

# UN Human Rights approach to field work

## Background

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) implements its work at national and regional levels, which includes the provision of advisory services and technical cooperation, in accordance with the High Commissioner's mandate under General Assembly resolution 48/141.

At the country level, OHCHR works with its national counterparts to strengthen protection systems and implement effective measures to break down obstacles to the realization of human rights. To do so, the Office acts to establish or reinforce the capacity of accountability and justice mechanisms at the national level to undertake monitoring and investigation and secure redress for victims of human rights violations. OHCHR prioritizes follow-up to recommendations is-

sued by international human rights mechanisms in relation to Member States, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The ultimate aim of these efforts is to strengthen the national human rights infrastructure through the establishment of coordination mechanisms that are led by the executive with the active participation of State institutions, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organizations for integrated reporting and follow-up. 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, while also contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2017, OHCHR responded to deteriorating human rights situations and early signs of emerging crises



OHCHR staff members on the road to a monitoring mission in Antioquia province, Colombia. © OHCHR/Colombia

through the rapid deployment of monitoring missions or additional surge capacity for UN operations in the context of humanitarian emergencies. As of the end of the year, OHCHR was operating in 59 field presences and providing support to other members of the UN system through rapid deployments of human rights officers in response to emerging situations.

## 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, which 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 human rights advisers (HRAs), who 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 consist of 13 country offices in Bolivia, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, Mauritania, Mexico, the State of Palestine<sup>1</sup>, Tunisia, Uganda and Yemen, as well as one field-based structure in Seoul covering the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. OHCHR also operates the Human Rights Mission in Ukraine.

### Regional offices and centres

Regional offices have an important role to play in supporting governments in their engagement with the international 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. OHCHR also maintains regional centres with specific mandates that are 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) and South America (Santiago de Chile), a sub-regional 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 2017, 13 UN peace missions maintained a human rights component and incorporated human rights protection and promotion into their mandated work in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Kosovo<sup>2</sup>, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan (Darfur). The peace mission in Côte d'Ivoire was closed in mid-2017, and the peace mission in Haiti closed as another opened, in October, with a new mandate. The Heads of human rights components of peace missions report to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They represent OHCHR in connection with both the peace and security and human rights aspects of their missions. In addition to monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation on the ground, the human rights components conduct a wide range of activities including technical assistance, capacity building, investigation into serious human rights violations and also support follow-up action to the recommendations issued by the international human rights mechanisms in relation to the host country.

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

In 2017, OHCHR proactively engaged with Security Council members to integrate human rights into the peace and security agenda and with the General Assembly's Fifth Committee to ensure the adequate allocation of resources for human rights work in peace operations. OHCHR focused on the implementation of the Secretary-General's decision to consolidate specialized protection functions under the human rights components of peace missions, including through the practical implementation of the guidance note on consolidation in the peace and political missions in the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia and by supporting the enhanced impact and coherence of protection approaches in missions. Under the Protection of Civilians mandate, OHCHR ensured that information gathered by human rights components was used to inform early warning assessments, analyses of common threats and joint protection responses to identified hot spots, particularly for vulnerable populations. Based on OHCHR casualty recording and monitoring methodologies, human rights components in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia issued reports on the Protection of Civilians.

OHCHR actively engaged with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to develop and shape policy documents on key areas, such as the protection of civilians and related accountability, the approaches of missions to conflict-related sexual violence and the detention by UN personnel. OHCHR also supported peace operations in implementing the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN Support to non-UN Security Forces (HRDDP). OHCHR continued to work closely with DPA and DPKO in delivering human rights training to senior mission leaders and uniformed personnel, including by being part of the core group developing the United Nations Police Commanders Course.

Engagement with the African Union (AU) to develop a robust human rights framework, notably in the context of plans to finance AU peace operations, was a key focus area for OHCHR in 2017. The Office provided substantive support to the AU Peace and Security Department to develop a compliance framework for regional peace support operations and prepared a common workplan towards its implementation. The Office partnered with the Department of Field Support (DFS) and DPKO in the implementation of human rights due diligence mechanisms related to the UN's support to the operations of the AU Mission in Somalia. Furthermore, OHCHR played a leadership role in ensuring the creation of a compliance framework in the establishment and operations of the Joint Force for the G5 Sahel States, as called for by the Secretary-General and Security Council in December 2017.

OHCHR continued to integrate human rights into the day-to-day operations of DPKO and DFS, including through direct involvement in the Integrated Operational Team's discussions on mission concepts and the development of strategic priorities. The Office provided technical guidance on the implementation of the HRDDP to peacekeeping missions and special political missions in CAR, DRC, Haiti, Mali and Somalia, to the African Union and the United Nations Police Division in the context of their support to national police. OHCHR helped to facilitate the downsizing and placement of human rights staff in the missions in Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti and supported DPKO in starting up the human rights component in the new UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, including by providing advice on required staffing numbers and structures and screening candidates for deployment. Moreover, OHCHR supported peacekeeping and special political missions in the selection and deployment of Heads of human rights components in DRC, Haiti, Iraq and Sudan (Darfur) and screened over 140 UN Volunteer profiles for human rights deployment to peace operations.

## 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 build and strengthen national human rights capacities. A particular focus of the advisers is to provide human rights expertise in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. Additional functions include advising on the establishment and delivery of 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; promoting and supporting the integration of gender equality and women's rights into programming and, when applicable, advising on integrating human rights into humanitarian response and post-crisis recovery processes.

Human rights advisers are funded through extrabudgetary contributions. In some instances, cost-sharing agreements have been concluded with UNDP or relevant UNCTs as well as other UN entities at the country level. Since 2012, new deployments have been

aligned with the UNDG Strategy for the Deployment of new HRAs. This Strategy faced numerous challenges at the beginning of 2017 in terms of financial sustainability, which resulted in the termination of a number of deployments. Nevertheless, due to ongoing cooperation with the UN Development Coordination Office and UNDG and with the financial support of a number of Member States, OHCHR managed to ensure continuity for existing deployments through 2018 and responded to the requests from the teams on the ground. This development also resulted in the expansion of modalities of support to UNCTs on the ground.

During 2017, OHCHR deployed 24 human rights advisers/human rights mainstreaming projects in various countries, including Bangladesh<sup>3</sup>, Barbados<sup>3</sup>, Chad, the Dominican Republic<sup>4</sup>, Jamaica<sup>4</sup>, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi<sup>4</sup>, Mozambique<sup>4</sup>, Niger<sup>3</sup>, Nigeria<sup>4</sup>, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay (until February 2017), the Philippines<sup>4</sup>, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone<sup>4</sup>, the South Caucasus (based in Tbilisi and covering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste<sup>4</sup>, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and to the UNDG regional team in Bangkok<sup>4</sup>.

## Engagement in humanitarian action

The Office maintained strong engagement in humanitarian action at the global and field levels, with a view to ensuring that the protection of human rights remained a central tenet of humanitarian action in line with the UN's Human Rights up Front Action Plan and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Centrality of Protection Agenda. Throughout the year, OHCHR participated in global humanitarian leadership fora, including the IASC Principals, Working Group and Emergency Directors Group, as well as IASC subsidiary bodies, such

as the Task Team on the Humanitarian-Development Nexus and the Task Team on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. OHCHR continued to implement the commitments it made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

At the country level, OHCHR integrated human rights into the overall efforts of Protection Clusters, humanitarian country teams and humanitarian coordinators. The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights participated in the annual humanitarian coordinators retreat and OHCHR maintained the deployment of three staff members to advise the regional- and country-level humanitarian leadership of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. OHCHR led the Protection Cluster in the State of Palestine and participated in the work of Protection Clusters or working groups, in Guatemala, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Mauritania, Mexico, Myanmar, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Timor-Leste, Ukraine and Yemen, as well as in the Pacific region. In the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, OHCHR supported the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency in its recovery planning discussions with affected countries. In addition, through its deployments to Bangladesh, the Office endeavoured to assess the protection needs and risks of the Rohingya community displaced in Cox's Bazaar. Also, in the context of humanitarian operations in north-east Nigeria, OHCHR deployed six human rights officers who contributed to establishing mechanisms for systematic monitoring and response to protection concerns. During the reporting period, the Central Emergency Response Fund supported the Office's engagement in Myanmar.

In 2017, OHCHR created the first emergency response teams for the Regional Offices in Pretoria and Bangkok. Recruitment has been finalized. The teams are composed of a human rights emergency response officer and a national professional officer specialized in information management to enhance the production of human rights analysis and early warning information at the regional level; and to establish the basis for targeted preventive action and swift response in relation to potential, emerging or actual crises.

<sup>3</sup> National human rights advisers/officers in UNCTs.

<sup>4</sup> Human rights adviser deployed through the UNDG Strategy for the Deployment of Human Rights Advisers operationalized by OHCHR.