

# OHCHR REPORT 2015

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UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



# Foreword by the High Commissioner

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High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein

2015 was a year of massive paradoxes. On the one hand, it was wracked with violence, brutal oppression, deprivation and despair. Crackdowns against civil society and independent media robbed people of their inherent right to freedom of expression, opinion, assembly, association, and more broadly, participation. Warfare targeted civilians, either deliberately or with reckless disregard, turning whole regions into death traps and driving millions of vulnerable people to seek safety elsewhere. And in many parts of the world, across a range of topics, we saw a creeping return to narrow, hate-filled agendas, scapegoating migrants and minorities for political profit.

But at the same time, across the world, grassroots movements for greater freedom continued to do brave inspiring work to advance the rights of women and girls; ethnic, racial and religious minorities; and oppressed social groups, such as castes and sexual minorities. Human rights defenders, some supported by my Office, drove social change and greater empowerment of the people. And within both the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – to which my Office contributed extensively – we saw the international community come together with strong commitments, at year's end, promising more equality, more justice, more and better development, and greater peace.

All these trends and more are at the core of the work that is done by my Office. We exist to assist States to uphold the human rights norms that safeguard human dignity, and which States themselves laid down. Our aim is to build up both their will and their capacity to protect human rights, and to ensure accountability for any violations or abuses – in order to prevent future violations.

The unique value of my Office is our dual monitoring and problem-solving ability. We monitor violations – through reporting, in-depth assessment and investigations – and identify and prioritise the key human rights gaps, whether torture, land grabs, or discrimination by gender, ethnicity or caste. Then, based on that fact-finding work, we are able to construct technical cooperation programmes, guidelines and other tools which are targeted, evidence-based, and effective in generating change.

These pages outline a very wide array of such technical assistance programmes. Around the world, we have helped to build skills, and deliver advice, to governments and judicial institutions, to boost compliance with national and international human rights law. Working with police or prison personnel, we encourage them to combat torture, to respect freedom of assembly, to protect the security of demonstrators, and to maintain adequate conditions of detention. Working with civil society groups, we build up skills, and help to federate multiple actors, facilitating cross-cutting relationships with officials and other useful personnel.

This work is vital to prevention. It is essential to de-escalating human rights crises. And it is crucial in those deeply tragic cases when human rights emergencies are generating massive suffering. In all circumstances, the work of promoting and protecting the people's human rights builds deep, structural resilience, a sense of equality and justice, strong and protective institutions, economic hope, and participation in the common good.

None of this would be possible without the support of our donors, and without the admirable and selfless endeavours of countless human rights defenders around the world. I take this opportunity to thank all of them, as well as the staff of my Office, who work across the globe with few resources and great dedication. This work, which helps to prevent conflict and deprivation, is a vital force for justice, equality and peace, and in today's world of turbulence, the need for it is urgent and growing. I hope we can count on your increased support in the coming months and years, so that we can better meet the challenges of tomorrow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein  
High Commissioner for Human Rights

May 2016

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