

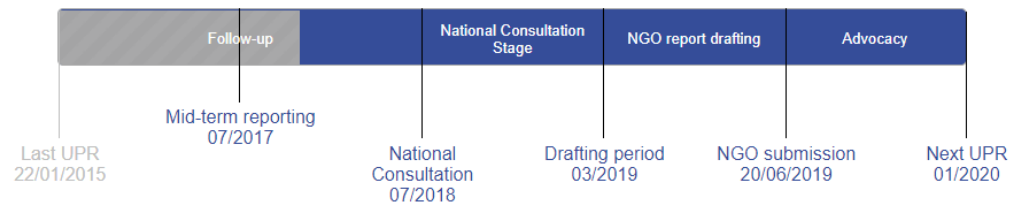


# ACTIVITY REPORT ARMENIA

## Public hearing on mid-term reports

19 April 2018

### Timeline for UPR engagement in the current cycle



UPR  
INFO

# 1. Introduction

On 19 April 2018, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Armenia, UNDP, OSF Armenia, and *UPR Info* co-organised a public hearing on draft 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle UPR mid-term reports developed respectively by the Government of Armenia and a coalition of CSOs. The event successfully gathered representatives from various Government ministries, civil society, the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia [NHRI], UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF and the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia. The hearing took place on the back of the [CSO mid-term workshop](#) held in Armenia in October 2017.

## 2. Activity

### 2.1. Overview

In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr Ashot Hovakimian, *Deputy Minister Foreign Affairs*, noted that it was customary for the Government to consult national CSOs within the framework of human rights implementation. He welcomed the public hearing on mid-term reports by Armenian stakeholders as an opportunity to revisit related topics including constitutional law reform and the adoption of the electoral code. Mr Hovakimian spotlighted the increased participation of women in parliament,<sup>1</sup> and progress in combatting trafficking<sup>2</sup> and domestic violence<sup>3</sup> as achievements connected to the Government's UPR engagement. In discussing the preparation of the State mid-term report, he congratulated the inter-ministerial task force for their efforts in compiling information. The task force reports to the UPR and the treaty body system, and Mr Hovakimian stated that he expects that 80% of 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle UPR recommendations will have been implemented before Armenia's next review in 2020. He also applauded CSOs for their constructive engagement in the UPR, and expressed his appreciation for the work conducted by *UPR Info*. Finally, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed the importance of the UPR as a vehicle for deepening partnerships between national actors.

Mr Shombi Sharp, *UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative*, attributed the presence of a wide range of diverse stakeholders at the meeting to the coalescing effect of the UPR. In his remarks, Mr Sharp outlined the role of UNDP in the UPR and gave examples of how the agency supports national stakeholders to realise recommendations. The unique peer-review mechanism, coupled by the many entry point it offers, establishes an inclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendations made by Angola and Belarus

<sup>2</sup> Recommendations made by Belgium, Russian Federation, Greece, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, and Moldova

<sup>3</sup> Recommendations from Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, United States, Switzerland, Latvia, Sierra Leone, Brazil, Romania, United Kingdom, Norway, Slovenia, Germany, Thailand, Albania, Serbia, Czechia, and Australia



process conducive for acting together for human rights improvement, he said. He also urged actors to draw on the mutually reinforcing nature of Agenda 2030, the SDGs, and recommendations from the UPR.

Mr Hans Fridlund, *UPR Info*, stressed that in the absence of an institutionalised UN follow-up procedure to assess implementation, a mid-term report, underpinned by multi-stakeholder consultations, is the most comprehensive way to take stock of progress. This exercise is also tremendously helpful in tailoring actions to address implementation gaps, he said. Mr Fridlund further added that in accordance with the cooperative spirit of the UPR, a genuine dialogue, built on trust, transparency and respect is critical in the process of following up on recommendations. Referring to the importance of an integrated approach to advancing human rights, he commended the decision of the Government to present their Voluntary National Review at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2018.

The focus of the next segment was the Government's draft UPR mid-term report. Mr Vahram Kazhoyan, *Head of International Organizations and Human Rights Department*, moderated the session. The first speaker, Mr Vigen Kocharyan, *Deputy Minister of Justice*, thanked CSOs, UN agencies and the EU for their support and feedback in the process improving human rights in Armenia. To formalise multi-stakeholder discussions, he noted the need to create a standing mechanism in which deliberations on draft legislation and other matters could take place in a systematic manner. As examples of UPR achievements, he mentioned, among several steps taken:

- ❖ increased efficiency in curbing corruption through legislation, including criminalisation of illicit gainful activity;<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ the creation of an institution tasked to ensure protection of whistle-blowers; and
- ❖ the development of a draft law on the protection of national minorities, developed in close cooperation with persons belonging to minorities.<sup>5</sup>

Several official from the *Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs* presented on human rights developments in areas related to gender, children and persons living with disabilities. Representatives from the ministry also introduced their work on reporting on domestic violence

<sup>4</sup> Recommendation made by the Netherlands

<sup>5</sup> Recommendations made by the United Arab Emirates, Russian Federation, Kuwait, Namibia, Spain, Austria, Lebanon, Djibouti, Venezuela, Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Greece, Equatorial Guinea, Algeria, and Azerbaijan

cases to international bodies. They informed that in 2018, it is a priority for the ministry to draft a new law on social inclusion of persons living with disabilities in line with the UN convention.<sup>6</sup> Officials from the *Ministry of Healthcare* briefed participants on their work of tackling sex selective abortions. They stressed that behavioural change was imperative to curb the practice, and appreciated the support from the UN, as they are on the path towards closing the gap. In terms of education, the *Ministry of Education and Science* reported on challenges of ensuring quality education throughout the country and to all population groups, partly due to shortage of staff and small quantity of children in some rural areas. The ministry is actively seeking a dialogue with all concerned stakeholders, including national minorities, to identify solutions to challenges.

Mr David Amiryanyan, *Deputy Director for Programs at OSF Armenia*, presented an overview of the findings of the joint CSO submission that the organisation is leading on. He stated that CSOs are ready to hold discussions with ministries on implementation of for them relevant recommendations, and regretted the lack of follow-up from ministries to CSO communications in the immediate aftermath of Armenia's second review in 2015. Questions from civil society representatives to Government officials addressed issues such as: abuse of administrative resources; obstacles in access to information; ineffective implementation of the 2017-2019 National Human Rights Action Plan; input from civil society not being considered in a meaningful manner in the process of drafting legislation; and the need for transparent fact-finding missions, inclusive of civil society representatives, to mental health facilities.

## 2.2. Achievements

The event proved successful in bringing together a broad array of UPR stakeholders. The Government provided an exhaustive update on the human rights situation and measures to be taken to accelerate UPR



implementation. The high-level Government officials present at the event demonstrated a willingness to engage with national actors and should be commended. It is noteworthy that the Government of Armenia submitted a mid-term report in the first cycle, and has pledged to

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<sup>6</sup> Recommendations made by Benin, Republic of Korea, Austria, Spain, Venezuela, Thailand, Malaysia, and Argentina

repeat this voluntary exercise in the second cycle. The positive way in which UN agencies have participated in the UPR mid-term stage in Armenia further lends itself as a good practice to be replicated in the region and beyond.

National human rights groups, activists, journalists and other civil society representatives have effectively used the UPR since the inception of the mechanism. These actors, working on the full spectrum of human rights, have for several months, with the support of *UPR Info*, engaged in consultations in the preparation of a comprehensive mid-term report. This has been an inclusive and transparent process, constituting yet another good practice to be shared with CSO networks in other countries. The work will culminate with the publishing of a joint CSO mid-term report, the content of which also will be useful in the preparation of the CSO submission ahead of Armenia's third review in 2020.

### 2.3. Lessons learnt

The event took place during a time marked by intense political protests which consumed significant resources from all actors and caused an initial postponement of the public hearing. As a result, fewer civil society representatives than expected participated. It is also clear that, women must be provided a more prominent role in future discussions. Moreover, it will be beneficial if representatives from both civil society and Government illustrates the connection between implementation of UPR recommendations, and progress made in human rights enjoyment. Nonetheless, particularly considering the context, *UPR Info* is most grateful for the efforts undertaken by the co-organisers which ensured that the event could take place.

## 3. Way forward

The mid-term reports of the Government and CSOs are expected to be made public shortly and it will be important to discuss how they can be most effectively popularised, both in Armenia and at the UN level. Both reports should be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders and through various channels including written and social media, radio and public meetings. It is hoped that the work undertaken, and partnerships formed, during the mid-term stage will strengthen the national UPR momentum in the run-up the next review.

## 4. Testimonies

*First of all, it was important for me to listen different actors participated in the UPR process - UNDP, line ministries and civil society representatives. Each of these actors underlined its own priorities, which in fact are elements of the overall picture. So it was easy to assess the whole report.*

*We will circulate the Government UPR mid-term report once again and ask for comments and suggestions and after transmitting it to the Government for further consideration and approval.*

### **Ms Karine Soudjian**

Head of the Division of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues, *Department of International Organisations for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*



*I would like to say that it was very interesting as a member of the Human Rights Defender's Office to listen to the opinions of different actors involved in the process, to compare information and opinions provided by them. I am thinking that as a politically neutral human rights body, we can play a central role in bringing together all actors under one roof for smooth discussions and negotiations. It came to my mind to organise vocational trainings by using our educational mandate for the purpose of:*

- ❖ *raising awareness among respective state bodies, civil society representatives, media actors, and society at large;*
- ❖ *enhancing the capacity of the respective state bodies, civil society representatives to deal with respective issues;*
- ❖ *ensuring harmonized implementation of international standards; and*
- ❖ *strengthen the cooperation between all involved actors for accelerating the exchange of views, opinions, and information.*

### **Mr Mikayel Khachatryan**

Head of International Cooperation Department, *Human Rights Defender's Office*

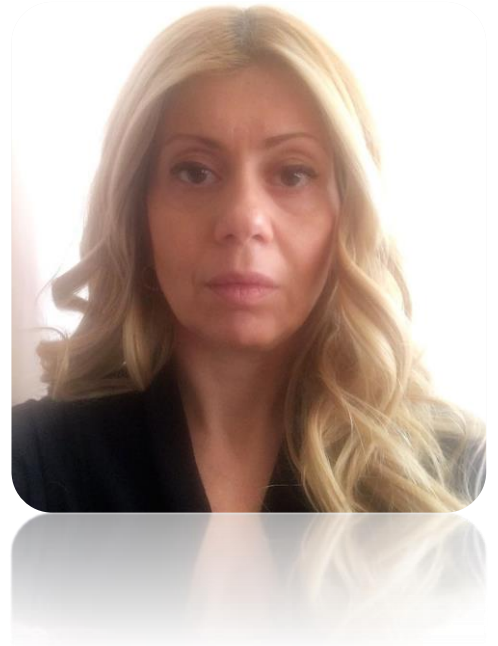
*It is important to continue regular consultations between the Government, civil society and the Human Rights Defender's Office on UPR recommendations and the overall human rights agenda. The platform should be used for regular assessment over the implementation of the recommendations by the Government, civil society and the Human Rights Defender's Office. The participation of the Parliament in the discussions is equally important.*

*Likewise, it is crucial to put in place monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the progress in implementation of the recommendations of the UPR, UN Treaty Bodies and the National Human Rights Action Plan.*

*I believe that UPR Info can make a valuable contribution to the process in terms of sharing information on best formats of the Government- CSO dialogue, involvement of the national human rights institutions in the process and development of reports to ensure clear links to UPR recommendations.*

**Ms Maria Silvanyan**

Project Coordinator, *Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Armenia - UNDP Armenia*



*Armenian civil society views the UPR process as an opportunity to improve the human rights in the country. Today's workshop has showed that for the last two years the government has not taken sufficient steps towards implementing the UPR recommendations, and did not perceive the UPR process as an opportunity for structural changes, but rather approached it solely from a technocratic law-changing perspective. As a result, no real and practical changes have been registered in the realm of rights and freedoms.*

*Moving forward, the CSO mid-term report will constitute the main source of information in the preparation of our submission to Armenia's third UPR. We stay hopeful that the changes in our country will help us to keep the protection of fundamental freedom and promotion of human rights as a priority in the government's agenda.*

*We hope that the collaboration with UPR Info will be continued. Their support has been, and remains to be, crucial for us and for all the stakeholders to ensure effective and meaningful participation.*

**Ms David Amiryan**

Deputy Director for Programs, OSF Armenia

## Annex 1: Agenda

UPR SECOND MID-TERM REPORT  
April 19, 2018  
Erebuni Plaza, Yerevan

13:30 – 14:00 – Registration

14:00 – 14:30 – Opening Session

Opening Remarks:

- H.E Mr. Ashot Hovakimian, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Welcoming Remarks:

- Mr. Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative
- Mr. Hans Fridlund, UPR Info

14:45 – 15:00 – Coffee Break

15:00 – 16:30 – Session 1: Government of Armenia UPR second mid-term report: its structure, main directions, current status of implementations

Moderator: Mr. Vahram Kazhoyan, Head of the International Organizations and Human Rights Department, MFA

Presentations by:

- Ministry of Justice, Deputy Minister Mr. Vigen Kocharyan
- Ministry of Labor and Social Issues
- Ministry of Health
- Others

Discussion

16:30 – 16:45 – Coffee Break

17:00 – 18:00 – Session 2: Good Practices of Multi-stakeholder co-operation in UPR implementation

Moderator: Mr. Hans Fridlund, UPR Info

Presentations by:

- Civil Society, including presentation of the CSO UPR Alternative Report
- Human Rights' Defender of Armenia (TBC)

18:00 – 18:30 – Conclusions and Closing Remarks





Promoting and strengthening  
the Universal Periodic Review  
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