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Statement  
by  
Navanethem Pillay  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



Signing Ceremony for the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights

2009 UN Treaty Event (New York)

24 September 2009

Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you in this ceremony which marks the opening for signature and ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. I wish to extend my warm thanks to the Secretary-General for his participation at this landmark event.

Six decades ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promised universality, indivisibility and equal value of all human rights for all people. Its framers wisely chose not to rank rights. On the contrary, they recognized that political and civil rights go hand in hand with economic, social and cultural rights. They did so because all rights are inextricably linked. Violations of a set of rights reverberate on other rights and undermine them all. Indeed, economic, social and cultural rights, like other human rights, are the birthright of every human being. A child excluded from primary school because of school fees, a woman paid less than her male colleague for the same work, a family forcibly evicted from their home, a man left to starve when food stocks lie unused—these are all instances of individuals denied their economic, social and cultural rights.

Yet, for far too long economic, social and cultural rights were not given the same attention and status in law, and were deprived of the same vehicles for enhancement and resources devoted to civil and political rights. On 10 December 2009, this historic gap in the protection of economic, social and cultural rights was finally addressed. The Optional Protocol closes a historic gap in human rights protection. It reaffirms the equal importance of economic, social and cultural rights with civil and political rights. It will enable victims to seek justice for violations of their economic, social and cultural rights at the international level for the first time, through the submission of communications before the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Thus, the Optional Protocol represents a veritable milestone in the international human rights system.

rights. The Optional Protocol also contains a specific clause on international assistance and cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a historic moment in the evolution of the protection of human rights and in providing access to remedies to victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights. With the adoption of the Optional Protocol, the United Nations has now been able to come full circle on the normative architecture envisaged by the Universal Declaration. I call on all States to promptly sign and ratify this crucial new human rights instrument.

Thank you.