OHCHR's approach to field work

Background

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) implements its work at the country and regional levels, in line with the mandate of the High Commissioner under General Assembly resolution 48/141, including through the provision of advisory services and technical cooperation.

At the country level, OHCHR works with national counterparts to strengthen national protection systems and support the implementation of effective measures to overcome obstacles to the realization of human rights. This includes efforts to establish or reinforce justice and accountability mechanisms at the national level, such as undertaking effective monitoring and investigation, and helping to secure redress for victims of human rights violations. OHCHR prioritizes follow-up to recommendations that Member States have received from international human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The ultimate aim of these efforts is to strengthen national human rights capacities and national human rights infrastructure –through the establishment of coordination mechanisms for integrated reporting and follow-up, led by the executive with the active participation of State institutions, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organizations. Ensuring that this work is systematically and increasingly carried out in line with national development plans enhances the abilities of Member States to address gaps in implementation and revise legislation and practices to be in conformity with human rights norms and contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

OHCHR also responds to deteriorating human rights situations and early signs of emerging crises through the rapid deployment of monitoring missions or additional surge capacity for UN operations on the ground in the context of humanitarian emergencies.

As of the end of 2016, OHCHR was responsible for 60 field presences and provided support to other members of the UN system through the rapid deployment of human rights officers in response to emerging situations across regions.

OHCHR staff members during a monitoring mission in Guatemala. © OHCHR/Guatemala

Types of Field Presences

OHCHR operates through two main types of field presences: stand-alone offices and collaborative arrangements. The first category is composed of country and regional offices that are under the direct supervision of OHCHR. The second category consists of field presences with double reporting lines, namely human rights components of peace or political missions which report to the Head of the mission and the High Commissioner and to human rights advisers who in turn report to resident coordinators and the High Commissioner.

Country and stand-alone offices

OHCHR country and stand-alone offices are established on the basis of a standard agreement between OHCHR and a 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 14 country or stand-alone offices which are composed of 13 offices in: Bolivia, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, Mauritania, Mexico, the State of Palestine[1], Tunisia, Uganda and Yemen, as well as one field-based structure in Seoul covering the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Regional offices and centres

Regional offices are established through an agreement with a host government and in consultation with other countries in the region. These offices have 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 UPR. They also focus on cross-cutting regional human rights issues, in close cooperation with regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations and civil society. Regional offices further support and cooperate with OHCHR country offices by providing assistance on institutional and thematic issues. In addition to the regional offices, OHCHR maintains regional centres with specific mandates established through General Assembly resolutions. Regional offices and centres are funded by the UN regular budget and voluntary contributions.

OHCHR maintains 12 regional presences which are composed of 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

During 2016, 14 UN peace missions maintained a human rights component and incorporated human rights promotion and protection into their mandated work in: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Kosovo[2], Liberia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan (Darfur). Heads of human rights components of peace missions report to the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They represent OHCHR in connection with the work of both pillars of the mission. In addition to monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in-country, they support follow-up action with respect to recommendations received by the host country from all United Nations human rights mechanisms.

OHCHR took steps to actualize the Secretary-General's report on the future of peace operations, which provides guidance on the implementation of recommendations issued by the High-level Panel Review on peace operations, and successfully advocated for human rights integration in the agenda of peace operations. In particular, OHCHR focused on the realization of the Secretary-General's decision to consolidate specialized protection functions under human rights components of peace missions, prepared and issued a guidance note to all peace operations on this process and partnered with relevant UN entities to assess progress and further guide activities at both mission and headquarters' levels. Moreover, OHCHR engaged proactively with the African Union (AU) to develop a robust human rights framework in the context of plans to finance AU peace operations.

OHCHR continued to further the integration of human rights in the day-to-day operations of the Departments

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[1] Reference to Palestine should be understood in compliance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/19.

[2] Reference to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support by working with Integrated Operational Teams on mission concepts and defining strategic priorities. It provided technical guidance on the implementation of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy to peacekeeping missions and special political missions in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan, to the United Nations Police Division in the context of their support to national police and to the United Nations Force in the context of their support to the respective national armies. Advice was also provided to the Department of Field Support in relation to the recruitment, clearance and deployment of start-up teams to United Nations peace operations.

Human rights advisers in United Nations Country Teams

Human rights advisers (HRAs) 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 through 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 funded through extrabudgetary contributions and, in some instances, cost-sharing agreements have been concluded with UNDP or relevant UNCTs and other UN entities at the country level. Since 2012, new deployments have been funded through a Multi-Donor Trust Fund established under the United Nations Development Group's Human Rights Working Group (UNDG-HRWG), chaired by OHCHR, to support the implementation of the 2012 UNDG strategy for the deployment of new HRAs. A number of the UNCTs that received an adviser under the strategy have fulfilled their commitments under the cost-sharing arrangement for the third year of the deployment, while several others faced difficulties which resulted in the closing of their deployments. Where challenges remain in meeting these cost-sharing requirements, OHCHR will support local efforts to ensure the continuation of these important deployments.

During 2016, OHCHR deployed 25 human rights advisers or national human rights officers in: Bangladesh (closed in 2016 and a national officer appointed), Chad, the Dominican Republic[3], Jamaica[3], Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi[3], Mozambique[3], Nigeria[3], Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, the Philippines[3], the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone[3], the South Caucasus (based in Tbilisi and covering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Sri Lanka, Tanzania[3] (closed in June), Timor-Leste[3], the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Zambia[3] (closed in January) and for UNDG regional teams in Panama[3] and Bangkok[3] (closed in June and December, respectively).

Engagement in Humanitarian Action

The Office sustained strong engagement in humanitarian action at the global and field levels, with a view to ensuring that the protection of human rights remains a central tenet of humanitarian action in line with the United Nations Human Rights up Front Action Plan and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Centrality of Protection Agenda.

At the global level, OHCHR participated in the World Humanitarian Summit and made 32 commitments that will strengthen its engagement in humanitarian action. As part of the Summit, the Office was part of the round-table on "Upholding the norms that safeguard humanity" and organized a side event on the protection of human rights in humanitarian crises. Throughout the year, OHCHR participated in global humanitarian leadership forums, including the IASC Principals, the IASC Working Group and the IASC Emergency Directors Group. The Office continued to serve as co-chair, along with InterAction, of the Global Protection Cluster Task Team on the IASC Protection Priority. The work of this team successfully concluded this year with the finalization of the first IASC policy on protection.

At the field level, the Office continued to work closely with Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams and Protection Clusters, ensuring that the protection of human rights was integrated into humanitarian preparedness and response. The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights participated in the annual Humanitarian Coordinators retreat and OHCHR deployed three staff members to advise the regional- and country-level humanitarian leadership focused on the Syria crisis. OHCHR is a member of the

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[3] Deployed through the UNDG-HRWG.

Humanitarian Country Team in Ukraine; continues to lead the Protection Cluster in the State of Palestine[4]; and participates in the work of Protection Clusters or working groups in El Salvador, Haiti, Iraq, Myanmar, the Pacific, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Ukraine and Yemen. The Office also provides support to national partners, for example the Direction de la Protection Civile in Haiti, and promotes the involvement of human rights defenders in humanitarian action. During the reporting period, the Central Emergency Response Fund supported OHCHR's engagement in Burundi.

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[4] Reference to Palestine should be understood in compliance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/19.