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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

Against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which poses an unprecedented challenge to all humanity, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the 100th anniversary of the League of Nations, in the present report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights appeals to the international community to renew its collective commitment to act on multilateral solutions to global problems, international solidarity and cooperation, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Likewise, she calls on all States to reaffirm their commitment to the universality of human rights; across all political and economic systems, all States share a common obligation to respect all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 41/3 of 11 July 2019, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights, proposing also possible ways to face the challenges to the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development.

II. International cooperation and the normative framework of human rights

2. International cooperation can help realize human rights. According to Article 1 (3) of the Charter of the United Nations, one of the fundamental purposes 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 for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. In Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter, “all Members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organization” to achieve the purposes set forth in the Charter, which include “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. This is echoed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in article 22 recognizes the role of international cooperation in everyone’s entitlement to realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his or her dignity and the free development of his or her personality.

3. The critical role of international cooperation in the realization of human rights is also recognized in several human rights treaties. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights mandates international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, as means of achieving economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2 (1)). Elaborating on this provision in its general comment No. 3 (1990) on the nature of States parties’ obligations, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized that international cooperation for development, and thus for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, is an obligation of all States. The Covenant also recognizes the importance of international cooperation based on free consent in the context of realizing the right to an adequate standard of living and to freedom from hunger (art. 11). Furthermore, it encourages international cooperation in the scientific and cultural fields (art. 15 (4)). Other human rights treaties, 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 recognize the importance of international cooperation for realizing human rights.

4. The Declaration on the Right to Development recognizes that States have the primary responsibility for the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development (art. 3 (1)). This requires full respect for the principles of international law concerning friendly relations and cooperation among States (art. 3 (2)). States also have the duty to cooperate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development (art. 3 (3)). States 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 (art. 3 (3)).

5. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, aims at “achieving substantial progress in human rights endeavours by an increased and sustained effort of international cooperation and solidarity” (preamble). In it, the World Conference reaffirmed that enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights is essential for the full achievement of the purposes of the United Nations (part I, para. 1). It also 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 requires effective development policies at the national level, as well as equitable economic relations and a favourable economic environment at the international level (part I, para. 10). Furthermore, it recognized that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and 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, para. 5). The same principles also underpin the mandate of the Human Rights Council (General Assembly resolution 60/251 and Council resolution 5/1).

III. Policy frameworks and new and emerging opportunities

6. As humanity faces the immediate threat from coronavirus disease (COVID-19), “more than ever before, we need solidarity, hope and the political will and cooperation to see this crisis through together”.¹ This crisis reinforces the importance of international cooperation.

7. International cooperation is key to realizing peace, human rights and sustainable development. Rapid and far-reaching developments in transport, information and communication technologies, exchange of information, ideas, goods and services and mass migrations, as well as growing inequalities, have posed 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 in an interdependent, globalized world are deeply affected by international policies and developments beyond their borders. The Declaration on the Right to Development affirms the duties of States to cooperate in order to advance development and to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms. States also have the duty to take steps, individually and collectively, to formulate international development policies with a view to facilitating the full realization of the right to development (art. 4 (1)), and thus all human rights. Notably, States must take sustained action for more rapid development of developing countries. Effective international cooperation is essential to provide them with appropriate means and facilities to foster their comprehensive development (art. 4 (2)).

9. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the General Assembly called for a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, emphasizing the critical importance of international cooperation for realizing the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. The Agenda includes universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike. 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.

10. In the 2030 Agenda, the General Assembly further committed to leave no one behind and to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. This commitment is underpinned by Sustainable Development Goal 17, which is to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. Effective implementation of Goal 17 will serve to advance the realization of human rights, including the right to development (A/HRC/42/29, paras. 29–68). It will further help to redress inequalities within countries and asymmetries among them in line with Goal 10 (A/HRC/39/18, paras. 53–56). Goal 17 can be fully implemented only through increased political commitment, new innovative resource mobilization strategies and a strong commitment to international cooperation (A/HRC/41/21, para. 84). As highlighted by the Secretary-General’s response

¹ United Nations, “Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19”, March 2020, p. 2. Available at www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socio-economic_impact_of_covid19.pdf.

to COVID-19, partnerships are imperative to accelerate a unified, global response to “build back better” on the basis of global solidarity and shared responsibility. The high-level political forum on sustainable development, held in September 2019, adopted a political declaration (General Assembly resolution 74/4), in which the General Assembly launched an ambitious and accelerated response and pledged to make the coming decade one of action and delivery for sustainable development.²

11. The 2030 Agenda builds on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, in which the General Assembly elaborated on the critical role of the global partnership for development. In the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Member States committed to respect all human rights, including the right to development, and made reference to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework and other relevant standards. The High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development was held in September 2019 to reaffirm the call for collective action to energize growth and tackle challenges in the global economy, encourage public and private investment to align with the 2030 Agenda, and promote new and innovative initiatives that target gaps in financing sustainable development.³

12. The 2030 Agenda also builds on the recognition that progress has been uneven, particularly in Africa and in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as States recommitted to international cooperation for developing countries, paying particular attention to these groups of countries. States reaffirmed their commitment to implement relevant strategies and programmes of action, including the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action, 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 the African Union Agenda 2063 and the programme of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development.

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. It encouraged developed and developing countries to strengthen South-South and triangular cooperation in the field of education to enhance developing countries’ capacities to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and produce more high-value goods and services. It also requested the United Nations Development System to enhance its support to South-South and triangular cooperation.

14. All of the above normative and policy frameworks are reinforced by the Secretary-General in his publication entitled “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights”,⁴ and in the report entitled “Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19”.

IV. Implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights

A. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

15. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) plays a multifaceted role as the United Nations system organization responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights. Through its work at its headquarters, its regional and country presences and in collaboration with other United Nations entities, OHCHR

² See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsummit>.

³ See www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffddialogue/ and A/74/559.

⁴ See www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.

supports global, regional and national capacity-building within the ambit of the United Nations human rights system. It provides Secretariat support to mechanisms of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the human rights treaty bodies, including mandates on commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and transitional justice programmes. OHCHR also contributes to system-wide work, including by leading or co-leading coordination bodies. It liaises with the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in implementing human rights policies linked to peace operations. Paragraphs 16 to 23 below provide selected examples of the work of OHCHR over the past year at the global level aimed at implementing and enhancing international cooperation in the field of human rights.

16. OHCHR promotes the integration of human rights in development policy, doctrine and frameworks, including in strategic analysis, programming, policy support and advocacy at all levels. The Office continued to mainstream human rights through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group globally and through resident coordinators and United Nations country teams locally. In the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, OHCHR co-chaired the task team on leaving no one behind, human rights and the normative agenda, and contributed to different work streams, notably on resident coordinators' human rights leadership, deployment of human rights advisers and piloting the United Nations Sustainable Development Group operational guide for country teams in Cameroon, Nepal and Tunisia. OHCHR jointly leads the development of practical tools to support United Nations country teams in integrating human rights in development operations, notably the United Nations Sustainable Development Group operational guide on leaving no-one behind and the common learning package on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation to align it with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

17. OHCHR continued to mainstream the right to development, including through research, advocacy, outreach and collaboration. In partnership with the University for Peace and the United Nations University International Institute for Global Health, it continued to deliver an interactive, online module on operationalizing the right to development in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. To date, 306 participants from 116 countries have participated in the module. The Office supported the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development in implementing the Human Rights Council mandate to elaborate a legally binding instrument on the right to development. To this end, it convened an expert group meeting which drew up a draft convention, which the Chair-Rapporteur will present to the Working Group at its twenty-first session.

18. OHCHR maintains fruitful cooperation with international financial institutions in pursuit of its mandate. In that context, the Office published *The Other Infrastructure Gap: Sustainability* and disseminated it, including through the Global Forum on Responsible Business Conduct of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Forum on Business and Human Rights. An open letter from the High Commissioner to the member States of the Group of 20 (G20) foregrounded a historic agreement at the G20 Summit held in 2019 at Osaka, Japan, on the inclusion within the new G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment of a responsibility to respect human rights. OHCHR monitored infrastructure projects and supported project-affected communities in several countries, in partnership with the respective Governments, project financiers, businesses and implementing authorities. The Office engaged in policy dialogues with multilateral development banks and other development financing institutions on their social and environmental safeguard policy review processes, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. It produced a draft due diligence benchmarking study, comparing the safeguard policies of development finance institutions with the standards in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and collaborated with the independent accountability mechanisms of multilateral development banks to develop and strengthen the effectiveness of policies and procedures on reprisals.

19. Through its country offices, OHCHR has been extending thematic and technical support to local entities, including Governments, civil society and businesses, to implement plans and policies on business and human rights. In international cooperation efforts,

OHCHR conducted several business and human rights peer learning workshops, providing opportunities for dialogue and cooperation. These workshops convened business representatives in a candid and practical dialogue on implementing the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in specific operational contexts. The workshops were held at the regional office for South-East Asia in Bangkok, in Moscow and in Pretoria. In the context of the OHCHR Accountability and Remedy project,⁵ the Southern African subregional consultation covering Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe was jointly convened with rights holders, civil society and national human rights institutions and saw the participation of the human rights commissions of these three countries. In addition, a consultation focused on the role of national human rights institutions in access to remedy for business-related human rights harms.

20. In “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights”, the Secretary-General envisions a world in which everyone can benefit from the new frontiers of the digital age, including through cooperation. Further to the 2019 report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation,⁶ OHCHR is jointly leading follow-up to the human rights recommendations and is engaged in several system-wide efforts, including the Secretary-General’s strategies on hate speech and data. With a view to developing clearer guidance on human rights expectations from private companies as they develop and deploy digital technologies, OHCHR launched the B-Tech project, an inclusive and dynamic process of dialogue, consultation and research to advance respect for human rights in business practices in the development and application of digital technology.⁷

21. In the United Nations Network on Migration, OHCHR contributes to system-wide support to Member States in their implementation, follow-up and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Office thereby supports human rights-based international, regional and bilateral cooperation and dialogue on migration in all its dimensions and by all stakeholders, towards realizing the rights and well-being of migrants and their communities of destination, origin and transit.

22. Following the launch in 2017 by OHCHR of the “Faith for Rights” framework,⁸ the #Faith4Rights toolkit, as refined in 2019, contains prototypes of peer-to-peer learning modules, exploring the relationship between religions, beliefs and human rights. Taking the elimination of religious intolerance as a means to enhance international cooperation in human rights, the toolkit translates the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights and its 18 commitments into practical learning and capacity-building programmes. The 18 modules offer concrete ideas for learning exercises, share personal stories or provide inspiring examples of artistic expression.

23. The Group of Five for the Sahel provides an institutional framework for coordination and regional cooperation in development policies and security matters in the Sahel region. OHCHR participated in strengthening human rights interventions there by seeking to build mechanisms, systems and policies required for greater protection and promotion of human rights in the region. OHCHR promotes human rights and the rule of law as the fundamental bases of national, regional and international counter-terrorism policies and strategies through technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives, monitoring, advocacy for and reporting on human rights compliance in the counter-terrorism context.

1. Country and regional presences

24. OHCHR has 84 presences worldwide, including 17 country offices, 12 human rights components in peace operations, 12 regional offices, 37 human rights advisers deployed under the United Nations Sustainable Development Group framework, and 6 other presences. This section provides examples of the activities of OHCHR at the regional and

⁵ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/ARP_III.aspx.

⁶ See www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf.

⁷ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/B-TechProject.aspx.

⁸ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx.

country levels aimed at implementing and enhancing international cooperation in the field of human rights.

25. The OHCHR regional offices in South East Asia and in the Pacific participated in the Asia-Pacific Climate Week in Bangkok. In collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, they organized a side event entitled “Needs and gaps for integrating human rights in climate action: challenges and good practices”, with multi-stakeholder participation including representatives of Fiji and the Marshall Islands, and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiators. The Office continued to lead United Nations efforts to strengthen cooperation with the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, including by organizing a second interface meeting on potential areas of collaboration and supporting its events, notably a consultation on realizing the right to development. OHCHR engaged in developing common country analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes in Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives and Timor-Leste; developed materials on human rights, the 2030 Agenda and voluntary national reviews; and led a discussion on the right to public participation and the 2030 Agenda at the International Forum on Public Participation and Stakeholder Engagement for the Sustainable Development Goals, held in Bangkok in 2019.

26. At the second senior management meeting between OHCHR and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, participants took stock of multiple strands of cooperation and considered potential priorities and modalities to further increase cooperation.

27. Collaborating with members of the Economic Community of Central African States, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, and Sao Tome and Principe, OHCHR strengthened the capacity of national mechanisms for human rights reporting, including through training of trainers in Burundi and Cameroon; supported reporting on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Cameroon and on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Sao Tome and Principe; and prepared a compendium of human rights recommendations in Gabon, which resulted in a plan of action.

28. In Cameroon, OHCHR held a capacity-building workshop on human rights, conflict prevention and reconciliation, which resulted in a road map for future engagement. Partnering with the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, it organized a workshop on monitoring and reporting on economic, social and cultural rights for multiple stakeholders, including the National Institute of Statistics. Stakeholders defined indicators and established a platform to advance them.

29. OHCHR trained civil society organizations in Gabon on strategies to mobilize rights holders and advocate for the participation of marginalized groups in public life. In Burundi, training on human rights protection in the context of elections was organized for civil society organizations, journalists and young people. A network of human rights observers was established to monitor the 2020 elections. In Burundi and Cameroon, the Office developed partnerships with civil society for the prevention, monitoring and reporting of human rights violations, and advocacy in that regard.

30. With support from OHCHR, Eswatini enhanced its engagement with the treaty bodies, culminating in the establishment of its national mechanism on reporting and follow-up in June 2019. In Mauritius, the national mechanism on reporting and follow-up was established, in accordance with the National Human Rights Action Plan 2012–2021, with technical support from the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa and the treaty body capacity-building programme. The Office also supported Mauritius in its reporting to the human rights treaty bodies and in the preparation of its national report for the universal periodic review.

31. Together with the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the OHCHR Uganda country office reissued a booklet comprising the recommendations made at the country’s universal periodic review in 2016, highlighting their linkages with the Sustainable Development Goals. Also in cooperation with the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the Office

supported the Government to strengthen the capacity of its ministries, departments and agencies to engage with the treaty bodies and implement the recommendations they made.

32. Following longstanding advocacy by OHCHR and the European Union, Guinea adopted a national human rights plan spanning civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. OHCHR provided training on the human rights-based approach to the Sustainable Development Goals, budgeting and data collection. Consequently, the Government sought its assistance to advance the right to development and economic, social and cultural rights in its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. OHCHR cooperated with the parliament to promote civic space and inclusive participation in public life, prevent violence, uphold the rule of law and fight impunity. Leading human rights campaigns on key issues including child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, rape and sexual violence, it reached out to 1,453 beneficiaries in 23 cities. OHCHR trained 100 judicial and police officers on human rights-based investigation and reporting and supported the interministerial committee on reporting on and follow-up to human rights recommendations.

33. In Liberia, OHCHR supported the Ministry of Justice, which coordinates the committee on the national mechanism on reporting and follow-up, the secretariat and steering committee for the second National Human Rights Action Plan (2019–2024), which was launched in December 2019. The Office provided training to Members of Parliament on human rights and gender principles and assisted the Law Reform Commission to identify laws that were not compliant with human rights standards and to recommend amendments. In January 2020, OHCHR analysed the law on the judiciary of 1972 and found that magisterial courts were in a vulnerable position with regard to the executive power, which prompted a discussion on an amendment. OHCHR led the activities of the national United Nations Human Rights Working Group, which under its guidance, prepared the report of the Liberia United Nations country team for the universal periodic review. With the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union and other bodies, OHCHR initiated mediation between the Government and the Council of Patriots before the peaceful protest of 7 June 2019.

34. In Tunisia, OHCHR supported the United Nations country team to mainstream a human rights-based approach in its implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in its voluntary national report on the Sustainable Development Goals. As a result, an analysis was undertaken of the links between the Sustainable Development Goals and the human rights treaties ratified by Tunisia and a section was added on leaving no one behind, listing vulnerable groups. OHCHR trained United Nations country team staff to support the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and ensure that the guiding principles of adopting a human rights-based approach and leaving no one behind were upheld. With its support, the resident coordinator organized a workshop for heads of agencies on taking a human rights-based approach, mainstreaming practices, challenges to inter-agency coordination and opportunities for progress.

35. In Madagascar, OHCHR supported national human rights plans, policies and institutions and a plan for the implementation of recommendations from human rights mechanisms. The Office assisted the parliament and the judiciary, and supported the establishment of a national human rights institution that was in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). It worked on capacity-building among rights holders, notably vulnerable groups, including on improving their participation in development policies, decision-making and the reconciliation process. Within the framework of the Peacebuilding Fund, OHCHR contributed to implementing the Malagasy security sector reform. It raised awareness about economic, social and cultural rights and human rights compliance in natural resource exploitation. In that regard, the Office supported State agents responsible for social and environmental permits for mining, petroleum and agrofuel businesses; local communities, including with the creation of a charter for integrating human rights standards in sector-based policies; and by implementing an independent observatory of economic, social and cultural rights.

36. In Colombia, OHCHR established partnerships with the Office of the Ombudsperson on the rights of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex

persons and ethnic peoples. It also cooperated with the Counsel General concerning the situation of the indigenous peoples of Putumayo, who are at risk of physical and cultural extermination. It advised the Attorney General, the Counsel General and the Ombudsperson on taking a human rights-based approach to corruption. In partnership with the Presidential Council, OHCHR contributed to the national human rights action plan. It supported the Ministry of Mines and Energy to implement the sector's human rights policy, and helped businesses such as Ecopetrol, Nestlé, Empresas Públicas de Medellín and Amerisur to increase human rights capacity in their operations. OHCHR supported the national land agency to incorporate international standards in rural reform, notably the right to land and territory of farmer and ethnic communities. The Office provided assistance concerning social dialogue, ethnic affairs and access to land, including on the Nukak Maku people of Guaviare and the Barí people of Catatumbo. It supported a partnership among the ministries of the environment and of agriculture and the World Wide Fund for Nature to develop the land use and management plan for the territory of the Alto Mira y Frontera community council. OHCHR supported government authorities of Afro-descendent communities with a view to protecting their territorial rights and the quality of the environment in regions where there are conflicts as a result of land dispossession and contamination by agro-industry megaprojects. It also supported community council authorities of black communities in northern Cauca.

37. The human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine collaborated with the Council of Europe, the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union Advisory Mission. This helped to multiply the effects of its own advocacy and to prepare tools for improved monitoring. The mission reinforced its advocacy through cooperation with embassies and consulted with civil society organizations on emerging trends and challenges.

2. Integrating human rights into national policies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

38. As the Secretary-General has said, “when we take a human rights-based approach to development, the outcomes are more sustainable, powerful and effective. This is why human rights permeate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are underpinned by economic, civil, cultural, political and social rights, as well as the right to development” (“The highest aspiration”, p. 4).

39. In mainstreaming human rights in efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, OHCHR worked with resident coordinators, United Nations country teams, Member States and civil society in Argentina, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Cameroon, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Liberia, Maldives, Montenegro, Nepal, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Zimbabwe. It provided support on using the interlinkages between the 2030 Agenda and human rights to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and at the same time advance human rights, including within common country analysis and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes. The Office provided guidance on integrating human rights in the voluntary national reviews to all 51 countries that have signed up for the review in 2020 and responded to several requests for technical cooperation in this regard.⁹

40. OHCHR and the human rights mechanisms engaged with the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development, preparatory expert group meetings and regional forums, provided inputs to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development and engaged in the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, with further engagement envisaged as the 2020 high-level political forum preparations advance. OHCHR developed tools, including information management systems for recommendations and human rights indicators to support national efforts. The Universal Human Rights Index, a web-based database designed to facilitate access to recommendations issued by the human rights mechanisms, has become a very useful tool to

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SDGS/Pages/2020VoluntaryNationalReviews.aspx.

provide an overview of recommendations, which can be searched by country, affected persons and human rights themes, linked with Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

41. Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 37/24, the second intersessional meeting for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda was held on 3 December 2019, on the theme of “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. As noted in the summary report (A/HRC/43/33), the meeting highlighted the centrality of the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development in the United Nations; the indivisible and mutually reinforcing relationship between human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals; and the vital need for a human rights-based approach. The centrality of the right to development was also highlighted, as was the value of international and regional cooperation and mobilization of financial and other resources, including from the private sector.

42. The meeting participants recalled the political declaration of the high-level political forum, which called for accelerated action at all levels, and involvement of all stakeholders. This required a concerted search for lasting solutions and filling systemic gaps in implementation, necessitating international cooperation. The participants reflected on human rights policies, practices, mechanisms and commitments at the country, subnational and city levels and international cooperation. Several participants affirmed the value of integrating human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals, building on their synergies, and shared measures taken at the national level. These included systems change approaches; sustainable development councils, human rights councils, information committees, stakeholder forums, Sustainable Development Goal champions programmes and online tracking systems. The need for meaningful participation in Sustainable Development Goal implementation was highlighted.¹⁰

3. Enhancing the role of parliaments

43. OHCHR, in partnership with the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF), convened a workshop aimed at strengthening the capacity of parliamentarians to engage in the universal periodic review. In total, 14 members of parliament from Burkina Faso, Burundi, France, Gabon, Mali, Morocco, Romania and Switzerland participated. Another session was organized with OIF for Members of Parliament from countries that were reviewed at the thirtieth and thirty-first sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review.

44. A joint Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)-OHCHR seminar for members of parliamentary human rights committees was held in Geneva, entitled “Parliamentary engagement on human rights: identifying good practices and new opportunities for action”, with over 90 parliamentarians from 36 countries. Participants shared examples of parliamentary engagement on human rights and the relevant mechanisms, and emphasized the importance of IPU and OHCHR in guiding and supporting parliaments in these tasks.

4. Ensuring a strong and independent judiciary

45. OHCHR seeks to enhance the capacity of key stakeholders to promote and protect the rights of individuals in the administration of justice, putting them at the centre of justice systems and ensuring equal access to justice for all. It provides support to judges and lawyers, including in the implementation of human rights recommendations, at the request of Member States. In Cambodia, the Office hosted a national conference for judges, lawyers and prison officials to improve transparency and communication in the judicial system. In Timor-Leste, OHCHR and the national human rights institution delivered capacity-building programmes for the judiciary, the police and the army.

46. OHCHR participates in the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law, led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with support from other United Nations partners. The Global Focal Point conducts joint assessments, formulating country-specific plans, providing expertise and focusing

¹⁰ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/259832020_OHCHR_input.pdf.

attention on rule of law priorities in countries most in need of assistance, with a view to preventing conflict and sustaining peace. In Iraq and Thailand, OHCHR observed trials and investigations, including of human rights defenders and political activists, to assess compliance with fair trial guarantees. The Office supports legislative reforms aimed at ensuring that members of the judiciary and law enforcement officers comply with human rights law.

5. Strengthening national and regional human rights institutions

47. National human rights institutions that have A status, indicating full compliance with the Paris Principles, play an important role in the protection and promotion of human rights. Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 39/17, OHCHR organized an intersessional consultation on the experiences and practices of national human rights institutions in working to support the establishment and maintenance of inclusive societies and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (see A/HRC/41/30).

48. OHCHR provided technical assistance to establish and strengthen national human rights institutions. As indicator 16.a.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals is the existence of an independent national human rights institution in compliance with the Paris Principles by 2030, the advice of OHCHR is increasingly solicited. Consequently, in 2019, OHCHR conducted needs assessments of the national human rights institutions of the Philippines and of Tajikistan for technical cooperation projects. The Office also provided legal advice to Barbados, Botswana, Djibouti, Kuwait, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan on establishing national human rights institutions. OHCHR performs secretariat functions for the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and its Subcommittee on Accreditation, and provides substantive and financial assistance to the Global Alliance and its regional networks.

49. Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 34/17, OHCHR organized a workshop on regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights, including a thematic discussion on the role of regional arrangements in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and in the implementation of the commitments in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Pursuant to the same resolution, an eight-week programme was created for staff of regional mechanisms to gain experience in the United Nations human rights system. Visiting staff received insights into OHCHR, the Human Rights Council and the mechanisms.

6. Establishing and strengthening national mechanisms for reporting on and follow-up to recommendations from international human rights mechanisms

50. Member States are increasingly working towards establishing or strengthening their national mechanisms for reporting on and follow-up to recommendations from international human rights mechanisms and sharing relevant experience, leading to the formal establishment of such mechanisms; reducing the number of reports not submitted to the treaty bodies; improving understanding of the need to consult with national human rights institutions and civil society; and developing plans for the implementation of human rights recommendations and of human rights indicators at the national level. Countries are exploring the use of human rights data for reporting on their achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.¹¹ The importance of this work was recognized by the Council in its resolution 42/30, in which it requested OHCHR to organize five regional consultations to exchange experiences and good practices relating to the establishment and development of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up. The national recommendations tracking database was developed to provide States with a tool to help compile, cluster, prioritize and track their implementation of recommendations from international human rights mechanisms. OHCHR developed this generic database based on the support it had provided previously on the development of national databases in Paraguay, Samoa and Uganda. The national recommendations tracking database can be customized by States to support national reporting internally and externally, for global and

¹¹ As encouraged by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 36/29.

regional mechanisms and voluntary national reviews. In 2019, OHCHR rolled out the database in six pilot countries, namely Botswana, Mauritius, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone and the State of Palestine. Over 30 countries received briefings and requested access to or are considering using the database. The Group of Friends on national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, comprising 28 States led by Portugal, offers an informal platform to share good practices and lessons learned, reporting and impact.

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

51. “Society is stronger and more resilient when women and men can play a meaningful role in political, economic and social life, contributing to policymaking that affects their lives, including by accessing information, engaging in dialogue, expressing dissent and joining together to express their views. This includes the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (“The highest aspiration”, p. 8) Civil society and a safe and enabling environment in which it can freely operate are important for effective international cooperation. People’s free, active and meaningful participation and the involvement of communities in policies, plans, projects and decisions that affect them, including their ability to address real grievances, are key to sustainable development and conflict prevention. Leaving no one behind implies reaching underrepresented groups, notably in policymaking that affects them. Implementing the guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs will help to advance effective public participation at all levels.

52. OHCHR supported civic space through its technical cooperation. The Office commented on laws and policies that expand or encroach on civic space and on States’ responses to protests, including in Guatemala, Nicaragua and the Sudan. In Afghanistan, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Lebanon, Liberia, Mauritania, Mexico, Timor-Leste and Uganda it strengthened the capacity of parliamentarians and civil society, including human rights defenders and journalists, to monitor and report on human rights violations and to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Acts of intimidation and reprisals for cooperation with OHCHR were also addressed.

8. Voluntary funds and technical cooperation

53. Programmes implemented by OHCHR through the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights benefit from the advice of the Board of Trustees. The Chair of the Board, which also serves as the Board of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review, reports to the Human Rights Council. The Fund aims to provide financial support for technical cooperation to strengthen national and regional institutions and legal frameworks and infrastructure that will have a positive long-term impact on the implementation of human rights standards. In his most recent report (A/HRC/43/68), the Chair highlighted the profound impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights and noted that corruption has increasingly been included in training and capacity-building initiatives and policy dialogues. The Chair welcomed the partnership of OHCHR with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the efforts of OHCHR to disseminate its experience in addressing human rights challenges and to upgrade its outreach and communications mechanisms and methodologies, including its Internet tools.

54. The voluntary fund for participation in the universal periodic review has provided support to over 110 developing and least developed States for their participation in the process since its establishment. In 2019, 26 States and 31 delegates received assistance to participate in the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review or the Council. Furthermore, one intergovernmental organization, OIF, contributed to the fund.

55. The Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review supports States in implementing review recommendations, with the aim of making its follow-up support more proactive, systematic and results-oriented. In 2019, the Fund supported 15 projects in 15 countries and contributed to a regional workshop in Panama, organized in partnership with the Development Coordination Office, the UNDP regional office and the Resident Coordinator. Some 70 representatives

from 17 Spanish-speaking countries and multiple stakeholders attended the workshop, enabling the sharing of good practices.

56. 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 is designed to strengthen institutional capacity to underpin the effective and informed participation of delegations from these countries in the work of the Council.¹² OHCHR provided support, including through training and travel assistance. To date, the fund has supported 132 delegates and fellows from 72 least developed countries and small island developing States.

57. In its study on the role of technical assistance and capacity-building in fostering mutually beneficial cooperation in promoting and protecting human rights (A/HRC/43/31 and Corr.1), the Human Rights Committee Advisory Committee underscored that Member States must give full consideration to the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and mutual benefit in international cooperation in human rights. It noted that States proposing bilateral technical assistance and capacity-building in the field of human rights to other States should do so only at the request of the latter, and should pursue full respect of the requesting State. Proposing States should avoid applying any pressure to secure cooperation.

B. United Nations human rights system

1. Universal periodic review

58. The universal periodic review mechanism has included inter-State cooperation and development assistance as a theme in its reports.

59. Recent developments include the emerging good practice of submitting midterm reports. For example, collaboration between the ad hoc interministerial committee of Sierra Leone and OHCHR culminated in the submission of a midterm report in July 2019, in preparation for the review scheduled in January 2021.

60. The Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review supported a follow-up project in Mongolia, which included the establishment of a national mechanism for the prevention of torture. The project was implemented in cooperation with OHCHR, the treaty bodies and the special procedures, the United Nations country team, the Government, including the parliament, the national human rights institution and national and international civil society organizations. Consequently, the parliament adopted the revised law on the National Human Rights Commission, which designates the Commission as the national mechanism for the prevention of torture.

2. Treaty bodies

61. Several treaty bodies have recommended that States improve their international cooperation in specific areas, such as enforced disappearances, trafficking in persons and migrant workers. The Committee on Migrant Workers 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 called upon Barbados to continue its cooperation with specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system (CEDAW/C/BRB/CO/5-8, para. 54).

62. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Vanuatu continue and 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 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations entities in the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the

¹² See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/SIDS-LDCs.aspx.

Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC/C/OPAC/VUT/CO/1, para. 18).

3. Special procedures of the Human Rights Council

63. Special procedure mandate holders have consistently promoted cooperation in the implementation of their mandates and have underlined the important role of international cooperation in the field of human rights. Mandate holders have engaged with various stakeholders at the local, national, regional and international levels and promoted cooperation among all of them. Throughout the year, mandate holders have sought closer cooperation with the wider United Nations system and agencies, programmes and funds, and with regional mechanisms, including by raising awareness of their mandates and conducting joint activities with the overall objective of ensuring that human rights have the place they deserve. Special procedure mandate holders have also contributed to bringing a human rights perspective to various processes, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, migration and climate change.

64. Through their thematic reports and recommendations made after their visits to countries, mandate holders have also addressed issues of importance for international cooperation. The list of themes addressed by special procedures, their recommendations to States and other stakeholders and information on relevant activities by mandate holders are available in A/HRC/43/64 and Add.1 and A/HRC/43/65. For example, special procedure mandate holders have been assessing and giving concrete recommendations to States on how to integrate human rights in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals by addressing the issue in their thematic reports, issuing open letters, participating in meetings, and raising matters related to the Goals during country visits. In several reports, they have also addressed cross-cutting issues such as the environment, conflict prevention, humanitarian issues and migration.

V. Possible ways to face the challenges to the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development, and opportunities to overcome them

65. The present report is submitted against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented crisis with profound human rights implications. The year 2020 also marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (see General Assembly resolution 73/299), and the 100th anniversary of the League of Nations. These anniversaries provide an opportunity to emphasize the meaning of “we the peoples” for today; to recommit to the spirit and values, principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations; and to reimagine the role of the United Nations as a proponent of ideas, a catalyst for action and a driver of multilateral solutions to global problems, including the unfolding human crisis caused by COVID-19. States must reaffirm their commitment to the universality of human rights, under which, across all political and economic systems, all States share a common obligation to respect all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Now more than ever, States must work together to create a social and international order which enables everyone, everywhere, to live with freedom from want and freedom from fear.

66. OHCHR continues to review and adjust its work to best respond to evolving political, economic, social and institutional challenges, including growing inequalities, rising nationalism, climate change, environmental degradation and declining multilateralism. The Office is committed to taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations development system reform and the Secretary-General’s focus on prevention and his call to action to advance all human rights for all people. Everyone must act together to heed all aspects of this call, which gain new urgency in light of COVID-19.

67. Income inequality, the unequal sharing of the benefits of economic growth, and lack of access to basic services are among the root causes of many of the mass protests that the world has witnessed recently. Now these gaps are also exacerbating the impact of COVID-

19. Economic inequality drives social crises. As the Secretary-General stated in his report on global solidarity and shared responsibility, the pandemic is creating a human crisis; there is a need to focus on people, especially the vulnerable and marginalized. Those living in poverty, women, young people, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, indigenous peoples, low-wage workers, the displaced, the homeless, migrants and refugees are among the most vulnerable. As all humanity faces a struggle for human rights, especially the rights to life and to health, the health of all the world's people is only as strong as the weakest health system. This underscores the need for international cooperation to safeguard all human rights for all.

68. The climate emergency continues to pose a profound challenge to human survival, threatening millions, the yet unborn and the very survival of small island developing States, calling for urgent global responses underscored by international solidarity. Under the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, States should act collectively “on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”. Equity in climate action, including through international cooperation, requires that mitigation and adaptation efforts benefit people in small island developing States and other developing countries, indigenous peoples and others in vulnerable situations.

69. Technical cooperation must be underpinned by the universality and indivisibility of human rights, non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity. It should engage the broadest possible participation of people, including at the local level and advance concerted action to address international solidarity in the context of COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, including structural ones. Strengthened global cooperation for debt relief will help mobilize the resources for indebted countries to fight the pandemic, especially least developed countries, as underlined by the Secretary-General in his report on global solidarity and shared responsibility and in “Debt and COVID-19: a global response in solidarity”.¹³ International cooperation on sharing scientific and technological advancements with developing countries will help save lives. The United Nations report entitled “COVID-19 and human rights: we are all in this together” underscores the need to strengthen international cooperation and take steps towards the provision of universal health care, collaborate in developing a vaccine and treatment for the pandemic, expedite trade and transfer of essential medical supplies and equipment, including personal protective equipment for health-care and other front-line workers, and address intellectual property issues, to ensure that COVID-19 treatments are available and affordable to all.¹⁴

70. Human rights begin “in small places close to home”.¹⁵ Listening to and engaging with people from all walks of life worldwide, including young people, reaching out and enabling concerted citizen action can advance progress. In-country work gives meaning to the idea of international cooperation for human rights with positive impacts on lives, labour and livelihoods. In the context of recovery from COVID-19 and the need to build back better, OHCHR stands ready to provide human rights-based advice, such as on progressive taxation, including of wealth, human rights impact assessments of economic policies, including trade and austerity measures, illicit financial flows and human rights-based budget analysis, which will serve to address economic inequalities. The report entitled “A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19” calls for urgent responses that aim to protect people and the planet; preserve gains across all the Sustainable Development Goals; ensure equality; promote transparency, accountability and collaboration; increase solidarity, including between generations; and place the voice, rights and agency of people at the centre.¹⁶

¹³ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf.

¹⁴ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf.

¹⁵ See www.amnesty.org.uk/universal-declaration-human-rights-UDHR.

¹⁶ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_framework_report_on_covid-19.pdf.

71. COVID-19 is a stark reminder of our interdependence and the imperative for urgent collective action. It calls for human, social, international and intergenerational solidarity and shared responsibility, and global, regional and national action. As highlighted by the Secretary-General in his call to action, human rights must be at the heart of collective action, and in any effective response to crises and emergencies:

We face a terrible paradox. Global challenges are more connected than ever, but our responses are more fragmented ... And yet, collective action is the only answer for the multiple crises that humanity is facing. And it must be truly collective – no longer the domain of States and international organizations alone but of the many civil society and private sector actors who have a role to play in solutions to our shared problems. Stronger multilateralism must be more inclusive, more networked and place human rights at its very centre. Our human rights institutions must stand at the very heart of this coming together, just as the human rights commitments we have already made represent a beacon of hope in our complex world. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is central to all elements of this Call to Action but we all share responsibility for advancing a culture of respect for the full spectrum of human rights (“The highest aspiration”, p. 11).

Across humanity’s diversity and differences, the shared human condition and values are a source of unity, to create a social contract between all human beings.
