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**Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

### **Strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation and the importance of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General**

##### *Summary*

The present report provides an overview of relevant normative and policy frameworks and new and emerging opportunities and efforts that may strengthen United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation and the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity. In the report, the Secretary-General highlights activities of the United Nations system, in particular those of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and draws on contributions from Member States, to provide practical proposals and ideas pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/171](#).

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\* [A/74/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [72/171](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to invite Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to present further practical proposals and ideas that would contribute to the strengthening of United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation based on the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity, and to submit a comprehensive report on the question to the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session.

2. The present report provides an overview of relevant normative and policy frameworks and new and emerging opportunities and efforts that may strengthen United Nations action in the field of human rights. While every part of the United Nations system is engaged in promoting the respect for human rights through international cooperation, the report provides an outline of the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and draws on contributions received from Member States following a call for contributions issued to Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to provide practical proposals and ideas pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/171](#).

## II. International cooperation and the normative framework of human rights

3. International cooperation can help to realize human rights. According to Article 1 (3) of the Charter of the United Nations, a fundamental purpose of the Organization is to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. Pursuant to Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter, all Members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organization in order to achieve the purposes set forth therein, which include the promotion of universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Those concepts are echoed in article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the role of international cooperation is recognized in ensuring everyone's entitlement to economic, social and cultural rights in the context of the right to social security.

4. The critical role of international cooperation in the realization of rights is also recognized in several human rights treaties. Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights contains a mandate for international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, as a means for realizing economic, social and cultural rights. Elaborating on that provision, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 3 (1990) on the nature of States parties' obligations, recognized that the obligation for international cooperation for development, and thus for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, was an obligation of all States. In article 11 of the Covenant, States parties recognize the importance of international cooperation based on free consent to the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living and to freedom from hunger. In article 15 (4), States parties to the Covenant also promote the encouragement of international cooperation in the scientific and cultural fields. Human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also reflect States parties'

recognition of the importance of international cooperation for the realization of human rights.

5. In article 3 of the Declaration on the Right to Development, the General Assembly proclaims that States have the primary responsibility for the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development (para. 1), which requires full respect for the principles of international law concerning friendly relations and cooperation among States (para. 2). States also have the duty to cooperate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development and should realize their rights and fulfil their duties in such a manner as to promote a new international economic order based on sovereign equality, interdependence, mutual interest and cooperation among all States, as well as to encourage the observance and realization of human rights (para. 3).

6. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, is aimed at achieving substantial progress in human rights endeavours by an increased and sustained effort of international cooperation and solidarity. In part I, Conference participants declared that enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights was key to the full achievement of the purposes of the United Nations (art. 1). They reiterated that States should cooperate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development and that lasting progress towards the implementation of the right to development required effective development policies at the national level, as well as equitable economic relations and a favourable economic environment at the international level (part I, art. 10). Moreover, all human rights were recognized as being universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and it was noted that the international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis (part I, art. 5). The same principles also underpin the mandate of the Human Rights Council (see General Assembly resolution [60/251](#) and Council resolution 5/1).

### **III. Policy frameworks and new and emerging opportunities**

7. International cooperation is key to realizing peace, human rights and sustainable development. Rapid and far-reaching developments in transportation, in information and communication technologies and in the exchange of information, ideas, goods and services, as well as mass migrations and growing inequalities, all pose new opportunities and challenges for the realization of human rights. Global economic and environmental crises, including profound threats from climate change, transformative changes in global demographics and the rise of nationalism and populism, which undermine democratic ideals and human rights values, call for collective and holistic global responses.

8. While States bear the primary responsibility for promoting sustainable development, the structures, processes and outcomes of that development in an interdependent, globalized world are deeply affected by international policies and developments beyond national borders. Pursuant to the Declaration on the Right to Development, States have both the duty to cooperate to advance development and the duty to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms. States also have the duty to take steps, individually and collectively, to formulate international development policies to facilitate the full realization of the right to development (article 4 (1)), and thus all human rights. Notably, States must take sustained action for more rapid development of developing countries and effective international cooperation to provide them with appropriate means and facilities to foster their comprehensive development (article 4 (2)).

9. In Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the General Assembly calls for a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Assembly resolution [70/1](#), para. 40), emphasizing the critical importance of international cooperation in realizing the Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda includes universal goals and targets that involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike (*ibid.*, para. 5). Accordingly, it is to be implemented in a non-selective way and in a manner consistent with the rights and obligations of states under international law (*ibid.*, paras. 18–19).

10. Member States further committed themselves to leaving no one behind and to reaching the furthest behind first. That commitment is underpinned by Goal 17, which contains a pledge to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. As outlined in the most recent report of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the activities of OHCHR ([A/HRC/42/29](#)), the effective implementation of Goal 17 will serve to advance the realization of human rights, including the right to development. The implementation of Goal 17 will further help to redress inequalities within countries and asymmetries among them ([A/HRC/39/18](#)); the Goal can only be fully implemented, however, through increased political commitment, new innovative resource mobilization strategies and a strong commitment to international cooperation ([A/HRC/41/21](#), para. 84).

11. The 2030 Agenda builds on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, in which the critical role of the global partnership for development is underscored. Through the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Member States committed themselves to respecting all human rights, including the right to development (General Assembly resolution [69/313](#), annex, para. 1). It also contains a reference to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and other relevant standards and recognition that such standards must be implemented effectively (*ibid.*, para. 37).

12. The 2030 Agenda also builds on the recognition that progress has been uneven, in particular in Africa, in the least developed countries, in landlocked developing countries and in small island developing States, as States recommitted themselves to international cooperation for developing countries, with special attention paid to the aforementioned groups of countries. States reaffirmed their commitment to implementing relevant strategies and programmes of action, including the Istanbul Declaration and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, and reaffirmed the importance of supporting Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, and the programme of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (General Assembly resolution [70/1](#), paras. 42 and 64).

13. In the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the General Assembly committed to promoting good governance, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, equal access to fair justice systems, and measures to combat corruption and curb illicit financial flows (Assembly resolution [73/291](#), annex, para. 14). It called for strengthening South-South and triangular cooperation in several areas to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and produce more high-value goods and services in the South and for the United Nations development system to enhance its support for those forms of cooperation (*ibid.*, paras. 27 and 31).

## **IV. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: advancing human rights through international cooperation**

14. All components of the United Nations system contribute in many different ways to strengthened action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation in a non-selective, impartial and objective manner. As the United Nations system organization responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights, OHCHR plays an extensive and multifaceted role in that context. That approach makes international cooperation and multilateral and bilateral technical cooperation, as well as national efforts, more effective in promoting and protecting human rights. The work of the Office ranges from supporting local authorities in the context of its country presences to collaboration with United Nations system entities in working with Member States within the ambit of the United Nations human rights system. OHCHR also provides secretariat support to mechanisms of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the treaty bodies. These include mandates on commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and transitional justice programmes. Furthermore, OHCHR works with entities across the United Nations system and contributes to system-wide work, including by leading or co-leading the work of several United Nations coordination bodies. It also works closely with the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in implementing human rights policies relevant to peace operations.

### **A. Country presences**

15. Perhaps the most dynamic tool of OHCHR is its presence in a country. As at 30 June 2019, the Office had 77 human rights presences worldwide, as follows: 16 country offices, 12 offices in the context of peacekeeping or peacebuilding missions, 12 regional offices, 33 presences with human rights advisors providing assistance to United Nations country teams and 4 other field presences. OHCHR in-country work gives meaning to the concept that promoting international cooperation and realizing the right to development has a concrete impact on people's lives. The proactive work of OHCHR goes well beyond seminars. The Office has created partnerships with local, departmental and national authorities, as well as civil society actors, to work together in real time to assist countries, upon request, with improving their level of compliance with international human rights obligations. Often, country presences bring their own financial and human resources to assist Member States in overcoming human rights problems, and they often serve to reinforce the need for and leverage of additional resources for key players (e.g., national human rights institutions and the judiciary).

### **B. Support for national human rights plans, policies, institutions and constituencies**

#### **1. Developing national human rights action plans**

16. National human rights action plans place efforts towards realization of human rights within the context of public policy and are aimed at identifying and addressing gaps in the national human rights protection system. National laws, policies and other institutional frameworks are examined, and proposals developed, through consultation with all stakeholders, informed by baseline assessments, and through collaboration across government ministries, political parties and civil society groups. The plans cover civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, and

they often specifically target the equal enjoyment of human rights by especially vulnerable groups.

17. In plans for the implementation of recommendations, all recommendations from international human rights mechanisms are thematically clustered and prioritized, implementation responsibilities are assigned to ministries and other State entities, and a timeframe for implementation is outlined, as are resources and indicators.

18. In accordance with its comprehensive guidance manual on the subject, OHCHR has provided technical assistance to Member States on the establishment of their national human rights action plans. OHCHR strengthens national capacities, including through technical assistance on the elaboration or revision of such plans. Among the countries that benefited from that assistance during the reporting period were Angola, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Gabon, Haiti, Montenegro, Namibia, Nauru, the Republic of Moldova, Samoa, Uganda and Uruguay.

## **2. Integrating human rights into national policies for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals**

19. OHCHR has provided technical assistance to Member States and to entities within the United Nations system on mainstreaming and integrating human rights into Sustainable Development Goal implementation, monitoring and review efforts. For example, the Office provided technical assistance on the interlinkages between the 2030 Agenda and human rights, including on leaving no one behind, to resident coordinators, United Nations country teams, Member States and civil society in Angola, Argentina, Belarus, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Lebanon, Ghana, Guinea, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe. OHCHR provided technical support to Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius and South Africa in the preparation of their 2019 voluntary national reviews.

20. OHCHR and the human rights mechanisms have consistently engaged with the high-level political forum on sustainable development at the global level, as well as with the preparatory expert group meetings (notably on Goals 10, 13 and 16) and the regional preparatory forums on sustainable development, such as the Economic Commission for Africa regional preparatory workshop for voluntary national review countries in Africa, focusing on the role of national human rights institutions and data-driven policies in empowering the most marginalized and supporting a human rights-based approach to achieving the Goals.

21. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution [37/24](#), OHCHR contributed to the organization of a one-day intersessional meeting for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda, held on 16 January 2019, to feed lessons learned into the 2019 high-level political forum. The Office will organize the second such meeting in advance of the 2020 high-level political forum. OHCHR also worked with States, national human rights institutions and civil society to organize expert meetings and side events on topics that included implementing the principle of leaving no one behind, climate justice, civic space and economic inequalities.

22. OHCHR engaged in the various streams of the United Nations development system reform processes, including working on the integration of human rights into guidance on the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, emphasizing the normative role of the Organization in developing, implementing and promoting the system-wide strategic guidance document and providing input for the regional review of the development system. OHCHR co-led the development of the new draft operational guide for United Nations country teams on leaving no one behind, which is currently being piloted under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group with the support of an inter-agency task team on

leaving no one behind, human rights and the normative agenda, co-chaired by OHCHR.

23. OHCHR has developed several tools to support efforts by Member States to enhance the implementation of international human rights recommendations and integrate them into their national policies for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Those tools include human rights indicators and information management systems for recommendations. The Universal Human Rights Index, a web-based database designed to facilitate access to human rights recommendations issued by the treaty bodies and the special procedure mandate holders and pursuant to the universal periodic review, has proved to be an especially useful tool, providing an overview of recommendations by country, affected persons and human rights themes and linking recommendations to Goals and targets. The Office contributed to the development and delivery of an interactive, online module on operationalizing the right to development in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. In a number of countries, OHCHR is also piloting, upon request, a national recommendations tracking database, which is a specific tool to facilitate tracking and reporting on the implementation of recommendations at the country level. The customized database allows Member States to import, directly from the Universal Human Rights Index, the recommendations addressed to them by United Nations human rights mechanisms; cluster and prioritize them; develop an implementation plan, including indicators and responsible institutions, with clear budgets, benchmarks and timelines; and report on their implementation. For example, in Paraguay, the online database was developed with OHCHR support and expanded in 2017 to link human rights recommendations with the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets. A new feature was also added, through which civil society organizations can monitor the follow-up to each recommendation and provide comments, creating the first dialogue space among stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of recommendations and Goal achievement (A/HRC/38/28, para. 18). In 2018 and 2019, OHCHR supported the sharing of the experience of Paraguay with Argentina and Costa Rica.

25. In order to respond to the growing demand for human rights indicators, OHCHR has developed a conceptual and methodological framework of indicators that provides guidance for the identification of contextually relevant and feasible indicators in compliance with international human rights norms. The Office has also developed guidance tools on the use of human rights indicators and data disaggregation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and has provided support to Member States in that regard. For example, in Kenya, the National Bureau of Statistics and the National Commission on Human Rights signed a memorandum of understanding in 2017 for institutional collaboration on the development of human rights and Sustainable Development Goal indicators and on data collection (*ibid.*, para. 27).

### **3. Enhancing the role of parliaments**

26. According to the report of OHCHR on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review, some 50 per cent of recommendations emanating from that review required parliamentary action to be implemented (A/HRC/38/25, para. 11). Against that backdrop, OHCHR recommended that parliaments consider establishing specialized human rights committees and that they strengthen their engagement with the international human rights mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review (*ibid.*, para. 63). The draft principles on parliaments and human rights, contained in annex I to the report, provide relevant guidance for parliaments that wish to establish such committees.



27. In November 2018, the Office organized the second session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law on the theme, “Parliaments as promoters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”. From 24 to 26 June 2019, a joint Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)-OHCHR seminar, entitled “Parliamentary engagement on human rights: identifying good practices and new opportunities for action”, was held in Geneva for members of parliamentary human rights committees, with the participation of more than 90 members of parliament from 36 countries. Participants shared examples of parliamentary engagement on human rights and parliamentary involvement in the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the universal periodic review, and emphasized the importance of IPU and OHCHR guiding and supporting parliaments in those tasks.

#### **4. Ensuring a strong and independent judiciary**

28. OHCHR contributes to the overall United Nations effort in the area of administration of justice, including by supporting constitutional or other legislative reforms to ensure compliance with human rights law, protect the human rights of persons deprived of their liberty, enhance the human rights knowledge of members of the judiciary and law enforcement officers and support transitional justice processes and mechanisms.

29. At the request of Member States, OHCHR provides support to judges and lawyers worldwide, including in the implementation of human rights recommendations. For example, in 2018, OHCHR supported Jamaica in the implementation of recommendations stemming from the universal periodic review that were focused on raising awareness of international human rights norms among judges, lawyers and prosecutors, to ensure that they were taken into account before the national courts. An online training course on international human rights law for the judiciary was developed for that purpose.

30. OHCHR participates in the work of the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law, led by the Department of Peace Operations and UNDP. The Global Focal Point conducts joint assessments, formulating country-specific plans, providing expertise and focusing attention on rule of law priorities in countries most in need of assistance, thus playing an important role in efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace.

#### **5. Strengthening national human rights institutions**

31. Although the responsibility for follow-up to recommendations of international human rights mechanisms lies with the State, other stakeholders have a significant role to play in the promotion and advancement of the implementation of those recommendations. National human rights institutions fulfil an important bridging role between national human rights protection systems and the international obligations of the State by linking ministries, parliaments and other State bodies with civil society, promoting broad-based participation in developing policies.

32. In the current third cycle of the universal periodic review, more than 90 per cent of national institutions that are fully compliant with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights have submitted written contributions to stakeholders’ reports. From September 2018 to August 2019, 59 of those institutions submitted information, and 38 provided briefings to the treaty bodies. Many of them have made important commitments aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In March 2019, an intersessional half-day consultation allowed national human rights institutions to share their experiences and best practices in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda ([A/HRC/41/30](#)).



33. OHCHR is the focal point within the United Nations system for the provision of technical assistance to Member States on the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions. That cooperation includes the provision of technical assistance, notably through the provision of legal advice for the establishment of legislative frameworks, the implementation of capacity-building activities and the sharing of best practices. The Office also encourages engagement by national human rights institutions with international human rights mechanisms and supports their efforts to mainstream human rights in national development policies. OHCHR also cooperates with UNDP and the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions through a strategic tripartite partnership initiated in 2011 and aimed at supporting national human rights institutions at the global, regional and national levels.

34. OHCHR provided legislative advice to States and strengthened the capacity of national human rights institutions, including in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Congo, Guinea, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mongolia and Tunisia. In Sri Lanka, OHCHR supported the national human rights institution as the designated domestic screening mechanism for conducting human rights screenings of military personnel nominated for deployment to United Nations peacekeeping missions. It conducted regional capacity-building activities for national human rights institutions, for instance with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States and the network of national human rights institutions in West Africa.

## **6. Establishing and strengthening national mechanisms for the reporting and follow-up of recommendations of international human rights mechanisms**

35. OHCHR provides advice and assistance to Member States on national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up, including through its treaty body capacity-building programme established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/268, the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights. OHCHR plays a leading role in substantively supporting the ten treaty bodies in fulfilling their mandates as custodians of the legal norms established by the human rights treaties. In accordance with its mandate and to ensure coherence, the Office facilitates the improvement of the working methods of the treaty bodies and greater coordination, both among them and with other mechanisms.

36. During the reporting period, OHCHR supported more than 60 countries from all regions in the establishment of national mechanisms for the reporting and follow-up of recommendations of human rights mechanisms and/or the strengthening of their capacities. At the regional level, OHCHR organized three peer-learning events, held in Serbia, Switzerland and Uruguay, in order to share good practices. OHCHR also supported the regional high-level dialogue on national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, held in Fiji, in April 2019, for all Pacific States of the Asia-Pacific Group. In the Southern Africa region, OHCHR commissioned a study to assess the status of national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up aimed at informing the Office's technical support to the countries in that region.

37. An increasing number of Member States are establishing national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. Such bodies enhance national ownership and coherence, allow for systematized relationships with parliaments, the judiciary, national human rights institutions and civil society and strengthen participatory and accountable human rights-based governance. Many Member States have made voluntary commitments, or have received and supported recommendations, to establish national

mechanisms for reporting and follow-up, in particular in the context of the universal periodic review.

38. Those mechanisms are well placed to take the lead in clustering and prioritizing recommendations, developing a comprehensive national human rights action plan or a specific plan for the implementation of recommendations and promoting the integration of such recommendations into national policies for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Their effectiveness is based on four core capacities: (a) engagement capacity; (b) coordination capacity; (c) capacity to consult broadly with the State's national human rights institution and civil society; and (d) information management capacity.

## **7. Enabling public participation, civic space and a safe environment for civil society**

39. The free, active and meaningful participation of individuals and the effective involvement of local communities in policies, plans, projects and decisions that affect them, including their access to information and their ability to address real grievances, are keys to sustainable development, the prevention of conflict and sustained peace. The implementation of the guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, endorsed by the Human Rights Council, will help to advance effective public participation at all levels ([A/HRC/39/28](#)).

40. Civil society and its ability to maintain a safe and enabling environment in which it can freely operate are key for effective international cooperation. That has also been highlighted in several resolutions by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, which remain attentive to maintaining an enabling environment for human rights defenders and to eliminating threats made and/or acts of reprisal carried out against them for their cooperation with the United Nations. In recent years, reports and practical guides have been issued, aimed at increasing the engagement of civil society actors with the United Nations (see also the report of the Secretary-General on 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 ([A/73/230](#))).

41. OHCHR has continued to advocate for the inclusion of civil society in all United Nations processes under the pillars of the Organization. In 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights spelled out key measures needed for effective engagement, namely, access to information, transparency with regard to participation rules, diversity among the international and regional organizations with which the United Nations engages and safety and security for civil society actors ([A/HRC/38/18](#)). With a view to improving the approach of the United Nations system to civic space, a mapping of how United Nations entities support civil society and civic space was conducted. OHCHR also sought to inject civic space approaches into other United Nations processes, such as the elaboration of system-wide community engagement guidelines in the peacekeeping area and in development reform streams.

42. OHCHR and the United Nations independent human rights mechanisms address acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the Organization on human rights, including through the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. As the senior official designated to lead those efforts within the United Nations system, he continued to engage with States, including by collecting information on good practices for addressing reprisals.

43. OHCHR has also supported civic space through its provision of technical cooperation. For example, OHCHR commented on laws and policies that expanded or encroached on civic space and on State responses to protests, for instance in Guatemala, Nicaragua and the Sudan. In Afghanistan, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Lebanon, Liberia, Mauritania, Mexico, Timor-Leste and

Uganda, OHCHR strengthened the capacity of parliamentarians and/or civil society actors, including human rights defenders and journalists, to monitor and report on human rights violations and on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### C. Voluntary funds and technical cooperation

44. Programmes implemented by OHCHR through the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights benefit from advice of the Board of Trustees of the Fund. The Chair of the Board, which also serves as the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review, reports to the Human Rights Council, and presented his most recent report ([A/HRC/40/78](#)) on 21 March 2019.

45. The aim of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights is to provide financial support for technical cooperation aimed at strengthening national and regional institutions and legal frameworks and infrastructure that will have a positive and long-term impact on the implementation of human rights standards. In 2018, programmes were implemented in 40 regions, countries and territories, in close cooperation with Member States and other partners, complementing other funding tools available to OHCHR (*ibid.*, para. 63).

46. In his most recent report, the Chair stressed the critical importance of integrating human rights across the work of all United Nations programmes to better support national human rights efforts (*ibid.*, para. 50). That was particularly relevant in view of the reform of the United Nations development system, aimed at supporting States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

47. The current United Nations development system reform will ensure that the normative framework guides and informs the transformation of the United Nations system, in particular with regard to human rights. An empowered resident coordinator and reinvigorated country team should make every effort to enhance policy coherence of United Nations system support in a manner that simultaneously supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of human rights. OHCHR is well placed to continue to support the system in that regard, reinforcing the key normative role of the Organization and integrating human rights into programming and strategies (*ibid.*, paras. 49–57).

48. The voluntary trust fund for participation in the universal periodic review, aimed at facilitating the participation of developing countries, in particular least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, in the universal periodic review, and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review also support those countries in their engagement with the universal periodic review and in implementing its recommendations (see [A/HRC/38/26](#) and [A/HRC/38/27](#)).

49. 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<sup>1</sup> is designed to strengthen institutional capacity to underpin the effective and informed participation of delegations from least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Council. Since becoming operational in 2014, the trust fund has supported 132 delegates and fellows (82 women and 50 men) from 71 of the 72 least developed countries and small island developing States (35 from Africa, 22 from the Asia-Pacific region and 14 from Latin America and the Caribbean). In November 2018, the secretariat of the trust fund

<sup>1</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/SIDS-LDCs.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/SIDS-LDCs.aspx).

organized the first regional workshop mandated by the Council. Held in Georgetown, the workshop brought together all former trust fund beneficiary delegates from the Caribbean region who had participated in a regular session of the Council and some former beneficiaries from the Asia-Pacific region and Africa. The President of the Council participated in the workshop, at which participants adopted the outcome document entitled, *Georgetown Declaration: Towards 2022*, which was aimed at enhancing the participation of small island developing States within the Council. The Declaration contains several recommendations and priorities, including with regard to concerted efforts to improve the functioning of the trust fund and to ensuring discussion on topics of particular interest to the Caribbean small island developing States. The next workshop, for countries of the Pacific region, will take place in Fiji, in November 2019.

50. In the draft report on its study on technical assistance and capacity-building in fostering mutually beneficial cooperation in promoting and protecting human rights (A/HRC/AC/23/CRP.3), the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council explored the basis and practice of technical assistance. In its final report, the Committee will, *inter alia*, address best practices, achievements and obstacles. There is scope to increase State cooperation with the Council and with its technical cooperation programme to advance the implementation of human rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including with regard to gender equality.

## **V. United Nations human rights system**

### **A. Universal periodic review**

51. Reports of the universal periodic review mechanism have included recommendations on inter-State cooperation and development assistance. Several States have made recommendations, in the context of the universal periodic review, to strengthen cooperation in the field of human rights with the international community, including with other States, international and regional human rights mechanisms and other international organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (see, for example, [A/HRC/39/6](#), paras. 120.89 and 120.91; [A/HRC/40/7](#), para. 148.239; and [A/HRC/40/12](#), paras. 121.9 and 121.10). Those recommendations address both bilateral issues, such as increasing efforts to protect and safeguard the human rights of the civilian population in border areas, within the framework of international cooperation ([A/HRC/39/6](#), para. 120.182), and global issues, such as continuing to strengthen international cooperation in addressing climate change and its impacts for the promotion and protection of human rights ([A/HRC/39/9](#), para. 155.116).

52. Also in the context of the universal periodic review, several States have made specific recommendations that the States being reviewed should increase international cooperation to safeguard the rights of the child. Examples include recommendations to strengthen policy and international cooperation to counter child trafficking ([A/HRC/39/9](#), para. 155.162), to take effective measures to promote children's rights in close cooperation with the international community ([A/HRC/38/15](#), para. 118.119) and to pursue measures to establish a plan of action to combat child labour, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization ([A/HRC/36/5](#), para. 125.175).

## B. Treaty bodies

53. Several treaty body committees have made recommendations that States need to improve their international cooperation efforts in specific areas, such as enforced disappearances, trafficking in persons and migrant workers. The Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families recommended that Ecuador step up its international, regional and bilateral cooperation in efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in persons ([CMW/C/ECU/CO/3](#), para. 47 (g)). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women made general recommendations that Barbados should seek technical assistance and continue its cooperation efforts with specialized agencies and programs of the United Nations system ([CEDAW/C/BRB/CO/5-8](#), para. 54).

54. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that Vanuatu strengthen its cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and that it explore increased cooperation with UNICEF and other United Nations entities in the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict ([CRC/C/OPAC/VUT/CO/1](#), para. 18).

## C. Special procedures

55. In several reports, the special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council have addressed the role of international cooperation in strengthening action in the field of human rights. The special procedures mechanism contributes to promoting and protecting human rights globally. Mandate holders provide technical assistance and cooperation by undertaking activities such as country or fact-finding missions, sending communications to governments, preparing thematic studies and interacting with the media. Several mandate holders have underlined, in their reports, the importance of international cooperation to the realization of human rights.

56. In his report on South-South cooperation, the Special Rapporteur on the right to development indicated that, in accordance with the Declaration on the Right to Development, the right to development could not be realized without effective cooperation among States, nor could all States be able to fulfil their obligations without support from the international community,<sup>2</sup> and that, in the Declaration, the parties highlighted the importance of cooperation among individuals, States and the international community in creating an enabling environment for development that was sustainable, just, equitable and inclusive ([A/73/271](#), para. 19). In the report, he noted that developing countries and emerging economies had become key players and an important source of good practices in advancing sustainable development at the national, regional and global levels. He outlined new solutions to emerging global trends and challenges that adversely affected the realization of the right to development, including global economic and financial crises, climate change and natural disasters, corruption and illicit financial flows.

57. In his report, the Special Rapporteur also noted that South-South cooperation initiatives on disaster risk reduction management, when effectively employed, could support developing countries in addressing challenges related to climate change and disaster risks. The Special Rapporteur recommended that stakeholders in South-South cooperation should integrate human rights principles enshrined in the right to

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<sup>2</sup> See also the report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance ([A/HRC/41/54](#), para. 30).

development into the design, financing, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the processes involved. He also recommended that States should promote avenues for cooperation with non-State actors, including civil society networks promoting sustainable development, and that stakeholders should establish transparent and participatory processes of monitoring and evaluation to promote a culture of accountability (*ibid.*, paras. 69, 75 and 81).

58. The Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity noted that international solidarity underlay the duty of States to cooperate in order to fully mainstream the effective realization of the right of peoples and individuals to international solidarity. In his 2018 report to the Human Rights Council, he recognized the interconnectedness between his mandate and other thematic areas that required that the cooperation of all stakeholders be effectively addressed, including climate change and environmental crises, technology and innovation and taxation ([A/HRC/38/40](#)).

59. The Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment has also drawn attention to the importance of cooperation in addressing the effects of climate change. In his report on the right to breathe clean air, he pointed out that the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution of the Economic Commission for Europe exemplified regional cooperation, whereby 51 parties have collaborated to set emission reduction targets, monitor compliance and build capacity, activities that demonstrate the promotion of international cooperation ([A/HRC/40/55](#), para. 106). Since climate change has severe effects on children and their rights, in his report on the relationship between children's rights and the environment, the Special Rapporteur recommended that States increase their cooperation to address the effects of global and transboundary environmental harm on the rights of children. States should also cooperate with businesses to ensure their compliance with all applicable environmental laws ([A/HRC/37/58](#), paras. 74–75).

60. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants has emphasized that cooperation between States was crucial for the return of migrants who did not meet international or national legal criteria to remain in their host country. He recommended that States facilitate the voluntary return of migrants, when migrants were fully informed and their returns free of coercion, through cooperation on consular assistance ([A/HRC/38/41](#), paras. 87–88).

61. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance recommended that States meaningfully contribute to or cooperate in confronting global structural racial inequality in the extractivism economy. She called on States and non-State actors to take community-based resistance to extractivism seriously, while urging them to work with affected communities to develop sustainable and just alternatives to the status quo ([A/HRC/41/54](#), paras. 65–66).

## **VI. Replies from States**

### **A. Italy**

62. Italy considered that United Nations action in the field of human rights, through the promotion of international cooperation, facilitated the exchange of good practices, prevented mass violations of human rights and strengthened international peace and security. Technical assistance and capacity-building were important tools for supporting States in achieving those goals.



63. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the launch of the United Nations reform process and the commencement of the third cycle of the universal periodic review provided new momentum for constructive engagement in human rights mainstreaming on the basis of global, regional and national endeavours premised on the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.

64. Italy actively engaged in the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda and adopted measures for its national implementation. It also promoted events linking related processes with those of the human rights mechanisms and with the work of its national human rights institutions.

65. Italy cooperated actively on several areas related to human rights, including business and human rights, the promotion of the rights of women and children in both peace and conflict situations, the rule of law, crime prevention and the moratorium on the death penalty.

## **B. Mexico**

66. Mexico actively promoted international cooperation on human rights at the global, regional, subregional and bilateral levels. It engaged in South-South and triangular cooperation in such areas as gender, children's rights and economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to health. It was both a donor and a recipient country.

67. Mexico promoted the integration of a gender perspective in the negotiations for the 2030 Agenda and in its implementation. It hosts the Global Centre of Excellence on Gender Statistics, supported by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and has used the Gender-based Analysis Plus tool, which it received from Canada, for identifying good practices.

68. Mexico cooperated and signed agreements with OHCHR to train and support the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice in the Ayotzinapa Case and the National Guard on international human rights standards.

69. Among its recommendations, Mexico stressed the importance of assessing health needs at all levels to better focus and ensure the efficacy of international cooperation projects; the importance of strengthening the cooperation role of the international human rights mechanisms and the implementation of their recommendations; and the desirability of the adoption of early warning tools by the Human Rights Council.

## **C. Portugal**

70. Portugal argued that ensuring non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity should be a core concern of all United Nations mechanisms in carrying out their mandates.

71. Referencing General Assembly resolution [68/268](#) on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system, Portugal recommended more transparency in the procedure for nominating members of human rights mechanisms. Those members should engage in dialogues of a more constructive and dynamic nature, with concrete examples, and cite general comments of the treaty bodies and reports of special rapporteurs and independent experts in their recommendations. The universal periodic review reports by troikas should present examples of best practices.



72. Portugal shared good practices, namely, its cooperation with members of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries in promoting access to justice and inclusive institutions and the work of the country's High Commission for Migration in promoting and protecting rights. It recommended training, awareness-raising, mentoring and the promotion of migrant and refugee entrepreneurship to support integration.

73. Portugal also recommended training of military and other public officers in international human rights and humanitarian law and stronger dialogue between the Human Rights Council, the International Law Commission and the Security Council.

#### **D. Syrian Arab Republic**

74. The Syrian Arab Republic agreed that United Nations action in the field of human rights was strengthened through commitment and adherence to the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations and through supporting the efforts of Member States to promote international cooperation on that basis. Those principles include universality, transparency, impartiality, non-selectivity and objectivity, as well as genuine geographic, professional, legal and cultural diversity in all human rights actions. OHCHR and the special procedure mandate holders can support constructive and practical partnerships between the human rights system and Member States.

75. International cooperation programmes in human rights must be a means to support States' capacities to implement their international obligations, in accordance with their national priorities and with full respect for their sovereignty and political independence. They must be free from political and economic conditions and must not become monitoring and investigation activities, involving intervention in matters at the core of national jurisdiction or tools to point fingers at the human rights situation in specific States. The Syrian Arab Republic acknowledged that the universal periodic review mechanism remained the best agreed mechanism, that it strengthened international cooperation in the field of human rights and that it should continue to be supported.

### **VII. Conclusions and recommendations**

**76. International cooperation is critical to the realization of the vision of a world in which everyone has access to inclusive and equitable quality education, universal health coverage and quality health care, food security and improved nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, affordable, reliable and sustainable energy and quality and resilient infrastructure. Through its human rights actions, the United Nations will continue to contribute to the realization of all human rights, including the right to development.**

**77. In a world of significant inequalities, rising vulnerabilities and entrenched deprivations, special focus should be placed on vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, children, young people and older persons, minorities, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, in line with the international commitment to leave no one behind and reach those furthest behind first.**

**78. Integrated approaches to advancing peace, human rights and development are increasingly important in a globalized and interdependent world, wherein the most pressing problems require collective responses. Through strengthened action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international**

cooperation, the United Nations promotes an integrated approach in order to advance human rights, implement the 2030 Agenda and sustain peace.

79. Human rights can only be fulfilled when the ecosystem is protected and when patterns of consumption and production have been truly transformed.

80. Strengthened international cooperation is vital to closing the financing gap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, creating an enabling environment for sustainable development and to doing so in accordance with human rights law. Durable partnerships among governments, at all levels, and with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, academia and youth, will be critical in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

81. Member States should cooperate to rebuild consensus on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whereby, irrespective of the forms of government or of the economic systems in place, all States have an obligation to respect the economic, social and cultural rights of all people, as well as their civil and political rights. The Declaration further contains a call for a social and international order in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized for everyone. The 2030 Agenda, the reform of the United Nations development system and the third cycle of the universal periodic review provide new opportunities for Member States to realize, universally, the values and aspirations of the Declaration for respect for all human rights of all people as the basis for sustainable development and peaceful coexistence.

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