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

Universal periodic review

Operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council decision 17/119, in which the Council requested the Secretariat to provide an annual written update on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review and on the resources available to it. The report was prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund and contains a description of the actions taken to operationalize the Voluntary Fund and of the results achieved through the various activities financed by it since the submission of the previous report.¹

In view of the upcoming start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review process, in November 2022, the report also contains an analysis of ways in which the Voluntary Fund can be strategically used to mobilize further assistance from the United Nations and the wider international community to support national efforts to implement the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review process.

¹ [A/HRC/47/19](#).



I. Introduction

1. The Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review was established in 2009 pursuant to resolution 6/17 of the Human Rights Council. In that resolution, the Council requested the Secretary-General to establish a voluntary fund for financial and technical assistance in order to provide, in conjunction with multilateral funding mechanisms, a source of financial and technical assistance to help countries to implement recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the country concerned. In its resolution 16/21, the Council requested that the Voluntary Fund be strengthened and operationalized to help countries, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, to implement recommendations emanating from their respective reviews.

2. Support to States that request assistance from the Voluntary Fund is provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the spirit of Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and the annex thereto, in particular subparagraphs 4 (a), (b) and (c), in which the Council indicated that, among the objectives of the universal periodic review were the improvement of the human rights situation on the ground, the fulfilment of the State's human rights obligations and commitments and the enhancement of the State's capacity and of technical assistance, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the State concerned. In the same resolution, the Council also stipulated that a gender perspective should be fully integrated into the universal periodic review.

II. Operations of the Voluntary Fund

A. Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund

3. In its resolution 16/21, the Human Rights Council requested that a board of trustees of the Voluntary Fund be established in accordance with the rules of the United Nations. In view of the complementarities of its mandate with that of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, established in 1987, in 2013, the Secretary-General appointed members to serve on the Board of Trustees of both Funds.

4. The Board of Trustees provides advice to OHCHR on policy orientation and strategy in the operationalization of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. Its members are appointed by the Secretary-General for a three-year term, renewable once, and are chosen for their wide experience in the field of human rights and technical cooperation. In 2021, Nozipho January-Bardill (South Africa) was nominated to fill the seat vacated by Esi Sutherland-Addy (Ghana), and the composition of the Board was as follows: Azita Berar Awad (Islamic Republic of Iran); Santiago Corcuera-Cabezut (Mexico); Morten Kjaerum (Denmark) (Chair); Valerya Lutkovska (Ukraine); and Nozipho January-Bardill (South Africa). The position of Chair is held on a rotational basis, covering at least two sessions of the Board.

5. The Board of Trustees holds two regular sessions per year. In 2021, the Board continued to provide advice to OHCHR on ways to enhance the effectiveness of the technical and financial support provided by the Voluntary Fund to States, including by strengthening synergies with the wider OHCHR and United Nations assistance provided at the country level.

6. The Board of Trustees held its fifteenth session on 1 and 2 June 2021. Given the travel restrictions imposed to contain the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic worldwide, the session was held virtually. Using information and communications technology, the Secretariat enabled the Board to hold discussions with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant senior OHCHR staff. The session was focused on assessing lessons learned and recommendations made over the past several years by the Board to OHCHR on strengthening its technical cooperation programme, with a view to contributing to the process of extension of the OHCHR organizational management plan, 2018–2021, to 2023.

7. The Board reviewed the activities planned and implemented with the support of the Voluntary Fund across all regions. It stressed that the outcomes of the universal periodic review and other international human rights mechanisms were important entry points for the provision of OHCHR support to States and offered guidance, if strategically used, to ensure a solid United Nations programming at the country level. They were also of great value in identifying areas needing action to stop the deterioration of a situation on the ground. The Board considered it important to optimize avenues for United Nations country teams to fully engage with the human rights mechanisms and to strengthen thematic capacity in regional offices, in order to enhance the use of the outcomes of the mechanisms to better support States, at their request.

8. The sixteenth session of the Board of Trustees was held from 16 to 19 November 2021 at the OHCHR country office in Chad. At the session, the Board reviewed the OHCHR technical cooperation programme, both in the country and in the broader region. The Board welcomed the continued efforts made by OHCHR to provide guidance for the implementation of the outcomes of the universal periodic review at the national level. It noted the increased access by countries, including Chad, to programme funding for catalytic projects through the Voluntary Fund and the efforts made by OHCHR to ensure a whole-of-Office approach to responding to requests for support. The Board considered that, in order to ensure the full implementation of the activities funded by the Voluntary Fund, a multi-year commitment, at least for the two years of the extended organizational management plan, and a further streamlining of internal procedures should be considered.

9. Given that the Board of Trustees oversees the activities of both Funds, the most recent report of the Chair of the Board of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights to the Human Rights Council² also contains information on technical cooperation to follow up on the outcomes of the universal periodic review, at the request of States.

B. Strategic use of the Voluntary Fund and results achieved through the implementation of activities supported in 2021

10. In line with the guidance provided by the Board of Trustees, OHCHR is focused on ensuring that its support for the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review is proactive, strategic and results-oriented. Such support is anchored in a holistic and integrated approach to technical assistance that takes into account those recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review together with those of the other international human rights mechanisms. The recommendations and outcomes of international human rights mechanisms represent a cross-section of the critical human rights gaps at the country level and point to the areas that need strengthening in order to bolster the national human rights institutional framework and capacities, foster societal resilience and create an environment conducive to addressing the root causes of human rights violations.

11. As part of the efforts to make its follow-up support more proactive, at every session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, OHCHR holds two informal briefings for members of State delegations participating in the review of their countries. The briefings provide delegations with an overview of follow-up processes for implementing the recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review, and inform them about the support available through the Voluntary Fund. In 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OHCHR conducted the informal briefings in a hybrid format.

12. Since the start of the third cycle of the universal periodic review, OHCHR has systematically produced tools to facilitate follow-up to recommendations by States and the integration of recommendations into the United Nations country programming processes. Such tools include the elaboration, for each country reviewed, of matrices of thematically clustered recommendations, linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals, and of infographics reflecting trends between the second and third cycle of the review process in

² [A/HRC/49/93](#).

terms of accepted recommendations.³ The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also provided advice to States that have undergone their third cycle review on areas that deserve particular attention during the four and a half years until their next reviews and has offered support from OHCHR and the United Nations system on the implementation of recommendations and the integration of those recommendations into the national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2021, a study on emerging good practices from the universal periodic review⁴ was conducted, documenting effective forms of cooperation in the implementation of recommendations at the national level among governments, parliaments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in seven countries. OHCHR also conducted a desk review of national reports submitted for the third cycle, to gather examples of good practices at the country level.⁵

13. As an additional tool to assist United Nations entities in engaging with the mechanism, to support progress by States on human rights and sustainable development, OHCHR continued to promote the application of the practical guidance on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review at the country level.⁶ In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the Development Coordination Office, OHCHR also created a repository of good practices of United Nations strategic engagement with the universal periodic review.⁷ The good practices collected revealed several encouraging trends, including an increased alignment of recommendations with national plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the use of the review process as a practical problem-solving tool for addressing priority challenges, such as climate change and the response to, and recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasing integration of the outcomes of the review into United Nations country programming. The good practices collected also indicated that there is a growing use of the tools developed by OHCHR.

14. OHCHR works to ensure that the support to States receiving assistance from the Voluntary Fund is strategic, results-oriented and benefits from the tools developed by the Office. In line with Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, the Voluntary Fund provides assistance at the request, and with the consent of, the State concerned, with OHCHR serving as a source of expertise and technical support. National ownership reflects the spirit of the universal periodic review, in which the primary responsibility to implement the recommendations rests with the State, and it is an essential factor for the success and sustainability of any development cooperation effort.

15. In 2021, OHCHR streamlined the implementation procedures of the Voluntary Fund and ensured a comprehensive whole-of-Office approach to the assistance delivered to States, fostering coordination and complementarity with the support provided by the treaty body capacity-building programme, which was created following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 68/268, by the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights and by relevant sections of OHCHR. In order to make available, in a transparent manner, information on the technical support available for States, the web page of the Voluntary Fund⁸ was updated and expanded.

16. Requests for support from the Voluntary Fund may be submitted by States directly to OHCHR or one of its field offices or to the office of the United Nations resident coordinator or through other appropriate channels. Requests may be made by State entities engaged in the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. Support can also be provided through the integration of the recommendations into United Nations country programming in support of national priorities agreed with States. Priority attention is given to requests from least developed countries and/or small island developing States. OHCHR focuses on providing seed funding to activities that can help to mobilize

³ See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/documentation.

⁴ See

www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Emerging_UPR_GoodPractices.pdf.

⁵ See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Good-Practices-Desk-Review.pdf.

⁶ See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf.

⁷ See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-main.

⁸ See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/trust-fund-implementation.

additional resources and build partnerships, in particular with the wider United Nations system.

17. Based on the terms of reference of the Voluntary Fund, and in the light of developments at the national and international levels since its establishment, OHCHR has focused its technical assistance on five priority areas, which are described below. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 6/30, the Voluntary Fund encourages proposals aimed at achieving gender equality and advancing women's rights.

18. In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect the implementation of several approved projects and led to an adjustment in the execution of some activities. Notwithstanding those difficulties, a number of initiatives were implemented in Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guinea, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Malaysia, the Republic of Moldova, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Serbia and Uruguay. All activities were focused on enhancing national capacities in one or more of the focus areas of the Voluntary Fund, creating synergies between the implementation of key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, strengthening the Government's institutional capacity to ensure comprehensive follow-up to, and reporting on, the progress achieved, enhancing the role of parliaments and strengthening United Nations country teams to support national efforts to implement recommendations from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms.

1. Implementation of key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review

19. In February 2022, the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review held its fortieth session – the last under the third cycle – with 100 per cent participation of States. In November 2022, the mechanism will begin the fourth universal periodic review cycle. From the second cycle onwards, a particular focus of the reviews has been on the implementation of previously accepted recommendations. The focus on implementation has provided OHCHR with the opportunity to strengthen its engagement with States in the context of the follow-up to the recommendations made by international human rights mechanisms, making use of accepted recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review as a key entry point and leading to nationally led and nationally owned processes, which have resulted in a more constructive engagement with States.

20. Support from the Voluntary Fund is focused on the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review that can make a significant and lasting contribution to change at the national level, including through legislative or institutional reforms. In keeping with the holistic approach of OHCHR to the delivery of technical assistance, in making funding decisions, the extent to which the proposed activities contribute to the implementation of the recommendations of other United Nations human rights mechanisms and the creation of synergies between national efforts to implement human rights recommendations and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals are also taken into account.

21. In 2021, the Voluntary Fund supported activities to implement key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, in several countries. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Asia assisted the Government in implementing a legal inventory of the national legislation to bring it into accordance with international human rights standards. An in-depth human rights analysis of 18 laws was carried out, with a focus on issues of non-discrimination and protection of groups in situations of vulnerability. In addition, the project strengthened the communication between the national authorities and civil society organizations, by organizing public discussions on six laws and allowing civil society organizations and representatives of groups in situations of vulnerability to raise their concerns and provide relevant recommendations.

22. In Belize, the OHCHR Regional Office for Central America supported, through the Voluntary Fund, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration in leading the national efforts to establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). Belize has had a long-standing need to strengthen its

institutional framework for the protection and promotion of human rights. The project, which will continue in 2022, is aimed at promoting a participatory process and fostering interaction between representatives of the State and civil society organizations to develop a model of national institution that is both compliant with the Paris Principles and responsive to the context of Belize. The results of the process will feed into the parliamentary discussion on the establishment of a national human rights institution in the country.

23. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo conducted preliminary consultations with national stakeholders, including the standing Committee on Human Rights of the National Assembly, the Human Rights Interministerial Committee, the National Commission for Human Rights and civil society organizations on the role that they could play in the follow up to the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. Further activities will be implemented in 2022 to develop a workplan for a national level coordination mechanism to monitor the implementation of the recommendations and facilitate consultations and awareness-raising among various stakeholders.

24. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, with the support of the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR and the Government launched a project to strengthen data collection on persons with disabilities and conduct a review of policies and legislation affecting them. A project committee, composed of Government officials and representatives of civil society organizations, was established and developed a project implementation plan. A training plan on the human rights of persons with disabilities for government officials was also elaborated. In addition, the project committee began developing a database that will hold the information collected from the disability survey. Given that the disability survey was linked with the implementation of the national census, which, initially scheduled for 2021, was ultimately postponed to 2022 due to the COVID-19 situation, the project is planned to be completed in 2022.

25. In Uruguay, OHCHR used the Voluntary Fund to support, in collaboration with various United Nations agencies, capacity-building for 250 justice operators (180 women and 70 men). Three training courses were organized, together with the Center for Judicial Studies, on the rights of particular groups, including the right to non-discrimination based on race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation, the rights of migrants and refugees and the rights of women, children and adolescents, strengthening the capacities of 187 judges. In addition, as a result of two training courses carried out with the National Defence Office and the Association of Public Defenders of Uruguay, 63 public defenders were trained on the use of international human rights standards in public defence applied to vulnerable populations. OHCHR, together with the National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, also trained 60 representatives of non-governmental organizations (42 women and 18 men) working in various areas on how to use the recommendations made to Uruguay in the context of the universal periodic review and by other human rights mechanisms, in their advocacy activities and the programmes that they implement. The activity also resulted in a series of contributions of the participant organizations to the first national action plan on human rights.

2. Establishment or strengthening of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up

26. In order to ensure a comprehensive, more efficient and sustainable approach to reporting on, and follow-up to, recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other international human rights mechanisms, an increasing number of States have established a new type of governmental structure known as national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up. Such mechanisms ensure coordination between government entities and work in coordination with ministries and specialized State bodies, such as the national statistical office, the parliament and the judiciary, and in consultation with national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. Many States have made voluntary commitments or have supported recommendations to establish such mechanisms.

27. A group of friends on national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, led by Portugal, offers a broad informal platform for States, United Nations agencies, national human rights institutions, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to share good practices and discuss common challenges and lessons learned. In its report on measures taken

to implement Human Rights Council resolution 42/30 relating to the establishment and development of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, OHCHR provides relevant information on experiences and good practices relating to the establishment and development of such mechanisms.

28. OHCHR provides advice and assistance to States on establishing or strengthening national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, in particular through its treaty body capacity-building programme. In 2021, the Voluntary Fund provided support for the establishment or strengthening of such mechanisms in a number of countries. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the Government initiated, with support from the OHCHR human rights adviser, a review of the decree and internal regulations governing the Inter-Institutional Commission on Human Rights, to consolidate the role of the mechanism and adapt it to new institutional realities in the country, and upgraded the database used to track the implementation of recommendations.

29. In Bhutan, following the commitment expressed by the country during the third universal periodic review cycle, in 2019, to establish a formal national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, OHCHR used the Voluntary Fund to support the efforts of the Government to strengthen the existing ad hoc mechanism and enhance its capacity to fulfil the country's reporting obligations. In August, OHCHR organized, in collaboration with the Government and the United Nations country team, a two-day workshop to strengthen the capacity of Bhutan for reporting to the international human rights mechanisms. The workshop brought together 29 interministerial focal points (15 women and 14 men) and the United Nations country team, with a view to also ensuring effective and timely follow-up to the recommendations received by the country. Against the background of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, the activity was conducted in a hybrid format. Following the workshop, the Government expressed its commitment to submit, in 2022, a voluntary midterm report on follow-up to recommendations emanating from the third cycle and requested OHCHR to provide further capacity-building assistance. In September, a second two-day workshop was organized, and also conducted in a hybrid format, for 23 government officials and civil society representatives (18 women and 5 men) to strengthen their capacity to draft the country's tenth periodic report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

30. In Guinea, the Government initiated the reform of the existing Interministerial Committee on Human Rights, aiming at its transformation into a full-fledged national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up. As part of the project supported by the Voluntary Fund, the capacities of the 30 members of the mechanism (22 men and 8 women) were strengthened to monitor the implementation of the recommendations made to Guinea. OHCHR also provided support to the Government for the operationalization of the national human rights situation room within the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights to follow up on recent recommendations of human rights mechanisms, in particular those emanating from the universal periodic review. The situation room uses the Universal Human Rights Index platform to follow up and report on human rights obligations.

31. In Serbia, the OHCHR human rights adviser provided technical assistance to the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, which replaced the Office for Human and Minority Rights in 2020, in order to resume the work of the Council for Follow-Up to Recommendations from United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms and enhance the capacities and performance of its new structure. Several training sessions were implemented to raise the awareness of the decision makers and staff of the national mechanism, expand its functions and begin the development of a national human rights action plan. As a result, the Ministry committed to reorganizing its reporting structures and procedures and to organizing an open and public debate to define a baseline for a national human rights strategy.

32. In the Republic of Moldova, the OHCHR human rights adviser used the Voluntary Fund to further strengthen the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up, integrated into the National Human Rights Council, its Permanent Human Rights Secretariat, which is part of the State Chancellery, and the local structures of the Council. In July, a five-day training was conducted in partnership with the Permanent Human Rights Secretariat to increase the knowledge of 60 representatives of State institutions (53 women and 7 men) on the international human rights system, the application of a human rights-based approach to

carrying out public policies and the mainstreaming of the human rights of minorities into policy development. In addition, the capacities of 100 representatives (52 women and 48 men) of the local structures of the National Human Rights Council were strengthened on the use of the international and national human rights monitoring systems and their role as local human rights focal points.

33. OHCHR also organized, in partnership with the State Chancellery and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a two-day training of 20 representatives of State institutions (15 women and 5 men) on the elaboration of the fourth periodic report of the Republic of Moldova under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, through use of the simplified reporting procedure. The national report submitted in the context of the third cycle of the universal periodic review and the report on the implementation of the national human rights action plan were also developed following 10 extensive and inclusive thematic consultations with the participation of about 100 representatives of government entities, the Office of the People's Advocate, the Equality Council, civil society organizations and development partners. The thematic consultations also provided the opportunity to identify human rights priorities for future interventions.

34. The Permanent Human Rights Secretariat and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection organized, with OHCHR support, an inclusive dialogue with 82 representatives (70 women and 12 men) of State authorities, civil society organizations, the Office of the People's Advocate, the Equality Council and development partners to discuss the progress in the implementation of the recommendations formulated by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and identify further priorities for advancing their implementation.

3. Creation of plans for the implementation of recommendations

35. As a result of the increased coordination capacity provided by national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, States are developing plans for the implementation of recommendations and linking them to national efforts for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In implementation plans, all recommendations from international human rights mechanisms are thematically clustered and prioritized, implementation responsibilities are assigned to ministries and State entities and a time frame indicated for implementation, as well as resources and indicators therefor.

36. Plans for the implementation of recommendations are often supported by a database that is hosted at a ministry that administers the software. In several countries, at their request, OHCHR is implementing the National Recommendations Tracking Database,⁹ a specific tool that is aimed at facilitating the recording and tracking of, and reporting on, the implementation of recommendations at the country level. The database allows States to import the recommendations emanating from United Nations human rights mechanisms directly from the Universal Human Rights Index,¹⁰ cluster and prioritize them, develop an implementation plan and report on implementation. The Index has also proven to be a useful tool for integrating human rights recommendations into national human rights action plans, which are wider in scope than plans for the implementation of recommendations and offer a structured approach for strengthening the realization of human rights in the context of public policies.

37. In 2021, the Voluntary Fund supported initiatives proposed by States to develop plans for the implementation of recommendations and national human rights action plans and to establish online databases linked to them. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the OHCHR human rights adviser used the Voluntary Fund to assist the Government in integrating the recommendations of international and regional human rights mechanisms with the commitments set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sistema de Monitoreo de Recomendaciones de la República Dominicana (SIMORED) was upgraded to SIMORED-Plus to assist the Inter-Institutional Commission on Human Rights to better plan for, track and monitor, and report on, the implementation of recommendations

⁹ See <https://nrt.d.ohchr.org/about>.

¹⁰ See <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>.

emanating from international and regional human rights mechanisms, while ensuring their linkages with the Sustainable Development Goals. The Voluntary Fund was also used to support the Government in evaluating the status of implementation of the national plan on human rights, 2018–2022, and producing a report outlining milestones in each of the plan's 10 programmes, including civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, labour rights, the rights of children, adolescents, women, older persons and persons with disabilities. the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, the fight against discrimination, and countering the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.

38. In Kyrgyzstan, the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Asia supported the Coordination Council on Human Rights and other State institutions in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of human rights recommendations and linking them with the Sustainable Development Goals. OHCHR provided advisory assistance to assess the implementation of the national human rights action plan, 2019–2021, and supported the development of the national human rights action plan for the period 2022–2025. The draft national action plan was developed taking into account the recommendations formulated by international human rights mechanisms. OHCHR also supported the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, as the Secretariat of the Council on the Rights of People with Disabilities, in organizing a public meeting to discuss how to create an accessible environment for persons with disabilities. Following the meeting, the Council formed a working group, consisting of State officials and civil society representatives, to strengthen its efforts to monitor the rights of persons with disabilities.

39. In Ecuador, the OHCHR human rights adviser supported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility and the Human Rights Secretariat in strengthening the capacities of the national mechanism on implementation, reporting and follow-up and updating the Sistema de Información sobre Derechos Humanos (SiDerechos) platform to ensure its full integration into the information technology system of the Ministry. A one-week online course was organized in June to strengthen the capacities of about 30 government officials integrating the network of State focal points using the platform on the preparation of the national report for the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, in 2022. In September, the focal points were also trained on the preparation of the national report submitted under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The strengthening of the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up and of the SiDerechos platform enabled the coordination and exchange of information on human rights issues between the United Nations system and the Government and contributed to keeping follow-up to human rights recommendations as an important part of the dialogue between them.

40. In Guyana, the Voluntary Fund was used to provide technical assistance to the recently created Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance on the development of a five-year comprehensive national human rights action plan. In addition, a series of training sessions on international human rights mechanisms was carried out for the Ministry and the Interministerial Coordinating Committee, focusing on the preparation of reports in the context of the universal periodic review and human rights treaties. In 2021, Guyana submitted its reports under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and it is preparing its reports under other human rights treaties, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

41. Madagascar made significant progress with the development of a national plan for the implementation of the recommendations issued by international and regional human rights mechanisms. The plan was developed by the interministerial committee for reporting and follow-up on the recommendations of human rights mechanisms through a participatory process, under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice and with the support of the OHCHR human rights adviser. Two workshops were organized, with the participation of 54 members (30 women and 24 men) of the interministerial committee, the national human rights institution and civil society organizations, to provide input to the draft plan. The Ministry of Justice then organized hybrid (online and in-person) consultations with key stakeholders, including Parliament, civil society organizations, the Bar Association, the Association of Journalists, academia, trade unions, the media, the private sector and financial and technical partners, to review and enrich the draft plan.

42. The plan that emerged from the consultation process was validated by the Government and key stakeholders during an online workshop held in July. Sixty-three participants, representing relevant ministries, Parliament, the national human rights institution, the Ombudsperson, the High Council for the Defence of Democracy and Rule of Law, the private sector, civil society organizations, technical and financial partners and United Nations agencies attended the online meeting, which was chaired by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Justice. OHCHR subsequently supported the editing, printing and dissemination of 1,000 copies of the plan.

43. In Malaysia, the Government requested support from the Voluntary Fund for the translation into the Malay language of the core human rights conventions, the optional protocols thereto and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The request was made in particular within the context of the efforts of the Government to develop an implementation matrix of the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. The translation was finalized in early 2022.

44. In Serbia, the Council for Follow-Up to Recommendations from United Nations Human Rights Mechanism and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue approved a plan for follow-up to the recommendations, which was presented to the Government for endorsement. The Ministry also committed to using the National Recommendations Tracking Database. Regular sessions of the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up were resumed together with thematic discussions with civil society. OHCHR also facilitated the dialogue between State actors and the Platform of Organizations for Cooperation with United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms, comprising 18 leading civil society organizations, on the potential steps towards the expansion of the mandate of the national mechanism to include follow-up to recommendations made by treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders.

4. Strengthening parliamentary capacities for implementation

45. As highlighted in the OHCHR report on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review,¹¹ strengthened engagement of parliaments on human rights can greatly contribute to increasing the implementation of recommendations made by international human rights mechanisms. Parliaments play a critical role in ensuring follow-up to recommendations that require legislative action. They also lay the foundation for, and strengthen, the rule of law, provide oversight regarding the functioning of national institutions and ensure that rights-based approaches are taken into account in national budgets. In the report, OHCHR recommended that parliaments set up human rights committees and strengthen their engagement with the international human rights mechanisms, especially the universal periodic review.

46. OHCHR actively promotes the role of parliaments and parliamentary human rights committees in the universal periodic review process. In close cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Commonwealth, OHCHR continued to strengthen the capacities of members of parliaments to engage at all stages of the review. Joint workshops¹² were organized to promote the sharing of experiences, including on parliaments' cooperation with national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review.

47. Through the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR also supported activities in several countries. For example, in Brazil, the United Nations country team and the OHCHR Regional Office for South America used the Voluntary Fund to support the implementation of the Parliamentary Observatory on the universal periodic review, a pioneering initiative under the leadership of the Chamber of Deputies. In 2021, the Observatory engaged with 108 State representatives and 145 representatives of civil society organizations to discuss the progress made on the implementation of the 242 recommendations accepted by Brazil in the context of the third universal periodic review cycle, in 2017. That engagement contributed to

¹¹ [A/HRC/38/25](#).

¹² See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/parliaments.

strengthening the parliament's role in the monitoring of public policies and improved the involvement of civil society organizations in the country's public affairs.

48. The Parliamentary Observatory organized 26 public hearings, producing 23 reports in which it gathered the most recent data on the progress achieved. The participation of 33 experts and representatives of the United Nations system in the public hearings allowed for the dissemination of information on the international human rights framework to a wide public audience, reaching more than 23,000 people through the live broadcast of the meetings. As a result of that process, the National Congress of Brazil made key contributions to the protection and promotion of human rights in the country. In 2021, three laws were approved that addressed three key recommendations from the universal periodic review: (a) Law 14.192, which altered the electoral code to prevent, suppress and combat political violence against women; (b) Law 14.216, which suspended and prohibited forced evictions, in public and private properties, due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and (c) Law 14.275, which established emergency measures to assist small family farmers, mitigate the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic that they face and ensure their right to food.

49. In Uruguay, the Voluntary Fund was used by the OHCHR human rights adviser to support the work of the Parliamentary Penitentiary Commissioner in the elaboration of the plan to combat recidivism and favour rehabilitation, based on a gender and human rights perspective. The plan, which outlines measures to address the issue of the increasing number of persons deprived of their liberty in Uruguay, was presented at a high-level meeting on 8 December by the Vice-President of the Republic, the Parliamentary Commissioner and the OHCHR regional representative for South America. OHCHR also organized, jointly with the Centre for the training of penitentiary officers and with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the parliament and the international non-governmental organization Association for the Prevention of Torture, a series of virtual courses on human rights standards in prisons, including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules). As a result, more than 300 officers of the National Penitentiary Institute from all over the country were trained on the prevention of ill-treatment and torture.

5. Strengthening the capacity of United Nations country teams

50. In line with the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights,¹³ United Nations country teams should integrate the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms into United Nations common country programming documents to strengthen the capacity of States to achieve specific progress in the implementation of such recommendations and to foster synergies with national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The practical guidance on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review is an important tool, which can assist United Nations entities in that regard.

51. Most of the activities that benefited from the support of the Voluntary Fund in 2021 were implemented in collaboration with other United Nations agencies. In addition, the Voluntary Fund was used to support specific initiatives aimed at mobilizing the United Nations system in support of the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms. For example, in Guinea, the OHCHR country office used the Voluntary Fund to support the publication of the compilation of recommendations of human rights mechanisms accepted by Guinea in relation to the national economic and social development plan and the Sustainable Development Goals. The publication allowed other United Nations agencies to engage with the Government and led to the adoption of a United Nations road map to support the implementation of such recommendations.

¹³ See

www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/2020_sg_call_to_action_for_hr_the_highest_aspiration.pdf.

52. Integration of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review into the work of the United Nations country teams is particularly effective when support is provided through OHCHR human rights advisers to the United Nations resident coordinators in the various countries of operations. For example, in Uruguay, the OHCHR human rights adviser used the Voluntary Fund to support the Building Bridges programme, a joint United Nations programme launched in 2021 that seeks to integrate the recommendations received by Uruguay in the context of the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms into the voluntary national review of the country. OHCHR supported the Directorate of Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in generating a dialogue between the government units in charge of reporting on human rights and those reporting on the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The project is expected to create spaces for training, interaction and alignment between the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up and those entities that work on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

III. Financial situation of the Voluntary Fund

53. Table 1 sets out the detailed financial situation, with regard to income and expenditure, of the Voluntary Fund as at 31 December 2021. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a number of planned activities, with several of them adjusted to a virtual format or implemented in a hybrid format, continued to affect the total expenditure of the Fund, despite the higher number (15) of projects implemented compared with previous years. Total expenditures exceeded the contributions received during the year, leaving however an adequate level of reserves to ensure continuity of work into 2022. Requests for assistance in 2022 have already been received from 19 States, and further requests are anticipated.

Table 1

Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January–31 December 2021

(United States dollars)

<i>I. Income</i>	
Voluntary contributions received	212 195.12
Gain and loss exchange	(567.21)
Miscellaneous and investment income	1 554.04
Total income	213 181.95
<i>II. Expenditure</i>	
Staff costs	151 600.88
Other personnel costs (consultant fees and travel)	110 217.82
Travel of staff and consultants	28 295.61
Travel of representatives and participants to meetings and seminars	28 259.39
Contractual services	65 962.74
General operating and other direct costs	97 459.12
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	2 000.00
Grants out (<\$50,000) and fellowships	-
Programme support (indirect) costs	64 217.71
Total expenditure	558 013.27
Adjustments to prior year expenditure (liquidation of commitments)	-
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditures for the period	(344 831.32)
Opening balance as at 1 January 2021	2 226 618.24

Outstanding contributions receivable (United Arab Emirates (2017))	(100 000.00)
Outstanding contributions receivable	-
Total fund balance as at 31 December 2021 (including pledges)	1 881 786.92

54. The Voluntary Fund receives voluntary contributions from Governments, organizations and individuals. Between the establishment of the Voluntary Fund in 2009 and the end of 2021, 20 States have made financial contributions: Australia, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (see table 2).

Table 2

Contributions to the Voluntary Fund, from the establishment of the Fund to 31 December 2021

(United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Biennium 2008–2009	
Colombia	40 000
Russian Federation	450 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	45 326
Biennium 2010–2011	
Germany	148 148
Morocco	500 000
Russian Federation	200 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	133 707
Biennium 2012–2013	
Australia	387 580
Germany	475 664
Kazakhstan	9 975
Norway	849 114
Biennium 2014–2015	
Germany	242 844
Kazakhstan	53 890
Netherlands	30 000
Norway	601 733
Oman	10 000
Biennium 2016–2017	
France	22 753
Germany	221 631
Kazakhstan	10 000
Norway	475 367
Paraguay	3 000
Republic of Korea	50 000
Saudi Arabia	150 000
Spain	111 485
United Arab Emirates	100 000

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Biennium 2018–2019	
France	23 229
Germany	124 224
Norway	357 270
Pakistan	6 000
Republic of Korea	100 000
Russian Federation	200 000
Saudi Arabia	145 000
Singapore	5 000
Spain	84 170
Biennium 2020–21	
France	141 002
India	200 000
Kazakhstan	25 000
Pakistan	5 000
Republic of Korea	100 000
Romania	47 790
Singapore	15 000
Philippines	25 000
Total contributions	6 925 903

IV. Conclusions

55. In his recent report, entitled “Our Common Agenda”,¹⁴ the Secretary-General called for the fuller use of the human rights monitoring systems, including the universal periodic review, the treaty bodies and the special procedures, to solve pressing social, economic and political challenges. He also encouraged mutual accountability of all actors, including through peer review models, such as the universal periodic review, and mechanisms for sharing good practices and transparent data gathering.

56. The good practices collected by OHCHR and other United Nations entities show that the universal periodic review mechanism has advanced the promotion and protection of human rights and secured greater compliance, in law and in practice, with international human rights norms and with the commitments made by States in all regions of the world. Accepted recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review have proven to be an important entry point for creating nationally led and nationally owned processes to follow-up to the recommendations made by all international human rights mechanisms and linking them to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Such recommendations can also highlight areas in which early action is needed to address the root causes of human rights violations, thereby contributing to the prevention of such violations.

57. With the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review beginning in November 2022, the strategic support of the United Nations and the wider international community for national efforts to implement recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review will be crucial to the continued success of the mechanism in its aims of improving the human rights situation on the ground and achieving the other objectives set out in Human Rights Council resolution 5/1. In this context, OHCHR will continue providing assistance to States and United Nations country teams, including through the use of the Voluntary Fund.

¹⁴ A/75/982.

58. In line with the advice of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR will continue strengthening its support to States, at their request, in the focus areas of the Fund, creating synergies between the implementation of key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, the strengthening of the Government's institutional capacity to ensure comprehensive follow-up to, and reporting on, the progress achieved and the enhancement of the role of parliaments. It will also increase partnerships with the wider United Nations system to integrate recommendations into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As part of the pillar on human rights mechanisms of its extended organizational management plan, OHCHR will strengthen the inclusion of such recommendations in the planning processes for its field presences and improve the monitoring of, and reporting on, their implementation through the Office's internal monitoring system. OHCHR, including through the support of the Voluntary Fund, will also build on the capacities created in its regional offices through the treaty body capacity-building programme to increase the support provided to United Nations country teams and will continually rethink and revitalize its strategic vision in order to target more effectively the support provided to States.

59. The advice provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, together with tools produced by OHCHR, such as the infographics and the matrices of thematically clustered recommendations linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals, will facilitate follow-up efforts by States, in close cooperation with national stakeholders, United Nations country teams and international partners. OHCHR reiterates the importance of the active participation of national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in the follow-up processes and will continue exploring ways through which such stakeholders may also benefit from the Voluntary Fund by becoming involved in the technical cooperation programmes of the States concerned. OHCHR will also promote the use of the guidance notes on the engagement of national human rights institutions and civil society in the context of the universal periodic review,¹⁵ developed in cooperation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and the non-governmental organization UPR Info, and on the role of parliamentarians before, during and after the universal periodic review process,¹⁶ developed in cooperation with the IPU. The partnership with the IPU, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Commonwealth will be especially important to further strengthening the role of parliaments in the implementation process.

60. The collection and sharing of good practices has proven to be an excellent way of providing relevant information and specific examples of the successful implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review to States and United Nations country teams. OHCHR is developing a strategy to disseminate the good practices of United Nations strategic engagement on the use of the universal periodic review and is exploring additional avenues to strengthen collaboration with United Nations country teams, including by promoting the early engagement of United Nations resident coordinators during the upcoming fourth cycle of the universal periodic review. Through the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR will also continue promoting the practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review mechanism to provide practical advice on how United Nations entities can engage in the review process to support progress by States on human rights.

61. In addition to the support provided by OHCHR and the wider United Nations system, increased South-South and North-South cooperation should be encouraged. Through the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR will continue promoting exchange of information and the sharing of best practices, including through the organization of regional and subregional meetings, seminars, consultations and other forms of interaction. As highlighted in the OHCHR report on the implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights,¹⁷ the link between official development assistance and the support to accepted recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review could also be strengthened. For example, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-

¹⁵ See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Tips_21Sept2020.pdf.

¹⁶ See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/TIPs_Members_Parliament.pdf.

¹⁷ [A/HRC/41/25](#).

operation and Development could be encouraged to systematically take into account human rights recommendations, notably those emanating from the universal periodic review, in its peer reviews of the development cooperation efforts of its members. The international community could also better leverage the universal periodic review mechanism as an important tool for coordinating bilateral development cooperation in a specific country context, especially when countries that are recipients of assistance are ready to implement supported recommendations arising from it, thereby enhancing national ownership and the effectiveness of aid.

62. In 2022, it is envisaged that the Voluntary Fund will be supporting at least 22 projects in countries in all regions worldwide, in line with the increasing trend of proposals received from States that has been observed in the previous two years. Priority attention will be given to requests from least developed countries and/or small island developing States and to the integration of a gender perspective into the proposals to be supported by the Voluntary Fund.

63. In view of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review beginning in November 2022, the strengthening of the financial basis of the Voluntary Fund will also be crucial in order to show the increasing importance that States attach to the implementation of recommendations arising from the universal periodic review and the reception of dedicated support for that task. Increased donations to the Voluntary Fund and a widening of the donor base will be key to further solidifying the long-term sustainability of universal periodic review-related technical cooperation, in particular by taking into account the increase of projects envisaged in the event that the restrictions currently in place to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic are eased in 2022.
