Human Rights Council 43rd Session Resumption

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Shotlist

3. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria), President of the Human Rights Council (14th cycle): “I hereby declare open this 35th meeting of the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council.”
4. Medium: delegates wearing masks looking up at podium (out of shot).
5. SOUNDBITE (FR) - Dieudonné W. Désiré Sougouri, Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva (Coordinator of the African Group): “Les événements tragiques du 25 mai à Minneapolis aux Etats-Unis qui ont entrainé la mort de George Floyd ont déclenché des protestations dans le monde entier contre l’injustice et la brutalité policière auxquelles les personnes de d’ascendance africaine sont confrontées quotidiennement dans de nombreuses régions du monde. La mort de George Floyd n’est malheureusement pas un incident isolé.” EN - “The tragic events of 25 May in Minneapolis in the US which led to the death of George Floyd led to protests throughout the world against injustice and police brutality that persons of African descent face on a daily basis in many regions of the world. The death of George Floyd is unfortunately not an isolated incident.
6. Medium shot: delegates wearing masks, looking at laptop screens, sitting back.
7. SOUNDBITE (FR) - Dieudonné W. Désiré Sougouri, Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva (Coordinator of the African Group): “De nombreuses autres cas de personnes de d’ascendance africaine ayant...
subi le même sort en raison de leurs origines et de violences policières existent. Après l’indignation unanime et générale soulevée par cette situation, il serait inconcevable que le Conseil des droits de l’homme ne se saisisse pas de cette question d’actualité, conformément à son mandat. C’est la raison pour laquelle le Groupe Africain demande au Conseil des droits de l’homme d’organiser un débat urgent sur « les violations actuelles des droits de l’homme d’inspiration raciale, du racisme systémique, la violence policière contre les personnes d’ascendance africaine, et la violence contre les manifestations pacifiques » pour appeler à mettre un terme à ces injustices.”

EN- “Many other cases of persons of African descent having faced the same fate because of their origin and police violence exist. After the widespread of indignation over this situation, it would be inconceivable that the Human Rights Council not deal with these questions which are very relevant in accordance with its mandate and this is why the African Group calls upon the Human Rights Council to organise an Urgent Debate on current violations of human rights that are based on racism, systemic racism, police brutality against persons of African descent and violence against peaceful demonstrations to call for an end to be put to these injustices.”

8. Medium shot: delegates wearing masks listening to declarations, some standing at rear of room.

9. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria), President of the HumanRights Council (14th cycle): “Can I now therefore take it that the Council wishes to endorse the Bureau’s proposal to hold the Urgent Debate on the ‘current racially inspired human rights violations, systematic racism, police brutality and the violence against peaceful protests’ on Wednesday 17 June at 3pm? I can see no objection; it is therefore so decided. Thank you very much.”

10. Wide shot: UN Geneva Press Room III; various journalists, seated far apart from one another, with Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger sitting at podium to rear of shot.

11. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria), President of the HumanRights Council (14th cycle): “We got a request from the African Group to have an urgent debate in the follow-up to what happened in America with George Floyd and the whole tragedy which showed the problems of racism, of police violence and the follow-up to that.”


13. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria), President of the HumanRights Council (14th cycle): “As you have seen with demonstrations all over the world, including here in Geneva, so this is a topic that is not about just one country, it goes well beyond that.”


15. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria), President of the HumanRights Council (14th cycle): “When I said it’s not against the United States, I mean there is complaints about a lot of racism in many countries of this world, of course in Europe, but not only; you find it all over the world.”


17. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria), President of the HumanRights Council (14th cycle): “I think that the African countries – that’s the way I understand it – they thought that the situation was such, and also with demonstrations and the intensity of the public debate was such that we shouldn’t just have a regular Human Rights Council session and we should really put some focus on that topic.”


Human Rights Council picks up again after COVID suspension, to hold racism debate

After a three month long COVID-19-enforced break, the Human Rights Council resumed its work at UN Geneva on Monday, giving the green light to a rare Urgent Debate on racism, alleged police brutality and violence against protesters sickened by the killing of American George Floyd in police custody.

Opening the 35th meeting of the 43rd session of the Council in the unusual setting of the Assembly Hall to comply with social distancing requirements – rather than the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room – the current Council President, Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, gave the floor to Burkina Faso, coordinator of the African Group.

“The tragic events of 25 May in Minneapolis in the US which led to the death of George Floyd led to protests throughout the world against injustice and police brutality that persons of African descent face on a daily basis in many regions of the world,” said Dieudonné W. Désiré Sougouri, Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva. “The death of George Floyd is unfortunately not an isolated incident.”

Insisting that many other persons of African descent had “faced the same fate because of their origin and police violence”, Mr Sougouri said that it would be “inconceivable” if the Council did not address the issue.

“This is why the African Group calls upon the Human Rights Council to organise an Urgent Debate on current violations of human rights that are based on racism, systemic racism, police brutality against persons of African descent and violence against peaceful demonstrations to call for an end to be put to these injustices,” he said.

After endorsement of the African Group’s request, Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger fixed the provisional date of the Urgent Debate on “current racially inspired human rights violations, systematic racism, police brutality and the violence against peaceful protests” for Wednesday 17 June at 3pm.

Speaking later to journalists, the Council President confirmed that the request from the African Group came after “what happened in America with George Floyd and the whole tragedy which showed the problems of racism, of police violence and the follow-up to that”.

It was not clear whether any members of Mr Floyd’s family had been invited to address the Council, but a draft resolution would be prepared by the Group, she added.

The group’s initiative came after a call from more than 600 rights groups last Monday to investigate alleged police violence after the killing of Mr Floyd.

The issue was universal, the Ambassador maintained, highlighting the large number of Black Lives Matter protests that have been held in many countries. “As you have seen with demonstrations all over the world, including here in Geneva, so this is a topic that is not about just one country, it goes well beyond that,” she explained.

“When I said it’s not against the United States, I mean there is complaints about a lot of racism in many countries of this world, of course in Europe, but not only; you find it all over the world.”

Asked about the significance of the development – which is only the fifth Urgent Debate to take place in the Council’s 14-year history – she added in her view that the African Group “thought that the situation was such, and also with demonstrations and the intensity of the public debate was such that we shouldn’t just have a regular Human Rights Council session and we should really put some focus on that topic.”

For seasoned Council-watchers, the day will also be remembered for the fact that Member States and non-
governmental organisations convened in the cavernous Assembly Hall, where the near 2,000-seat capacity had to be slashed by around 90 per cent in line with Swiss government health directives.

In more normal times, deliberations happen in the Council’s altogether more colourful - if smaller - home elsewhere in the Palais des Nations, in the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room – although voting on some 40 draft resolutions is expected to be held there on Thursday afternoon and Friday.

To further prevent possible transmission of the respiratory disease, facemasks – and a few pairs of protective gloves - were almost universally in evidence.

Delegations were also parsed to just one representative rather than the usual two or three people in line with coronavirus social distancing measures.

Some delegations preferred to participate remotely, no mean feat in six languages, the unflappable Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger conceded, describing the exercise as “fairly complicated”.

The decision to resume the Council’s work mirrors deconfinement moves in Switzerland and beyond, as the country reopens its borders with Austria, France and Germany on Monday 15 June.

To date, Switzerland has confirmed more than 31,000 cases of COVID-19 infection and more than 1,670 deaths, according to latest WHO data.