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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 in consultation with the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund and contains an overview of contributions and expenditure, together with a description of activities funded and the results achieved since the submission of the previous report.^a

In view of the overlapping context of the start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, in November 2022, and the fifteenth anniversary of the creation of the Voluntary Fund by Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights outlines how the use of the Fund is integrated into the wider initiatives implemented by the Office to support national efforts to implement the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review mechanism. It also reviews the initiatives taken to mark the anniversary of the creation of the Voluntary Fund and analyses opportunities and challenges to strengthen the support provided by the Fund during the fourth cycle, including through the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 51/30.

^a [A/HRC/50/18](#).



1. Introduction

1. In its resolution 6/17, the Human Rights Council requested the Secretary-General to establish a voluntary fund for financial and technical assistance to provide, in conjunction with multilateral funding mechanisms, a source of financial and technical assistance to help countries to implement the 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. It also requested that a board of trustees of the Voluntary Fund be established in accordance with the rules of the United Nations and considering equitable geographical representation.

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 line with Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and the annex thereto. OHCHR administers the Voluntary Fund jointly with the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review, also established by resolution 6/17, which facilitates the participation of developing countries in their review. As the combined assistance provided by the two voluntary funds enables States to engage with the universal periodic review process in all its phases, the present report should be read in conjunction with the report on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review.¹

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

II. Operations of the Voluntary Fund

A. Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund

4. The Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund provides advice to OHCHR on policy orientation and strategy in the operationalization of the Fund. In 2013, in view of the complementarities of the mandate of the Voluntary Fund with that of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, the Secretary-General appointed the members of the latter to serve on the Board of Trustees of both funds. The members of the Board are appointed for a three-year term, renewable once, and are chosen for their wide experience in the field of human rights and technical cooperation. In 2022, the composition of the Board was as follows: Azita Berar Awad (Islamic Republic of Iran) (Chair); Santiago Corcuera-Cabezut (Mexico); Morten Kjaerum (Denmark); 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. The Board held its seventeenth session in New York from 16 to 18 May 2022 to discuss the importance of technical cooperation in the field of human rights with United Nations entities based in New

¹ [A/HRC/53/56](#).

York with key responsibilities across the three pillars of the Organization. Within that context, the Board also addressed how the outcomes of the universal periodic review and other international human rights mechanisms could contribute to the enjoyment of human rights by informing technical cooperation in the field of human rights and by integrating them into United Nations country programming processes. The Board encouraged OHCHR to consider further initiatives to ensure that United Nations entities fully integrated recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review into their programmes, such as discussions with the respective heads of United Nations entities and their governing boards, if necessary, as well as to expand information-sharing at the technical level.

6. The eighteenth session of the Board, held in Fiji from 6 to 8 December, was the Board's first-ever held in the Pacific region. The Board reviewed the OHCHR technical cooperation programme in the region, focusing on the relationship between human rights, climate change and environmental transition, as well as on the support provided to small island developing States. It noted the limited national capacity of countries in the region, including regarding reporting and follow-up on ratified treaties or accepted recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. In that regard, it considered that OHCHR support to strengthen those capacities was particularly important, given the absence of a regional human rights system.

7. Given that the Board of Trustees oversees the activities of both funds, the most recent report to the Human Rights Council of the Chair of the Board of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights also contains information on technical cooperation to follow up on the outcomes of the universal periodic review.²

B. Results achieved through the implementation of activities supported by the Voluntary Fund in 2022

8. In line with Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, the Voluntary Fund provides assistance in consultation with, and with the consent of, the State concerned, with OHCHR serving as a source of expertise and technical support. OHCHR ensures a comprehensive whole-of-office approach to the assistance delivered to States through the Voluntary Fund, fostering coordination and complementarity with the support provided by the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights and by the treaty body capacity-building programme created by General Assembly resolution 68/268. The Voluntary Fund provides seed funding to activities that can help to mobilize additional resources and build partnerships, in particular with the wider United Nations system.

9. Requests for support may be submitted directly to OHCHR, one of its field offices or the office of the United Nations resident coordinator in the country by States 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 is given to requests from least developed countries and small island developing States. To make information on the technical support available for States available, the web page and information materials on the Voluntary Fund are regularly updated and disseminated and briefings are organized with State delegations during every session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review.³

10. In 2022, the lifting of measures to counter the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic throughout the world enabled the Voluntary Fund to resume the full scale of its activities. Several initiatives were implemented with the support of the Fund, in Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, Chad, Comoros, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Madagascar, the Republic of Moldova, Mozambique, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Serbia, Somalia, Tunisia, Uruguay and Uzbekistan. Based on the terms of reference of the Fund, OHCHR focuses its technical assistance on five priority areas, which are described below.

² A/HRC/52/80.

³ See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/trust-fund-implementation.

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

11. From the second cycle, a particular focus of the reviews has been on the implementation of previously accepted recommendations. The recommendations provide an important entry point for OHCHR to strengthen its constructive engagement with all States by ensuring nationally led and nationally owned processes. OHCHR support is anchored in a holistic and integrated approach to technical assistance that considers the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review together with those of the other international human rights mechanisms. Within this context, assistance 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 reform. In addition, OHCHR encourages the creation of synergies between national efforts to implement human rights recommendations and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. In 2022, the Voluntary Fund supported activities to implement key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review in several countries. In Belize, OHCHR Regional Office for Central America and the Dominican Republic assisted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Immigration in conducting a participatory dialogue with various national actors, including government entities and civil society organizations, on the establishment of a national human rights institution in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). The process resulted in a recommendation to the Government to strengthen the existing Office of the Ombudsman and expand it into a full-fledged national human rights institution. OHCHR also provided technical guidance on the legislative reform and operational restructuring needed for the transition. The proposal will be presented to the government Cabinet for approval in 2023.

13. In Chad, the OHCHR country office supported the National Human Rights Commission, as the national mechanism for monitoring places of detention, to participate in the work of the commission for the verification of illegal detention and to conduct visits to nine prisons, in Klessoum, Bol, Mao, Moussoro, Koro-toro, Faya, Kelo, Pala and Bongor. The advocacy conducted during and after the visits led to the release of 180 people, including 22 children, 50 refugees and nine asylum-seekers.

14. In Costa Rica, the OHCHR human rights adviser supported the judiciary in conducting a participatory assessment of the access to justice of Indigenous people in 11 Indigenous territories, namely, Abrojo Montezuma, Altos de San Antonio, Boruca, Cabagra, China Kichá, La Casona-Coto Brus, Maleku, Rey Curré, Salitre, Térraba and Ujarrás. The meetings gathered more than 300 Indigenous leaders and authorities of the different territories and will provide the basis for the development of the judiciary's institutional policy on access to justice for Indigenous peoples.

15. Support to the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review related to improving access to justice was also provided in Madagascar, where an awareness-raising campaign was conducted by the Ministry of Justice, reaching more than 6,000 people, including local authorities, prosecutors, judges and members of security forces, from 15 rural communities in the southern part of the country. It allowed for representatives of local authorities and the wider population to learn about the country's justice system and share their concerns with ministry officials, including regarding the distances of courts from rural communities, long processing times and the use of French instead of the local language in judicial decisions. The Ministry of Justice plans to use the feedback to guide reforms towards the effective implementation of the related recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review.

16. In Somalia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia received support from the Voluntary Fund to support the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development in Galmudug State to train members of the police, prosecutors, judges, health practitioners, safe house staff, community leaders and women's rights activists in the reporting, investigation and prosecution of cases of gender-based violence. A total of 60 participants (20 women and 40 men) attended the training, which led to several commitments, including the creation of gender desks in all police stations, the establishment of a coordination platform and the

collaboration between the ministry and two local radio stations to raise public awareness of reporting cases of gender-based violence through the formal justice system.

17. In the Republic of Moldova, the OHCHR human rights adviser assisted the State Chancellery and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in strengthening the knowledge and skills of 78 civil servants (67 women and 11 men) in preparing reports under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, gender mainstreaming and the application of a human rights-based approach to public policy. Civil servants, trained with the support of the Voluntary Fund, developed skills to analyse draft laws, policy documents and disaggregated statistical data to identify possible inequalities, identify their structural causes and formulate interventions to address them. OHCHR, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, also developed a study on the implementation of the decisions and Views issued by the treaty bodies in domestic law.

18. In Kyrgyzstan, the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Asia trained 25 human rights activists (15 women and 10 men), 23 of whom were persons with disabilities, on the standards set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to monitor information and environmental accessibility for people with disabilities. Following the training, the participants assessed the accessibility of 30 public buildings in Bishkek and 18 in Osh. OHCHR assisted the National Council for People with Disabilities in organizing a meeting in Osh, attended by 50 persons with disabilities (37 women and 13 men), focusing on the lack of physical and information accessibility in the country and the challenges faced by people with hearing disabilities in acquiring access to secondary education. OHCHR trained 26 members of the local Council for People with Disabilities under the Osh Mayor's Office (14 women and 12 men) on the Convention, implementing the relevant recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and on developing a draft activity plan for the Council for 2023.

19. In Uzbekistan, OHCHR, in partnership with the non-governmental organization Association of Persons with Disabilities of Uzbekistan and the National Center for Human Rights, supported the concluding event of the School for Human Rights and Advocacy for Young People with Disabilities in Tashkent, where 20 young people with disabilities (13 women and seven men) presented the results of their advocacy activities. OHCHR also partnered with the Center in developing a video course on the rights of people with disabilities in Uzbek, Karakalpak and sign languages and in organizing a global forum on human rights education in Samarkand, facilitating the participation of seven young people with disabilities (4 women and three men). The results of the forum were referenced in the decree of the President of the Republic approving the national human rights education programme.

20. In Lesotho, the Voluntary Fund enabled the OHCHR human rights adviser to support the Ministry of Education in holding two public consultations with civil society and the private sector on the national inclusive education policy, which promotes the provision of quality education to all learners, including learners with disabilities, on an equitable basis. The Fund was also used to translate the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review into Sesotho and disseminate them through a weekly television programme, conduct a study on the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights in the country and train 40 representatives of associations of persons with disabilities, government officials and parliamentarians (25 women and 15 men) on the rights of persons with disabilities and how to monitor their implementation.

21. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Voluntary Fund supported the preparation of a national disability survey and the conduct of a census in Nevis. It also supported the development of public information materials aimed at raising awareness about the issue of disability from a human rights perspective, including two short animated videos, and the participation of Saint Kitts and Nevis in the regional "More than" campaign, aimed at raising awareness about the crucial role that inclusion and diversity play in enriching communities and societies. The activities allowed for identifying areas that need further development to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Starting in January 2023, the new Ministry on Youth, Elders and Disability will have a more visible portfolio on disability inclusion.

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

22. In recent years, States have increasingly adopted more efficient and sustainable approaches to reporting on the implementation of, and conducting follow-up efforts with regard to, recommendations emanating from all human rights mechanisms through the establishment of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up. Such mechanisms ensure coordination between government entities and work in coordination with ministries and other 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.

23. In its resolution 51/33, the Human Rights Council encouraged States to establish or strengthen national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up and share good practices and experiences in their use for the elaboration of public policies with a human rights approach. OHCHR provides assistance to States on establishing or strengthening such mechanisms, in particular through its treaty body capacity-building programme. In coordination with the latter, in 2022 the Voluntary Fund provided support in this area to several countries.

24. In Ecuador, the OHCHR human rights adviser provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Women and Human Rights on the drafting of the executive decree establishing the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up. The decree, which endorses a standing inter-agency mechanism convened across the two ministries, serviced by an executive secretariat, should be approved in 2023. OHCHR also supported the two ministries in improving the quality and scope of the national report for the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review and trained 57 civil society representatives (29 women and 28 men) on engaging with the review process.

25. The creation of a similar mechanism was also supported in the Comoros and Guyana and through, respectively, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. In both countries, national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-ups were formally established in June 2022. In Guyana, the Voluntary Fund also enabled the training of members of the mechanism and representatives of key stakeholders on the country's human rights framework and its international human rights obligations. OHCHR also supported the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance in marking Human Rights Day, which included two high-level panel discussions, an all-day exhibition with over 30 public sector and international organizations, an art and photo competition for children and young people and a Human Rights Volunteer Award given to individuals for their community work on the rights of vulnerable groups.

26. In the Comoros, 33 members of the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up were trained on the universal periodic review and other international human rights mechanisms and the implementation of the recommendations emanating from them. The Voluntary Fund also enabled the training of 60 civil society leaders on their role in the implementation of such recommendations. Two outreach workshops were organized in Anjouan and Mohel to disseminate the commitments made by the country in the context of the third cycle of the universal periodic review, in 2019.

27. In Lesotho, the Voluntary Fund enabled the OHCHR human rights adviser to support the newly established national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, chaired by the Minister of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs. Thirty-four members of the national mechanism (21 women and 13 men) were trained on the preparation of reports under the human rights treaties and on conducting follow-up to the recommendations emanating from them. As a result, the mechanism drafted the country's fifth periodic report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Voluntary Fund was also used to support the Government in conducting consultations with civil society and local government on the preparation of the country's midterm report on the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, due in 2023, strengthening the capacity of the country's oversight institutions, including relevant parliamentary committees, the police complaint authority and the Office of the Ombudsman, and training 40 civil society representatives (23 women and 17 men) on engaging with international human rights mechanisms.

28. In Chad, the OHCHR human rights adviser supported the establishment of the permanent secretariat of the interministerial committee to follow-up on the international human rights instruments and the adoption of the committee's strategic plan for the period 2022–2024. The support provided also led to the drafting of three periodic reports under the human rights treaties and of a bill on the protection of human rights defenders, which is currently being validated by the Government and civil society organizations before its adoption by the National Transitional Council. As part of those processes, five workshops were organized that gathered 110 participants, including members of the National Human Rights Commission, leaders of civil society organizations and officials of the Ministry of Justice.

29. In the Republic of Moldova, the Voluntary Fund enabled the further strengthening of the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, integrated into the national Council for Human Rights and its permanent human rights secretariat, which is part of the State Chancellery. OHCHR supported the permanent human rights secretariat in carrying out four thematic consultations with 60 participants (48 women and 12 men) from civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and other State institutions on the recommendations received by the country in the context of the third cycle of the universal periodic review. The consultations provided an opportunity for civil society organizations and national human rights institutions to take advantage of the period between the review of the country at the session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review and the adoption of the outcome of the review at the following session of the Human Rights Council to lobby the authorities to accept the recommendations received and promote measures for their implementation.

30. In Kyrgyzstan, the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Asia supported the Secretariat of the Coordination Council on Human Rights and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in carrying out seven capacity-building events for a total of 152 participants (73 women and 79 men) to enhance engagement with international human rights mechanisms by members of the Coordination Council, the Government's human rights focal points and civil society organizations. Three of the workshops were focused on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in preparation for the dialogue to be held with the Human Rights Committee. Two workshops were focused on the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Two public discussions were aimed at facilitating the broad participation of civil society in the reporting process.

31. In Serbia, the Voluntary Fund enabled OHCHR to support the strengthening of the capacity of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, as Chair of the national Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms, to report to international human rights mechanisms and follow-up to recommendations emanating from them, with a particular focus on the outcomes of the universal periodic review. The Ministry elaborated indicators for most of the recommendations received, and the resulting plan of recommendations monitoring, developed by the Council, was approved by the Government. The Voluntary Fund also supported a dialogue between State actors and civil society organizations on the potential expansion of the Council's mandate to include follow-up to the recommendations of special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and the decisions of treaty bodies. OHCHR supported the participation of civil society in State-led processes, such as the development of legislative and policy documents, and in public discussions, such as the social dialogue events hosted by the Ministry.

32. In Uruguay, the OHCHR human rights adviser and the United Nations country team supported the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to include local governments in its institutional structure, which would enable the national mechanism to present to international human rights mechanisms detailed information on progress made in the implementation of recommendations throughout the country.

33. In Bhutan, OHCHR continued to support the efforts of the Government to implement the recommendations emanating from international human rights mechanisms, in particular those emanating from the universal periodic review. In partnership with the United Nations country team, OHCHR supported the preparation of the common core document for treaty

body reporting of Bhutan, in particular in connection with its upcoming review under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

34. In the Dominican Republic, the Voluntary Fund enabled the OHCHR human rights adviser to strengthen the capacity of the Human Rights Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through a series of panel discussions, including on gender, human rights and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for 63 participants (33 women and 30 men) on the right to work, for 72 participants (35 women and 37 men) and on the protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities, for 83 participants (44 women and 39 men).

35. In Mozambique, following the establishment of the Interministerial Commission on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, OHCHR, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, trained 36 members of the Commission (14 men and 22 women) to build the capacity to effectively implement the Commission's mandate. During the workshop, the next steps to finalize the internal regulation and workplan of the Commission were identified. Further capacity-building support was also discussed.

36. In Tunisia, the OHCHR Country Office supported the strengthening of the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up to engage with the universal periodic review mechanism and ensure a comprehensive, more efficient, and sustainable approach to reporting on, and follow-up to, the recommendations emanating from it. The process of preparation of the national report provided the opportunity to increase the engagement of the national mechanism with civil society organizations through the organization of various consultations. OHCHR also facilitated the screening of the review of the national report at the session of the Working Group in a movie theatre. The broadcast, which included sign language interpretation, was attended by approximately 100 representatives of civil society organizations.

3. Creation of plans for the implementation of recommendations

37. 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 for implementation, the resources allocated and the indicators of implementation indicated.

38. Plans for the implementation of recommendations are often supported by a database that is hosted at the ministry that administers the software. At their request, OHCHR is providing the National Recommendations Tracking Database⁴ to several countries. The Database allows States to import the recommendations emanating from United Nations human rights mechanisms directly from the Universal Human Rights Index⁵ developed by OHCHR, to cluster and prioritize them, to draft an implementation plan and to report on their implementation. The Index has also proven to be a useful tool for integrating human rights recommendations into national human rights action plans, which offer a structured approach for strengthening the realization of human rights in the context of public policies.

39. 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 Comoros, the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa supported the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up in developing and adopting a road map for the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. Similarly, in Mozambique, OHCHR, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Embassy of Norway to Mozambique, supported the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs in developing a universal periodic review implementation plan for the period 2022–2025. Public consultations to ensure a participatory process were held in three provinces, namely, Gaza in the south of the country, Zambézia in the centre and Nampula in the north, with a total of 393 participants (271 men and 122 women). The plan that emerged

⁴ See <https://nrttd.ohchr.org/about>.

⁵ See <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>.

from the consultation process was validated in August during a workshop that was attended by 51 participants (35 men and 16 women) and submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval.

40. In the Dominican Republic, the OHCHR human rights adviser supported the Interinstitutional Commission on Human Rights, comprising 37 representatives of State institutions and civil society organizations, and chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the revision and two-year extension of the national plan on human rights, 2018–2024. The process included a series of peer dialogues among members of the Commission and officials from Argentina and Peru and informative workshops, including on the methodology recommended by OHCHR for the elaboration and revision of human rights action plans, human rights indicators and the incorporation of human rights into public policies. The Voluntary Fund also supported a national consultation on the draft plan with the participation of 150 civil society organizations. The first strategic pillar of the revised and extended version of the plan was validated by the Government in December.

41. The Voluntary Fund also enabled the Government of the Dominican Republic to upgrade the database system for international recommendations regarding human rights (SIMORED), a tool similar to the National Recommendations Tracking Database to better plan, track, monitor and report on the implementation of international and regional human rights recommendations, to SIMORED Plus, which also ensures linkages with the Sustainable Development Goals and promotes integrated monitoring and reporting. The updated database was launched in June, and its website will be made available to the public in 2023. Support was also provided to a similar initiative in Ecuador by improving and updating its similar platform, SiDerechos. The OHCHR human rights advisor, in partnership with the civil society organization Idea Dignidad, also provided three training courses to 42 government focal points for the platform (32 women and 12 men) to strengthen their capacity to use the database.

42. In Madagascar, OHCHR supported the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up in revitalizing the implementation of the universal periodic review operationalization plan for the period 2019–2023. Central to the process was the building the capacity of 35 members (23 women and 12 men) of the national mechanism to better understand their roles and acquire practical skills to monitor the human rights situation and draft national reports. OHCHR also supported the establishment of a national recommendations tracking database which is overseen by the Ministry of Justice, as the secretariat of the national mechanism.

43. In the Republic of Moldova, the OHCHR human rights adviser supported the State Chancellery in undertaking a participatory evaluation of the national human rights action plan, 2018–2022, with the involvement of more than 100 representatives of civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and State institutions. The evaluation was instrumental to assessing the plan's impact and establishing the priorities for the next human rights framework, which is expected to be approved by the Government in 2023.

44. In Guyana, the OHCHR human rights adviser supported the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance in developing a comprehensive national human rights action plan. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan, the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Asia provided assistance to the Secretariat of the Coordination Council on Human Rights in finalizing the national human rights action plan for the period 2022–2024, which was then adopted in November 2022. OHCHR also supported the Government in preparing an evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations received during the third cycle of the universal periodic review.

45. In Serbia, OHCHR supported the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in implementing preparatory steps to develop the country's first human rights strategy. A commitment was also made to introduce the National Recommendations Tracking Database.

4. Strengthening parliamentary capacities for implementation

46. Parliaments play a critical role in ensuring follow-up to recommendations made by international human rights mechanisms 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 considered in national budgets. In 2018, in its report on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and the universal periodic review mechanism,⁶ OHCHR recommended that parliaments set up human rights committees and strengthen their engagement with international human rights mechanisms, especially the universal periodic review.

47. Support for strengthening the capacity of national parliaments to engage at all stages of the universal periodic review process is provided in coordination with the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review, including through joint activities with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie to promote the sharing of experiences. In 2022, the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review also supported activities in-country, for example by building the capacity of members of relevant parliamentary committees in Chad with a view to strengthening the oversight functions of those committees.

48. In Brazil, the OHCHR Regional Office for South America and the United Nations country team continued to support the Parliamentary Observatory on the Universal Periodic Review, created by the Chamber of Deputies with the support of the Voluntary Fund, in engaging with public authorities on the recommendations made to the country by international human rights mechanisms. In June, the Observatory held a public hearing on the issue of homeless people, with the participation of representatives of civil society organizations and government authorities, members of the parliament and representatives of other public bodies and United Nations agencies. As a result, a new thematic report was elaborated, adding to the 23 reports already produced in 2021. The reports were formally presented to the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Brazil to be considered in the formulation of the new United Nations cooperation framework, 2023–2027, in the country. In addition, 24 infographics were developed with the main findings of the reports and widely disseminated, including online.

49. The Voluntary Fund also supported the dissemination of videos on key human rights issues, including mental health, the rights of trans people, the rights of people of African descent, human rights defenders and combating violence against women. The development of data panels, associated with training of 26 employees of the Chamber of Deputies, strengthened the capacity of the employees to monitor the implementation of human rights recommendations addressed to Brazil based on reliable information. The efforts also resulted in important legislative changes. In addition to the legislation approved in 2021, in 2022, the Chamber of Deputies took further steps towards the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

5. Strengthening the capacity of United Nations country teams

50. An additional area of support by the Voluntary Fund is the integration of the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms into United Nations common country programming documents. In line with the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights,⁷ such recommendations should be increasingly reflected in United Nations common country assessments and sustainable development cooperation frameworks, as well as in the programming of individual United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

51. Most of the activities that benefited from the support of the Voluntary Fund in 2022 were implemented in collaboration with other United Nations agencies. In addition, the Fund supported specific initiatives aimed at mobilizing the United Nations system to strengthen the capacity of States to implement human rights recommendations and foster synergies with national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, in Tunisia, the OHCHR country office used the universal periodic review process to raise the awareness of the United Nations country team of the application of a human rights-based approach to programming and the call to integrate the recommendations into common country programming documents. Similar support was provided to the United Nations country team in Guyana. In Ecuador, OHCHR supported the drafting of the report of the United Nations

⁶ A/HRC/38/25.

⁷ See www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml.

country team for the universal periodic review, by integrating relevant information on priority issues defined during the common country assessment inter-agency discussions.

52. In Uruguay, the Voluntary Fund supported the engagement of the United Nations country team in supporting the local governments of three provinces, namely, Canelones, Rocha and Paysandú, in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level and aligning them with the recommendations received by international human rights mechanisms. The Voluntary Fund supported activities in the three provinces, such as the mapping of provincial public policies from a human rights-based perspective, the identification of good practices, the training of 150 technical staff and managers and the publication of guidance booklets for each provincial government on how to apply a human rights-based approach in local planning. The Governor of Rocha decided to explore the creation of a human rights unit within his Cabinet.

53. The Voluntary Fund enabled the OHCHR Regional Office for Europe to support United Nations agencies as part of the Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), with a view to strengthening the knowledge of the latter about recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review related to the human rights of migrants accepted by States members of the European Union and fostering their implementation. The project contributed to mainstreaming the recommendations of human rights mechanisms into Frontex policies and procedures for safeguarding human rights.

III. Financial situation of the Voluntary Fund

54. Table 1 below sets out the detailed financial situation (income and expenditure) of the Voluntary Fund as at 31 December 2022. Total expenditure exceeded the contributions received during the year, reflecting the substantial increase in the number of requests for support received by States, and the decrease in contributions experienced since 2019 continued. An adequate level of reserves was ensured to guarantee the continuity of its work in 2023.

Table 1

Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January–31 December 2022

(United States dollars)

<i>Component</i>	
Income	
Voluntary contributions received in 2022	246 786.63
Gain and loss on exchange	898.11
Miscellaneous and investment income	15 440.70
Total income	263 125.44
Expenditure	
Staff costs	27 961.79
Other personnel costs (consultants' fees and travel)	381 404.15
Travel of staff and consultants	37 187.33
Travel of representatives and participants to meetings and seminars	117 415.47
Contractual services	100 816.26
General operating and other direct costs	243 013.49
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	28 601.56
Grants out (<\$50,000) and fellowships	—
Programme support (indirect) costs	121 732.02
Total expenditure	1 058 132.07

<i>Component</i>	
Adjustments to prior year expenditure (liquidation of commitments)	–
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditures for the period	(795 006.63)
Opening balance 1 January 2022	1 881 348.36
Outstanding contributions receivable	–
Total fund balance as at 31 December 2022	1 086 341.73

55. The Voluntary Fund receives voluntary contributions from Governments, organizations and individuals. From the establishment of the Voluntary Fund to the end of 2022, a total of \$7,434,696 has been received from 22 States (see table 2 below).

56. In 2022, seven countries contributed to the Voluntary Fund, for a total amount of \$246,786.63 (see table 3 below). While this constituted an increase compared with the year 2021, to be able to sustain the current level of support during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review and respond to the increasing number of project proposals received, the financial situation of the Fund must be progressively strengthened to reach an annual income of at least \$1,000,000 in voluntary contributions.

Table 2

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

(United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Australia	387 580
Belgium	51 706
Colombia	40 000
France	349 919
Germany	1 326 665
India	300 000
Kazakhstan	113 865
Morocco	500 000
Netherlands	30 000
Norway	2 283 483
Oman	10 000
Pakistan	11 000
Paraguay	3 000
Philippines	50 000
Republic of Korea	250 000
Romania	47 790
Russian Federation	850 000
Saudi Arabia	320 000
Singapore	35 000
Spain	195 655
United Arab Emirates	100 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	179 033
Total contributions	7 434 696

Table 3
Contributions received, 1 January–31 December 2022
 (United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Belgium	51 706.31
France	20 080.32
India	100 000
Kazakhstan	15 000
Philippines	25 000
Saudi Arabia	25 000
Singapore	10 000
Total contributions	246 786.63

IV. Strategic use of the Voluntary Fund during the fourth cycle of the review and scaling up the dedicated regional capacity of the Universal Periodic Review Branch

57. With the start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, in November 2022, OHCHR is focusing on the enhanced implementation of recommendations and working to ensure that the support of the Voluntary Fund is strategically integrated into the wider initiatives and tools it has developed to promote follow-up by States on the recommendations emanating from all human rights mechanisms.

58. To ensure the wide dissemination of information on the support available to States, at every session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, OHCHR holds two informal briefings for members of State delegations. In 2022, OHCHR also began organizing specific informational meetings for delegates whose participation in the Working Group is supported by the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review to create a virtual network of such delegates to promote the exchange of experiences and identify good practices in the preparation of and follow-up to the reviews.

59. Initiatives supported by the Voluntary Fund increasingly integrate the use of the tools produced by OHCHR since the start of the third universal periodic review cycle to facilitate follow-up to recommendations by States and the integration of those recommendations into 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 in terms of accepted recommendations between the second and third cycle of the review process.⁸ The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also provides advice to States that have undergone their review on areas that deserve particular attention during the four and a half years until the next review cycle.

60. A critical component of the work undertaken by OHCHR to increase the impact of the activities supported by the Voluntary Fund has been the strengthening and leveraging of partnerships. Joint initiatives were undertaken, with UNDP, the United Nations Development Coordination Office and the Peacebuilding Support Office, to promote the use of the universal periodic review as an entry point for United Nations engagement with States during the fourth cycle and maximize the impact of activities at the country level by combining various sources of funding.

61. Specific guidance for United Nations entities involved in the implementation of activities supported by the Voluntary Fund is provided in the practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review at the country level.⁹ Developed by

⁸ See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/documentation.

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf.

OHCHR in line with the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, it contains advice on how United Nations entities can engage in the review process. In 2022, OHCHR, in cooperation with UNDP and the Development Coordination Office, also launched a repository of good practices of United Nations strategic engagement with the universal periodic review,¹⁰ showcasing how the United Nations system has used the review process in 18 countries to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and address relevant human rights issues.

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

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

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

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

V. Conclusions

65. The start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review has generated new momentum for the constructive engagement of OHCHR with States and United Nations entities on the implementation of the recommendations emanating from all human rights mechanisms, resulting in an increased interest in the support available through the Voluntary Fund. The need for further technical cooperation and capacity-building was further reiterated by State delegations during the activities organized in the context of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, leading to the adoption of resolution 51/30 and the scaling up of OHCHR capacity in the regions.

¹⁰ See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/UPR_good_practices_2022.pdf.

66. Starting in 2023, the deployment of 11 universal periodic review focal points in the OHCHR regional offices will increase OHCHR capacity to engage with States and United Nations country teams. The focal points will provide advice on the use of the Voluntary Fund to follow up on the recommendations emanating from the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review. Aware of the importance of the active participation of national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in those processes, OHCHR will continue encouraging States to include such stakeholders in the projects supported by the Voluntary Fund.

67. In line with the advice of the Board of Trustees to ensure that United Nations entities fully integrate recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review into their programmes, the universal periodic review focal points will also facilitate the direct engagement of OHCHR with the regional directors of the Development Coordination Office and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as with regional commissions. The Voluntary Fund will facilitate such engagement, including through the organization of regional and subregional meetings, seminars, consultations, and other forms of interaction.

68. Support provided to countries and, at the regional level, to United Nations country teams will be based on, and integrate, the tools produced by OHCHR, such as the infographics and the matrices of thematically clustered recommendations linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals. It will also build on the partnership established with UNDP and the Development Coordination Office to further develop the repository of good practices of United Nations strategic engagement with the universal periodic review and continue the practice of holding focused discussions with United Nations resident coordinators ahead of the review of the countries concerned to encourage the engagement of the whole country team in the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review.

69. To ensure the efficient management of the projects supported by the Voluntary Fund, a web-based project management platform, linked to the public web page of the Fund, will be developed by OHCHR. In addition, OHCHR will enhance the coordination between the two voluntary funds linked to the universal periodic review mechanism to provide comprehensive and coordinated support to States in all phases of the universal periodic review process.

70. The strengthening of the secretariat of the two voluntary funds of the universal periodic review mechanism, the deployment of focal points in all regions and the development of the web-based project management platform will provide the Voluntary Fund with the necessary capacity to efficiently support States during the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review and to respond to the increasing number of requests for assistance, with priority attention being given to the least developed countries and small island developing States.

71. The process will need to be accompanied by a substantial strengthening of the financial basis of the Voluntary Fund. While the prudent management of the Voluntary Fund by OHCHR has ensured the continuity of operations in 2023, additional voluntary contributions and a widening of the donor base are necessary to respond to the increasing number of requests for support and would reflect the increasing importance attached by States in the Human Rights Council to the implementation of recommendations arising from the universal periodic review.

72. To ensure the sustainability of technical cooperation relating to the universal periodic review during the fourth cycle and to respond to the increasing number of project proposals submitted to the Voluntary Fund, an annual income of at least \$1,000,000 in voluntary contributions will be needed. In this regard, the recent creation of a Group of Friends of the Universal Periodic Review in the Human Rights Council represented a positive development towards increased support by all States for the voluntary funds for the universal periodic review.