

# OHCHR's approach to field work

## Background

Supporting the work of human rights field presences is the main function of OHCHR's Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD). The Division, in cooperation with other parts of the Office, oversees activities relating to field operations, including advisory services and technical cooperation.

Based on dialogue with national counterparts, the Office's activities at country level (through headquarters or field presences) focus on the promotion and protection of human rights, including by preventing and reducing human rights violations. This occurs mainly through strengthening national protection systems which involves ensuring that government authorities are aware of their human rights obligations, supporting them in their implementation and designing effective remedies to overcome obstacles to the realization of human rights. Through its programmes in the field, OHCHR likewise seeks to ensure that national authorities and civil society actors have the capacity to address human rights concerns and are better informed about international human rights standards and how to translate these into laws, regulations and policies so that rights-holders are better protected and

empowered. In particular, OHCHR supports efforts to establish or strengthen justice and accountability mechanisms at the national level, including through strengthened monitoring and investigation and redress of violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

In 2013, a new peace mission was established in Mali and a new Human Rights Adviser (HRA) was deployed to Timor-Leste. The peace mission in Sierra Leone closed in 2013. At the end of 2013, OHCHR was running or supporting 59 field presences and providing support to other members of the UN family through rapid deployment.

## Types of field presences

OHCHR field presences fall into two categories: stand-alone presences and collaborative arrangements. The first category comprises those offices that are under the direct supervision of OHCHR, namely country and regional offices. The second category comprises field presences with double reporting lines, namely human rights components of peace or political missions who report to the Head of the mission and the



High Commissioner and HRAs who report to the Resident Coordinator and the High Commissioner.

The decision to establish an OHCHR country or regional presence is made with the concerned government, taking into account the overall human rights situation, security considerations, the presence and role of other international actors on the ground, as well as available human and financial resources, administrative arrangements and the scope of activities to be undertaken.

## Country and Stand-alone Offices

OHCHR country and stand-alone offices are established on the basis of a standard agreement between OHCHR and the host government. A mandate typically includes human rights monitoring, protection, technical cooperation activities and public reporting and is tailored to a specific country situation. These offices are primarily funded through voluntary contributions.

OHCHR has 13 country or stand-alone offices which are comprised of 12 country offices in Bolivia, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Mauritania, Mexico, State of Palestine,<sup>1</sup> Togo, Tunisia, Uganda and Yemen and one stand-alone office in Kosovo.<sup>2</sup>

## Regional Offices and Centres

Regional offices are similarly established on the basis of an agreement with a host government and in consultation with other countries in the region. These offices focus on cross-cutting regional human rights concerns and play an important role in supporting governments in their engagement with the UN human rights mechanisms, specifically the human rights treaty bodies, the special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). They work closely with regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations and civil society. Regional offices complement the expertise of OHCHR country offices by providing support on institutional and thematic issues. In addition to the regional offices, OHCHR has regional centres that are established in accordance with a General Assembly resolution and are imbued with a specific

mandate. Regional offices and centres are funded by the UN regular budget and voluntary contributions.

OHCHR has 12 regional presences which include 10 regional offices in East Africa (Addis Ababa), Southern Africa (Pretoria), West Africa (Dakar), South-East Asia (Bangkok), the Pacific (Suva), the Middle East and North Africa (Beirut), Central Asia (Bishkek), Europe (Brussels), Central America (Panama City), South America (Santiago de Chile), a subregional centre for human rights and democracy for Central Africa (Yaoundé) and a Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region (Doha).

## Human rights components of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions

OHCHR supports human rights components of peacekeeping and political missions by providing strategic and expert advice, technical assistance, operational support and day-to-day backstopping on human rights issues. In this context, the Office participates in interdepartmental technical assessment missions for the design, establishment and reconfiguration of peace missions. Additionally, OHCHR contributes, through its voluntary contributions, to the implementation of technical cooperation activities and projects. While most of the human rights staff in peace missions are contracted by the Department of Field Support and report to the peace missions, the Head of a human rights component acts as the representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the country and has a dual reporting line, both to the Head of the mission and to the High Commissioner. In accordance with UN Security Council mandates, typical functions of a human rights component may include:

- ▶ Monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation and investigating human rights violations;
- ▶ Advocating for peace processes to be inclusive, addressing past human rights violations and promoting and protecting human rights;
- ▶ Integrating human rights in legislative and institutional reforms, including the rule of law and security sectors reforms;
- ▶ Preventing and redressing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, with a focus on the protection of civilians;
- ▶ Building human rights capacities and institutions; and
- ▶ Mainstreaming human rights into all UN programmes and activities.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to the State of Palestine should be understood in compliance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/19.

<sup>2</sup> All references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Fifteen UN peace missions maintained a human rights component and incorporated human rights promotion and protection into their mandated work, namely in: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan (Darfur).

## Human Rights Advisers in United Nations Country Teams

Human rights advisers are deployed at the request of Resident Coordinators on behalf of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs). Advisers support and assist the Resident Coordinators, Heads of UN agencies and members of UNCTs to integrate human rights into their programming strategies and their implementation and to build and strengthen national human rights capacities. Other functions include: advising and providing training to independent national human rights institutions and other stakeholders; advising State actors on the promotion and protection of human rights and other UN norms and standards; building networks with and providing practical support to civil society actors; providing operational support to human rights training and/or national capacity-building activities; promoting engagement with the international human rights mechanisms; and when applicable, advising on integrating human rights in humanitarian response and post-crisis recovery processes.

Human rights advisers are normally funded through extrabudgetary contributions. In some past instances, cost-sharing agreements have been concluded with UNDP or relevant UNCTs and other UN entities at the country level. Since 2013, new deployments have been funded through a Multi-Donor Trust Fund established under the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Human Rights Mainstreaming Mechanism (UNDG-HRM), chaired by OHCHR, to support the implementation of the 2012 UNDG strategy for the deployment of new human rights advisers.

OHCHR has deployed 19 human rights advisers in Chad, Ecuador, Honduras, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives,<sup>3</sup> Niger, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Serbia, the Southern Caucasus (based in Tbilisi and covering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste,<sup>4</sup> the former

Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine. In 2014, the deployment of human rights advisers through the UNDG-HRM has been agreed for UNCTs in Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia and for UNDG regional teams in Bangkok and Panama.

## Engagement in Humanitarian Action

At the global level, OHCHR integrates human rights considerations and advocates for the adoption of a human rights-based approach into the strategies and policies of humanitarian initiatives through its engagement in a number of inter-agency mechanisms. In October 2013, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) endorsed protection as a priority for 2014-2015, requesting the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) to take forward implementation of three related tasks, including: publication of an IASC Principals statement on the centrality of protection in humanitarian crises; a whole-of-systems review of protection; and the subsequent development of an IASC policy on protection. This work seeks to ensure that humanitarian action responds appropriately in the face of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. OHCHR, with InterAction, is co-chair of the GPC Task Team facilitating implementation of the three tasks.

OHCHR actively contributed to other key IASC work, primarily through participation of the High Commissioner, Deputy High Commissioner, its Field Operations Director and Rapid Response Chief, in the regular and ad hoc thematic and country-specific meetings of the IASC Principals, Working Group and Emergency Directors Group. OHCHR integrated human rights considerations and approaches in IASC policies, strategies and operational decisions and processes, including the Transformative Agenda Protocols and implementation in Level-3 crises in Syria, the Philippines and the Central African Republic (i.e., IASC policy paper on integration; IASC draft terms of reference; the Transformative Agenda Protocol: Common Framework for Preparedness; Syria Security Council Statement Plan of Action).

OHCHR continues to lead Protection Clusters in Haiti, Mauritania and the State of Palestine, co-lead at the regional level in the Pacific and lead a Sub-Cluster on access to justice in Mali. In December, OHCHR took the lead of a Protection Cluster hub at subnational level in the Philippines.

<sup>3</sup> Funded through the Multi-Donor Trust Fund established under the UNDG-HRM.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.