

Annual Report 2013



INTRODUCTION

The fifth year of work of UPR Info was marked by a significant development of the organisation: we moved into a new office closer to the United Nations; we hired a Programme Manager, bringing the team to three permanent staff; and we strengthened our position in Geneva as a major player of the Universal Periodic Review process. This expansion in size and activities was deeply correlated to the expansion of the UPR process as 2013 marked the entrance of the UPR into the second cycle.

In 2013, institutionally speaking, the UPR process in Geneva faced two major threats that could have potentially been detrimental to the process, namely the absence of Israel to its own review and the creation of sub-category of recommendations. UPR Info closely followed these two issues and engaged in both with proposals and remedies. We took a strong stance on the non-participation of Israel and called on the Human Rights Council to take action and define “persistent non-cooperation”. We also warned actors of the potential danger that a sub-category of recommendations in Working Group reports could bring to the UPR process, and actively pushed the Human Rights Council to act upon this issue. This resulted in a letter by the Human Rights Council President that is now recalled at each UPR session and has been used during troika meetings to prevent States from modifying recommendations. UPR Info took a prominent role in both instances and profiled itself as the guardian of the UPR. We managed to mobilise actors, notably States and civil society, around crucial points and delivered results that impacted the process.

The UPR also faced in 2013 an increased participation of stakeholders. The number of submissions by civil society organisations per State under Review has grown from 16 during the first cycle to 19 during the second cycle. The growth called for a better support in terms of impact on the recommendations made during review. Our Programme “Pre-sessions” responded to that need: 156 organisations took part in 2013, reaching since 2012 over 300 organisations and the participation of 99 Permanent Missions. Organisations are progressively including this activity in their planning and are de facto engaging earlier in the UPR process - when statements are not finalised yet - that results in an increased impact on the process. By connecting Permanent Missions from the five regions to grass roots activists, we have built confidence among actors, ensured that discussions on human rights can take place in a transparent and open manner and that the work of civil society is perceived as legitimate and useful to the UPR.

The increase in the participation of other stakeholders was also manifested by an increase in visits to our website. They reached a symbolic mark of 250,000 in one year. We therefore had to start working on a new website to respond to this increased demand which will be launched in 2014.



UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay and UPR Info Executive Director Roland Chauville share a panel for the launch of a UN Guide on follow-up to human rights recommendations, November 2013.

The increase in the number of recommendations made, with an average of 196 recommendations received by each State reviewed during the 16th session, also led us to take action. We entirely reworked our database to make it better equipped to face the new cap of 30,000 recommendations made since the beginning of the process, enabling a faster and more comprehensive search.

Let me take this opportunity again to congratulate your fantastic initiative to gather and systematize UPR information, this is truly a very essential tool for all of us in the UN human rights system.

Izsák Rita,
UN Independent Expert on minority issues

Since the publication of «On the road to implementation» in 2012, our study on the implementation of UPR recommendations, we released 70 further reports, and stakeholders commented upon 5,405 recommendations. Compared with 2012, the Follow-up Programme has evolved in many directions. The period assessed hereby has been the occasion to contact more diverse types of actors (notably UN Agencies), and adapt the programme to the needs expressed by stakeholders. We explored new areas in order to strengthen the UPR process, increased its credibility, and improved the understanding of all actors. So far, the Follow-up Programme offers unique data on what is happening on the ground. Since no UN monitoring process has been set up, this programme is the only tool to enhance States accountability at the UPR.

Our Achievements in 2013:

UPR universality protected by the HRC President.

While the UPR was developing in 2013, UPR Info had to follow in order to continue providing quality support to all stakeholders. As the second cycle unfolds, the destiny of UPR Info becomes ever more interconnected with the fate of the UPR process.

Roland Chauville
Executive Director

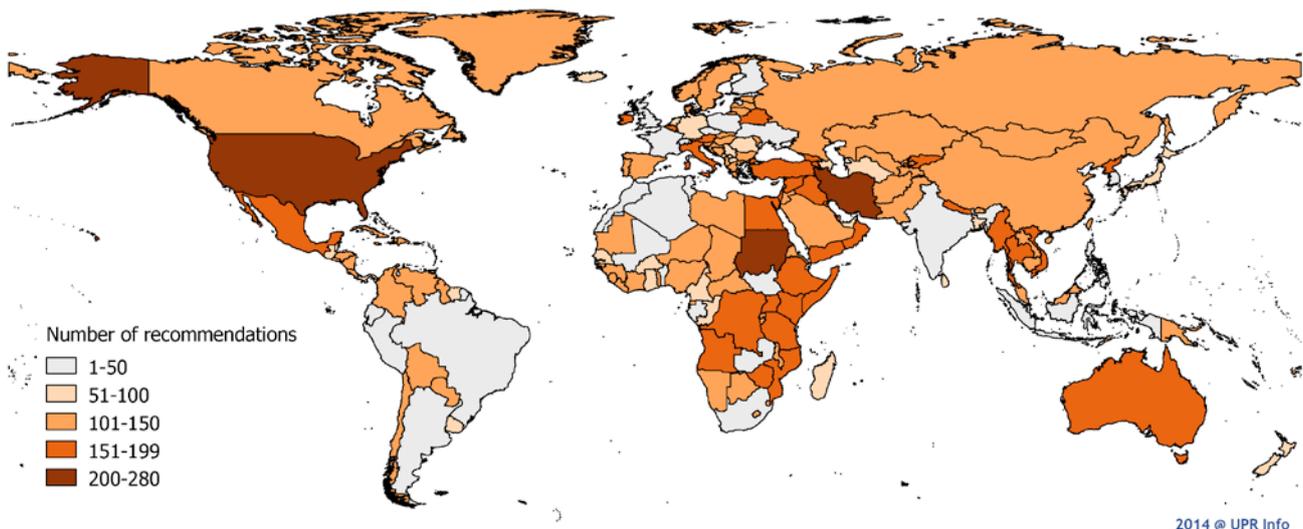
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roland Chauville', written in a cursive style.

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1. A year at the UPR

2013 was a test for the UPR process; a test for the engagement of States, institutions and civil society in the mechanism and an opportunity for all actors to demonstrate their genuine interest in safeguarding the mechanism. This was the year to actually start building on first cycle achievements by following up on 21,353 recommendations made at the first cycle, during which the State that received the most recommendations was the United States (280); and Bahrain and Ecuador the least (12 each).



The pinnacle of the threats against the universality of the UPR was the review of Israel which was facing the absence of the delegation due to its conflicting relation with the Council. In May 2012, Israel had decided to suspend its relations with the Council and as a consequence was absent during its second review, initially scheduled on 29 January 2013. Following intense negotiations with different stakeholders, Israel finally decided a couple of days before its new review date to be present. Israel's decision to resume cooperation with the UPR was an important step to preserve the universality and the credibility of the mechanism, and was dully reviewed on 29 October. The biggest threat to the process, a country absent from its own review, was successfully avoided. Notwithstanding, this event has been a missed opportunity to define cases of «persistent non-cooperation» as contained in Article 38 of Resolution A/HRC/RES/5/1.

The UPR was also put to a test when the Russian Federation tried to create second-class recommendations by moving some of them in footnotes in the Working Group report. However, thanks to the determination of the Council's President, this event will not be repeated. Indeed, on 18 September Mr. Romigiusz A. Henczel circulated a letter to all delegations reminding them of the modalities and practices of the UPR, clearly stating that all recommendations suggested during the UPR will, in the future, have to be included in the body of the Working Group Report and that all recommendations included in the Report are part of the outcome that States under Review must address. UPR Info was at the origin of this letter. In June, we had called on the President to tackle the issue of these footnotes in order to prevent the event from setting a worrisome precedent. Our statement made at the 23rd Human Rights Council (HRC) session was joined by 76 other civil society organisations (CSOs) from all over the world. By joining our call, they clearly demonstrated the importance of the UPR process to them and the need for the UPR to be protected from States manipulations. We successfully followed up on that statement.

An increased focus was also put by the HRC President and CSOs on reprisals against human rights defenders cooperating with the UPR. On several occasions, Mr. Henczel reiterated the crucial role CSOs were playing in the process and the responsibility for States to protect them.

The year was marked by an expansion in the number of States participating in the reviews. The symbolic mark of 100 speakers was reached on several occasions, with a peak on China with 137 States taking the floor.

Finally, the negotiation of recommendations continued in 2013, especially during the 17th UPR session. Saudi Arabia managed to get the wording of recommendations it had received modified and to get a reference to the Rome Statute removed from a recommendation made by Tunisia. However, this move backfired when the delegations of Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States took the floor during the adoption of the Working Group report to complain about such practice.

Now that the UPR is in the middle of the second cycle, the international community should start looking into the third cycle and what we want the UPR to be. The focus on implementation will have to be strengthened and States will have to start delivering concrete results on the ground. Armed with the experience of our last three years working on this very issue, we are well equipped to lead the debate in the years to come.

2 Supporting CSO participation in the UPR

2.1. Reach out to CSOs

2.1.1. Newsletter and social media

Sharing with grass roots CSOs what is happening in Geneva is core to our work. We aim at bringing the UPR to the national level. Our newsletter is a great asset to this. 58 news articles on the UPR were published while 7 newsletters were sent to over 1,600 subscribers. Our visibility on social media such as Facebook (“Likes”) and Twitter (“Followers”) doubled in 2013. Covering each review live on social media made our work crucial to actors not present in Geneva and allowed them to follow the discussion happening in the UN.

2.1.2. Publications

We published a third edition of our fact sheet series developed in partnership with the organisation Child Rights Connect. Following the two fact sheets previously published on (1) the UPR mechanism and on (2) CSO submission, the third factsheet, available in English, concentrates on advocacy at the UPR. The French and Spanish versions of this third fact sheet will be available in 2014.

2.2. Strengthen CSOs

2.2.1. Trainings and conferences

Over the course of 2013, UPR Info participated in three coalition trainings in Belarus, Egypt and Scotland. The training in Belarus with local CSOs focused on the preparation for the second cycle of the UPR. UPR Info presented the different modalities of the second cycle and the timeline for CSO engagement. The training in Egypt allowed us to instruct 25 CSOs during two days on how to build a coalition and share the opportunities offered by the UPR, with a focus on written submissions. The Scottish event aimed to engage local CSOs in the follow-up of UPR recommendations. While the United Kingdom had committed to submitting a mid-term report, the training created an occasion for CSOs to learn how to hold the Government accountable and mobilise partners on providing their own views of the implementation of recommendations.

In addition to these events, we took part in 25 trainings and conferences organised by various institutions such as Freedom House, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the International Service for Human Rights, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Peace Brigades International, United Nations Development Programme in Thailand, the University of Padova (Italy), and the World Federation of United Nations Associations.

Our Achievements in 2013:

CSOs are better aware of the UPR and how to engage with it.



UPR Info Executive Director Roland Chauville discusses UPR with journalists from Chad, Nigeria and Senegal during GMedia Center training.

2.2.2. Technical assistance

Throughout the year, we have been contacted by different actors, mostly CSOs, to provide information about the process by email, phone, or in face-to-face meetings. Over 300 actors received support from us in Geneva to facilitate their engagement in the process.

2.3. Keep CSOs engaged

In 2013, we fine-tuned our overall strategy on CSO engagement for the second cycle. It is indeed crucial to keep CSOs involved in the UPR process during the period of time between two UPRs. They may have participated in the UPR once, but it is important now to exert leverage over the numerous participants, to keep them informed of the new modalities, to remind them of the different deadlines, etc.

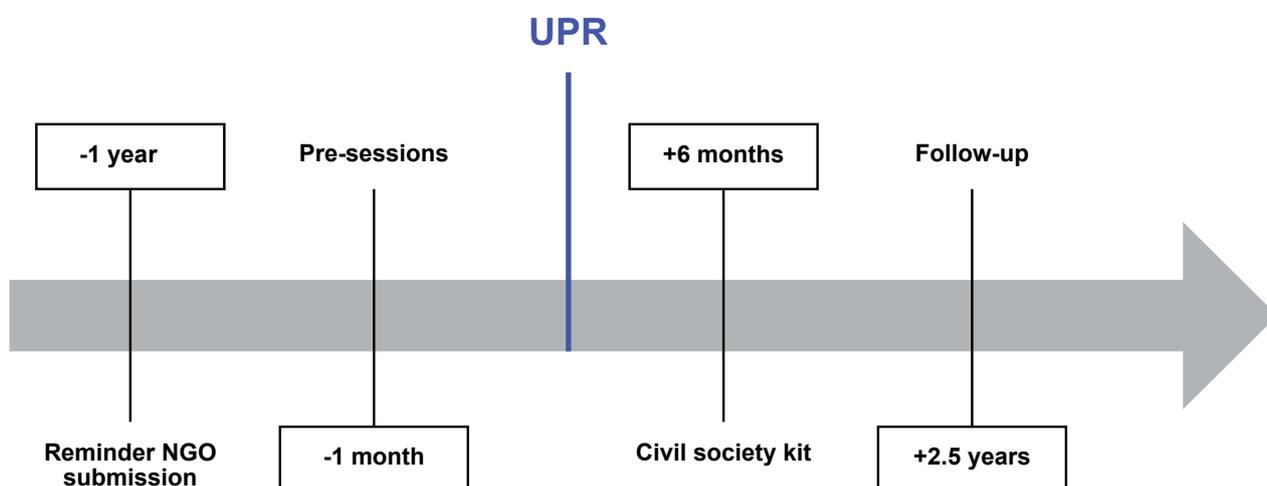
Our Achievements in 2013:

Reached out to over 300 human rights defenders through meetings and trainings conferences.

We contacted in 2013 stakeholders working on different sessions at four different stages:

1. Reminding of the UPR and its opportunities for engagement one year before the UPR;
2. Engaging CSOs to participate in our Pre-sessions one month prior to the UPR in order to better shed light on issues of concerns;
3. Providing CSOs with official UN documents related to the UPR (recommendations and responses accordingly) six months after the UPR;
4. Inviting CSOs to take part in the Follow-up Programme two and a half years after the UPR.

In other words, we were in contact with hundreds of CSOs in order to make sure they fully understand UPR opportunities.



As UPR Info sees in the national consultation an opportunity for civil society to meet with Government, we sent to every CSO which took part in the first UPR a reminder on the upcoming CSO submission deadline. We sent an email respectively in January, July and October to CSOs working on countries to be reviewed at sessions 18, 19 and 20. The email contained the date of the review of the specific country, the deadline for the submission of information, links to explanations of the new modalities, links to the recommendations received by the Government at the previous cycle and information about our “pre-sessions”. Approximately 400 CSOs were therefore provided with relevant information in 2013.

2.3.2. Pre-sessions and advocacy facilitation

Our pre-sessions offered an ideal platform to reach out to Permanent Missions in Geneva. We invited all CSOs working on countries to be reviewed at sessions 16, 17 and 18 to participate to our pre-session. For more information see the Pre-sessions chapter.

2.3.3. Outcomes of the review

States' definitive responses to recommendations are difficult to find and comprehend. To address this challenge, we have developed a clear and accessible methodology to categorise State responses. This analysis requires close monitoring of the Working Group, the adoption at the HRC and an in-depth analysis of several documents.

We sent to 1,247 civil society organisations working on countries reviewed at sessions 13, 14 and 15 documentation on how to follow up on UPR recommendations, and shared final outcomes of the UPR (recommendations and responses to these recommendations).

2.3.4. Follow-up

Effective implementation of recommendations is required if the UPR is to actualise its promise to advance human rights. However, at this time, there exists no UN mechanism ensuring the implementation of recommendations. We recognize that CSOs have the opportunity to take the lead in this work, and UPR Info strives to ensure they have the information necessary to become leaders in this important effort. We contacted CSOs working on countries that will be reviewed at sessions 21, 22 and 23 to encourage them to engage in the follow-up of the first cycle recommendations. This moment coincided with the period for States to submit their mid-term report, and occurred at the appropriate time to collect information for the upcoming second UPR. For more information see the Follow-up chapter.

3. UPR Strengthening

3.1. Monitoring the UPR

We closely followed the UPR process and monitored how it evolved during the year. A couple of main concerns emerged in 2013: the absence of Israel to its own review in January and the listing of recommendations in footnotes. On these issues and others relating to the process, we raised awareness and engaged in discussions through newsletters and statements at the Human Rights Council, as well as direct contact with diplomats and civil society. We shared both ideas and solutions.



(c) Jean-Luc Ferré

This year has been particularly challenging for the UPR process and UPR Info had to dedicate significant amount of time and resources to monitor and strengthen the process. While our impact in the re-engagement of Israel in the process was beyond our reach, we were nonetheless consulted by actors in numerous occasions on the path to follow. As for the footnotes issue, we took the lead on the discussions and successfully collaborated with the Council to find out a solution.

3.2. Website

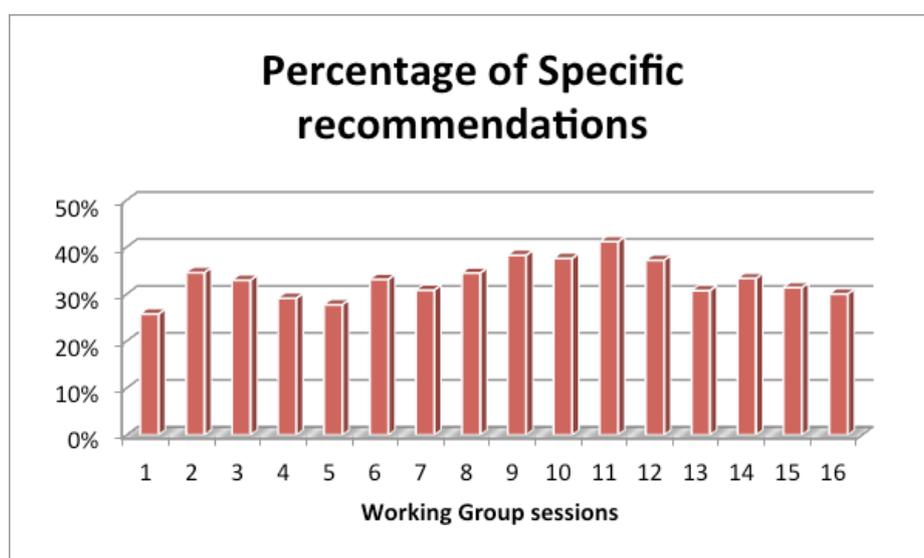
We updated our website in the three main UN languages (English, French, and Spanish) with information on the process and all the documents on the UPR. While the modalities evolved in 2013 in a limited way, we made sure to give the most accurate information to CSOs. That need has even become more pre-eminent in 2013, due to the high number of web-visitors. Many actors use our website as the main source of information for the UPR, and as a consequence we need to constantly meet these expectations.

3.3. Database

I wanted first to express our appreciation for the excellent UPR-info database. We found it indispensable in preparing for China's upcoming UPR later this month.

Casey O'Connor,
Human Rights in China

The database was entirely re-worked to handle the second cycle of recommendations. We added new tools such as the possibility to select recommendations by cycle and issues can now be selected with further precision, thus making searching by CSOs on a specific issue is much easier. The 6,777 recommendations made at sessions 14, 15, and 16 were added to the new database, totalling over 30,000 recommendations since the inception of the process. During 2013, from sessions 14 to 16, the number of recommendations requiring specific action (as defined by category 5 in our database) has decreased:



Our Achievements in 2013:

Over 1700 documents on the UPR made easily accessible to all actors

4. Pre-sessions



The “Pre-sessions” consist of meetings between Permanent Missions and CSOs and take place one to two months before the UPR, in order to discuss the human rights situation of the countries to be reviewed at the upcoming UPR. The purpose of these pre-sessions is to save time and resources to CSOs and to enable them to meet several delegations at once. For delegations, these meetings offer an opportunity to be briefed by CSOs about the human rights situation in the State under review.

Participating in the pre-sessions gives us an opportunity to get our concerns known to a wider group of people at an earlier time frame. [The pre-session of Malaysia] has been a most useful opportunity to come and to meet and to advance the concerns shared and to be able to speak to people whom we might have otherwise have not been able to have contacts with.

M. Andrew Khoo
Bar Council Malaysia

Our Achievements in 2013:

Organised 33 meetings between Permanent Missions and CSOs

Launched in March 2012, the Pre-sessions have become in 2013 the flagship programme of our organisation. 33 Pre-session meetings were organised on States to be reviewed at the 16th, 17th and 18th UPR sessions, namely: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Eritrea, Germany, Jordan, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Uruguay, Viet Nam, and Yemen. In total, 78 different Permanent Missions attended (on average, 22 at each session), as well as 156 CSOs - 103 of which were national organisations - and 4 National Human Rights Institutions participated. A broad diversity was thus achieved, regarding both CSOs (68.4% of them were domestic CSOs) and PMs (more than half of the Permanent Missions located in Geneva attended at least once). This ensured the engagement of new actors in the UPR, and offered new opportunities to domestic CSOs to raise their issues of concern. As it has been the case in 2012, the Pre-sessions provided a unique opportunity for CSOs to reach out to State delegations and present the human rights situation of the States that were reviewed. In this way, pre-sessions strengthened the voice of civil society actors and their role in the process giving them a chance to make a real difference in a state-driven mechanism.

I find the [pre-session] very valuable and very informative to take note of remarks, comments and recommendations of both national and international NGOs. We transmitted the issues, related to human rights situation in Yemen, raised in the meeting to our UPR-team to study them and prepare replies to them

Mr. Al-Foqumi

Permanent Mission of Yemen to the United Nations in Geneva

In order to enhance the voice of the CSOs, we continued building and strengthening partnerships with other international organisations to bring more grassroots organisations to Geneva. The UNDP in collaboration with the Canton of Geneva funded the participation of a human rights defender (HRD) from Malaysia; the FIACAT brought two activists from Chad and the Republic of Congo; Franciscans International and Amnesty International brought two activists from Uruguay; the Minority Rights Group supported a HRD from the Dominican Republic; the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom two defenders from Nigeria and Yemen; CIVICUS supported one CSO representative from the Central African Republic; the CODAP a defender from Senegal; the Centre of Documentation, Research and Information of Indigenous Peoples brought an indigenous activist from the Republic of Congo; and International Rehabilitation Council for Torture one HRD from Nigeria.

In December, we published a video presenting the pre-sessions⁽¹⁾. The three-minute footage, made of images taken from previous pre-sessions and interviews from participants, explains the modalities of those meetings and the opportunities they offer to stakeholders.

(1) <http://youtu.be/osKQ-jwkHUK>

Our Achievements in 2013:

*77 Permanent Missions made aware by CSOs of human rights realities
Provided a platform in Geneva to 103 grass roots organisations*

5. Follow-up Programme

5.1. Assessment of the UPR follow-up of 42 countries

I would also like to express my country's appreciation for the work of UPR Info in following-up on the implementation of UPR recommendations. We believe the latter is a true measure of the success and value of the UPR process and we are, for our part, determined to raise it in our statements in the dialogues with countries under review.

Matjaz Kovacic
Ambassador of Slovenia in Geneva

The third year of the Follow-up Programme, launched in 2011, developed significantly in 2012, and reached a pinnacle in 2013. A total of 42 Mid-term Implementation Assessments (MIAs) were published. A total of 1060 CSOs from 42 countries were contacted in addition to 22 NHRIs, and 53 UN agencies. All types of stakeholders are now engaged in the Follow-up Programme, which is continually growing and attracting attention.

In order to maximise the efficiency of the Programme, it is run at mid-term, that is to say, between two UPRs. Two actions are undertaken under the Follow-up Programme umbrella: sending civil society kits and publishing the MIAs.

5.2. Civil society kit

Specially we want to thank you for the documents, they will help us for sure in the next steps regarding the implementation of recommendations and pledges made by our country in the last UPR.

Josefina Doz Costa
Abogados y Abogadas del Noroeste Argentino

The "Civil society follow-up kit" ⁽²⁾ saves valuable time and resources to all civil society organisations interested in the UPR. It contains relevant information to those actors such as: the main tools available on our website, best practices acquired shared by NGOs, the results of the Follow-up Programme, etc. We take the opportunity to annex the list of recommendations made to the country they are working on as well as the responses to that country on those recommendations.

These documents were sent to all NGOs which participated in the UPR sessions 13 to 16. In total, 1,247 recipients received such information.

(2) English http://www.upr-info.org/followup/stable/Civil_society_kit.pdf
French http://www.upr-info.org/followup/stable/Civil_society_kitFR.pdf

5.3. The Mid-term Implementation Assessments

I believe [the Mid-term Implementation Assessment] will be of the most relevance for creation of our advocacy activities for forthcoming period.

*Ahmed Pjano,
Director of Programmes Save the Children - Bosnia & Herzegovina*

Data collected from all stakeholders is compiled into a Mid-term Implementation Assessment (MIA). This report provides an overall picture of the situation according to the views expressed by the participants. It is put online, sent to all stakeholders, and to all Permanent Missions in Geneva. The Permanent Missions are indeed key, as they have an important follow-up role to play: in theory, if States under review are not implementing the recommendations received, recommending States could raise the very same issue two years later, at the next UPR. The information from the MIAs is used not solely by States, NGOs, and NHRIs but also by a plurality of actors such as scholars, UN agencies and the media.

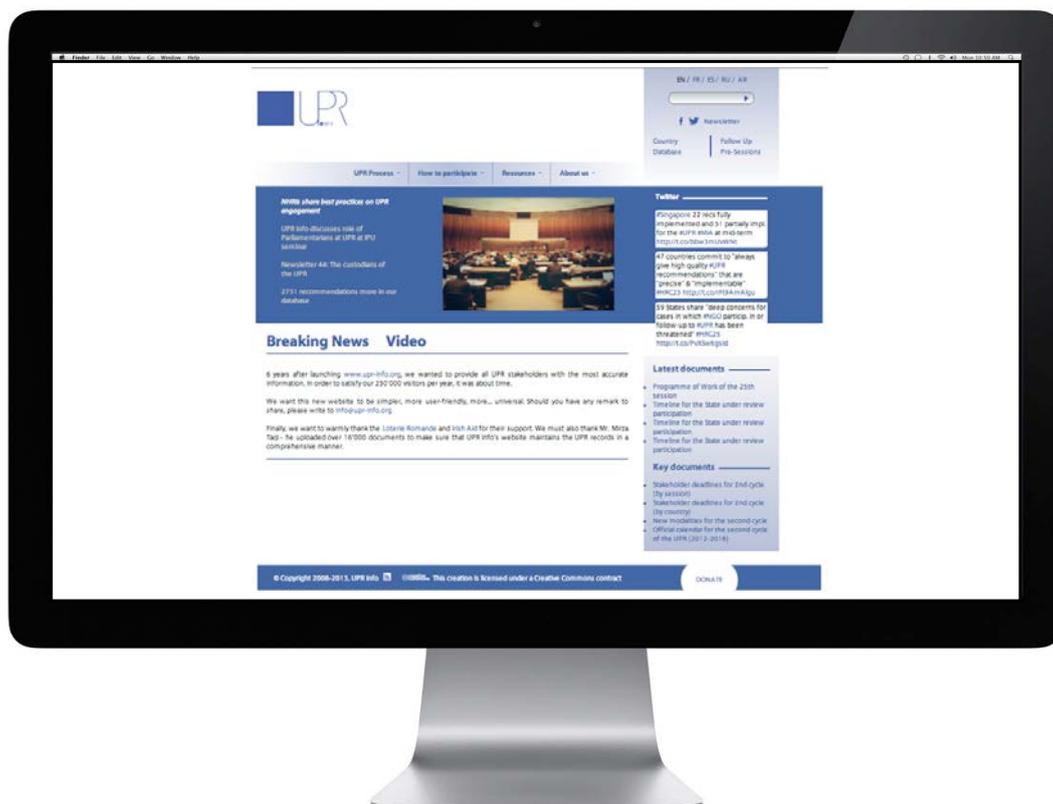
In 2013, we released 42 Mid-term Implementation Assessments.

Our Achievements in 2013:

*Assessed the progress made to implement recommendations in 42 countries
CSOs take ownership of their national UPR process*

6. Looking Forward: 2014

Turning to 2014, two major projects will occupy our organisation. We will be launching a new website, making information on the UPR even easier and better targeted to the visitors. The new website will hold innovative ways to access information and will provide tailor-made information to actors of the UPR. Searching for information on the UPR will never be so easy. Another important project will be the publication of a new study on the implementation, at mid-term, of over 10,000 recommendations by 165 countries. An update to our 2012 publication “On the road to implementation”, this launch will cover the work of three years of our “Follow-up Programme” and will be the first mapping of human rights implementation of this size.



7. Organisation

UPR Info moved our office to a new location. We came closer to the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, the Palais des Nations. We found a room with double the space of the previous office located in the “NGO building” of Geneva, at 3 rue de Varembé.



Executive Board

- Bertrand G. Ramcharan - *President*
- Saida Manieva - *Treasurer*
- Waqas Ali Saqib - *Secretary*

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- Anita Goh (France) - *NGO Group for the CRC*
- Marianne Lilliebjerg (Denmark) - *Amnesty International*
- Marc Limon (United Kingdom) – *Universal Rights Group*
- Professor Edward R. McMahon (United States) - *University of Vermont*
- Katharina Rose (Germany) - *International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions*
- Rasvan Rotundu (Romania) - *Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations in Geneva*

8. Staff

New staff were hired to strengthen our team. This recruitment answered a need to dedicate more time to our latest programme. With increased interest by CSOs and PM and with increased opportunities offered by those pre-sessions, a dedicated staff was able to bring better quality and steadiness. The Programme manager worked on improving the quality of the trainings as well as the content of the pre-sessions.

Secretariat

- Roland Chauville - *Executive Director*
- Jean-Claude Vignoli - *Programmes Director*
- Enkeleda Papa - *Programme Manager*
- Mirza Taqi - *Programme Assistant*

- Trixie Akpedonu - *Intern*
- Therese Arnessen - *Intern*
- Anna Corrado - *Intern*
- Aurélie Mayné - *Intern*
- Ashley Weyland - *Intern*

9. Funding

UPR Info's programme to Support CSO participation in the UPR was supported by the Open Society Foundations – Budapest, the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the United Nations in Geneva, the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva and the Loterie Romande. The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway financed the Follow-up programme. The Pre-sessions were made possible thanks to the support of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, the Canton of Geneva, the City of Geneva and Irish Aid.

We are very grateful for the trust they have put into our work and would like to warmly thank them for this.

CONTACT

UPR Info is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland. It aims to both raise awareness on the UPR process and to provide capacity-building tools to its different actors, such as UN Member States, NGOs, NHRIs, media, academics and civil society in general.

To this end, UPR Info collects information and documents on each review, provides detailed explanations and videos about the process and the role of each actor, communicates via newsletter and social media on the UPR and its evolution, manages an online database of all UPR recommendations, publishes reports on the implementation of recommendations by countries at mid-term and organises meetings between Permanent Missions and civil society in Geneva prior to reviews.

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