



Promoting human rights through
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United Nations Human Rights Council: 50th Session

Oral statement – High-level commemorative event on the occasion of the 50th session of the Human Rights Council: achievements and lessons learned.

UPR Info – June 15th, 2022 (delivered by Mona M'Bikay, Executive Director, UPR Info)

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to speak about my passion, human rights. I would like to share with you today the impacts of the UPR I have observed in my capacity as director of UPR Info but also when I was working in the field on the implementation of the UPR recommendations.

The Universal Periodic Review over three cycles, it is more that 90'000 recommendations covering a broad range of human rights issues: civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, the protection of the rights of specific groups and international humanitarian law. More than seventy human rights issues were raised during the interactive dialogue.

All 193 UN members States participated in the UPR.

Beyond number, a couple of elements made the UPR a successful mechanism:

- The participation of States, formulating and receiving recommendation, on an equal footing.
- The periodicity of the review that foster accountability and transparency not only to States' peer but also towards their constituents at the national level.
- The participation of the civil society that ensure that rights holders are heard. The recommendations issues at the interactive dialogue reflect indeed national concerns, are gaining "energy" in the room XX, and are returning to the country under review for implementation.

The UPR is a mechanism that evolved over the years and that has proven its agility to address new emerging issues such as the right to a healthy environment and business and human rights. It has also the capacity to respond to crisis. We saw many States both informing how they responded and adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic by addressing the underlying "stressor" factors that contributed to exacerbate the impacts on human rights caused by the pandemic.

We saw also an increased participation over the three cycles of other UPR stakeholders such as civil society; the contribution of NHRIs has doubled and an increasing number of civil society organisations and



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UN agencies are submitting a report in view of the review. We see also a growing number of parliamentarians engage in the UPR process.

The UPR became a pillar of the HRC because it has supported dialogue and cooperation between States and the State under review and national actors (NHRIs, CSOs, youth, parliamentarians, the judiciary) and between CSOs (more CSOs are coordinating their work around the implementation of the UPR recommendations). The consultation and the contribution of national stakeholders contributed to create a human rights culture in the countries. Thanks to the UPR recommendations we saw States putting in place the legal framework to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening institutions to foster the rule of law by the establishment of NHRIs (for instance in Pakistan and more recently in Switzerland), national mechanisms for the prevention of torture and national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up.

The UPR supports the three pillars of the United Nations that are:

- Peace and security (by addressing the root causes of conflict and discriminations),
- Development (by lifting people out of the cycle of poverty by ensuring access to economic and social rights and supporting the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the 17 sustainable development goals) and
- Human rights by giving a voice to groups in vulnerable situation.

Let me give you some examples of how the UPR has contributed to improve human rights on the ground.

In DRC, in the 3rd UPR cycle, the advocacy work of CSOs led to the establishment of a state ministry in charge of the rights of vulnerable groups and the adoption of a legislation to better protect their rights. It led for instance to measures to ensure that they can access buildings, to provide them wheelchairs and reinforce their dignity, and to develop an inclusive education for children. The narrative of people with disability has changed to people in needs of assistance to empowering them and taking actions to develop their autonomy.

The UPR has also foster dialogue. The NMRF in Portugal organise regular dialogue on the implementation of human rights with the NHRI and CSOs.



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Amongst other realisations of the UPR, I can note:

- Youth in Australia has successfully advocated for recommendations on environmental and migrants' rights.
- The death penalty has been abolished in several countries such as recently in Sierra Leone.
- Cambodia has accepted recommendations to protect LGBTQI rights.
- Argentina has adopted a legislation authorising abortion which has given back to women their bodily autonomy.
- In Bangladesh: the age of a child was from 16 to 18 years old ensuring a better protection of children in conflict with the law.

To unleash the potential of the UPR in the fourth cycle and achieve transformational changes that will improve people's rights, I encourage States to:

- Develop human rights action plans with indicators and regularly monitor the implementation of UPR recommendations.
- Adopt a multistakeholder and integrated approach (Government, CSOs, Parliament, Judiciary, NHRIs, CSOs, Youth / UPR – Treaty bodies – Special procedures and regional mechanisms).
- Build the capacity of actors responsible for the implementation of UPR recommendations.
- Present how UPR recommendations support the achievement of the SDGs in the UPR (link NY-Geneva).
- Present in the UPR national report how the UPR recommendations support the realisation of the SDGs.
- Have a holistic approach to the implementation by working on the policy and human rights education level.
- Tackle the restrictions to civic space and see CSOs as allies instead of adversaries.
- Address early warning signal of systemic human rights violations to prevent atrocities.
- Ensure that local and regional actors participate in the implementation of the UPR recommendations.
- Share good practices on the implementation of UPR recommendations and move from pilot project to a systemic mainstreaming of human rights in all national programmes.

This will require genuine commitments and funding.



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Let us work together for an effective implementation of the UPR recommendations in the 4th UPR cycle.

I thank you for your attention.