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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

# Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights\*


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\* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

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## **I. Introduction**

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141 and highlights activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) between 1 December 2017 and 30 November 2018 in support of international human rights mechanisms and in the areas of development, peace and security, non-discrimination, accountability and participation.
2. As of 30 November 2018, OHCHR had 71 presences worldwide. In 2018, the previous High Commissioner visited Ethiopia, Fiji, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights visited Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Yemen.
3. The year 2018 marked the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. OHCHR implemented a year-long campaign to promote the principles of the Declaration, engaging a wide range of audiences across the world and reflecting on human rights progress to date.

## **II. Activities of the Office of the High Commissioner**

### **A. International human rights mechanisms**

#### **1. Treaty bodies**

4. OHCHR continued to facilitate the work of the human rights treaty bodies. It supported the reviews of 141 State party reports; the adoption of views and decisions on 232 individual communications; visits to 7 State parties by the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the elaboration of 3 general comments; and the initiation of 3 confidential inquiries. The Office registered 274 complaints by individuals alleging violations of their human rights, but inadequate resources prevented timely action.
5. The second biennial report of the Secretary-General on the status of the human rights treaty body system (A/73/309) confirmed the pressing need for additional resources to ensure its effective functioning. The 2020 review will be a crucial opportunity for addressing the situation.

#### **2. Human Rights Council**

6. OHCHR continued to support the efforts of the Human Rights Council, which held a total of 140 meetings on a broad array of chronic and emerging human rights issues, and to respond to human rights crises.
7. OHCHR also continued to support the commissions of inquiry on Burundi and the Syrian Arab Republic; the group of eminent international and regional experts on Yemen; the commission on human rights in South Sudan; the team of independent experts on the Kasai region, Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the fact-finding mission on Myanmar. It also supported the commission of inquiry established in June 2018 to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip. Pursuant to resolution 39/2 of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR prepared, in collaboration with the Office of Legal Affairs, for the establishment of the independent mechanism for Myanmar.
8. OHCHR also supported the endeavours of the Human Rights Council Bureau to increase the efficiency of the Council and therefore its ability to manage the exponential growth in its work.
9. The increasing support of States for the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council, administered by OHCHR, enabled 25

delegates, including those from six small island developing States without permanent representation in Geneva, to attend Council sessions. OHCHR supported a workshop for the Caribbean region, at which the Georgetown Declaration Towards 2022 was adopted, which seeks to facilitate the engagement of the least developed countries and small island developing States with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

### **3. Universal periodic review**

10. With the support of OHCHR, the universal periodic review continued to see 100 per cent participation by States under review during the ongoing third cycle. The Voluntary Trust Fund for participation in the universal periodic review, administered by OHCHR, benefited 22 of the 42 Member States reviewed during the reporting period. To facilitate follow-up to recommendations, upon completion of reviews the High Commissioner continued to address letters to Ministers of Foreign Affairs offering support.

### **4. Special procedures**

11. OHCHR continued to support the work of 44 thematic and 12 country-specific special procedures mandates. It also assisted the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures and ensured the increased visibility and efficiency of the overall system. The report on the annual meeting of the special procedures contains an overview of the activities of mandate holders in 2018 (A/HRC/40/38 and Add.1).

### **5. Follow-up to the work of human rights mechanisms**

12. OHCHR intensified its support for the comprehensive implementation of recommendations issued by United Nations human rights mechanisms, which provide opportunities for United Nations system-wide engagement at the national level.

13. Through the Voluntary Fund for financial and technical assistance for the implementation of the universal periodic review that it administers, OHCHR continued to respond to requests for assistance from Member States. In 2018, it initiated regional workshops involving a wide range of actors to share good practices on the universal periodic review, including on follow-up to recommendations.

14. OHCHR presences throughout the world continued to support Governments and other actors in submitting reports for the universal period review. They assisted States in establishing or strengthening national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up, and in developing tools to track the implementation of recommendations, sometimes in combination with the Sustainable Development Goals, including in Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Namibia, Panama, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uruguay. In Haiti, Nauru, the Republic of Moldova, Samoa and Uganda OHCHR additionally assisted in the elaboration or revision of national human rights action plans.

15. Through the treaty body capacity-building programme, OHCHR provided national and regional training courses, building the capacities of officials from more than 50 States. It produced guidance and training materials and continued upgrading the Universal Human Rights Index.

### **6. Humanitarian funds**

16. The United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, both administered by OHCHR, awarded grants to support redress and rehabilitation for about 10,000 victims of contemporary forms of slavery in 32 States and for about 40,000 victims of torture in 78 States. The Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture also issued emergency grants to respond to cases occurring in human rights and humanitarian crises. The Special Fund established by the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment supported 13 prevention projects in 12 States parties.

## **B. Development**

### **1. Sustainable Development Goals**

17. OHCHR increased its engagement in advancing sustainable development through the promotion and protection of human rights. It supported regional events with Resident Coordinators and other senior United Nations officials in Chile, Ethiopia and Senegal to foster linkages between the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the recommendations of international human rights mechanisms. It also produced analyses on the links between economic, social and cultural rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>1</sup>

18. At the country level, OHCHR provided technical assistance to and participated in inter-agency engagements, including support to States through mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support initiatives, and in capacity-building for United Nations country teams, including in El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe. It strengthened the collaboration between statistical offices and human rights institutions on indicators and a human rights-based approach to data, including in Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Pakistan, Tunisia, Uganda and the State of Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

19. OHCHR supported Member States and civil society in the context of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. It organized expert meetings and side events, including on the enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls and the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **2. Right to development**

20. OHCHR completed studies on the international dimensions of the right to development, illicit financial flows, international investment agreements and industrialization, and climate finance to support the Working Group on the Right to Development. It also supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development. With academic institutions, OHCHR provided an e-learning module on operationalizing the right to development in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals to over 100 participants from over 60 countries.

### **3. International financial institutions**

21. OHCHR continued its engagement with development and financing institutions to promote the integration of human rights into their policies and accountability mechanisms. It also contributed to initiatives to develop policies governing responses to intimidation and reprisals against environmental and human rights defenders.

### **4. Economic, social and cultural rights**

22. OHCHR strengthened its work and partnerships to promote and protect economic and social rights, including the rights to education, food, health, housing, water and sanitation, work and land rights. It raised the visibility of those rights through collaboration with United Nations agencies in the context of the UDHR70 campaign. In the framework of UN-Water, it led inter-agency advocacy efforts on the human rights to water and sanitation for World Water Day in 2019.

23. OHCHR engaged on addressing forced evictions, including those related to land and natural resources, often affecting indigenous communities. It engaged in advocacy and provided advice on legislative and policy changes, mediation and/or capacity-building support for civil society and affected communities, including in Cambodia, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Guatemala and Thailand.

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<sup>1</sup> See A/HRC/37/30, A/HRC/37/32, A/HRC/38/37 and E/2018/57.

<sup>2</sup> See “A human rights-based approach to data: leaving no one behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, available from [www.ohchr.org/HRBAD](http://www.ohchr.org/HRBAD).

24. OHCHR expanded its work on integrating economic, social and cultural rights into early warning and conflict prevention frameworks, based on the analytical framework developed in 2016 (E/2016/58).

25. OHCHR expanded its collaboration with regional and local authorities on a human rights-based implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. It continued to promote the “Shift” initiative of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, which is aimed at changing the perception of housing from a commodity to a human right.

26. OHCHR contributed to the work of the Committee on World Food Security in taking stock of the use and application of the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security. It supported the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, including on improving the human rights situation of agricultural workers. It also supported the open-ended intergovernmental working group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, which completed its mandate by adopting a United Nations declaration.

27. Together with the World Health Organization (WHO), OHCHR developed a framework of cooperation and a workplan to implement the recommendations of the High-level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents. It contributed to inter-agency initiatives, such as the United Nations Common Position on ending HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis through intersectoral collaboration and also organized a consultation on human rights and mental health (see A/HRC/39/36).

## **5. Business and human rights**

28. OHCHR assisted the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights, which embarked on negotiation of a legally binding instrument and optional protocol. It organized the annual forum on business and human rights, addressing the emerging practice and enabling factors for corporate human rights due diligence. More than 2,700 representatives, including some from the private sector, participated in over 70 panels and round-table discussions. OHCHR organized a multi-stakeholder consultation on corporate human rights due diligence in practice and several regional consultations on the gender lens to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

29. OHCHR provided technical support for the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, notably for the development of national action plans for business and human rights, including in countries in central Africa and in Colombia, Honduras, Kenya, Thailand and Uganda. Particular attention was paid to consultations with and the protection of indigenous communities affected by business practices and infrastructure projects.

30. In several countries, including Senegal and Uganda, OHCHR helped to develop the capacity of national human rights institutions, of civil society organizations and of communities to monitor and report on the impact of business, notably mining companies, on human rights (in Cameroon and Guinea). It supported the establishment of an economic, social, and cultural rights observatory in Madagascar and a national observatory for the respect of human rights in the extractive sector in Senegal.

31. OHCHR launched the third part of the accountability and remedy project, which focuses on enhancing the effectiveness of non-State-based grievance mechanisms for access to remedy in cases of business-related human rights abuse. It pursued its engagement to ensure responsible business involvement and respect for human rights in the context of mega sporting events, supporting the creation of an independent centre for sport and human rights. It worked to clarify the human rights responsibilities of companies in the finance and technology sectors and to strengthen corporate reporting in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

## **C. Peace and security**

### **1. Support to peace missions**

32. OHCHR continued its strategic and operational support to human rights components of United Nations peace operations and its engagement with the Security Council.

33. OHCHR participated in strategic assessments of peace operations in Mali and the Central African Republic and in transition planning in Darfur in the Sudan. It contributed to the development and review of policies on the protection of civilians, conflict-related sexual violence and child protection, and conducted training of uniformed peacekeeping personnel and senior leaders of peace operations.

### **2. Human rights due diligence and compliance frameworks**

34. OHCHR co-led the global review of implementation of the human rights due diligence policy and provided technical and operational expertise for the implementation of the policy in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda.

35. OHCHR worked on the human rights compliance of non-United Nations international military operations authorized or mandated by the Security Council. It engaged with the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and its member States for the establishment and operationalization of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework.<sup>3</sup> It continued working with the African Union towards strengthening the human rights, international humanitarian law and conduct and discipline compliance framework for their peace support operations.

### **3. Prevention, early warning and emergency response**

36. OHCHR supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to prioritize prevention and continued to implement the Human Rights Up Front initiative.

37. As part of its enhanced focus on preventing violations and strengthening protection of human rights, OHCHR continued to refine methodologies and reinforced its information management and early warning capacity. It developed a field-oriented information management strategy to respond to the needs of an increasingly data-driven environment and established emergency response teams in the regional offices for Southern Africa and South-East Asia. It also embarked on a project with the World Bank to strengthen the continental early warning system of the African Union.

38. Early warning tools developed by some human rights components of peace missions contributed to strengthening the protection of civilians in countries such as Mali and South Sudan. In the Central African Republic, OHCHR supported the adoption of a national action plan on the prevention of public incitement to violence and hate speech and the related national campaign.

39. OHCHR engaged in conflict prevention or resolution, for example between internally displaced persons or refugees and host communities in the south of Mauritania and in Nigeria, where it engaged with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in alternative dispute resolution measures on land and property issues emanating from the Boko Haram insurgency and counter-terrorism operations.

40. OHCHR dispatched teams to several countries to respond to crises and other emerging situations (Ecuador and Nicaragua), including as part of United Nations missions in Comoros and Togo. It remotely monitored the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and conducted missions to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, in relation to the situation of the Rohingya population of Myanmar and to the integration of human rights in humanitarian assistance. It also supported the response of the humanitarian country team in Ethiopia and enhanced its advice to the authorities.

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<sup>3</sup> Security Council resolution 2391 (2017) provides for this compliance framework.

#### 4. Sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking and related exploitation

41. OHCHR organized a workshop on the protection of victims of sexual violence; promoted coordination among United Nations entities on critical country issues and enhanced capacities for monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. It monitored, analysed and reported on sexual and gender-based violence in a number of places, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Sudan, Ukraine, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Indian-Administered Kashmir and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir.

42. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, OHCHR contributed to the implementation of the action plan against sexual violence of the national armed forces and the development of the national plan of action against sexual violence of the National Police. It supported the implementation by the South Sudan People's Defence Force of an action plan to address and monitor conflict-related sexual violence.

43. In Guatemala and Uganda, OHCHR supported the filing of strategic litigation cases for reparations on behalf of women who survived sexual violence committed during the conflicts. In Kenya, with the national human rights institution it convened consultations with the Government and civil society on strategies for an effective response to the widespread sexual violence that took place during the 2017 elections, leading to a plan of action for prevention, coordination of data collection, monitoring, protection, prosecution and redress.

44. Promoting the implementation of the Latin American Protocol for the investigation of the gender-related killings of women (femicide), OHCHR launched an online course to strengthen the investigation capacities of public officials in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama. In Argentina, it supported the elaboration of a protocol for the investigation of femicide cases.

45. In Colombia, OHCHR developed a tool to map gender-based violence against women in high-risk areas to guide authorities and civil society in their prevention efforts. In Jamaica, it supported the development of a national strategic action plan on ending gender-based violence.

46. OHCHR and the International Civil Aviation Organization organized a human trafficking forum and launched guidelines to train cabin crews in identifying and reporting trafficked individuals. It also supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children (A/73/171 and A/HRC/38/45).

#### 5. Humanitarian action

47. OHCHR remained actively engaged in United Nations efforts to ensure respect for international human rights and humanitarian law in crises. It continued to integrate human rights into the overall efforts of protection clusters, humanitarian country teams and humanitarian coordinators, including in relation to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. It continued to lead the protection cluster in the State of Palestine and participated in the work of protection clusters or working groups in countries including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Mexico, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Timor-Leste, Ukraine and Yemen, as well as in the Pacific and Southern Africa.

48. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, OHCHR provided technical support in the context of the Ebola virus outbreak, and developed a "rights watch strategy" involving human rights monitoring and reporting, and advocacy with the relevant authorities and humanitarians in affected provinces. It deployed monitors in north-eastern Nigeria to assess the human rights impact of the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency and support the humanitarian response. In Guatemala, it provided advice in the context of the humanitarian response following the volcanic eruption. It also provided support to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency.

## D. Non-discrimination

### 1. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

49. OHCHR continued to work on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. It supported the launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent in Canada and also on the African continent during the first African Union-United Nations high-level dialogue on human rights. The fellowship programme for people of African descent administered by OHCHR sponsored and empowered activists from 13 countries.

50. OHCHR contributed to the guide on preventing unlawful profiling produced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.<sup>4</sup> Together with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, it finalized a tool to facilitate measurement of the racial equality of populations of African descent.

51. In Kyrgyzstan, South Africa and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, OHCHR provided advice on harmonizing anti-discrimination legislation and action plans with international human rights standards. In Tunisia, it advised on the drafting of the law against racial discrimination. It also contributed to a training manual on combating incitement to racial and religious hatred for judicial training institutions in the Middle East and North Africa.

### 2. Migrants

52. OHCHR continued to focus on the human rights of people on the move and countering xenophobia. In the context of negotiations on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, it convened strategic stakeholder discussions and provided expert advice to States on the Compact and on the establishment of a new United Nations migration network. It also co-drafted the Principles and Guidelines, Supported by Practical Guidance, on the Human Rights Protection of Migrants in Vulnerable Situations<sup>5</sup> and convened an expert meeting on human rights violations related to the return of migrants.

53. With the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, OHCHR developed a training course for border officials and supported pilot training courses at the regional level (for example in the Middle East and North Africa) based on the Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders. It conducted missions to Austria, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and the Niger to monitor the human rights of migrants, and engaged with the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. It pursued its advocacy with the authorities in Australia and Papua New Guinea to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees on Manus Island.

54. As part of the Stand Up for Migrants campaign, OHCHR launched videos featuring conversations with migrants and their communities. It assisted the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, who assessed the impact of slavery and servitude on marginalized migrant women workers in the global domestic economy (A/HRC/39/52).

55. OHCHR prepared reports on climate change and human rights protection for cross-border migrants (A/HRC/38/21 and A/HRC/37/35), which contributed to the adoption by the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts of recommendations that explicitly reference a rights-based approach to climate-related migration.

### 3. Discrimination on the basis of indigenous or minority status

56. OHCHR facilitated the inclusion of indigenous peoples in decision-making at the national and international levels. It provided support to Governments and minority

<sup>4</sup> *Preventing Unlawful Profiling Today and in the Future: a Guide* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Available at [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/PrinciplesAndGuidelines.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/PrinciplesAndGuidelines.pdf).



representatives for strengthening legislation on minority rights and addressing key concerns ranging from the protection of religious minorities to advancing the rights of Roma. It contributed to a specialized training course, held in Vienna, on protecting national minorities in the area covered by of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A mission to France sought to strengthen the actions of the Government to promote and protect the right to housing and related rights for Roma.

#### **4. Gender equality and women's rights**

57. OHCHR organized panel discussions on access to and participation in information and communication technologies, violence against women human rights defenders and women's organizations in digital spaces, and gender integration in human rights investigations. It issued two reports on the implementation of the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce and eliminate preventable mortality and morbidity (A/HRC/39/26 and A/73/257).

58. OHCHR supported the Equal Opportunities Commission of Uganda in mainstreaming gender issues in the programming and budgeting of local government. In El Salvador, it provided technical support to the authorities for the establishment of a committee of experts to review the cases of women accused and/or convicted of homicide charges following miscarriages and other obstetric emergencies.

59. OHCHR organized two workshops relating to gender, human rights and migration as well as gender-based violence and human rights for West African countries. With the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and WHO, it organized an expert meeting in Bangkok on surrogacy and human rights and conducted a regional workshop for women human rights defenders with UNFPA in Pretoria on engaging international and regional human rights mechanisms to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. It supported two meetings of the Central American network of women's non-governmental organizations working on sexual and reproductive health rights.

60. Further to the 2017 report "Women's rights in Africa", OHCHR, with the African Commission, contributed to a project on ratification, domestication and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

61. OHCHR continued to support the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice in setting progressive standards and, with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, in strengthening protection networks for women human rights defenders.

#### **5. Persons with disabilities**

62. OHCHR contributed to the development of an action plan and accountability framework to strengthen accessibility and mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities across the United Nations system. It continued to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the adoption of legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities in a number of countries, including Burundi, Guinea, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Suriname and Uganda. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, OHCHR advised on the elaboration of a national strategy on the deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities.

63. In Timor-Leste, OHCHR, together with United Nations agencies in the framework of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, embarked on a joint project to reduce violence and discrimination against women and girls with disabilities. It co-organized events in the occupied Palestinian territory on the protection of persons with disabilities in conflict and on mainstreaming disability in the humanitarian response.

#### **6. Sexual orientation and gender identity**

64. OHCHR worked to raise awareness of the human rights concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. It led the United Nations Free and Equal public

information campaign; raised awareness for the global equality standards of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons for the business community, which were launched in 2017 and supported by over 200 of the world's largest companies; and supported the second joint dialogue between African and Inter-American regional human rights mechanisms and United Nations human rights experts on strategic approaches to addressing violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. It also supported the work of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

#### **7. Older persons**

65. OHCHR assisted the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing and supported the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons. It organized a seminar on the obligations of States under international human rights law with regard to the protection of the family; contributed to the International Day of Older Persons; organized a consultation on promoting the human rights of older persons in business and a side event on the exclusion of older persons; and contributed to the international conference on the human rights of older persons in Vienna.

#### **8. Children and youth**

66. OHCHR contributed to the formulation of the United Nations Youth Strategy, Youth2030, organized the annual full-day meeting of the Human Rights Council on protecting the rights of the child in humanitarian situations (see A/HRC/37/33) and prepared a report on discrimination that young people face in claiming their rights (A/HRC/39/33).

#### **9. People with albinism**

67. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi and Mali, OHCHR continued to raise awareness of the regional action plan on albinism in Africa. It followed up on the work of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism. In Guinea, it supported the drafting of a law on the rights of persons with albinism.

#### **10. Caste-based discrimination**

68. OHCHR published a guidance tool on descent-based discrimination entitled *Key Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Combat Caste-Based and Analogous Forms of Discrimination*.

### **E. Accountability**

#### **1. Transitional justice**

69. OHCHR worked to strengthen the rule of law and accountability for past and present human rights violations. It provided expertise for the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, supported their work, undertook capacity-building for judicial actors and civil society, participated in workshops and contributed to the protection and participation of victims in a number of countries, including the Central African Republic, Colombia, El Salvador, the Gambia, Guatemala, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nepal, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Tunisia.

70. Also in the Gambia, OHCHR supported the establishment of a gender platform to ensure women's meaningful participation in the transitional justice process.

71. OHCHR supported the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence in his work on the contribution of transitional justice to the prevention of mass atrocities, undertaken jointly with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide (A/HRC/37/65).

## 2. Death penalty

72. OHCHR advocated with States for the establishment of moratoriums, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/176, and for the protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty in countries including Bangladesh, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Japan, Malawi, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand and the United States of America.

73. OHCHR organized a high-level panel discussion on poverty, the right to legal representation and the death penalty in New York and a regional event on the death penalty and drug-related offences in South-East Asia. It held a joint consultative meeting with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights on the death penalty and human rights.

## 3. Counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism

74. OHCHR trained defence and security forces on the integration of human rights norms and standards into fighting violent extremism and terrorism in Cameroon and for the Joint Force of the Group of five for the Sahel and its member States. It conducted a joint regional workshop with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the gender dimensions of criminal justice responses to terrorism for government representatives from Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Somalia. In Nigeria, it held an expert workshop to revise a training module on the gender dimensions of criminal justice responses to terrorism and conducted human rights and humanitarian training for the security forces in Somalia.

75. As chair of the inter-agency Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Working Group on promoting and protecting human rights and the rule of law while countering terrorism, OHCHR published guidance to States on human rights-compliant responses to the threat posed by foreign fighters and participated in an expert meeting on the development of a memorandum on the use of rule of law-based administrative measures in the context of counter-terrorism.

## 4. Administration of justice and law enforcement

76. OHCHR continued its support for effective, accountable and human rights-based national law enforcement institutions. It supported the World Wildlife Fund on integrating human rights into its training and policy guidance. It led training sessions on human rights and the protection of civilians at the inaugural United Nations police commanders' course in Langfang, China, for senior law enforcement officials awaiting deployment to peacekeeping missions. In Liberia, OHCHR supported efforts to implement good practices related to the use of force and firearms. In Fiji, it supported efforts to institutionalize human rights in training and policy frameworks. In Mauritania and Papua New Guinea, OHCHR supported national training academies to integrate human rights in their training curricula.

77. In Uganda, OHCHR supported the development of internal witness and victim protection guidelines for State prosecutors. It supported the implementation of the general law on disappearances in Mexico and provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Justice in Guinea in conducting inspections in pilot civil courts in five regions. It conducted workshops in Argentina, Panama and Uruguay on addressing harmful gender stereotypes among the judiciary in Latin America.

78. In the Central African Republic, OHCHR supported the drafting of legislation to establish oversight mechanisms for the police and gendarmerie. In South Sudan, it provided technical assistance to national police training academies and in Jamaica, it worked with the National Police College on developing the curricula for law enforcement officials. In Lebanon, it contributed to the elaboration of a code of conduct and human rights curriculum for the armed forces and to a training-of-trainers course for senior officials. It took part in developing a code of conduct for the Jordanian Gendarmerie. In Colombia, it supported the Ministry of the Interior in developing a protocol to prevent the excessive use of force and guarantee the right to peaceful protest.

79. In discussions held by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, OHCHR continued to advocate for the implementation of the human rights commitments made in the outcome document of the General Assembly special session on the world drug problem in 2016. In

Vienna, it organized a high-level expert panel on human rights and drug policy and a panel on drug offences, criminal justice responses and the use of the death penalty. In Bangladesh, Belarus, Cambodia, Colombia and the Philippines, OHCHR supported national authorities, the United Nations country teams and other stakeholders in applying a human rights-based approach to the drug problem.

80. In Yemen, based on over 100 visits to prisons and detention facilities, OHCHR engaged with the authorities and humanitarian agencies on improving conditions of detention and respect for human rights. It also trained law enforcement officials on human rights.

## **F. Participation**

### **1. Enhancing and protecting civic space and people's participation**

81. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, OHCHR supported a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

82. Within the framework of the Joint Action Mechanism to contribute to the protection of human rights defenders in the Americas, OHCHR followed up on the implementation of precautionary measures granted to human rights defenders at risk. In Mexico, it participated in the National Protection Mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists, supporting the design of public policies and protocols. In Guatemala, it provided technical assistance for the adoption and implementation of a protocol on investigating crimes against human rights defenders.

83. In Guinea-Bissau, the National Human Rights Defenders Network, with the technical and financial support of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau and OHCHR, concluded a mapping of human rights defenders, leading to the establishment of an early warning mechanism. In Kenya, OHCHR supported the training of environmental human rights defenders from different counties, contributing to the creation of an information-sharing and advocacy network. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it provided individual protection to 304 human rights defenders. In South Africa, it co-organized a conference on the theme of supporting social movements and civil society activism to leave no one behind for peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

84. OHCHR conducted workshops to strengthen the capacity and resilience of women human rights defenders to meet challenges related to their work in East Africa and the Middle East and North Africa regions. It supported advocacy by civil society organizations on removing barriers to access to education for pregnant girls.

85. OHCHR addressed acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the United Nations on human rights, including through the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, the senior official designated to lead efforts within the United Nations system in this regard. High-level engagement with States concerning urgent cases and on patterns of intimidation and reprisal was undertaken. In addition to the regional human rights defenders security platform, held in Bishkek and gathering together about 100 human rights defenders from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, a regional consultation in Bangkok with civil society representatives from 16 Asian countries was organized in March 2018 to engage with civil society from the region.

86. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples continued to facilitate the participation of indigenous representatives in meetings of human rights mechanisms and the OHCHR fellowship programmes brought to Geneva 73 advocates from indigenous and minority communities from 52 countries. The booklet marking 20 years of the fellowship

provides a snapshot of the inspiring work of former fellows upon their return to their communities.<sup>6</sup>

87. OHCHR worked on human rights in the digital space by enhancing its engagement with digital and technology stakeholders to ensure that the international human rights framework serves as a reference for digital and technology companies and to leverage the benefits of technology for advancing human rights. It contributed to efforts to address the challenges faced by human rights defenders and other threats to civic space posed by new technologies by involving stakeholders in exchanges on the practical challenges facing technology companies that relate to their responsibilities under the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

88. In Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, OHCHR conducted workshops on the role of religious leaders, women and youth in the promotion of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa, in line with the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence and the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Electoral processes

89. In the context of electoral processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Mali, OHCHR conducted human rights monitoring, advocated with the authorities, electoral bodies and the media, and built the capacity of national partners. In Uganda, it supported the national human rights institution in monitoring the first local council and municipal elections since 2001. In the Gambia, it organized a dialogue and training for women candidates for election. In the final stage of the presidential campaign in Colombia, based on OHCHR advocacy candidates signed a commitment to “respect, protect and guarantee human rights” and to protect human rights defenders and social leaders.

90. OHCHR drafted guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs to increase public participation in electoral and non-electoral contexts, and at the international level (A/HRC/39/28).

## III. High Commissioner’s reflections for 2019 and conclusions

91. **Seventy years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, the foundations of the United Nations are being tested and multilateralism is under attack. Progress in any of the three pillars, human rights, peace and security and development, requires sustained leadership and well-coordinated, well-designed partnerships to further support human rights. Reaffirming universal norms and standards on the one hand and seeking tangible results and solutions on the other is the way forward.**

92. **In these tough times for human rights, the ultimate objective of OHCHR, together with its partners across the United Nations system, is to effect positive change and to make a real difference on the ground for people. Its mandate to support the United Nations human rights mechanisms, mainstream human rights in the other pillars of the United Nations (development, peace, security and humanitarian), and advance the core human rights principles of non-discrimination, accountability and participation offer the framework to make such a difference.**

93. **OHCHR needs to use its entire tool box of interventions to effect positive change. It must engage Governments and other key actors in society through constructive dialogue, diplomacy, advisory services, technical cooperation and mediation. Human rights advocacy is an essential tool to be carefully calibrated alongside the many other avenues that are available.**

<sup>6</sup> OHCHR, “Indigenous Fellowship Programme 1997–2017: 20 Years, 20 Stories” (2017).

<sup>7</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx).

94. Where shortcomings in human rights are the result of gaps in resources, capacities and institutions, the Office needs to offer help through technical cooperation, development assistance, mediation and human rights diplomacy – if the political support of leaders is there, positive momentum can be generated to build more resilient societies.

95. Where gaps in human rights protection result from weak political will, the voice of the victims and the vulnerable must be amplified to demand accountability under the rule of law. The High Commissioner is committed to being the voice of the voiceless.

96. The issue of a dangerously shrinking civil society space is one of the priorities for action of OHCHR. Beyond the rhetorical yet crucial assertion of the values of free association, expression, assembly and movement, concrete practical steps can be taken to expand civic space, including by building strategic partnerships within the United Nations system, with other international and regional organizations and with Member States. Building civil society constituencies across traditional groups, for example, by facilitating space for human rights defenders to cooperate with women's rights groups and environmental activists can serve to open up democratic space for activism worldwide.

97. The human rights agenda is the prevention agenda. The special procedures of the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies, the commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions provide essential information for decision makers in the United Nations and beyond. The universal periodic review has provided in several ways the kind of narrative for political support by Member States for human rights action under United Nations auspices that needs to be applied far more broadly. The universal periodic review recognizes that all Member States have human rights challenges, that all States can make improvements and that the United Nations system has responsibilities to support States in that regard. The United Nations human rights system is a force for prevention. When it is backed by the political will of key actors, effective, sustained human rights work prevents, mitigates and helps to resolve conflict. The World Bank and the United Nations have recently co-authored a report on prevention that includes a focus on human rights, which should be built on and additional opportunities created.

98. Another opportunity to address one of today's critical global challenges is the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was adopted on 10 December 2018 in Marrakech and endorsed by an overwhelming majority of Member States at the General Assembly. It is a balanced human rights document that recognizes the human rights of all migrants, regardless of their status, and sets out achievable objectives to reduce the vulnerability of many of the world's 258 million migrants and minimize the human rights violations which so often characterize their movements. Together with the Global Compact on Refugees, also endorsed by an overwhelming majority of Member States at the General Assembly on 17 December 2018, the two Compacts offer hope for better and more effective governance of migration.

99. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals provide an essential roadmap for action. The High Commissioner is committed to playing her part in advancing their implementation. The entire 2030 Agenda, which is rooted in the right to development and all other rights, can only be fully achieved and sustained with a focus on human rights, by seeking out and fixing the root causes of insecurity; reducing inequalities; ensuring stable, transparent and inclusive institutions; and eliminating pervasive discrimination to fulfil the commitment of "leaving no one behind".

100. A stronger emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development in the research, analysis, monitoring, reporting, advocacy and capacity-building work of OHCHR will support States in implementing a number of the Sustainable Development Goals. OHCHR is already doing significant work in these areas, especially in research and methodology (producing reports, guidelines and

standard operating procedures), it now needs to move further towards operationalizing that work. The growing challenge is how to translate international norms and standards into tools acceptable to policy and decision makers, which will help them better understand how they and their people will benefit from protecting and promoting human rights.

101. In view of the existential threat of climate change, with the capacity to profoundly undermine human rights, the High Commissioner sees a critical need for OHCHR to engage more substantively and proactively around Sustainable Development Goal 13 and in protecting the right to a healthy environment. Environmental harms deepen inequalities, disproportionately affecting those who have the least. The Human Rights Council has made it eminently clear that addressing those challenges is the responsibility of everyone and a fundamental issue of human rights. The denial of that responsibility has inflicted countless preventable environmental catastrophes on human beings.

102. Overall, in support of the human rights-based commitment to “leave no one behind” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, OHCHR will ensure that its programmes consistently bring people in from the outside, providing opportunities for those with the least who have been rendered invisible. For the Sustainable Development Goals to serve the purpose for which they were designed, people who have been marginalized and discriminated against must be included in their implementation right across every goal to ensure that indeed no rights holder is left behind. More specifically, OHCHR will spotlight the human rights concerns of women, young people and persons with disabilities.

103. The High Commissioner is deeply committed to achieving gender equality and has pledged to implement a new programme that will strongly reinforce the integration of gender into the substantive work of the OHCHR field presences. In working with people deprived of their liberty, the issues that are important to women detainees as well as men need to be explored. Work on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly needs to include issues encountered by women protestors, including, if relevant, why women do not feel free to protest. Human rights monitoring in conflict situations needs to grasp the social and economic impact of violations on women, including on their health and welfare. It is critically important that all human rights responses to humanitarian crises integrate the prevention of maternal mortality. Internally, as international gender champion, the High Commissioner has pledged to achieve gender parity and to ensure that OHCHR implements the Secretary-General’s gender equality strategy as best as it can.

104. The world is equally facing a crisis of youth unemployment and trade deficits that demonstrate the biases of the global elites against youth and against certain economies. Marginalizing youth from work opportunities and the poorest nations from the greatest benefits of economic development is a recipe for failure in development and peace and security. Amid the extraordinarily complex task of protecting the global economy, the High Commissioner believes that the world must do more to introduce human rights into the analysis and management of regional and global economies and decision-making thereon, and into macro-development financing.

105. Women, young people and persons with disabilities, while distinctively affected by economic instability and insecurity, marginalization and exclusion, are also agents of change. They are part of what the High Commissioner envisions as a global constituency for human rights. Beyond ensuring transparent and constructive engagement with all stakeholders, she wants to further extend partnerships, to reach out to new audiences, and open a dialogue that can inspire and mobilize people to defend and promote human rights.

106. Within the United Nations system, the High Commissioner is fully committed to enhancing strategic partnerships across the Organization. For instance, with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on protecting women human rights defenders; with the International Labour

Organization on promoting social protection floors which seek to ensure that all have access to basic services, including a fair and inclusive globalization; and with the World Health Organization providing technical support on rights-based approaches to health and research on priority issues relating to health and human rights.

107. In terms of public-private partnerships, the question is how to harness private sector investment as part of delivering the transformational 2030 Agenda and at the same time ensure that human rights are not undermined in the process. Human rights are rightly recognized as integral to sustainable development and financing. The Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda have cemented that new thinking into international commitments. That global consensus must now be fully incorporated into investment laws and policies. The recent report on human rights due diligence, produced by the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises shows this new reality clearly. Attracting high-quality long-term investment should be the strategy of any Government to ensure policy coherence, long-term returns and progress towards desired development and well-being.

108. Business, because of its transnational nature, has a unique ability to work across boundaries for human rights and therefore to reverse the tide of many of these challenges. Companies not only have a need to act and a clear benefit from doing so: they have a framework, in the form of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. They also have a timetable, in the form of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Responsible businesses, supported by the rule of law and clear and effectively enforced regulatory frameworks, can generate decent jobs, build equal opportunities, drive essential investment, technologies and innovation, and contribute to domestic revenues available for development. That is mutualism in action – a symbiotic relationship where both sides benefit.

109. New technologies are transforming the world and the work to promote and protect human rights. OHCHR is seeking both to harness digital technology to advance human rights and to respond to the ever-evolving threats posed to human rights by technology. Artificial intelligence and big data raise difficult questions of discrimination, privacy and the right to work. Social media platforms have been used to promote hate speech, stoke violence and skew democratic processes. Those who stand up for human rights around the globe find themselves victims of technology-assisted surveillance and cyberharassment, with women facing particularly pervasive and vicious online attacks. Human rights are an essential foundation for tackling the myriad questions posed by new technologies. OHCHR has an important role working with Governments, the private sector, and civil society to better understand and address the human rights impact of new technologies and to make the most of opportunities presented by technology for the advancement of rights.

110. There are so many positive stories and developments from which to draw hope and inspiration, opportunities to take advantage of and partnerships to be forged. Those stories need to be told better to ensure that the narrative is one of hope and inspiration in the Organization and in multilateralism more generally – inspiring everyone to stand together and to assist each other in building progress on protecting the human rights that sustain development and peace.

111. OHCHR continues to be a global voice for equality and non-discrimination, and all human rights for all. It must be equipped and assisted to respond to both conflict and crisis situations, and emerging global, regional and national challenges, including with respect to ensuring human rights in the digital space, defending civic space, civil society and human rights defenders, and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The High Commissioner hopes that Member States and other stakeholders will extend to OHCHR all possible assistance and support to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively in support of Governments and rights holders worldwide.