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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

United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/166](#), the present report provides an overview of the activities of the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region from August 2017 to July 2019.

The present report highlights the achievements of the Centre and outlines steps taken to strengthen its effectiveness and efficiency in responding to the increasing need and demand for support and technical assistance for the promotion of human rights in the countries covered by the Centre.

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



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/166](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit at its seventy-fourth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. It provides an overview of the activities and achievements of the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region from August 2017 to July 2019.

2. The Centre was established in 2009 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Doha. Mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution [60/153](#) to undertake activities on human rights training and documentation, the Centre aims to promote human rights in the Arab region¹ and South-West Asia.² In collaboration with Governments, specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations, the Centre provides educational resources and human rights training in accordance with international human rights standards.

3. The Centre seeks to build knowledge and raise public awareness about human rights and to promote human rights through capacity-building and skills development. It also provides specialized resources to promote respect for human rights values and principles.

4. During the period under review, the Centre focused its main efforts on two strategic directions: (a) continuing to strengthen its effectiveness and efficiency in responding to emerging needs through tapping into available OHCHR resources and expertise beyond the Centre; and (b) reinforcing the three components of its mandate, namely, capacity-building, human rights education and documentation.

II. Main activities on key thematic priorities

5. The strategic priorities of the Centre align with the six thematic pillars of the United Nations Human Rights Management Plan for 2018–2021.³ More specifically, in the reporting period, the Centre's work focused on the following five areas:

- (a) Increasing implementation of the outcomes of the international human rights mechanisms;
- (b) Preventing violations and strengthening protection of human rights, including in situations of conflict and insecurity;
- (c) Enhancing equality and countering discrimination;
- (d) Enhancing participation and protecting civic space;
- (e) Strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations.

6. From August 2017 to July 2019, the Centre played a significant role in building the capacity of various actors to promote and protect human rights, including government officials, State institutions, regional organizations, national human rights institutions, academics, civil society organizations, human rights defenders and community and religious leaders. During the reporting period, the Centre was faced

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and State of Palestine.

² Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan.

³ See www2.ohchr.org/english/OHCHRReport2018_2021/OHCHRManagementPlan2018-2021.pdf.

with an increased demand for training, workshops and educational programmes in relation to the international human rights mechanisms, to the documentation of human rights violations and abuses, and to the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including countering hate speech and preventing violent extremism among youth. There was also a growing demand for references and training materials on human rights in Arabic.

7. During the reporting period, the Centre also improved its use of social media and reinforced its documentation mandate.

A. Increasing implementation of the outcomes of the international human rights mechanisms

8. From 9 to 11 October 2017, in Doha, in partnership with the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, the Centre organized a subregional training programme on the theme “Ways and skills of interaction of national human rights institutions with the treaty bodies”. The training was attended by 25 participants, including 12 women.

9. From 8 to 10 October 2018, also in Doha, in partnership with the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar the Centre organized a workshop to enhance the knowledge of the Committee’s staff regarding international human rights mechanisms and the obligations of Qatar. The workshop was attended by 13 participants, including 8 women.

10. From 2 to 5 December 2018, in Khartoum, the Centre conducted the first phase of a training-the-trainers programme for national human rights institutions in the Arab region. The activity was organized in partnership with the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions and the Sudanese National Commission for Human Rights. It benefited 24 trainers, including 10 women, and focused on international human rights law and international human rights mechanisms. The participants committed to exchanging their experiences through the next phase of the training, scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2019.

11. On 20 and 21 February 2019, in Doha, in cooperation with the Department of Human Rights and the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, the Centre organized an awareness-raising workshop on the international human rights mechanisms. The workshop was attended by 20 participants, including 8 women, from various governmental institutions, civil society organizations and the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar.

12. In view of the accession of Qatar to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on 21 May 2018, the Centre organized two workshops in cooperation with the National Human Rights Committee and the Department of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, from 25 to 27 February and on 2 and 3 April 2019. The workshops addressed the obligations of Qatar under the two covenants and the procedure of submitting initial reports to the respective treaty bodies monitoring compliance of the State parties to the covenants. The first workshop was attended by 40 participants, more than half of whom were women. It involved government officials from various ministries, members of the Shura Council, staff from the National Human Rights Committee, representatives of the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Qatar Lawyers Association, the Qatar Social Work Foundation and the Qatar Media Corporation. Approximately 30 participants – half of whom were women – from various government bodies concerned with preparing the State reports under the covenants, attended the second workshop.

13. From 2 to 4 April 2019, in Cairo, in cooperation with the Human Rights Department of the League of Arab States, the Centre organized a training workshop on the international human rights system. The event was conducted in the context of strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. It was attended by 37 participants, including 17 women, from various departments of the League of Arab States and the Arab Commission for Human Rights. Among other issues, the workshop addressed the core international human rights treaties and the position of Arab States on them. It also provided an opportunity to discuss ways to develop cooperation between the League of Arab States and OHCHR.

14. On 10 and 11 April 2019, in cooperation with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights and the Universal Periodic Review Branch of OHCHR, the Centre organized a technical and capacity-building workshop in Qatar on the universal periodic review. The workshop was attended by 20 participants from Qatar, more than half of whom were women. It targeted the human rights focal points of various governmental departments to strengthen their capacity to engage in the context of the third cycle of the universal periodic review in May 2019.

15. During the reporting period, the Centre published three volumes in Arabic on the general recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,⁴ the general recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination⁵ and the general comments adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁶ Each volume provides guidance on the scope of the relevant treaty and interpretation of specific human rights issues, outlines actions which would be considered as potential violations and offers advice to States on how best to comply with their obligations under the relevant treaty. These publications are aimed at Governments, national human rights institutions, legal professionals, academics, civil society organizations, human rights defenders and journalists, among others. They will be used in the training delivered by the Centre and other OHCHR field presences in the Arab region.

16. The Centre produced a reference book on the obligations of Mauritania under the core human rights treaties and their additional protocols, which includes the State's declarations and reservations, concluding observations of the treaty bodies on Mauritania, and comments by the Government. Furthermore, the Centre prepared 20 awareness leaflets covering the obligations of Mauritania under the core human rights treaties and their additional protocols as well as other issues such as minority rights, national human rights institutions and law enforcement.

17. The Centre edited the Arabic translation of the first part of the OHCHR professional training series No. 20 entitled *Reporting to the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies: Training Guide*.

B. Preventing violations and strengthening the protection of human rights, including in situations of conflict and insecurity

18. On 28 and 29 November 2017, in Doha, the Centre organized a workshop for members of the Qatari National Human Rights Committee on developing a national human rights action plan. The workshop was attended by around 20 participants, more than half of whom were women, including ministers and members of the National Human Rights Committee, the Qatari National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, and the Qatar Foundation for Social Work. Among other issues, the

⁴ See https://untrainingcentre.ohchr.org/ar-ae/Documents/GC_CEDAW_Ar.pdf.

⁵ See https://untrainingcentre.ohchr.org/ar-ae/Documents/GC_CERD_Ar.pdf.

⁶ See https://untrainingcentre.ohchr.org/ar-ae/Documents/GC_CRC_Ar.pdf.

workshop discussed the preparatory phase of drafting the plan of action, the respective roles of the national human rights institutions and civil society organizations, the development phase of the plan, including suggestions regarding its content, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

19. From 19 to 21 November 2018, for the first time since its establishment, the Centre organized activities in Djibouti in partnership with the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions and the National Human Rights Commission of Djibouti. Activities included a workshop on the prevention of hate speech and the protection of human rights while countering terrorism. Around 30 participants, including 10 women, attended the workshop: government officials, members and staff of the Commission, civil society organizations, religious leaders and journalists. The workshop included discussions on the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism ([A/70/674](#)), the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence ([A/HRC/22/17/Add.4](#), appendix), the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on Faith for Rights ([A/HRC/40/58](#), annexes I and II), and the implementation of human rights norms by law enforcement and investigators concerning hate speech, violent extremism and the fight against terrorism. The workshop also included discussions on the situation regarding hate speech and violent extremism in Djibouti and efforts to prevent these phenomena as well as terrorism.

20. From 2 to 5 May 2018, in Tunis, the Centre organized a regional workshop on the role of youth faith actors in promoting human rights in the Middle East and North Africa region to consult young human rights activists and religious leaders on the best way to implement the Faith for Rights framework in the region and to address the vulnerabilities of young people to incitement to hatred and violence in the name of religion. Twenty-five participants, including 10 women, attended the workshop, which involved government officials, experts, human rights educators and United Nations staff. Participants examined the general context, analysed the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights and its 18 commitments on Faith for Rights, and discussed their potential integration into capacity-building and education programmes to address religious radicalization of youth. The workshop identified ideas on the best ways to continue working together on promoting human rights.

C. Enhancing equality and countering discrimination

21. From 23 to 26 September 2018, in Doha, the Centre supported the implementation of a capacity-building programme on the theme "Human rights and migrant workers in Qatar", which was organized by the Diplomacy Training Programme of the University of New South Wales in partnership with the Migrant Forum in Asia and Georgetown University in Qatar. Around 30 participants, 10 of whom were women, attended the programme: academics, policymakers, and representatives of the business sector and civil society organizations. The Centre provided information on the international human rights system and international human rights standards and mechanisms related to the rights of migrant workers.

22. In 2018, the Centre published a compilation of recommendations of the first 10 sessions of the Forum on Minority Issues, for the period 2008–2017, which covers the following areas: right to education, political participation, economic rights, minority women's rights, statelessness, religious minorities, minorities in the criminal justice system and minorities in situations of humanitarian crises. The Centre also produced a publication on standards and guidance with regard to minority rights. The publication contains the main documents related to minorities' rights. Both publications are aimed at equipping defenders of minority rights and other civil

society actors, as well as government officials, national human rights institutions, legal professionals, with a guide and source material.⁷

D. Enhancing participation and protecting civic space

23. From 17 to 19 August 2017, in Amman, the Centre and the OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, in partnership with the Jordanian organization Tadamon, organized training for 20 women human rights defenders on engagement with the international and regional human rights mechanisms.

24. From 10 to 13 May 2018, in the wake of World Press Freedom Day, the Centre organized a seminar on the media, justice and the rule of law in the context of keeping power in check and a training workshop on media and the rule of law in Nouakchott, the first activity ever held by the Centre in Mauritania. Organized in partnership with the Al-Jazeera Public Liberties and Human Rights Centre and the General Union of Mauritanian Journalists, the seminar was attended by 70 participants, including 25 women, while the workshop was attended by 40 journalists, including 20 women, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Communications, the national human rights institution and civil society organizations. The seminar addressed various issues, such as the creation of an enabling legal environment for freedom of the press; access to information; protection of journalists and freedom of the press; freedom of expression online; and the role of the media during elections. The workshop covered several topics, including access to information; the safety of journalists; a human rights approach to press coverage, including on issues related to women, children and immigrants; and combating hate speech.

25. On 20 September 2018, in Doha, the Centre organized an awareness workshop on a human rights-based approach to journalism, which was attended by 15 journalists, including 5 women. The purpose was to enhance the knowledge of the participants regarding international human rights law and the obligation of States regarding critical topics (such as discrimination against women, hate speech, racism and xenophobia) and to encourage them to adopt a human rights-based approach in their work.

26. From 21 to 23 November 2018, in Tunis, the Centre and the OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa organized a workshop for 18 women human rights defenders from 12 Arab countries to develop a road map for the work of human rights defenders and women human rights defenders in the Arab region. The workshop was aimed at increasing the participation of women human rights defenders in a regional context in which they increasingly experience intimidation and reprisals from State and non-State actors. The workshop resulted in the establishment of a regional coalition to support women human rights defenders and advocate for a safer environment for their work.

27. From 19 to 21 April 2019, in Rabat, in preparation for World Press Freedom Day, the Centre organized two events in collaboration with the Al-Shuruq Centre for Media, Democracy and Human Rights and the Al-Jazeera Public Liberties and Human Rights Centre: a seminar on opportunities and challenges in the context of new media spaces, and a training workshop on the protection of human rights in new media spaces. Sixty participants – government officials, academics and university students – 25 of whom were women, attended the seminar, which was focused on new media and digital technology opportunities and challenges from a human rights perspective. Thirty-two participants, half of whom were women, benefited from the training, mainly journalists from various media platforms and media students. The training covered the guarantees of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to

⁷ https://untrainingcentre.ohchr.org/ar-ae/Documents/Minority_Forum_Ar.pdf.

access and disseminate information and the right to participate in public affairs under international and regional human rights law. The role of the media in promoting human rights was also discussed and participants exchanged ideas around initiatives to counter the spread of speech advocating national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

28. On 11 December 2018, in Doha, the Centre organized a symposium on the challenges and opportunities in the context of the media and human rights in partnership with the Al-Jazeera Public Liberties and Human Rights Centre. Around 40 participants, half of them women, attended the event, mainly journalists.

E. Strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations

29. From 13 to 15 December 2017, in Doha, the Centre organized, in cooperation with the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions, a training workshop on the role of national human rights institutions in monitoring and documenting human rights violations and handling complaints. It was attended by 24 representatives from 10 national human rights institutions, including 9 women. The event focused on the basic principles for information gathering, monitoring, documentation and reporting on human rights violations.

30. From 16 to 21 May 2018, in Nouakchott, the Centre supported a capacity-building programme for law enforcement entities organized by the OHCHR Regional Office in Mauritania, in partnership with the Mauritanian police academy. The programme was attended by 30 law enforcement officers, including 10 women, and covered topics such as democratic policing, policing of public assemblies, arrests, human rights and the use of force, non-discrimination, and gender.

31. From 11 to 14 November 2018, in Doha, in celebration of National Human Rights Day in Qatar, and in cooperation with the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior, the Centre organized a training workshop on the theme “Prohibition against torture in law and practice: from prohibition to prevention”. The event was part of an initiative of the authorities to implement recommendations, which the Committee against Torture addressed to Qatar in June 2018. The workshop was attended by around 30 participants, including 10 women. The participants were law enforcement officers, doctors, representatives of several ministries, national human rights institutions, the Office of the Prosecutor, the Qatar Social Work Foundation, and the medical rehabilitation department of Hamad Medical Corporation.

32. During the reporting period, the Centre edited the Arabic translation of OHCHR publications entitled *The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death*,⁸ *Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-finding Missions on International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law: Guidance and Practice*,⁹ and *Integrating a Gender Perspective into Human Rights Investigations: Guidance and Practice*.

F. Human rights education and promotional activities

33. On 23 and 24 April 2019, in Doha, in preparation for the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education,¹⁰ the Centre organized a round table discussion with 12 experts from the Arab region, 5 of whom were women, to discuss

⁸ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol_AR.pdf.

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/CoI_Guidance_and_Practice_AR.pdf.

¹⁰ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/Fourthphase/Pages/FourthPhaseIndex.aspx.

proposals on working with youth in the field of human rights. The experts presented the work done to include human rights in formal and informal education through legislation, policies, planning and programmes, and unofficial initiatives. The experts also discussed lessons learned regarding working with youth in human rights education and explored ideas regarding future work on the fourth phase of the Programme.

34. During the reporting period, the Centre hosted several students, researchers and professionals, gave them advice regarding general human rights matters and provided them with human rights documentation.

35. The Centre continued to use its Facebook page to spread knowledge about human rights issues and the United Nations human rights mechanisms and organized several awareness-raising campaigns on countering discrimination against women, human rights and business, the rule of law, democracy, enforced disappearances, ending impunity for crimes against journalists, the rights of older persons and the human rights of migrants.

36. The Centre distributed OHCHR publications, including the ones it produced, to Governments, State institutions, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, public libraries, academic institutions and research centres, and the media. During the reporting period, the Centre thus distributed nearly 3,000 hard copies and more than 1,000 electronic copies of human rights publications.

37. The Centre also prepared, printed and disseminated thousands of posters on the main human rights principles and standards on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also organized several activities in celebration of this anniversary. The first round of activities was held in Doha, from 8 to 10 December 2017, in partnership with the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar and the Katara Cultural Village Foundation. These included activities for children based on values and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Fifty visitors participated in the “Add your voice” campaign, and 20 artists contributed to an art symposium gathering 32 paintings about human rights.

38. On 6 December 2018, in Doha, the Centre organized a panel discussion on the theme “Human rights are essential for peace”, in cooperation with the Centre of Conflict and Humanitarian Studies of the Doha Institute of Graduate Studies. The event was attended by Qatari national partners, members of the diplomatic community in Doha, academics, students and journalists.

39. The Centre reviewed and edited the Arabic translation of OHCHR publication *ABC: Teaching Human Rights – Practical Activities for Primary and Secondary Schools*.¹¹

III. Conclusions

40. During the reporting period, the Centre continued to develop its partnership with a wide range of stakeholders in the Arab region, contributing to furthering the promotion of human rights and to supporting human rights advocacy. It also reinforced the documentation component of its mandate, expanding its outreach to a growing number of beneficiaries, including youth. For the first time since its establishment, the Centre organized activities in Djibouti and Mauritania. The Centre included critical issues in its capacity-

¹¹ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/ABCar.pdf.

building activities, such as new media and digital technology, hate speech and incitement to discrimination, and prevention of violent extremism.

41. The Centre, however, continued to experience significant challenges in implementing its mandate owing to its limited human resources compared with the wide geographic scope it covers and the increasing demands it faces. The Centre therefore had to decline several requests to organize capacity-building workshops and training programmes, including from individual States and from the League of Arab States. The Centre was also unable to implement a significant number of activities in non-Arabic speaking countries. Additional resources are necessary to strengthen the capacity of the Centre to better serve Member States and adequately deliver on its mandate.

42. In the coming two years, the Centre will strengthen its efforts to accommodate the needs of the 25 countries under its coverage. To reinforce the three components of its mandate, as set out in General Assembly resolution [60/153](#), the Centre intends to develop its human rights education programme, with more emphasis on the youth sector, in view of the upcoming global phase of human rights education. It also aims to further develop its training programmes for State institutions, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. Moreover, it will pursue the strengthening of its documentation component, notably the production and dissemination of human rights resource materials in Arabic.
