

## **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet concludes her official visit to Peru, July 18th – 20th**

**UN STATEMENT, July 20th, 2022, Michelle Bachelet**

I would like to begin by thanking the Government of Peru for inviting me. This visit has allowed me to better understand both the human rights advances and the challenges faced by the country – its people and its institutions. During my visit, I met with the President, the Vice-President, the Foreign Minister, and other members of the cabinet. I also had meetings with members of Congress from different political parties, and representatives of the justice system, civil society, the private sector, indigenous peoples, and victims of human rights violations. I also met with the national human rights institution and electoral authorities, and members of the National Accord, a platform for dialogue.

Peru is still recovering from a COVID-19 pandemic that was devastating for its people, resulting in the world's highest per capita death rate. More than 1 in 20 people who were confirmed to have COVID died – overall, some 213,825 deaths have been recorded. At the same time it is encouraging to note that currently 84 per cent of the population have had their second dose of a COVID vaccine.

The pandemic laid bare the deep socio-economic divisions in Peruvian society, and its effects will reverberate for years. The pandemic particularly affected the rural areas, impoverished people, as well as marginalised and discriminated groups. Girls and boys are now gradually returning to in-person schooling after nearly two years of their schools being closed, a situation that particularly affected those children in remote areas who do not have access to the internet.

Now another outside shock, the war in Ukraine, is having a deep impact on people's capacity to build back better. Amid rising food and fuel prices, some 15.5 million people in the country are considered to be food insecure, according to the World Food Programme. This troubling situation could worsen in the coming months due to shortages of fertilizers needed in the approaching planting season.

I have raised with all my interlocutors that socio-economic protection measures should be extended and be focused on generating tangible improvements for the most marginalised. Supporting small-scale agriculture and prioritizing efforts to help people move from the informal labour market are clear ways to build back better.

Polarization has been deepening over recent months and there are troubling indications that an anti-rights movement is gaining ground. With local and regional elections due in October, I am concerned that hate speech, discrimination and violence could further increase. The role of Peru's electoral authorities is fundamental to protect democratic space in the current context. Journalists also play a crucial role here, but have faced harassment as they carry out their work. This is particularly the case for women journalists. Many of those I met these past days stressed that only action by all sectors can prevent backsliding in the respect for – and the pursuit of – human rights. My Office has extensive experience in assisting such processes and I have offered the authorities the support of my team in Peru in this endeavour.

To counter regression in the respect for human rights, Peru already has important tools in place, including laws, policies and protocols that are consistent with human rights standards, but which require efforts to ensure implementation, with appropriate budget and staffing. Just as importantly, as I saw these past two days, the country has a courageous human rights movement that continues to fight tirelessly for justice. I also heard from State officials committed to human rights.

My exchanges with stakeholders have shown that the path forward can only be successfully charted by different sectors of society coming together and pursuing an inclusive national dialogue that represents the rich diversity of this country. To this end, I urge all political parties to act with what I call generosity, and with a sense of political responsibility, to address the challenges that the country faces. State institutions that are

strong, transparent, accountable and ready to root out corruption are fundamental for this process. I commend the crucial role of the Ombudsperson's Office and note the importance of having a transparent selection process, in accordance with international standards, to select the next holder of this office.

Peru's indigenous peoples and human rights defenders are on the frontline when it comes to the impact of climate change and other threats, such as illegal mining, illegal logging and drug trafficking, especially in the Amazon region. They should be seen as allies in efforts to tackle the impunity of criminal groups. Indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation are also affected by illicit activities. I admire the courage and strength of human rights defenders who play an invaluable role in Peruvian society amid ongoing risks. These defenders need effective protection and a safe and enabling environment for their work. I welcome the commitment of the authorities to work with my team in Peru towards this objective.

Mining and other extractive industries have been central to Peru's economy for centuries. But the development promises of extractive industries have all too often failed to benefit affected communities, especially indigenous peoples and rural populations. Remediation of contamination left by past projects has still not been fully implemented. One indigenous environmental rights defender described how the heavy metals from a local mine in the water sources had left people in her community in the Cusco region sick. "We are not against development. We just want companies to act responsibly. We don't want to die, we want to live."

Agreements reached to address social discontent provoked by extractive and other projects should be based on prior consultation, ensure protection for underlying rights to land and resources, incorporate social and environmental safeguards and mitigate any negative impacts. The private sector has an important role to play going forward, through the development of both voluntary and mandatory measures to implement corporate due diligence. Private sector representatives whom I met stressed to me their commitment to advance the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. I also encourage initiatives to move towards renewable and green energy.

I was moved to hear the testimonies of groups promoting gender equality, including the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. I encourage the authorities to work together with civil society to counter high rates of domestic violence, barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health services, discrimination based on sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes, and to address the troubling levels of missing women and girls.

I recognize Peru's efforts in responding to the arrival of some 1.3 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and it is a testament to the country and its people that they stepped up to help. However, as I mentioned in many of my meetings with stakeholders, I am concerned by a legislative proposal recently adopted by Congress which would require people to show regular migration status to rent property, and this could affect those most vulnerable, including children. This measure could also affect Peruvian men and women who rent out their homes and could lose this often vital rental income.

As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, I have been privileged to meet inspiring human rights defenders as well as victims and their families across the world. This week in Peru, I witnessed the endurance and hope of those seeking truth and justice for the violations they suffered. I spoke to one woman who told me how she was tricked and forcibly sterilized, and decades later, has still not received justice. She was one of thousands of women and men - mostly rural, poor and Quechua-speaking - who experienced this violation. My visit coincided with an emblematic date - the 30th anniversary of the horrific Tarata bombing by the Sendero Luminoso, resulting in the deaths of 25 people as well as the La Cantuta massacre, when nine students and a university professor were abducted and killed by a military death squad. Coming to terms with Peru's period of violence from 1980 to 2000 is vital to overcome key challenges of today, including current levels of political and social polarization. As a doctor I always say, you have to clean a wound for it to heal. Memorial sites, such as El Ojo que Lloro in Lima or La Hoyada in Ayacucho, honour victims and help overcome the past. Families of the victims of the protests of November 2020 have also shown similar strength in pursuing justice. One young man put it simply: "My generation has had enough of impunity – basta."

I held a number of constructive conversations with representatives of different State sectors, who recognise Peru's human rights challenges and have identified concrete responses to address them. I value the authorities' commitment to cooperate with international human rights mechanisms, including the upcoming visits by UN Special Rapporteurs. I also value the authorities' efforts to ensure a sustainable presence of my team in Peru.

Peru's human rights challenges are clear, as we have heard over the past two days. Based on the discussions I have had, I am convinced that they can be overcome and a way to a more inclusive future found. It is important to not lose hope. My Office stands ready to accompany these efforts. Thank you.