

Foreword by the High Commissioner



High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein. © OHCHR

I am delighted to present this Annual Report for the UN Human Rights Office. It details the wealth of work we achieved during 2017, as well as progress made over our four year planning cycle, which closed in December.

The mandate of the UN Human Rights Office is to promote and protect all human rights by everyone – everywhere. This is a formidable and complex mission, which is becoming increasingly challenging. We seek to prevent discrimination, exclusion, and deprivation, and contribute to fostering just and inclusive societies that are respectful of human dignity and rights. We seek to assist in building societies where disputes can be peacefully resolved; where development opportunities are available to all; where fundamental rights are respected; and where institutions are inclusive, transparent and accountable – at the service of all their people.

These are solid steps toward prevention – and prevention works. States that uphold human rights avoid the festering of grievances which so often lead to conflict. Countries that invest in women's rights, engage marginalized groups in meaningful participation and set up impartial, inclusive institutions demonstrably reduce the risk of violence.

It is impossible to do justice to the extraordinary range of work that is featured in these pages. To take one massive area of work – advice to legislative bodies regarding laws that will benefit generations of people – and focusing on just one essential area, the rights of women, I hail the progress made regarding legislation and policies to combat specific areas of gender discrimination in Belarus, the Gambia, Jamaica, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Tanzania and Zambia, as well as by the Economic Community of West African States. We also engaged strong efforts to combat all other forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against people with disabilities and the LGBTI community.

We have striven to combat the increasingly toxic discourse on migration, through monitoring, legal guidance, capacity building and advocacy. Our very active contribution to the Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration included successful efforts to ensure that the voices of civil society, human rights defenders and migrants themselves were heard.

Human rights are the foundation of peace, as stated by the Universal Declaration whose 70th anniversary we will soon celebrate. They are also the foundation of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda, which is built on human rights commitments, offers tremendous hope to realize the rights of millions of people. We have made significant progress in developing SDG indicators, including on the prevalence of discrimination; violence against human rights defenders; national human rights institutions, and the human toll of conflicts. We continue to co-lead a UN-wide initiative to ensure that resolving inequalities and discrimination remains a core focus of the SDGs. We also helped mainstream human rights recommendations into the new UN Development Assistance Frameworks, which have the potential to significantly amplify human rights priorities.

During this reporting period, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people living in Myanmar were forced to flee the country by a shocking wave of violence – a terrible reminder that economic development will not ensure peace unless it is coupled with respect for human rights. Rapid reporting by my Office helped keep the world abreast of the plight of the Rohingya and contributed to a continuing high-level effort to seek a principled and sustainable resolution to the crisis.

The very broad mandate of our Office means that a clear, coherent planning framework is essential. The results achieved during our 2014-2017 planning cycle are summarized in this report. Our forthcoming management plan for 2018-2021 has been developed after very extensive consultations, and includes a number of “shift” areas identified as key to the changing global landscape of human rights. They include the need to build a broad global constituency for human rights; the need to protect and expand civic space; prevention of conflict, violence and insecurity; and human rights aspects of climate change, corruption, digital space, inequality and migration.

It has been an extraordinary privilege to work with my colleagues at the UN Human Rights Office. I am confident that my successor will take the helm of an Office that is strongly committed, credible, and clear about its goals and value. We are grateful to our partners and donors for their participation, as well as to the local, national, regional and global actors who have stood up for the work of our Office over the past four years. At a time when human rights are under heavy pressure in numerous countries, your help is essential, and I trust that you will continue to step up your support to our work to advance justice, equality and dignity – building a safer, more sustainable world.



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
High Commissioner for Human Rights

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