**Background:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented challenge to States due to its multiple and widespread impacts on human rights. According to the World Health Organization (WHO as of 29 July 2020), as a consequence of the current outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), there are 16.558.289 confirmed cases, 656.093 confirmed deaths and 215.127 newly reported cases in the last 24 hours in 216 countries and territories throughout the world. The COVID-19 global health crisis has been described as the worst since World War II, because of its enormous impact on public health and unprecedented disruption of economies and labour markets.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), due to the spread of the virus and the total or partial shutdowns, more than 5 billion people have been affected, including 2.7 billion workers, or 81% of the global workforce. It is also estimated that in the second quarter of 2020 there will be a 7% reduction in employment worldwide, in addition to having a significant impact on 1.6 billion informal workers, with women over-represented in the most affected sectors. Finally, estimates indicate that at least 50 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty. The COVID-19 global crisis will have long-lasting impacts on our societies..

In response to the impacts of COVID-19, States have implemented various economic, social and political actions, including extraordinary measures such as the establishment of states or regimes of emergency, border closures, social distancing, quarantines and restrictions on freedom of movement, which in turn have limited the exercise of other human rights. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, in particular for vulnerable groups.

These measures, including states of exception, have caused incidences of abuse of authority and difficulties in accessing basic services such as health care and the provision of medicines, in addition to other limitations such as access to food, water, sanitation and shelter. There have also been impacts on labour rights, the continuity of education and the exclusion of people in vulnerable situations, among other consequences. The pandemic, therefore, has a differentiated impact that must be taken into account by States in each policy, action or measure they implement.

In this regard, the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies have issued statements and technical guidance notes with the aim of providing States with the necessary tools to uphold and respect all human rights, within their competence. In this regard, the CESCR issued the Statement on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and economic, social and cultural rights, the CEDAW and COVID-19 guidelines, the Advice of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture to States Parties and National Preventive Mechanisms relating to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Joint Statement: Persons with Disabilities and COVID-19 by the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, the Joint Guidance Note on the Impacts of COVID-19 on the Human Rights of Migrants by the CMW and the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, among other statements from Special Procedures, OHCHR and UN agencies. These have proved to be valuable tools for States, but also for other stakeholders who have used the authoritative voice of Treaty Bodies in their advocacy efforts. At the same time, an extensive fragmentation of treaty bodies’ responses to the crisis risks undermining the understanding and cogent application of the existing legal norms and standards and adds to the proliferation of statements by UN and non-UN bodies on COVID-19.

At a moment when the relevance of multilateral institutions is being questioned by the rise of nationalism, populism and by a rapidly evolving global crisis, it is essential to strengthen the mechanisms for cooperation and coordination between the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the establishment of a UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies Working Group will allow to have a joint, cohesive and comprehensive response, in accordance with their mandate to interpret the content and scope of the human rights treaties. This ad-hoc mechanism will help to coordinate treaty bodies’ efforts to identify trends of violations of human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and support efforts to develop a cogent response in terms of standard-setting, recommendations and guidelines issued by the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies when monitoring the compliance of States with their international obligations. Likewise, as 2020 is a crucial year for the process of reform of the treaty bodies, the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies Working Group will make its important work visible and bring them together for the first time to address, as a system, an unprecedented situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts.