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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 2020

[*on the report of the Third Committee (A/75/478/Add.2, para. 89)*]

75/185. Human rights in the administration of justice

The General Assembly,

Bearing in mind the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocols thereto,² the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,³ the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Optional Protocol thereto,⁴ the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,⁵ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁶ the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁸ as well as all other relevant international treaties,

Calling attention to the numerous international standards in the field of the administration of justice,

Recalling all the resolutions of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council that are relevant to the subject of human rights in the administration of justice, including

¹ Resolution 217 A (III).

² See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex; and United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1642, No. 14668.

³ See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vols. 1465 and 2375, No. 24841.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2716, No. 48088.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2515, No. 44910.



General Assembly resolution [73/177](#) of 17 December 2018 and Human Rights Council resolutions [37/22](#) of 23 March 2018⁹ and [42/11](#) of 26 September 2019,¹⁰

Recalling also its resolution [74/306](#) of 11 September 2020, recognizing the primary responsibility of Governments to adopt and implement responses to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that are specific to their national context, and that emergency measures, policies and strategies put in place by countries to address and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 must be targeted, necessary, transparent, non-discriminatory, time-bound, proportionate and in accordance with their obligations under applicable international human rights law, and reaffirming the obligation of States in this regard, in accordance with article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

Taking note with appreciation of the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening and coordinating United Nations rule of law activities,¹¹

Recalling the adoption of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules),¹²

Reaffirming the importance of international standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice, including in relation to drug-related crimes, as recognized by Member States in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem”,¹³

Welcoming the work of all special procedures of the Human Rights Council that address human rights in the administration of justice in the discharge of their mandates,

Taking note of the work of the human rights treaty body mechanisms on human rights in the administration of justice, inter alia, of general comments No. 21 (1992) on humane treatment of persons deprived of their liberty,¹⁴ No. 32 (2007) on the right to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial¹⁵ and No. 35 (2014) on liberty and security of person,¹⁶ adopted by the Human Rights Committee, general comments No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence¹⁷ and No. 24 (2019) on children’s rights in the child justice system,¹⁸ adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, general recommendation No. 31 (2005) on the prevention of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system,¹⁹ adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women’s access to justice,²⁰ adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and general comments No. 1 (2014) on equal recognition before the law,²¹ No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination²² and No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities,

⁹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-third Session, Supplement No. 53 (A/73/53)*, chap. IV, sect. A.

¹⁰ Ibid., *Seventy-fourth Session, Supplement No. 53A (A/74/53/Add.1)*, chap. III.

¹¹ [A/75/284](#).

¹² Resolution [70/175](#), annex.

¹³ Resolution [S-30/1](#), annex.

¹⁴ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 40 (A/47/40)*, annex VI.B.

¹⁵ Ibid., *Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 40 (A/62/40)*, vol. I, annex VI.

¹⁶ [CCPR/C/GC/35](#).

¹⁷ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 41 (A/67/41)*, annex V.

¹⁸ [CRC/C/GC/24](#).

¹⁹ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 18 (A/60/18)*, chap. IX.

²⁰ [CEDAW/C/GC/33](#).

²¹ [CRPD/C/GC/1](#) and [CRPD/C/GC/1/Corr.1](#).

²² [CRPD/C/GC/6](#).

including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention,²³ adopted by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

Noting with appreciation the important work in the field of the administration of justice of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Department of Peace Operations of the Secretariat and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as well as the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict,

Taking note with appreciation of the International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities, which are the product of joint work by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility,

Noting with satisfaction the work of the Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice and of its members,

Encouraging continued regional and cross-regional efforts, the sharing of best practices and the provision of technical assistance in the field of child justice, and noting in this regard the panel discussion on “Upholding the human rights of prisoners, including women prisoners and offenders: enhancing technical cooperation and capacity-building in the implementation of the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules”, held during the forty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council,

Convinced that the independence and impartiality of the judiciary and the integrity of the judicial system, as well as an independent legal profession, are essential prerequisites for the protection of human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democracy and for ensuring that there is no discrimination in the administration of justice and should therefore be respected in all circumstances,

Recalling that every State should provide an effective framework of remedies to redress human rights grievances or violations and to challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court,

Emphasizing that the right to access to justice for all, which could include access to legal aid, forms an important basis for strengthening the rule of law through the administration of justice,

Underlining the importance of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,²⁴ and recognizing the role of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals for eliminating discrimination in the administration of justice,

Mindful of the importance of ensuring respect for the rule of law and human rights in the administration of justice as a crucial contribution to building peace and justice and ending impunity,

Recognizing the importance of the principle that, except for those lawful limitations that are demonstrably necessitated by the fact of incarceration, persons deprived of their liberty shall retain their non-derogable human rights and all other human rights and fundamental freedoms,

²³ CRPD/C/GC/7.

²⁴ Resolution 70/1.

Concerned about the negative impact of overincarceration and overcrowding on the enjoyment of human rights, and acknowledging that overincarceration constitutes one of the major underlying causes of overcrowding,

Emphasizing that the penitentiary system should provide the possibility of reform and social rehabilitation of the offender in all appropriate cases, and that punishment should be dealt with in the larger framework of a criminal justice system that provides the possibility of reinsertion and reintegration of the offender into society,

Recalling that the social rehabilitation and reintegration of persons deprived of their liberty shall be among the essential aims of the criminal justice system, ensuring, as far as possible, that offenders are able to lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life upon their return to society,

Underlining that, where persons are in vulnerable situations or marginalized, prejudice and discrimination in the administration of justice may result in their overincarceration and overrepresentation throughout the criminal justice system, and recognizing the need for States to take measures, within the justice system, particularly the criminal justice system, to prevent discrimination, inter alia, against persons with disabilities and persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and to increase their effective participation within the system,

Aware of the need for special vigilance with regard to the specific situation of children, juveniles, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and people who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations in the administration of justice, in particular while they are deprived of their liberty, and their vulnerability to various forms of violence, abuse, injustice and humiliation,

Noting the importance of gender-sensitive justice systems,

Reaffirming that children who are victims and witnesses of crime and violence are particularly vulnerable and require special protection, assistance and support appropriate to their age, level of maturity and needs, in order to prevent further hardship and trauma that may result from their participation in the criminal justice process,

Recognizing the specific situation and needs of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups when accused of crimes under international law allegedly committed while they were children associated with armed forces or armed groups,

Reaffirming that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning the child in the administration of justice, including in relation to pretrial measures, as well as being an important consideration in all matters concerning the child related to the sentencing of the parents, or, where applicable, legal guardians or primary caregivers,

1. *Takes note with appreciation of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on human rights in the administration of justice, including on the situation of persons with disabilities;²⁵*

2. *Also takes note with appreciation of the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on violence, death and serious injury in situations of deprivation of liberty,²⁶ as well as previous reports on human rights in the administration of justice submitted to the Human Rights Council;*

²⁵ A/75/327.

²⁶ A/HRC/42/20.

3. *Reaffirms* the importance of the full and effective implementation of all United Nations standards on human rights in the administration of justice, and invites States to assess their national legislation and practice against those standards;

4. *Invites* States to make use of technical assistance offered by the relevant United Nations entities and programmes in order to strengthen national capacities and infrastructures in the field of the administration of justice;

5. *Expresses concern* that persons with disabilities may experience disproportionately high levels of unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and recalls that persons with disabilities should not be deprived of their liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily, and that if persons with disabilities are deprived of their liberty through any process, they are, on an equal basis with others, entitled to guarantees in accordance with international human rights law, including by provision of reasonable accommodation;

6. *Appeals* to Governments to include, in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in their national development plans, the effective administration of justice and equal access to justice for all as an integral part of the development process, with a view to promoting and protecting human rights, and to allocate adequate resources for effective, fair, humane and accountable justice systems, including the provision of legal aid services, and invites the international community to respond favourably to requests for financial and technical assistance for the enhancement and strengthening of the administration of justice;

7. *Urges* States, bearing in mind national priorities, to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, including in institutions of governance and in the judicial system, and to secure their empowerment and full and equal access to justice;

8. *Stresses* the special need for national capacity-building in the field of the administration of justice, in particular through reform of the judiciary, the police and the penal system, as well as juvenile justice reform, and through the encouragement of independence, accessibility, accountability and transparency in the judiciary, in order to establish and maintain stable societies and the rule of law in post-conflict situations, and welcomes the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in supporting the establishment and functioning of transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict situations;

9. *Reaffirms* that no one should be unlawfully or arbitrarily deprived of liberty, and notes that any deprivation should observe the principles of necessity and proportionality in this regard;

10. *Calls upon* States to apply individual criminal responsibility and to refrain from detaining persons based solely on their family ties with an alleged offender;

11. *Also calls upon* States to ensure that anyone who is deprived of liberty through arrest or detention has prompt access to a competent court with the effective power to determine the lawfulness of the detention and to order release if the detention or imprisonment is determined not to be lawful and prompt access to legal counsel, which could include legal aid schemes, in accordance with their international obligations and commitments;

12. *Calls upon* all States to consider establishing, maintaining or enhancing independent national mechanisms with the mandate to monitor all places of detention, including by making unannounced visits, and to hold private interviews without witnesses with all persons deprived of liberty, *inter alia*, in line with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules);

13. *Calls upon* States to ensure a proper file and data management system on prisoners that allows the tracking of the number of persons deprived of their liberty, their detention period, offences or grounds for detention, and developments regarding the prison population, and encourages States to collect other up-to-date, comprehensive and disaggregated data that allow for the identification and prevention of discrimination in the administration of justice and overincarceration;

14. *Affirms* that States must ensure that any measure taken to combat terrorism, including in the administration of justice, complies with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law;

15. *Recalls* the absolute prohibition of torture in international law, and calls upon States to address and prevent the detention conditions, treatment and punishment of persons deprived of their liberty that amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

16. *Calls upon* States to investigate promptly, effectively and impartially all alleged human rights violations suffered by persons deprived of their liberty, in particular cases involving death, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to provide effective remedy to the victims, in accordance with their international obligations and commitments, and to ensure that detention administrations fully cooperate with the investigating authority and preserve all evidence;

17. *Also calls upon* States to ensure effective access to justice for persons with disabilities when investigating, prosecuting and punishing persons responsible for human rights violations and abuses committed against them, including by providing effective remedies, taking into consideration, on an equal basis with others, the specific circumstances of the person with disabilities, as well as by implementing systemic changes, legal and policy reforms and capacity-building where needed in order to ensure non-repetition;

18. *Urges* States to endeavour to reduce, where appropriate, pretrial detention, which should be a measure of last resort and for as short a period as possible, *inter alia*, by adopting legislative and administrative measures and policies on its preconditions, limitations, duration and alternatives and by taking measures aimed at the implementation of existing legislation, as well as by ensuring access to justice and legal advice and assistance, which could include legal aid schemes;

19. *Encourages* States to address overcrowding in detention facilities, bearing in mind the various impacts of COVID-19 on persons deprived of their liberty, by taking effective measures, including through enhancing the availability and use of alternatives to pretrial detention and custodial sentences, bearing in mind the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules)²⁷ and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules),²⁸ access to legal aid, mechanisms for crime prevention, early release and rehabilitation programmes and the efficiency as well as the capacity of the criminal justice system and its facilities, bearing in mind the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems;²⁹

20. *Urges* States to take all necessary measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination in law and in practice against persons who are in vulnerable situations

²⁷ Resolution [45/110](#), annex.

²⁸ Resolution [65/229](#), annex.

²⁹ Resolution [67/187](#), annex.

or marginalized in the administration of justice that may also result in their overincarceration and overrepresentation throughout the criminal justice process;

21. *Also urges* States to pay special attention to the conditions of detention or imprisonment of persons who are in vulnerable situations or marginalized and to their particular needs;

22. *Continues to encourage* States to pay due attention to the Bangkok Rules when developing and implementing relevant legislation, procedures, policies and action plans, and invites relevant special procedure mandate holders, the Office of the High Commissioner, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and all other relevant organizations to take those rules into consideration in their activities;

23. *Encourages* States to review penal policies that can contribute to overincarceration and overcrowding, in particular regarding so-called “zero-tolerance policies”, such as the application of mandatory pretrial detention and mandatory minimum sentences, especially for minor and/or non-violent crimes;

24. *Recognizes* that all children and juveniles alleged as, accused of or recognized as having infringed the law, particularly those who are deprived of their liberty, as well as child victims and witnesses of crimes, should be treated in a manner consistent with their rights, dignity and needs, in accordance with international law, bearing in mind relevant international standards on human rights in the administration of justice, taking into account also the age, gender, social circumstances and development needs of such children, and calls upon States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and States parties to the Optional Protocols to the Convention³⁰ to abide strictly by their principles and respective provisions;

25. *Reiterates* the importance of the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice,³¹ and urges States to consider applying them, as appropriate, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of laws, policies, programmes, budgets and mechanisms aimed at eliminating violence against children in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, and encourages States to support and to benefit, as appropriate, from the programme proposed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Children’s Fund in this regard;

26. *Takes note with appreciation* of the global study on children deprived of liberty³² and the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children in the follow-up to the study in cooperation with the other entities in the United Nations inter-agency task force and the non-governmental organization panel, and in this regard encourages Member States, United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and offices, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to consider the follow-up to and recommendations of the global study;

27. *Encourages* States that have not yet integrated children’s issues into their overall rule of law efforts to do so and to develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated juvenile justice policy to prevent and address juvenile delinquency and to address risks and causes for children’s contact with the juvenile and/or criminal justice system, as well as with a view to promoting, *inter alia*, the use of alternative measures, such as diversion and restorative justice, and complying with the principle that deprivation of liberty of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, as well as to avoid, wherever possible, the use of pretrial detention for children;

³⁰ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vols. 2171 and 2173, No. 27531; and resolution [66/138](#), annex.

³¹ Resolution [69/194](#), annex.

³² [A/74/136](#).

28. *Stresses* the importance of including reintegration strategies for former child offenders in juvenile justice policies, in particular through the provision of gender-sensitive education and life skills programmes, as well as treatment and services for substance abuse and mental health needs, in line with relevant commitments and obligations under international human rights law, with a view to their assuming a constructive role in society;

29. *Urges* States to take all necessary and effective measures, including legal reform where appropriate, to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children within the justice system, including within the informal justice system, where it exists;

30. *Also urges* States to ensure that, under their legislation and practice, neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without the possibility of release nor corporal punishment is imposed for offences committed by persons under 18 years of age, and encourages States to consider repealing all other forms of life imprisonment for offences committed by persons under 18 years of age;

31. *Encourages* States not to set the minimum age of criminal responsibility at too low an age level, bearing in mind the emotional, mental and intellectual maturity of the child, and in this respect notes the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years as the absolute minimum age, and to continue to increase it to a higher age level;³³

32. *Also encourages* States to gather relevant information, including through data collection and research, concerning children within their criminal justice systems so as to improve their administration of justice, while being mindful of the children's right to privacy, with full respect for relevant international human rights instruments, and bearing in mind applicable international standards on human rights in the administration of justice;

33. *Stresses* the importance of paying greater attention to the impact on children of imprisonment or other sentences imposed upon their parents, while noting with interest the convening of and reports on all relevant meetings and panel discussions on these issues held by the Human Rights Council;³⁴

34. *Calls upon* States to take effective and appropriate measures to remove all barriers preventing persons with disabilities from having effective access to justice on an equal basis with others and without discrimination;

35. *Encourages* States to ensure equal access to justice for persons with disabilities through the provision of accessible information and communications, physical accessibility to relevant premises, gender- and age-appropriate accommodations that take into account their will and legal counselling, and, where applicable, free or subsidized and accessible legal aid, and to deploy efforts to enable the meaningful and equal participation of persons with disabilities throughout all stages of the judicial process;

36. *Invites* States to provide for tailored and interdisciplinary human rights training, including anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, multicultural, disability-inclusive, gender-sensitive and child rights training, to all judges, lawyers, prosecutors, social workers, immigration, correction and police officers and other professionals concerned, including personnel deployed in international field presences;

³³ See [CRC/C/GC/24](#).

³⁴ [A/HRC/21/31](#) and [A/HRC/25/33](#).

37. *Also invites* States, upon their request, to benefit from technical advice and assistance provided by the relevant United Nations entities and programmes in order to strengthen national capacities and infrastructures in the field of the administration of justice;

38. *Invites* the Office of the High Commissioner and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to reinforce their technical assistance to States, upon request and in accordance with their respective mandates, to strengthen the national capacity-building of States in the field of the administration of justice, in particular in post-conflict situations, and in this context to strengthen cooperation with relevant United Nations entities;

39. *Underlines* the importance of rebuilding and strengthening structures for the administration of justice and of respecting the rule of law and human rights, including in post-conflict situations, as a crucial contribution to building peace and justice and ending impunity, and in this respect requests the Secretary-General to further streamline and strengthen system-wide coordination and coherence of programmes and activities of the relevant parts of the United Nations system, including through the Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, the Rule of Law Unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the global focal point arrangement for the police, justice and corrections areas in the rule of law in post-conflict and other crisis situations;

40. *Invites* States, in the context of the universal periodic review mechanism and in their reports under international human rights treaties, to consider addressing the promotion and protection of human rights in the administration of justice;

41. *Also invites* States, when reviewing progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to consider the possibility of looking into the causes and effects of overincarceration and overcrowding, including, where persons are in vulnerable situations or marginalized, with regard to non-discrimination and persons who are in vulnerable situations or marginalized in the administration of justice;

42. *Invites* relevant special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council, as well as relevant treaty bodies, to give special attention to questions relating to the effective protection of human rights in the administration of justice, and to provide, wherever appropriate, specific recommendations in this regard, including proposals for advisory services and technical assistance measures;

43. *Invites* States to consider taking into account aspects relating to human rights in the administration of justice at the upcoming Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to be held in Kyoto, Japan, from 7 to 12 March 2021;

44. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session a report on the latest developments, challenges and good practices in human rights in the administration of justice, including on the situation of women and girls in the administration of justice, and on the activities undertaken by the United Nations system as a whole;

45. *Decides* to continue its consideration of the question of human rights in the administration of justice at its seventy-seventh session under the item entitled “Promotion and protection of human rights”.

46th plenary meeting
16 December 2020