most respectful way possible.
- By deconstructing this entrenched culture to make way for a system of rule of law, an independent judiciary and a system that does not prescribe crimes of torture.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) congratulates the Special Rapporteur for her very detailed report on good practices to criminalise, investigate and prosecute crimes of torture. We remain extremely concerned about the high number of reports of torture today, even in democratic states. It is necessary to give full effect to the international obligation to prevent and punish all cases of torture. We join the Special Rapporteur to urge national authorities to take ownership of justice processes and operate as primary responders in cases of torture and other inhuman treatment.

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11. Increase in violence against children as access to digital spaces increases.



By Bethany Morley / GICJ

On the 16th of March 2023, at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council, an Interactive dialogue took place with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Dr. Najat Maalla M’Jid, on violence against children. The report’s focus was on the correlation between the ever-increasing digital space, and the serious risk this poses to the rights of children being violated. These risks include, but are not limited to, cyberbullying, online sexual exploitation, exposure to violent and sexual content, promotion of self-harm, radicalisation, hate speech, trafficking and smuggling, and recruitment into extremist groups.

Delegations such as the European Union and South Sudan praised the Special Representative’s work thus far, highlighting the importance of putting children at the centre of decision making, listening to their lived experiences, and filling the gaps in legal framework to protect children.

However, the report of the Special Representative faced a line of critical comments regarding the inclusion of children. Delegates noted that including children in decision making, without parental guidance and sufficient life experience, can open avenues of exploitation and abuse. Though safeguarding measures are necessary, children’s participation builds on their lived experiences, creating a stronger and more inclusive legislative framework.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) remains concerned about the high levels of exploitation and violence experienced by children. We welcome the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General and the acknowledgement of the importance of ending global violence against children and how children can play a vital role by providing their lived experiences, to create a stronger and more inclusive legislative framework. Further, we welcome the participation of the delegations and the efforts made thus far to promote and protect the rights of children

12. Amidst renewed calls for the protection of children in armed conflict, three new countries added to the list of concern

By Isabelle Despicht / GICJ

On the 16th of March, 2022, an Interactive Dialogue of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict took place at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council. Covering the period from December 2021 to December 2022, the Special Representative, Ms. Virginia Gamba, discussed the findings of her report during an Interactive Dialogue at the 52nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

After the opening by the Vice-President, Ms. Virginia Gamba outlined her work conducted with UN Human Rights Mechanisms and the activities undertaken as part of her mandate. She addressed various challenges, such as numerous conflict escalations, the multiplication of armed actors, the use of mines, improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and explosive weapons in populated areas, and generally intensified humanitarian crises and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, amongst other things. During the ensuing interactive dialogue, various delegations expressed their views and concerns about the current state of affairs of children in armed conflict.

Numerous delegations called states to ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to the adoption of the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declarations.

The European Union, Lithuania, Poland and others addressed the human rights of children in Ukraine being forcibly deported to Russia and undergoing forced adoptions.

During the Interactive Dialogue, various Member States asked questions to the Special Representative, notably on the best "holistic approach" to tackle the most serious crimes against children in times of conflict. Various issues, such as child recruitment, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and the use of schools by military powers, were addressed.

In her concluding remarks, the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict noted the importance of holistic reintegration programmes. She emphasised that children must, in all circumstances, be considered victims instead of perpetrators and that the age of children should be considered as per the CRC. She further outlined the key priorities of the mandate looking forward.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) is appalled by the persisting violence faced by children in armed conflict and urgently calls the international community to take action to protect children. Standing with the report presented by the Special Representative, we believe that states have

the responsibility to protect children, who remain among the most vulnerable groups. GICJ calls on all states to ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Safe Schools Declaration as well as the Vancouver Principles. Further, we reiterate that while any additional code of conduct protecting children is welcome, it must do so by applying the definition of child provided for by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which considers all children as those under 18 years of age.

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13. Ukrainian Civilians forced to endure War Crimes by Russian Armed Forces



By Conall Corrigan / GICJ

On the 20th and 21st of March 2023, the 52nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) considered the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine (COI) on the human rights situation in Ukraine resulting from Russian aggression.

Mr Erik Møse, Chairperson of the Commission, noted that the report of the COI raises further concerns about the human rights and humanitarian situation in Ukraine. He highlighted that Russian authorities have committed a range of violations of international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL) throughout Ukraine. In the view of the COI, many of these violations amount to war crimes and include unlawful killings, attacks on civilians, torture, rape, and forced transfers and deportations of children. The Commission stressed that the destruction of key infrastructure and rising numbers of civilian casualties have impacted millions of people and have led to deteriorating living conditions and hampered access to food, water, and education. Mr Møse concluded by informing the

Council that the COI requires additional investigative and legal expertise as well as operational support to adequately fulfil its mandate.

Throughout the interactive dialogue, most states and NGOs continued to express concern about Ukraine's ongoing human rights situation and showed support for the work of the COI. Many called for the Council to extend the mandate of the Commission and appealed to the international community to ensure effective criminal accountability for perpetrators of rights abuses.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) reiterates its support for the work of the Commission and applauds its efforts to document and analyse the evidence of Russian war crimes within Ukraine. It is vital that the COI is adequately funded and provided with enough resources to carry out its mandate effectively. Moreover, it is essential that the international community, and all investigative teams involved in documenting human rights violations perpetrated in the region, coordinate efforts with the COI to hold all actors accountable for any crimes they may have committed. In addition to judicial measures, we strongly urge UN member states to adopt other dimensions of accountability including reparations to ensure non-recurrence.

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14. Ethiopia's transitional justice needs effective accountability



By Natalia Venegas / GICJ

On March 21st, Mr Mohamed Chande Othman, Chair of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, stated that the situation had evolved significantly. On the 2nd of November of 2023, the Federal Government and the Tigrayan Front (TPLF) signed a cessation of hostilities and a peace agreement, ending two years of armed conflict.

The International Commission of Experts stated that since the signing of the Agreement, the Federal government has pushed for a transitional justice process. This includes its current consultation on the

draft. However, according to the chairman, it is too soon to talk about success in the matter. According to the previous reports presented to the council, all parties to the conflict have committed war crimes.

The representative of Ethiopia highlighted the country's commitment to implementing the argument for lasting peace. He spoke about the increase in humanitarian aid, cease-fire and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of all forms of combatants. Compliance mechanisms of the African Union are overseeing this.

During the interactive dialogue, most states highlighted the progress since the signing of the Agreement by the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, including improved humanitarian access, delivery of essential services, and respect for human rights. However, they also highlighted the importance of acknowledging the atrocity crimes committed in the recent conflict is critical to supporting transitional justice efforts and enabling a lasting peace.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) congratulates the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayan Front (TPLF) for the Agreement reached. However, GICJ wishes to underline the key points that victims' reparation is central to the process of ensuring a lasting peace. Furthermore, the peace agreement should have a gender approach so that sexual and gender crimes are judged as independent crimes to ensure accountability for women.

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15. The dual approach of Venezuela and the denunciation of its passing law on NGOs



By Isabel García Aguilar / GICJ

During the 21st and 22nd of March 2022, two interactive dialogues related to the situation in Venezuela were held. The first was an oral update made by Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the second was an update made by the fact-finding mission.

Even though the situation portrayed by the High Commissioner and the fact-finding mission had many points in common, the way in which Venezuela received these points was not so similar. While Venezuela welcomed and collaborated with the High Commissioner's group, as Volker Türk stated, the country closed its doors to the fact-finding mission, which made its work challenging.

Both expressed the multiple human rights violations that are committed daily in Venezuela that continue to deepen the humanitarian crisis that the country has experienced for years. Freedoms and rights have been limited, for example, through the shutdown of media outlets or the passing of the Law on Control, Regularization, Operations, and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organisations. Furthermore, the situation of the indigenous people and the current judicial system need to be immediately addressed. Despite this terrible situation, the High Commissioner applauded some of the efforts made by Venezuela, such as establishing same-sex relations in the military.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) in a joint statement thanks the oral updates made by the High Commissioner and the fact-finding group and embraces the renewal of their respective mandates. Considering the multiple human rights violations committed in Venezuela, some of which can even be considered crimes against humanity, we call on the country to take measures to guarantee the respect of human rights and we welcome those already taken, such as the decriminalisation of same sex relations in the military. Moreover, we are extremely concerned about the draft law of NGOs, as it would restrict freedoms even more in the country. We urge Venezuela to implement measures to protect civil society participation and to guarantee free and fair elections. Finally, though we welcome the cooperation between the High Commissioner's office and Venezuela, we call on the country to do the same with the FFMV.

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16. Numerous and Systematic Violations in Belarus May Constitute a Crime Against Humanity



By Maeva Giambrone / GICJ

On the 22nd of March 2023, the Human Rights Council considered the report of the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in Belarus (A/HRC/52/68), during an interactive dialogue on the same topic.

Ms. Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner, opened the interactive dialogue by presenting the findings of the High Commissioner for human rights latest report, which described the numerous human rights violations committed by Belarus. The report presented that as of the 21st of March 2023, 1,459 people were arbitrarily detained on political grounds and about 250 people were labelled as extremists. Indeed, mass arrests and arbitrary detentions were carried out in response to the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. It also notes that many detainees have suffered torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

The report demonstrates the Office's concern about recent legislative amendments to extend the scope of the death penalty, trials in absentia, and the possibility of withdrawing citizenship from individuals.

The Deputy High Commissioner underlined that many people had left the country since May 2020 because of fears of repression. Finally, she notes that the withdrawal of Belarus from the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR is a real step backwards in the protection of the human rights of Belarusians. She pointed out that all these violations could constitute crimes against humanity.

Although the Belarusian delegate stated that the reports presented were biased and humiliated the people, various delegations expressed their deep concern about the numerous violations of the fundamental rights of the Belarusian population and the many acts that could constitute crimes against humanity. They declared that the authorities' policy of repression was aimed at destroying the

democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people. Furthermore, delegations are concerned that Belarus is using the pretext of a terrorist threat to repress defenders of democracy.

Many civil society groups pointed out that peaceful protesters are treated like the worst criminals and are arbitrarily detained. In addition, NGOs called for the establishment of an independent investigation mechanism and encouraged states to use the principles of extraterritoriality and universal jurisdiction. Further, civil society groups urged Belarus to re-ratify the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR in order to provide victims of violations with a remedy.

The Deputy High Commissioner concluded the discussion by recommending that Belarus release all arbitrarily detained individuals, to re-ratify the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR and to stop all human rights violations listed in the report.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) joins with the States and the High Commissioner in urging Belarus to end the systematic repression of its people, who call only for a democratic state that respects human rights. We call for the release of political prisoners and reparations to the victims. Finally, we urge Belarus to end its cooperation with the Russian Federation in the armed aggression in Ukraine, which violates the fundamental principles of international law.

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17. Protecting Minority Rights: Challenges and the UN Response



By Frizia Rounak / GICJ

On the 23rd of March 2023, at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), an Interactive Dialogue took place with the Special Rapporteur, Fernand de Varennes, on minority issues. In his report and presentation to the Council, Varennes emphasised the thematic parts of the report focusing on the

growing violations of rights targeted towards minority groups across the world and lack of initiatives at the United Nations to address these dire issues.

During the interactive dialogue, various countries and their representatives shared their views and concerns on the subject. For example, Iran expressed its profound concern regarding the incidents of the Quran being burned in many countries, the European Union reiterated its commitment to represent and amplify the voices of minorities across the globe, and Bangladesh raised concerns regarding the persecution of the Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) applauds the Special Rapporteur for creating regional forums that give minorities a voice, but expresses concern about the discrimination, xenophobia, and hate they still face worldwide. Millions of minority children are separated from their families, denied citizenship, education, and religious freedom. GICJ urges states to uphold minority rights, implement changes, and provide forums and platforms dedicated to strengthening minority rights. GICJ also emphasises that diversity must not only be acknowledged but celebrated, and that minority protection should be a priority for all states.

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18. A call for renewed commitments to combat racism and advancing racial equity



By Jamel Nampijja / GICJ

On the 29th of March 2023, a panel on the general debate on racial discrimination (GA res. 77/205) was held in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination during the 48th meeting of the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council. The panel theme was "The urgency of combatting racism and racial discrimination 75 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' adoption."

During the debate, Mr Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, was the keynote speaker at the panel. He highlighted the damaging effects of racial discrimination and the importance of upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Despite progress, Mr Türk acknowledged that no country could claim to be free of racism and called for more action to combat systemic racism and discrimination. He urged member states to adopt and implement comprehensive national laws and policies to eliminate racism and discrimination. Moreover, ensuring the effective participation of racial and ethnic groups in public decision-making and delivering reparatory justice.

The panel discussion featured speakers from diverse backgrounds who are actively involved in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. The panellists discussed the current state of the fight against racism and the importance of accelerating progress towards racial equality, to benefit society and future generations. They shared their experience, expertise and recommendations on addressing the most pressing challenges and obstacles to combat racism in all its forms and manifestations.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) calls on all UN member States to thoroughly examine and understand the extent and impact of systemic racism; addressing racism should go beyond viewing it as a collection of isolated or individual acts of discrimination but rather as a systemic issue deeply ingrained in various societal structures, policies, and institutions and requiring a systematic response.

Therefore, GICJ urges UN member States to adopt effective legal, policy, and institutional measures that go beyond surface-level approaches and address the root causes of systemic racism.

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19. An Urgent Call to Address the Consequences of Racism and Discrimination



By Emily Bare / GICJ

On the 30th of March 2023, during the 49th meeting of the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council, the Chair Rapporteur of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, Ms. Marie Chantal Rwakazina, reaffirmed the importance of the document as a tool against racism and intolerance globally. She reiterated that the Declaration's comprehensive agenda is a solution to addressing racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. As such, the Chair Rapporteur also encouraged states to step up their efforts to promote bilateral, regional, and international collaboration in putting national action plans into effect and for the international community to reinvigorate their commitment and political will for the cause of ending prejudice.

Importantly, she mentioned how last year the General Assembly requested that the Working Group entrust at least half of its session to the elaboration of a draft United Nations Declaration on the promotion and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent. Ms. Rwakazina stated that the Working Group had begun this process by drafting a working document that is set to be submitted to the General Assembly in December 2024. The draft report addresses many things, including concrete measures against racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent and elaborates on the rights of people of African descent in accordance with international human rights law.

During the general debate, many representatives addressed their concerns about the persistence of racism and discrimination across the globe. In addition to many other important issues that were discussed, many representatives expressed the importance of relying on the DDPA in the creation of the draft report being prepared by the Working Group. They urged states to rely on the DDPA as a roadmap to provide equality and justice and in combating racism and other intolerances, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) commends the Working Group for its work and draft report. However, we are appalled by the persistent racism and discrimination that continues around the world, especially against people of African descent. GICJ calls on states to renew and reaffirm their commitment to ending all forms of racism and discrimination.

Further, we encourage States and education institutions to embody the DDPA's call for the strengthening of human rights education by providing fundamental support toward educational programs and subjects that challenge anti-democratic ideologies but enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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20. Ukraine Continues to Endure Egregious Human Rights Violations at the Hands of Russian Forces



By Conall Corrigan / GICJ

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, during the oral update of his office's report on the current human rights and humanitarian situation in Ukraine, noted that Russia has dragged the international community back to an archaic age in which a neighbouring country's territory could be attacked and taken at will. In a meeting of the Human Rights Council (HRC) on the 31st of March 2023, the High Commissioner discussed the litany of crimes committed by Russian forces since the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine in February 2022.

The High Commissioner's Office report noted that more than 8,400 civilians have been killed and over 14,000 injured since Russia waged its war of aggression. Much of the Commissioner's report discussed the prevalence of conflict-based sexual violence, the mistreatment of prisoners of war and the systematic use of the forcible transfer and deportation of children to Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine or the Russian Federation. Although the High Commissioner observed abuses committed by Ukraine as a party to the conflict, he highlighted the variations in the scope and scale of violations committed compared to Russia.

Member states and representatives of NGOs were clear in their condemnation of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the impact it has had on the lives of Ukrainian citizens and the international community. They encouraged the High Commissioner to continue documenting human rights abuses in Ukraine and urged both parties to the conflict to abide by the principles of international law.

On the 4th of April 2023, the HRC adopted resolution A_HRC_52_L.41 Rev.1 titled the 'Situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression'. The resolution, introduced by Ukraine, calls on the Russian Federation to end its abuses and violations of IHL and IHRL and stresses

the need to ensure accountability for perpetrators of such acts. The resolution was adopted with 28 Yes votes, 2 No and 17 Abstentions.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the report of the High Commissioner's Office and all efforts to document the blatant and egregious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Ukraine. Throughout the conflict in Ukraine, the international community has witnessed flagrant violations of international law which greatly undermine the principles of the UN Charter. All states must make a collective effort to hold perpetrators to account for their actions to ensure victims are provided with justice.

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21. South Sudan lacks political will that is vital for technical assistance and capacity building



By Bethany Morley / GICJ

On the 31st of March 2023, at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council, an interactive dialogue took place on the report of the High Commissioner into the human rights situation in South Sudan, submitted in accordance with res. 49/35 of the Council. The discussions of the Council coalesced around high levels of violence, shrinking civic spaces and a severe lack of political will in addressing capacity building and technical assistance..

Mr. Christian Salazar, Director for Field Operations and Technical Cooperation (OHCHR), introduced the report, noting the report focused on violations that still persist in South Sudan, such as; the country still continuing to suffer high levels of violence committed by community based militias, and/or civil defence groups, conventional parties to the conflict; the exclusion of members of civil society organisations and ordinary citizens from governance processes, necessitating promotion and protection

of the civic space in South Sudan; an increase in reports of conflict related sexual violence being committed in the country, in 2022 there was a 96% increase compared to the number of victims in 2021; the need for the country to create a functioning justice system and reinforce a victim centered transitional justice process.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) commends the High Commissioner for his report. Further, we acknowledge South Sudan's advancements since the last report in 2022 to the Human Rights Council. However, we are extremely concerned with reports of an increase in conflict related sexual violence in the past year and the fragility of the human rights situation in the country. We condemn all forms of violence and attacks towards civilians, journalists and human rights defenders.

Further, we reinforce the need to strengthen the institutional capacity of the state to uphold the rule of law in order to hold parties who commit such violence accountable. Commend the report presented by the High Commissioner, and urge the international community to support South Sudan in creating a functioning justice system and move forward with peace and transitional justice.

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22. Mali Rejects reports of violation of Human Rights



By Jamel Nampijja / GICJ

On the 31st of March 2023, the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, Mr Alioune Tine, presented his report (A/HRC/52/81) during the interactive dialogue at the 51st Meeting of the 52nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (resolution 49/34). The report covered the period from April 1st to November 30th 2022. The report was compiled from data gathered during the Independent Expert's visit to Mali, which took place from August 1st to August 12th, 2022.

During his visit, Mr. Tine met with officials of the Government of Mali who facilitated his stay in the country and provided him with national and local officials access. He also met with the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the Minister of National Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion, the

President of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), and judicial authorities. Additionally, the Independent Expert met with representatives of civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, political parties, the diplomatic corps, and United Nations agencies.

His report highlighted the ongoing concerns about the human rights situation in Mali, particularly the security crisis, and its impact on the lives of civilians as well as the shrinking civic space and freedom of expression. It called for Mali to fulfil its international human rights obligations, investigate and punish perpetrators of violations, and ensure accountability and reparations for victims.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the report of the Independent Expert. We commend the efforts undertaken by the government, especially the cooperation with regional and international mechanisms. GICJ calls upon the international community to continue providing the technical assistance required by Mali to ensure stability, promote respect for human rights, and effectively fight against impunity.

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23. Human Rights Situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo deteriorates since last update to Council, in October 2022

By Patricia Mutebi Jjuuko/GICJ

The human rights and security situation has deteriorated since the last update to the Human Rights Council in October 2022. On the 30th of March 2023, 50th meeting of the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner and the team of international experts on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Volker Türk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that the human rights challenges facing the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were well known to the Council. In a country with abundant resources, the Congolese people were at risk of severe food insecurity. As a result of violence perpetrated by numerous armed groups, 6 million people were internally displaced, the largest number of internally displaced persons on the African continent. The Government was strongly encouraged to make the fight against impunity the backbone of its strategy for the return of peace to conflict-affected areas. The authorities also made significant efforts to create the conditions for a return to peace in the conflict-affected provinces. Mr. Türk concluded by strongly encouraging the acceleration of the

implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation, community rehabilitation and stabilisation programme.

Throughout the interactive dialogue, many states and NGOs approved of the efforts made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to improve the situation of human rights throughout its territory through various legislative means. However, they expressed concern for the situation in the east of the country, with regard to the human rights violations committed by the various armed groups, including the M23 group.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the efforts by the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to widen civic and political space and its endeavour to fight against impunity. However, we remain deeply concerned with the increasing human rights violations including sexual violence, the harassment and arbitrary arrest of journalists and human rights defenders and the increase in hate speech and incitement to hostility. We call on the government to respect freedom of expression and endeavour to curtail hate speech to improve trust and confidence amongst the Congolese.

Resolutions

1. Adoption of Human Rights Situation in North Korea

By Khoa D. / GICJ

On the 4th of April 2023, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted resolution A/HRC/52/L.9 - "Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea". It was submitted by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

The resolution, co-sponsored by South Korea, urged the North to ensure freedom of speech both online and offline, allow the establishment of independent media, and reconsider its law on blocking cultural content from outside the reclusive country. 23 countries voiced support for the resolution while eight opposed it - Bangladesh, Bolivia, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Vietnam. Another 32 countries abstained during the vote. Malaysia, Nepal, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates were among them.

The UNHRC has adopted a resolution condemning North Korea's human rights abuses every year since 2003. Several resolutions condemned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) for national policies that increasingly divert its resources into pursuing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles over the welfare of its people and their access to food. Others have emphasised the need for the DPRK to respect and ensure the welfare and inherent dignity of the people in the country, as referred to by the Security Council in its resolutions 2321 (2016) of 30 November 2016, 2371 (2017) of 5 August 2017, 2375 (2017) of 11 September 2017 and 2397 (2017) of 22 December 2017.

The latest resolution (77/226 of December 2022) called on Pyongyang to disclose all relevant information, including the whereabouts, of foreigners detained or kidnapped in the North to the families of the victims.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) appreciates the effort of South Korea under the Yoon Suk-yeol administration to hold the Democratic People's Republic of Korea accountable for its rights violations. We are deeply concerned about the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation and the adverse impact disproportionate and unnecessary measures taken following the global outbreak of the coronavirus disease have had on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from the use of deadly and excessive force at its borders and elsewhere and to work with the international community.

2. Commission of Inquiry to continue vital work in Ukraine following the adoption of draft resolution.

By Bethany Morley / GICJ

On the 4th of April 2023, at the 52nd regular session of the human rights council, a meeting took place regarding the vote on draft Resolution A/HRC/52/L.21/Rev.1, concerning the situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression, submitted by Ukraine. Following the session, the resolution was adopted with 28 voting yes, 2 voting no and 17 abstentions.

Mrs. Evjenniia Filipenko, the representative of Ukraine, introduced the draft Resolution and outlined how Russia's aggression towards Ukraine signifies a blatant breach of the United Nations Charter and the fundamental principles of international law. As the primary international human rights body, the way the Human Rights Council responded was to establish an independent commission of inquiry to document all violations and report to the council and assembly on their findings. The commission has found systematic and gross human rights violations as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity, the worst of which being the forcible transfer and deportation of children to Russia for their re-education and adoption.

Mrs. Filipenko noted that the draft resolution is an important step towards ensuring that peace and justice prevail for victims of the conflict. The floor was then given to delegates and representatives who acknowledged the need to adopt the resolution that reflects the commission's report. Ukraine was commended for steering constructive negotiations to achieve the resolution.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) continues to condemn the aggression Ukraine is facing at the hands of the Russian Federation. We strongly welcome the adoption of this resolution to ensure accountability and justice for Ukraine. We urge China and Eritrea, who voted against the adoption of the resolution, to reconsider their positionality. Further, we continue to condemn the forcible transfer and deportation of children to Russia.

3. Resolution to extend the Special Rapporteur on torture and ill-treatment mandate

By Maeva Giambrone/ GICJ

On the 3rd of April 2023, the Council adopted by consensus the resolution A/HRC/52/L.5/Rev.1. Denmark presented this new resolution to the Human Rights Council to enable the Special Rapporteur on Torture to continue the vital work which has been undertaken for 38 years now.

Denmark presented the resolution allowing the Special Rapporteur to continue to seek, receive and examine any information or allegations of torture for another three years. The state wished to highlight the upcoming 40th anniversary of the mandate and of the Convention against Torture.

This resolution supported by 66 co-sponsors was adopted without a vote, thus continuing the custom of adopting resolutions on torture by consensus. Chile, one of the co-sponsors, recalled the still fundamental importance of this mandate to eradicate torture. Therefore, the delegate encouraged states that have not yet done it, to ratify the Convention against Torture. Lithuania also intervened as a co-author to underline that torture unfortunately remains a widespread phenomenon using the example of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. Both representatives welcomed the inclusion of indigenous peoples as a group to be included in the discussions.

Finally, the resolution urges states to adopt a victim-centered and gender-sensitive approach in the fights against torture in order to take into account the discriminatory factors that may increase the risks for certain individuals who are victims of such acts.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the adoption of this resolution to enable the Special Rapporteur to continue to visit countries and make recommendations to end practices that constitute torture. We call on States that have not ratified the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol to do it.

4. Resolution on the right of Palestinian people to self-determination

By Juanita Beltran /GICJ

Pakistan introduced the resolution A/HRC/52/L32 on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The resolution passed with 41 votes in favour, 3 abstentions and 3 against.

The right to self-determination is particularly important for the people of Palestine, who have been denied this basic human right for decades. In pursuit of this cause, Pakistan and other 16 cosponsors reaffirmed the need to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and called on Israel to end its occupation in these territories. Also, it emphasises the need for the unity and integrity of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, and the realisation of the right to self-determination.

However, there are some countries that are not willing to become a part of this effort, which undermines the fundamental right to self-determination. This is particularly concerning as the right to self-determination is a founding principle within Article 2 of the UN Charter and Covenant and is a core principle of international law.

In its intervention, Palestine expressed its disappointment with some delegations that are willing to negotiate and vote on a text that undermines this right. The adoption of a resolution allowing for the exercise of the right to self-determination while denying the same right to Palestinian communities is unacceptable. It is essential to recognize the right to self-determination and to condemn colonisation, which is illegal and recognized as a war crime. This has been reaffirmed by a wide range of resolutions of the UN body and the Security Council. For instance, resolution 2234 of December 2016, which condemns the occupation and finds it runs contrary to international law.

The United States of America in its intervention highlighted the support for a two state solution arguing that one sided resolutions distract from advancing measures to achieve peace.

The international community must work together to end the abuse faced by the people of Palestine and support their right to self-determination. The construction of an independent nation is the only viable solution to this ongoing conflict. While some countries may not support country-specific resolutions, it is crucial that they remain consistent in their support for the principles of human rights and the right to self-determination.

5. Resolution on Palestine highlights the international division on human rights.

By Sasha Granelli / GICJ

On the 3rd of April , 2023, the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) passed resolution A/HRC/52/L43, urging states to ensure human rights accountability and justice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This draft text was introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The resolution was passed with 38 votes in favor and only two against, with the United States of America (USA) standing alone in its opposition to the resolution.

The USA expressed that the resolution did not serve the goal of establishing lasting peace between the two parties and criticised the disproportionate attention that the Council drew to this conflict in comparison to other situations that require its attention. Israel also echoed the USA's sentiment and called the council to stop targeting Israel and take into account the point that violations are perpetrated in Palestine against Palestinians and Israeli people. France, on the other hand, welcomed the resolution and called for the respect of human rights for both sides, condemned the settlement policies and called for the establishment of a two-state solution.

Palestine supported this resolution and called on the USA to stop asking for accountability all around the world except between Israel and Palestine. They recognized some mistakes in Palestine that are currently being addressed and asked Israel to respect their own international obligations before giving lectures to other states.

The USA's isolation in its opposition to this resolution on human rights in Palestine highlights the division among the international community. While some countries call for the establishment of a two-state solution, others criticise the disproportionate attention given to the conflict. Palestine, meanwhile, continues to call for accountability and justice for Palestinian people. The adoption of this resolution is a step towards achieving these goals and should be welcomed by all parties involved in the conflict.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the adoption of this resolution to ensure accountability and justice for Palestinian people. We urge the Israeli authorities to comply with their international obligation and ensure the respect of human rights for all. We call for peace and cooperation.

6. The Human Rights Council Adopts the Renewal of the Mandate of Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Racism

By Kiyana Newell / GICJ

On April 4th, during the 52nd Human Rights Council, the final draft resolution on Item 9, the mandate on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance (A/HRC/52/L.12), was voted on by member states of the UN, with a preliminary 22 additional cosponsors. The draft is a renewal for a further three-year extension mandate of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism.

The delegate from Côte d'Ivoire presented the text on behalf of the African Group. The African Group held a series of informal consultations on the draft resolution.

During the General Comments, Costa Rica stated that its delegation is committed to combating racism in all contexts. Additionally, she thanked the African group for the draft resolution and appreciated the draft's inclusion language of opportunity. Finally, the delegate urged all members to adopt the resolution by consensus.

The delegate of the United States explained that the Biden-Harris Administration is deeply dedicated to addressing inequalities at home and abroad. She quoted President Joe Biden saying that great nations do not hide from shortcomings; they acknowledge them and openly strive to improve with transparency. The United States welcomed the Special Rapporteur on Minorities and will welcome the Special Rapporteur on contemporary racism in the future. They are proud to cosponsor the mandate renewal.

The United Kingdom also cosponsored the resolution and remains committed to fighting racism. They acknowledge how they have one of the world's most diverse populations and are affected by racism and discrimination.

As there was no request for a vote on the draft resolution, it was adopted by consensus.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) commends all member states for their commitment to fighting racism, xenophobia, and intolerance globally. We appreciate the adoption of the draft resolution to renew the three-year mandate for the Special Rapporteur on contemporary racism without a vote. This shows that member states value the action taken by the Human Rights Council to combat racism. However, GICJ acknowledges that there is much to be done to end racial discrimination and xenophobia, which is why adopting this resolution is necessary to cease racial discrimination.

7. Adoption of a resolution to combat the affront to human dignity that is racial discrimination

By Maeva Giambrone / GICJ

Côte d'Ivoire presented a new resolution to the Human Rights Council to renew the Mandate of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) for a further period of three years. On the 4th of April 2023, the Council adopted the resolution A/HRC/52/L.13 by 45 votes to 2.

Côte d'Ivoire, on behalf of the African Group, presented the resolution on the renewal of the working group and requested that the annual session of the working group be divided into two periods, one of which would focus solely on the drafting of the Declaration on the promotion, protection and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent. Similarly, the resolution allows the Chair of the Working Group to hold informal intersessional meetings to continue efforts to develop this declaration. The Ivorian representative stressed the importance of the DDPA as it is the most elaborate document on the subject and is also the first to have highlighted intersectional forms of discrimination.

The United States regretted that the resolution only focuses on the implementation of the DDPA but does not take into account antisemitism. Indeed, racism and antisemitism are on the rise around the world. The United States believes that it is not possible to combat these two forms of hatred in isolation and therefore voted against the adoption of this resolution.

While following the European declaration in favour of the adoption of the draft, France was nevertheless concerned about the absence of a reference to the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, but especially the insertion of a reference to the draft Declaration on People of African Descent. Furthermore, France sees a risk to the indivisibility and universality of human rights in that the text assigns an individual to a group according to his or her origin.

Finland, on behalf of the European Member States of the Council, and China also supported the draft resolution considering that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances are affronts to human dignity that must be overcome.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the adoption of this resolution to finally implement the DDPA to combat racial discrimination. We remain determined that more must be done as racial discrimination, xenophobia, and other intolerances are increasing throughout the world.

Conclusions and Reflections

The 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council covered many key topics relating to human rights. Together with partner organisations, GICJ successfully participated in the session by delivering oral statements and writing discussion reports on topics such as the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, freedom of religion or belief, the right to development, as well as country specific issues in state parties including Afghanistan, China, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Nicaragua, Venezuela, among many others.

GICJ adopted a critical viewpoint in all of the discussions acknowledging on the one hand the progress made by the Council in country-specific issues, as well as in thematic issues. On the other hand, our team addressed the challenges ahead in ensuring the principles of the UN charter, principles of fairness and non-discriminations, the protection of rule of law and promotion of all fundamental human rights.

One of the key issues covered by the Council was the humanitarian situation in Syria, after more than a decade of escalating violence, food insecurity and more recently a series of earthquakes, the situation has become ever more painful for thousands of Syrians. Although two resolutions were adopted regarding the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and the consideration of human rights violations against Syrian in the Israeli occupied Syrian Golan, further action needs to be taken. The Syrian government must stop exploiting the disaster caused by the earthquake by delaying and blocking aid. We remain disappointed in the Council by the slow response to these disasters and humanitarian aid that impeded the rescue of thousands of Syrians.

The ongoing human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from Russian aggression is still one of the issues that has shaken the world and remains unresolved. The UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Ukraine established that Russian authorities have committed a range of transgressions to fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law. Amounting to war crimes, the Commission stressed the continuing torture, rape and forced transfer and deportation of children. We remain disappointed with regard the countries that voted against resolutions concerning Ukraine as it only perpetuates the general climate of impunity in war crimes. Additionally, all mechanisms in charge of reporting must have unfettered access to all areas of Ukraine to provide justice for those who have seen their fundamental rights violated.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was of great concern during the session. Many international and national NGOs, as well as UN experts, have determined that Israeli policies and practices against Palestinian people constitute acts of apartheid and discrimination. The commission of inquiry on the OPT mandated by the Human Rights Council found that Israel's permanent occupation and de facto annexation of Palestinian territory has to stop. Despite thereof, we are disappointed that

some countries regarded the Council's agenda on item 7 as politicised by arguing that it draws the attention of the Council only to this conflict in comparison to other situations that require its attention, while many other states emphasize the importance of the discussion under item 7 as long as the occupation continues on the Palestinian territory.

These and many more issues were covered throughout the Human Rights Council 52nd Session and in this full report. We acknowledge the work made by the Council to draw attention to these issues and install measures to counteract the several human rights violations happening in the world right now. The duty to respect and protect the fundamental human rights of every person must transcend these international mechanisms and be applied on a daily basis. Nonetheless, it is necessary to outline the fundamental role of political willingness and international cooperation of the state parties in the functioning of these mechanisms. We call on the international community to double its efforts to promote the UN charter principles and achieve durable peace in these issues from our time.

GICJ thanks its collaborators, interns and volunteers for their hard work during the session. You can read about our team [here](#).

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