

# Foreword by the High Commissioner

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High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

The mission of the UN Human Rights Office is to enable States to fulfil the human rights of every woman, man and child. The challenges we face are colossal. They include discrimination, on multiple grounds, in every region, which can involve massacres motivated by stereotypes and hatred of many kinds; widespread violations of economic and social rights; violations of fundamental freedoms in the context of counter-terrorism operations; sexual violence; enforced disappearances; over-incarceration, and the torture of powerless detainees; the death penalty; the plight of migrants, whose human rights are so often trampled; censorship of ideas; and crushing poverty.

Our work runs on multiple tracks. We advocate for States to endorse, and respect, the **broadest possible legal standards** for their human rights obligations – supporting the Treaty Bodies, as well as the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms; raising awareness; and speaking out whenever violations cry out for urgent action.

We also seek to **integrate human rights goals and tools across the work of the UN** – particularly its work on development, humanitarian operations, economic and social affairs, peace and security and rule of law. Our field presences, working in prisons, courts of law, workplaces and schools; on city streets and in village communities, **monitor, analyse and report** on human rights around the world – the hard and detailed work of uncovering the facts that can generate change.

Alongside that monitoring, wherever possible, we seek to **build up States' capacity** to fully realise human rights. Our presence in the field means that in addition to first-hand observation, we can sustain constant dialogue with authorities to strengthen the laws and institutions that should protect people's rights – including courts, parliaments, regional bodies and schools. Our field presences liaise constantly with civil society activists and human rights defenders, benefiting from their expertise and seeking to help them strengthen their ability to confront abuses. We also design training that is relevant and appropriate. That training may focus on groups of government officials, security and police forces, or civil society groups, but it is always driven by the need to translate human rights principles into practical measures that will improve lives.

It is also incumbent on our Office to strengthen the emphasis placed on human rights goals and principles by agencies and operations throughout the UN. We have helped to institute significant changes in UN policy, including the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front plan of action, and this has been vital to amplifying the impact of our work.

2014 was a challenging year for human rights in the world. In this report you will find many details of the ways in which my Office sought to

promote the human rights of people deprived of their dignity. Our work was guided by the clear idea that protecting human rights is not only the most principled strategy; it is also the most effective one. Countries thrive when their political and economic institutions empower and protect the full rights, and full potential, of every person – regardless of their race or ethnic group; whether or not they are disabled; citizens or migrants; no matter their sex, their class, their caste, their creed, their age or sexual orientation. Respect for human rights builds societies that are more fair, more flexible and more likely to be prosperous and stable.

I was honoured to become the High Commissioner for Human Rights in September 2014, taking over from the achievements of my predecessor, Navi Pillay. Sadly, it was also a year in which the unrelenting shortage of funds took its toll. With the reserve balance built up in previous years close to being depleted, we were forced to reduce our extrabudgetary plans for 2015. This meant that we had to continue to turn down requests for assistance, start closing down some of our field presences and terminate projects that were working for real change. This Office has seen 20 years of rapid expansion and in that time we have also witnessed an immense increase in the global human rights discourse. Following this growth and partly as a result of our lack of funding, we are now streamlining our structure to bring the focus closer to the ground, where we can strengthen efficiencies and aim for maximum impact.

As you look through this report, it is my strong hope that you will consider how you can assist our work in 2015, and beyond. Our task is vital to ensuring peace and development across our planet.



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein  
High Commissioner for Human Rights

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