

UNGA75 | Council has shown the fight for human rights continues despite Covid-19, says President

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Throughout the Covid-19 period, the Human Rights Council has successfully kept the flame burning for human rights and introduced innovations that should be continued, the Human Rights Council President, Elisabeth Tichy - Fisslberger, told UN Member States in New York in a recent dialogue.



Covid-19 is not only a health emergency but a human rights crisis, and the Human Rights Council has shown itself to be 'nimble and flexible' in facing challenges - by introducing innovations to its ways of working, the President of the Human Rights Council told State delegates in a dialogue held with the UN's Third Committee (human rights). She also underlined the importance of the work of civil society in the work of the Council, and the coordination between the UN in New York and Geneva.

In regard to Council innovation over the last months, the President noted the use of digital tools for meetings and information apps. Through the use of virtual meetings, many people around the world had been reached that the Council would otherwise not have, which was key to ensuring that people around the world could see that human rights were being promoted and protected despite the crises. These innovations in her view, should be retained beyond the span of the current crisis.

On the interaction between UN bodies in Geneva and New York, Tichy-Fisslberger said that 'this is one UN system and the UN should deliver as one ... in the world out there, nobody cares if it is one body or another'. Opportunities should be taken to compare analysis between delegates in different spaces, as these 'add to the consistency, relevant and effectiveness of all our work', she added.

In that regard, arguably the most interesting State interventions came in the form of questions on specific opportunities for greater synergy, such as Croatia's enquiry as to how the Council should feed in to the General Assembly's special session on Covid-19 in December.

The President spoke of civil society actors as the 'cornerstone of the work of the Council' making the Council's work 'more tangible and connected to the reality on the ground.' Human Rights Council successes so far 'would not be possible without the active participation of civil society', she added.

Several States spoke of the supposed politicisation of the Council. This the President pushed back against, requesting member States to engage with Special Procedures, for example, and voice their opinion rather than fail to engage and then accuse the mandate-holders of bias.

Finally, Tichy-Fisslberger noted that the UN's financial crisis has had its impact on the Council workings although Covid-19 had also allowed for savings related to conference services. Over the next months she was keen to keep looking at means to increase Council efficiency and effectiveness.

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