



The Human Rights Council and the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Human Rights Council was established by the General Assembly as the key United Nations intergovernmental body responsible for human rights. Decisions and actions by the Council, which consists of State representatives, are the result of negotiations among Member States.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a part of the United Nations Secretariat, has a unique mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights. It is headed the High Commissioner for Human Rights whose independent role as the principal United Nations human rights official comes from a separate mandate of the UN General Assembly.

OHCHR provides logistical, administrative and substantive support to the work of the United Nations human rights mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Council and the core treaty bodies.

The Human Rights Council, consisting of State representatives and reporting directly to the General Assembly, is a political body with a comprehensive human rights mandate and a distinct entity from OHCHR. The Council addresses violations, promotes human rights assistance and education, reviews States' human rights records, works to prevent human rights abuses, responds to emergencies, and serves as an international forum for human rights dialogue.

To implement its comprehensive mandate, OHCHR employs some 850 staff, deployed in 11 country offices, seven regional and sub-regional offices, and human rights units in 17 peacekeeping missions.

OHCHR offers leadership, works objectively, educates and takes action to empower individuals and assist States in upholding human rights. Through its unique access, OHCHR works with and provides assistance to Governments, such as expertise and technical trainings in the areas of administration of justice, legislative reform, and electoral process, to help promote and implement human rights worldwide. It also assists those with responsibility to fulfil their human rights obligations and individuals to realize their rights, and speaks out objectively in the face of human rights violations.

It provides a forum for identifying, highlighting and developing responses to today's human rights challenges, and acts as the principal focal point of human rights research, education, public information, and human rights advocacy activities in the United Nations system.

OHCHR also works to ensure the enforcement of universally recognized human rights norms, including through promoting both the universal ratification and implementation of the major human rights treaties and respect for the rule of law.

OHCHR's priorities

The year 2006 marked the beginning of a new chapter for OHCHR and for the United Nations human rights programme. In the 2006-2007 Strategic Management Plan (SMP), High Commissioner Louise Arbour, set out her office's priorities and reforms designed to strengthen the Office and reinforce human rights as a key pillar of the United Nations system, alongside security and development.

These priorities include greater country engagement, working closely with OHCHR partners at the country and local levels in order to ensure that international human rights standards are implemented on the ground; a stronger leadership role for the High Commissioner; and closer partnerships with civil society and United Nations agencies.

Please visit the website of OHCHR: <http://www.ohchr.org> for more information.