



GENEVA FOR HUMAN RIGHTS Global Training

GENEVE POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME
Formation Internationale

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Dear friends,

Thank you for so many reactions to our 24 March Message of solidarity, commitment and hope in these global health and economic crises ! As a training organisation, GHR wishes to continue contributing to the reflection on the dramatic human rights impacts of Covid-19.

We received many feed-backs and reports confirming the worsening human rights situation in all the regions. Unfortunately, as expected, vulnerable persons, groups and communities pay the highest price, and the worst is to be feared with the pandemic affecting all the countries in the South.

Obviously, it is too early a stage to draw conclusions. But some lessons can already be learned from these painful months:

- as long as inequalities and extreme poverty are not seriously tackled at national and international levels, a repetition of such human disaster seems to be unavoidable.
- our Governments did not listen to dozens of scientists and experts. Shouldn't we listen now to experts on climate change ?
- full and reliable information is critical. It is not '*official*' information (the Chinese Government did not tell all the truth). It depends on good governance, transparency, full access to all the sources, and monitoring by the civil society.
- the functioning of our societies has to be reviewed. We cannot simply start again with business-as-usual. 'Human rights' is not a matter of GNP or stock exchange: our economic and financial systems will have to change.

We should reflect upon the reaction of the UN human rights system. In this crisis, the actions of the High Commissioner and her Office, of the special procedures and treaty bodies confirmed their essential role in the global promotion and protection of human rights. However, in this process there is now a risk that the contribution of NGOs to the UN system, in particular of the NGOs from the regions, be more limited than before. It is essential that NGOs continue to fully and effectively participate in the Council's work.

Some decisions taken have an exceptional character, such as the adoption of statements by silent procedure or the suppression of side-events. They should not constitute a precedent. As soon as possible the same rules and practices should apply again as for the ordinary sessions of the Council.

Some suggest convening a special session of the Human Rights Council. But, this would make sense only if such a session would focus on the fate of the most vulnerable, be based on reports of OHCHR and thematic procedures, and be open to full and active participation of civil society representatives from the regions and from the most vulnerable groups.

Geneva, 22nd of April 2020

Adrien-Claude Zoller
President