



Human Rights Council**Fifty-third session**

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Agenda items 2 and 6

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General****Universal periodic review****Operations of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the
Universal Periodic Review****Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for
Human Rights***Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council decision 17/119, in which the Council requested the secretariat to provide an annual written update on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review and on the resources available to it. It contains a description of the activities implemented by the Voluntary Fund during the reporting period and an overview of contributions and expenditure since the previous report.¹

In view of the overlapping context of the start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, in November 2022, and the fifteenth anniversary of the creation of the Voluntary Fund by Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, the Office also analysed how the Voluntary Fund has been strategically used to ensure the participation and engagement of States in the review process and examined the opportunities to strengthen its support, including through the implementation of Council resolution 51/30, and challenges faced in that regard.

¹ [A/HRC/50/17](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 6/17, the Human Rights Council, bearing in mind that the universal periodic review was a cooperative mechanism with the full involvement of the country concerned, requested the Secretary-General to establish a universal periodic review voluntary fund to facilitate the participation of developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in the universal periodic review mechanism. In its resolution 16/21, the Council requested that the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review be strengthened and operationalized to encourage a significant participation of developing countries, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, in their review.

2. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) administers the Voluntary Fund jointly with the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review, also established by Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, which provides financial and technical assistance to help countries to implement the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review process, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the country concerned. Given that the combined assistance provided by the two voluntary funds enables States to engage in the universal periodic review process in all its phases, the present report should be read in conjunction with the report on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review.²

3. In 2022, the overlapping context of the start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review and the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 6/17 provided an opportunity for States, United Nations entities and other stakeholders to collectively reflect on the progresses achieved by both voluntary funds in supporting States to engage with the review mechanism. On 7 October 2022, the Council adopted resolution 51/30, entitled “Strengthening the voluntary funds for the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council”, in which it requested the Secretary-General to further strengthen the regular budget-funded dedicated capacity of OHCHR to implement the mandates of the two voluntary funds, and encouraged all States to consider contributing to them. Pursuant to the same resolution, OHCHR convened a high-level panel discussion, at its fifty-second session, focusing on the achievements, good practices and lessons learned by the two voluntary funds in the implementation of their mandates over the past 15 years and reflecting on further optimization of the use of the funds. The conclusions of the high-level panel discussion are contained in the report of OHCHR thereon.

II. Operations of the Voluntary Fund

4. In line with Human Rights Council resolutions 6/17 and 16/21, the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review facilitates the participation of developing countries, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, in the universal periodic review mechanism. The support provided by the Voluntary Fund ensures the in-person participation of delegates from eligible countries in the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review and in the meetings of the Council at which the outcome of the review is adopted. The Voluntary Fund also supports States in the preparatory process of the review through capacity-building activities for the preparation of national reports.

5. Since its establishment, the Voluntary Fund has been instrumental in ensuring the universal participation of States in the review process. It allows eligible delegations to participate in the presentation of their countries’ national reports and contribute to a constructive interactive dialogue at sessions of the Working Group, resulting in recommendations that are specific, action-oriented and implementable. The participation of delegations in the informational briefings organized by OHCHR during each Working Group

² [A/HRC/53/57](#).

session also contributes to raising their awareness of the implementation process of the recommendations received, and the support available for this purpose, including through the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review.

6. The Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review also supports the engagement of States in the preparatory process of the review, including through the advice provided to them on the preparation of their national reports and on the opportunity provided through the preparatory process to undertake a participatory and comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation in the country. In line with Human Rights Council resolution 35/29, in which the Council encouraged States to promote the involvement of parliaments in all stages of the universal periodic review reporting process, the Voluntary Fund also encourages the participation and engagement of parliamentarians with the universal periodic review, including by collecting and sharing good practices and lessons learned.

7. OHCHR promotes the creation of synergies between the support provided through the Voluntary Fund and that provided through 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, which is also managed by OHCHR. The Voluntary Fund and the Trust Fund ensure the complementary and efficient use of limited resources to support the participation of delegates from least developed countries and small island developing States in the universal periodic review process.

A. Travel to meetings

8. The Voluntary Fund provides financial support to developing countries, in particular least developed countries and small islands developing States, to cover travel to Geneva by one official State representative to participate:

(a) In sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review during which the representative's country is considered;

(b) In meetings of the Human Rights Council at which the outcome of the review of the representative's country is put forth for adoption.

9. The Voluntary Fund also provides for the travel of one official representative per delegation of eligible States that are members of the Human Rights Council and do not have a permanent mission in Geneva to act as rapporteurs, i.e. as members of a troika. In addition to covering travel costs, the Voluntary Fund also provides for the payment of a daily subsistence allowance at the rate applicable to Geneva at the time of travel.

10. In providing assistance through the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR implements a proactive and targeted approach. A few weeks prior to a session, OHCHR addresses correspondence to the eligible States, encouraging them to make use of the support available and outlining the process to be followed. This has raised awareness among States, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States without representation in Geneva, which may therefore be unfamiliar with the human rights machinery, of the opportunities provided through the Voluntary Fund and has enabled them to request support.

11. Since the beginning of the third cycle of the universal periodic review, OHCHR has been encouraging States to nominate a senior representative from the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up as a member of the delegation benefiting from travel assistance under the Voluntary Fund. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 6/30, on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, OHCHR has also been encouraging States to consider striking a gender balance in the composition of their delegation and in the sharing of responsibilities among its members.

12. The year 2022 marked the end of the third, and the beginning of the fourth, cycle of the universal periodic review, and therefore two sessions of the Working Group, rather than the standard three, were held. The fortieth session of the Working Group, the last session of the third cycle of the review, was held from 24 January to 11 February, and the adoption of

the outcomes of the reviews of the last considered States took place at the fiftieth session of the Human Rights Council, held from 13 June to 8 July. The forty-first session of the Working Group, the first session of the fourth cycle, was held from 7 to 18 November. During most of 2021, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had affected the ability of delegates to travel to participate in person in the sessions of the Working Group and the Council in Geneva, however, following the easing of pandemic-related restrictions, in 2022, meetings were increasingly held in person.

13. In 2022, the Voluntary Fund supported the participation of 19 delegates from eligible countries, including five least developed countries and four small island developing States. To attend the fortieth session of the of the Working Group, the Voluntary Fund supported the travel of one delegate each from the Republic of Moldova, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Timor-Leste, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe. To participate in the forty-ninth session of the Human Rights Council, held from 28 February to 1 April, the Voluntary Fund supported the travel of one delegate each from Eswatini, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Surinam and Trinidad and Tobago. To participate in the fiftieth session of the Council, the Voluntary Fund supported the travel of one delegate each from the Sudan, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe. To participate in the forty-first session of the Working Group, the Voluntary Fund supported the travel of one delegate each from Algeria, Brazil and Ecuador. Of the 19 delegates that benefited from the support of the Voluntary Fund, 7 were women and 12 were men.

14. Since its establishment, the Voluntary Fund has facilitated the attendance of delegates from 112 States, with many States receiving funding in two or more cycles of the review. Approximately 40 per cent of participants have been from least developed countries and 33 per cent from small island developing States. Table 1 below sets out the number of delegates per year that have received support from the Voluntary Fund to attend sessions of the Working Group and the Human Rights Council, including the meetings at which the outcomes of the reviews are adopted.

Table 1

Delegates supported by the Voluntary Fund from the establishment of the Voluntary Fund to 31 December 2022

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of delegates funded</i>
2008	6
2009	17
2010	23
2011	21
2012	3
2013	6
2014	15
2015	23
2016	26
2017	15
2018	22
2019	26
2020	10
2021	3
2022	19
Total	235

15. The number of delegates supported annually by the Voluntary Fund to participate in the sessions of the Working Group and the Human Rights Council varies depending on how many eligible countries were scheduled to have their reviews, and the outcomes thereof up

for adoption, in a given year. In 2020 and 2021, travel of delegates to Geneva was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

16. Due to the pandemic, from its thirty-sixth session, the Working Group followed the hybrid modalities introduced by the Human Rights Council, which combined virtual participation through statements delivered by pre-recorded video message with participation through live video links. Although in 2022 the easing of pandemic-related travel restrictions allowed for the return to in-person participation, the Council decided to maintain hybrid modalities for meetings to promote wider and more diverse participation of government representatives, civil society actors and other stakeholders. In that context, in 2022, the Voluntary Fund was also used to provide technical moderation and logistical support for virtual participation, enabling a larger number of representatives of States to participate in their reviews, as well as more multidimensional representation, including members of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Government, and increased gender-balanced representation.

B. Training

17. The terms of reference of the Voluntary Fund allow for the financing of briefings prior to the sessions of the Working Group to assist countries in the preparatory process and promote a greater understanding of the challenges faced in, and the opportunities provided by, engagement with the review mechanism at the country level. In 2022, OHCHR provided such briefings virtually and, in some cases, through in-country training to several countries, including Bahrain, Brazil, Ecuador, Gabon, Indonesia, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

18. In-country briefings usually consist of plenary segments and breakout group discussions during which policies and procedures of the universal periodic review are examined. They also provide the opportunity to discuss good practices concerning the organization of national consultations, the setting up of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up, the drafting of national reports and the participation in the interactive dialogues held at the sessions of the Working Group and the Human Rights Council.

19. Since the first cycle of the universal periodic review, OHCHR has also organized pre-session informational meetings in Geneva on the upcoming sessions of the Working Group for the States under review and members of the troikas. The meetings are conducted in both English and French and are open to all States. The discussions encompass the organizational aspects of the Working Group, such as the composition of the delegation of the State under review, the accreditation process, how to join the list of speakers and the modalities of participation, as well as more substantive aspects, including the role of the troika, the drafting of the report and the positions that the State under review can take on the recommendations received.

20. On the margins of each session of the Working Group, OHCHR holds two informal briefings for members of all State delegations. The briefings are aimed at providing delegations with an overview of follow-up processes to the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms and informing them about the support available through the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. In 2022, OHCHR also began organizing tailored informational meetings in Geneva for delegates whose participation in the Working Group is supported by the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review, with a view to creating a virtual network of delegates who are informed on the universal periodic review mechanism, which would contribute to promoting the exchange of experiences and identifying good practices in the preparation of and follow up to the reviews.

21. In its resolution 35/29, the Human Rights Council acknowledged the crucial role that parliaments played in translating international commitments into national policies and laws, and encouraged States to promote the involvement of parliaments in all stages of the universal periodic review reporting process through, inter alia, the inclusion of the national parliament

as a relevant stakeholder in the consultation process for the national report and in the implementation of supported recommendations by the State concerned. In 2018, in its report on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and the universal periodic review mechanism, OHCHR recommended that parliaments set up human rights committees and strengthen their engagement with international human rights mechanisms, especially the universal periodic review.³

22. In 2022, OHCHR, in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie, continued to raise awareness and strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians to engage with the universal periodic review process. OHCHR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union held pre-session briefings for parliamentarians of States under review ahead of the forty-first and forty-second sessions of the Working Group, a practice that will continue throughout the fourth cycle. At the briefings, staff of OHCHR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union informed a total of 22 participants, which included parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, of their role at each phase of the review process and addressed their queries. The briefings were scheduled in such a way that allowed for parliamentary contribution to the submission of the national reports of their respective countries. OHCHR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union also developed a human rights self-assessment toolkit for parliamentarians, aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of parliamentary action in implementing human rights, including through legislation, the budgetary process and oversight to hold government accountable for progress.

23. On 5 and 6 September 2022, OHCHR, in cooperation with the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, organized a workshop to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians from States members of the International Organization of la Francophonie. The event took place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva and gathered 26 members of parliament from Andorra, Belgium, Cameroon, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Greece, Haiti, Lebanon, Mauritius, the Republic of Moldova, the Niger, Rwanda, Seychelles and Togo. An additional 30 participants were connected virtually, including from Andorra, Benin, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Egypt, France, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius and Rwanda. Opening statements were made by the Permanent Observer of the International Organization of la Francophonie to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, the Permanent Representative of Chad to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva and President of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors, the Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie, the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Director of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division of OHCHR. Members of parliament shared information on the participation of their countries in the universal periodic review process. They also discussed the diversity of parliamentary structures in charge of human rights and their cooperation with national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in engaging with the review mechanism.

III. Financial situation of the Voluntary Fund

24. Table 2 below sets out the detailed financial situation of the Voluntary Fund as at 31 December 2022. Total expenditure exceeded the contributions received during the year, as a result of the unpredictable and increasingly negative pattern of income experienced in recent years, which is endangering the long-term sustainability of the Voluntary Fund. An adequate level of reserves was ensured to guarantee the continuity of its work in 2023.

³ [A/HRC/38/25](#).

Table 2
Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January–31 December 2022
 (United States dollars)

<i>Component</i>	
Income	
Voluntary contributions received in 2022	89 239.18
Gain and loss on exchange	(472.56)
Pledges received for 2022	–
Miscellaneous and investment income	1 210.21
Total income	89 976.83
Expenditure	
Staff costs	5 540.15
Other personnel costs (consultants' fees and travel)	(337.72)
Travel of staff	23 126.59
Travel of representatives and participants to meetings and seminars	146 780.19
Contractual services	31 876.45
General operating and other direct costs	7 340.59
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	–
Transfers and grants to implementing partners (>\$50,000)	5 000
Grants out (<\$50,000) and fellowships	–
Programme support (indirect) costs	28 924.87
Total expenditure	248 251.12
Adjustments to prior year expenditure (liquidation of commitments)	–
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditure for the period	(158 274.29)
Opening balance on 1 January 2022	612 438.80
Other adjustments (prior period)	(355.23)
Unpaid pledges	–
Total fund balance as at 31 December 2022	453 809.28

25. The Voluntary Fund can receive contributions from States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, private institutions and individuals. Since the establishment of the Voluntary Fund, 20 countries and one intergovernmental organization, the International Organization of la Francophonie, have made voluntary contributions for a total of \$3,659,247 (see table 3 below).

26. In 2022, only two countries and the International Organization of la Francophonie contributed to the Voluntary Fund, for a total amount of \$89,239.18 (see table 4 below). This constituted an increase compared with the year 2020, when no contributions were received, but it is a decrease compared with the year 2021, reflecting the lack of a predictable pattern of income to the Voluntary Fund.

27. In 2023, the current level of projected income will only allow the Voluntary Fund to support the travel of delegates from least developed countries and small island developing States. To ensure an adequate level of support during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, the financial situation of the Voluntary Fund must be progressively strengthened to reach an annual income of at least \$300,000 in voluntary contributions.

Table 3
**Contributions received from the establishment of the Voluntary Fund
to 31 December 2022**

(United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Australia	387 580
Austria	157 729
Belgium	57 681
China	100 000
Colombia	26 668
Cuba	3 817
Denmark	359 002
Germany	795 397
Hungary	19 083
Italy	422 852
Japan	480 000
Kuwait	50 000
Poland	10 934
Republic of Korea	50 000
Romania	73 746
Russian Federation	100 000
Saudi Arabia	140 000
Singapore	75 000
Sweden	100 000
Switzerland	95 238
International Organization of la Francophonie	154 178
Other and individual donors	341
Total contributions	3 659 247

Table 4
Contributions received, 1 January–31 December 2022

(United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
International Organization of la Francophonie	53 304.92
Poland	10 934.26
Saudi Arabia	25 000.00
Total contributions	89 239.18

IV. Strategic use of the Voluntary Fund during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review

28. With the start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, OHCHR is working to ensure that the support of the Voluntary Fund remains instrumental to the participation and engagement of States, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, in the review cycle. Through the assistance provided, the Voluntary Fund enables the informed, regular and full participation in the review of States with limited resources and often no representation in Geneva. In addition, OHCHR ensures that the use of the Voluntary Fund is coordinated with that of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance

in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review to help States not only to participate in the review, but also to understand it as part of a continuing process, in particular at the national level, focusing on the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review process.

29. As part of the implementation strategy of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review, prior to the session of the Working Group, OHCHR conducts capacity-building activities, both online and through in-country events. The training sessions allow States to increase their knowledge of the procedures of the review and analyse good practices concerning the organization of national consultations, the drafting of national reports and the participation in the interactive dialogues held at the sessions of the Working Group and the Human Rights Council.

30. Those capacity-building activities are complemented by two informal briefings organized by OHCHR at every session of the Working Group for members of all State delegations. The briefings provide delegations with an overview of follow-up processes to the recommendations emanating from all human rights mechanisms and the support available through the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. In addition, specific meetings are organized with the delegates whose participation in the Working Group is supported by the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review to create a virtual network to promote the exchange of experiences and identify good practices in the preparation and follow-up to the reviews.

31. OHCHR ensures the wide dissemination of information on the universal periodic review and makes it accessible through various means, enhancing its visibility, with a view to increasing engagement with the mechanism. The OHCHR website on the universal periodic review is regularly updated with the most recent news, information regarding upcoming sessions of the Working Group, review outcomes before the Human Rights Council for adoption and tools available for the preparation of the review and the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the review. The extranet of the universal periodic review⁴ is also regularly updated, providing a platform where schedules, oral statements and reports are readily available and accessible. The recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review are also included in the Universal Human Rights Index, maintained by OHCHR, which contains the recommendations made by all human rights mechanisms.⁵ Through its media team, OHCHR engages with media on all issues related to the Working Group, enabling accurate and timely reporting through media advisories produced in English and local languages of the countries reviewed and disseminating information on social media.

32. OHCHR also promotes synergy between the support provided through the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review and that provided through 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, with the secretariats of the Voluntary Fund and the Trust Fund working together to ensure complementary support and efficient use of limited resources. For example, staff members of the secretariat of the Voluntary Fund provide briefings for the beneficiary delegates of the Trust Fund on the work of the Human Rights Council during the induction courses organized by the latter in Geneva. Former beneficiaries of the Trust Fund have often been involved in the universal periodic review process at the national level and/or as a member of the delegation of their State.

33. OHCHR continues to encourage the participation and engagement of key national actors, in particular parliamentarians, with the universal periodic review. In this regard, the partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie has been crucial to promoting the greater involvement of parliamentarians in the universal periodic review process and in the work of other human rights mechanisms, as

⁴ See <https://uprmeetings.ohchr.org/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁵ See <https://uhri.ohchr.org>.

well as increasing the integration of international human rights standards into national legislation.

Strengthening the voluntary funds for the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council

34. The year 2022 marked the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, in which the Council created both the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. In that context, two side events were organized, one in Geneva on the margins of the fifty-first session of the Council and one in New York at the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly. The events provided State representatives and other stakeholders with a timely opportunity to share specific examples of the impact of the financial and technical assistance received and underscored the importance of strengthening the financial basis of the two voluntary funds to respond to the increasing needs of States. Calls for further capacity-building and sharing of good practices were reiterated by numerous State delegations during the general debate held under agenda item 6 at the Council session.

35. In its resolution 51/30, the Human Rights Council welcomed the 100 per cent participation of States in the universal periodic review since its inception, also welcomed the efforts made by the two voluntary funds to meet fully their respective mandates, acknowledged the significant and impactful support provided by the funds to States despite various challenges, requested the Secretary-General to further strengthen the regular budget-funded dedicated capacity of OHCHR to implement the mandates of the two voluntary funds, including by scaling up the dedicated capacity of the Universal Periodic Review Branch in each regional office, and encouraged all States to consider contributing to the voluntary funds. The draft of the resolution was sponsored by 73 States and was adopted by consensus.

36. Following the approval of the corresponding budget by the General Assembly in December 2022, efforts are under way to strengthen the secretariat of the voluntary funds, and universal periodic review focal points will be deployed in every OHCHR regional office around the world. The focal points will promptly and effectively respond to requests for assistance by States in their respective regions, disseminate the information on the support available by the Voluntary Fund and provide advice on the preparation of project proposals to implement the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. They will also engage with United Nations country teams to facilitate the integration of such recommendations into national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and into United Nations common programming documents.

V. Conclusions

37. Since its establishment, the Voluntary Fund has been instrumental in ensuring the full participation and engagement of States, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, in the work of the universal periodic review. The start of the fourth cycle of the review has generated a renewed engagement by States with the mechanism, resulting in an increased interest in the support available through the Voluntary Fund. The need for further assistance was reiterated by State delegations during the activities organized in the context of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, and the need for further strengthening of such capacity was also requested by the Council in its resolution 51/30.

38. Least developed countries and small island developing States are at the front lines of today's multiple crises, bearing the direct consequences of climate change, financial and food insecurity and growing inequalities. Their involvement and participation in the universal periodic review process is more relevant than ever. OHCHR will strengthen the focus of the Voluntary Fund on supporting such countries, including by working closely with the group of small island developing States, led by Maldives, and continue the close coordination with 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.

39. Starting in 2023, the strengthening of the secretariat of the Voluntary Fund in Geneva and the deployment of 11 universal periodic review focal points in the OHCHR regional offices will provide the Voluntary Fund with additional capacity to efficiently support States during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review and to respond to the increasing number of requests for assistance, with priority attention given to least developed countries and small island developing States at the regional level. The focal points will ensure the provision of support to States in their respective regions, providing information and advice on the preparatory process for the review and the preparation of national reports.

40. Informed participation by delegates in sessions of the Working Group and the Human Rights Council is critical to ensuring proper follow up at the national level. To foster the informed participation of delegates from eligible States, OHCHR plans to develop an e-learning tool on the universal periodic review and conduct remote sessions with the delegates selected to receive support prior to their travel to Geneva and in follow up to their participation. OHCHR will also create a virtual network of beneficiary delegates and facilitate their regular exchange of experiences in the preparation for, and the follow up to, the universal periodic review process, participation in training courses and workshops on the universal periodic review as a resource person, participation in other activities related to the international human rights mechanisms organized by OHCHR and sharing of best practices and lessons learned with regard to their engagement with the universal periodic review.

41. To ensure that the support provided by the Voluntary Fund is part of a continuing process leading to the implementation at the national level of the recommendations emanating from the review, OHCHR will further align the support provided by the Voluntary Fund with that provided by the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. Building on the partnership established with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie, OHCHR will continue to encourage the participation and engagement of parliamentarians and other key national actors with the universal periodic review.

42. Increased engagement by States, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, must be accompanied by a substantial strengthening of the financial basis of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review. The Voluntary Fund is entirely reliant on voluntary contributions to support its activities. To ensure its sustainability during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, an annual income of at least \$300,000 in voluntary contributions will be needed, as well as increased predictability of income. The recent creation of a Group of Friends of the Universal Periodic Review represented a positive development towards increased support by all States for the voluntary funds for the universal periodic review. In collaboration with the Group of Friends, OHCHR will organize annual side events on the margins of the Human Rights Council meeting at which the report on the Voluntary Fund is considered, with the aim of sharing good practices and experiences, providing information on the assistance provided by the Voluntary Fund and calling for additional support to it.