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**Human Rights in Transition Contexts:
The Contribution of Peace Operations
Statement delivered by ASG Zouev
8 July 2020**

Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I would like to thank Ambassadors Heusgen and Baeriswyl [*bear-is-vil*] for convening this meeting on a topic of eminent importance and for inviting me to address you today. I would also like to thank the members of the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucus New York for hosting.

Excellencies,

Human Rights and the Rule of Law – together – form the foundations on which resilient and inclusive societies are built and sustained. The correlation is apparent: human rights cannot be effectively protected without the rule of law; on the other hand, the protection and promotion of human rights remains the ultimate objective of strengthening and upholding the rule of law.

Mutually reinforcing, these are also the pillars for successfully emerging from conflict. Accordingly, the Security Council has included human rights and rule of law mandates in virtually all its resolutions authorizing peace operations in the past two decades. Simply put, these issues must be at the forefront of efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace, as recognized by the Council in resolution 2447 of 2018.

So, it will not surprise you that the outstanding work of OHCHR is linked in countless ways with the activities of the Office that I lead, the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions. This is especially true in those countries that host peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

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United Nations police, for example, collaborates closely with human rights components in mentoring and advising national law enforcement agencies on a people-centered, community-oriented approach to policing. It assists member states in vetting and reforming its police services, strengthen internal oversight and accountability mechanisms, and train its personnel in a human rights-based approach to policing, as outlined in the Strategic Guidance Framework for International Policing. For example in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA Police supports the training and recruitment of a total of 5,000 officers, in compliance with the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. Moreover, the sheer presence of international police operating alongside national services can be a deterrent of abusive behavior.

Especially during these unprecedented times, this support is critical. Some governments have responded to the pandemic with an expanded role and more forceful presence of police and other security actors. In these cases, bias or disproportionate use of force can emerge as challenges and result in human rights violations. Our Standing Police Capacity, with the generous support of Germany and together with OHCHR and UNDP, is advising several police services around the world on human rights-based approaches to COVID-19 related tasks. This includes Angola, Malawi, the Maldives and Zambia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Equally important linkages exist between human rights and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants. Especially in transition settings, their successful reintegration into civilian life often depends on making sure these processes are fully aligned with transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives.

Human rights are also at the center of the work of our SSR components. They support national governments in strengthening their security sector governance structures and ensuring adequate civilian oversight, thereby mitigating the risk of human rights violations by security forces. The MINUSCA SSR component, for instance, works closely with the Human Rights Division and other parts of the Mission to assist the national authorities with the development of a robust accountability framework for the security sector. This includes strengthening the military justice system, vetting new recruits in the CAR armed forces, building the capacity of the Ministry of Defence and the Inspector General of Armed Forces

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to uphold conduct and discipline, and building confidence between security institutions and the population.

The pandemic has brought additional challenges also in this realm. We have seen that some states may be utilizing emergency powers to consolidate executive authority at the expense of the rule of law, suppressing dissent, and undermining democratic institutions, especially where courts and other oversight bodies struggle to perform due to COVID-related restrictions. Our joint efforts are now more important than ever.

Excellencies,

The OROLSI colleagues working most closely with human rights components are arguably our justice and corrections experts. Among their mandated tasks is to strengthen national capacity to carry out investigations, prosecutions and trials of crimes that can fuel conflict. This often includes criminal accountability of military personnel.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, Prosecution Support Cells staffed with experts provided by contributing member states have supported national authorities in investigations and prosecutions of members of the military. This has included commanders and has sent a clear message that impunity has come to an end – thereby deterring future human rights violations. And in the Central African Republic, the documentation of conflict-related human rights abuses undertaken by OHCHR provided the basis for investigations by the Special Criminal Court.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A well-known compatriot of mine once remarked that “The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.” Yet, prisons around the globe have often been dark sites in terms of human rights. Especially in war-torn countries and those that experience extreme poverty, conditions in prisons are often abhorrent. Together with their human rights colleagues, our corrections experts in peace operations are doing their utmost to protect the human rights of prison populations and to address their most basic needs.

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In addition, and as most of you will know, prisons have been described as petri dishes during this pandemic. Social distancing is impossible, and sanitary and medical conditions are often abysmal. In response, my colleagues here in New York have developed practical tools for direct use by prison authorities to decongest prisons and mitigate the risk of contagion. These tools have been translated into over 15 languages and are being used around the world.

All of this work would not be possible without close and systematic cooperation with our UN partners. Our main vehicle for ensuring this partnership is the Global Focal Point for Rule of Law, or GFP, which brings together all relevant UN entities. The GFP has become a one-stop-shop for member states to access UN rule of law assistance. It pools knowledge, funds and expertise and ensures that the best possible police, justice, corrections and SSR support will be provided.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As recognized in the excellent concept note for this event, “the protection and promotion of human rights in transition contexts is particularly important in consolidating progress made towards peace and recovery.” This means that certain countries deserve our undivided attention. I am thinking here of Haiti, and especially Sudan. The hard-won gains must not be lost, and this must be reflected in mandates, funding and advocacy by the international community.

A yearning for human rights, fundamental freedoms and justice was at the heart of the Sudanese revolution. Now, during this critical time for the country, attention to these issues is essential to usher a successful political transition and build an enduring social contract. Related international assistance must build upon on the gains achieved in Darfur and focus on consolidating a protective and peacebuilding environment through inclusive and strong government institutions and civil society organizations, while continuing the support to protecting civilians in Darfur and other volatile regions.

In Haiti, UN support to building the police has often been quoted as the biggest success over the past two decades. Yet, we still have some way to go and must not relent on the last mile. Continued support is required to ensure that the Haitian National Police and its corrections institutions respect human rights at all times.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude with an appeal. Preventing human rights violations and fighting impunity is not possible without sustained political will. The voice of the High Commissioner is critical. However, Member States – be it as donors or as members in the Security Council – also play a pivotal role. We count on your continued advocacy and support, without which all our work will be for not.

Thank you for your attention.