

Participation (P)

Enhancing participation and protecting civic space



Participation in numbers

7.6 million



followers across UN Human Rights social media platforms

#StandUp4HumanRights mentioned

#408,000
times in 2019,

30 times more than in 2018

36,936

unique visitors to the Universal Human Rights Index website

Over

85,000

publications and other print materials were dispatched worldwide, reaching individuals in **51** countries



4.89 million

visits to online publications

481



civil society side events were organized during Human Rights Council sessions

UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples allocated

144

grants for participation of indigenous peoples in key UN mechanisms



Over **2,420**



participants in the 8th Forum on Business and Human Rights

719

new partnerships were established by UN Human Rights' field presences



66

grants were awarded by the UN Human Rights Grants Committee to the total amount of

\$4,272,554

for projects to be implemented in over **28** countries



New cases of reprisals against CSOs or individuals for cooperation with the UN in the field of human rights identified in

48

countries



EMPOWERING SURVIVORS OF TORTURE IN UKRAINE



The use of torture and ill-treatment constitute systemic human rights problems in Ukraine that have been exacerbated by the ongoing armed conflict that broke out in 2014.

As at the end of 2019, more than 13,000 lives had been lost due to the conflict, including at least 3,350 civilians. In addition, hundreds of women and men have been detained, tortured, ill-treated or endured sexual violence in the eastern territory controlled by the self-proclaimed “republics” and in the territory controlled by the Government.

“SOMEBODY HAD TO MAKE SURE THERE WAS DIGNITY”

In the spring of 2014, the life of Hanna Mokrousova changed forever. As an active supporter of Ukraine’s unity, she was detained by armed groups in her home town of Luhansk. When she was released, she fled to Kyiv. She saw how many people were in a similar situation, searching for help that did not exist. “Nobody knew what was next. Somebody had to make sure there was dignity. I had to do something,” recalls Hanna.

‘BLUE BIRD’ SPREADS ITS WINGS

In mid-2015, Hanna pulled together a team of like-minded people and founded an NGO called “Blue Bird” that provides victims of torture and their families with humanitarian, medical, psychological and legal assistance. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) provided essential advice, expertise and financial support. Significant funding also

came from the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, which has supported the organization since 2018.

“I felt their support at every step,” smiles Hanna speaking from a converted Kyiv apartment that serves as the Blue Bird office. From the onset of the armed conflict, the HRMMU interviewed victims of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment from both sides of the contact line. “We saw an urgent need for services for victims of torture and their families. Since Blue Bird’s inception, we have been referring victims and families there,” says Uladzimir Shcherbau from the HRMMU. Over the last five years, at least 3,000 people have received support from Blue Bird.

HELPING FAMILIES HELP THEIR LOVED ONES

Relatives or loved ones of a victim are often the first ones to look for multiple forms of assistance. Since it can take weeks, months or years for a family to reunite, Blue Bird also supports families for the entire time that their loved one is missing or deprived of their liberty.

“We help them to deal with hopelessness...not to give up and continue to fight for the release of a loved one,” says Hanna.

See the full version of this story on the UN Human Rights Exposure platform:
<https://unhumanrights.exposure.co/empowering-survivors-of-torture-in-ukraine>



Hanna Mokrousova, a psychologist specialised in crisis counselling, founded Blue Bird in 2015. © OHCHR

Highlights of pillar results

Participation (P)

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

P1

Stronger laws, policies and practices protect the right to participate and civic space, including online, and the environment for civil society is increasingly safe and enabling.



P2

The UN system and international, regional and national mechanisms provide increased, timely and effective protection to civil society organizations and individuals (including from reprisals).



RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS

Spotlights: Youth Disabilities Women

UN Human Rights continued its long-standing engagement with the **Afghan** Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). On 17 July, following a selection process that took more than one year, the President appointed nine new commissioners (four women, five men), including the new Chair, Shaharзад Akbar. UN Human Rights continued to cooperate with the AIHRC on issues related to its pending re-accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). As a result, the AIHRC was re-accredited with “A” status by the GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditations, in November. The AIHRC held public hearings across 33 provinces, in March and April, as part of its National Inquiry on the Role of Women in Peace and Security in Afghanistan. The hearings provided women in these provinces with an opportunity to raise their concerns regarding political participation and peace-related processes. The AIHRC produced a summary of these concerns, as well as recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders. AIHRC attended hearings in Kabul, Bamyan, Herat, Helmand and Kandahar provinces, where it advocated for the promotion of human and women’s rights in peace and security efforts.

The Office supported the Government of Ethiopia to revise its draft legislation on NGOs, adopted in March. This major achievement led to a significant widening of the space within which civil society can engage in human rights work. For instance, in May, UN Human Rights convened an unprecedented countrywide gathering of CSOs to discuss, among other issues, efforts to build a strong and effective constituency of human rights CSOs and to identify how UN Human Rights can enhance the capacity of CSOs to engage and work on human rights in the country following years of repression of civil space in the country.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders participated in the implementation of the global communication campaign on the twentieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on human rights defenders, which was launched in December 2018. The website established for the occasion (<https://togetherwedefend.org/>) included stories of HRDs that had been champions in protecting civic space in various regions of the world and focused on a variety of human rights issues. The digital campaign featured a flagship video that told the story of grassroots and high profile defenders around the world, two made-for-social videos, campaign branding, an interactive website to showcase the stories of 10 HRDs, including a tool to send a message of solidarity to a defender, and a digital toolkit to enable partners to share the campaign materials on social media. The Special Rapporteur met with HRDs from around the world and devoted his report to the General Assembly to the persistent impunity for human rights violations committed against HRDs. The findings of the report are the result of extensive consultations with HRDs that have taken place since the beginning of his mandate, five regional consultations held in 2018 and 2019, the review of communications sent by the Special Rapporteur and 71 submissions collected through a survey.

In **Colombia**, relevant actors successfully addressed an increasing proportion of cases regarding human rights violations that were identified by the Office. In 2019, there was a reported increase in the violations of the rights of HRDs that often led to their deaths. At the same time, the institution responsible for protecting these groups has not demonstrated an increase in the delivery of effective protection measures. Against this background, UN Human Rights' contributions to the Committee for Risk Assessment and Recommendation of Measures (CERREM) during the reporting period aimed to strengthen the Pathway for Collective Prevention, which would enable government institutions to adopt informed measures in response to threats being faced by HRDs. To date, UN Human Rights has conducted 23 workshops for 952 leaders and HRDs across the country to explain and disseminate the legislation and characteristics of the protection route (requirements, procedures and responsibilities) to local authorities and communities. In addition, UN Human Rights continued to provide assistance related to requests for individual protection. The CERREM submitted information provided by the field presences to relevant institutions. In 2019, UN Human Rights participated in 58 sessions of the CERREM and presented a total of 7,214 cases for risk assessment to determine the level of risk (extreme, extraordinary, ordinary).

P3

Business, policy-makers and the public at large increasingly value and support civic space.



Multi-stakeholder dialogues on HRDs and civic space took place during specific sessions of the Annual Forum on Business and Human Rights, in Geneva, in November, and at regional consultations. Providing guidance for business on engaging, respecting and supporting human rights defenders in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (in coordination with the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders) is in progress.

P4

Civil society assistance to victims of human rights violations is strengthened.



In October, OHCHR and the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), in Morocco, co-organized a workshop entitled “Towards legal protection for the safety and protection of women’s human rights defenders.” For several years, OHCHR worked closely with a group of 40 WHRDs from the Arab region to build their capacity to engage with the international human rights mechanisms. This work resulted in the establishment of the Regional Network for Women Human Rights Defenders in 2019. This year’s workshop included a group of female and male lawyers who were encouraged to collaborate with the WHRDs and use the international human rights complaint systems. The WHRDs were also introduced to two human rights activists who use art as a means to communicate messages about women’s rights.

The UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture are providing financial (and substantive) support to CSOs that provide assistance to victims of human rights violations. In 2019, for example, the directors of two organizations supported by the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, Trial International and Legal Action Worldwide, highlighted that the Voluntary Fund is a crucial partner in assisting them to obtain judicial decisions guaranteeing redress for victims of international crimes, which is essential for victims in the long term. In 2019, Legal Action Worldwide has received support from the Fund for projects throughout South Asia, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, including in **South Sudan** and for Rohingya victims from **Myanmar**. In 2019, Trial International has received support from the Fund for projects assisting victims from a number of countries, including the **DRC, the Gambia, Nepal** and the **Syrian Arab Republic**.

P5

More systematic monitoring of the environment for civic space, including threats to it, takes place.



With support from the special procedures, UN Human Rights conducted a human rights analysis of the draft amendments to legislation “On audio-visual media in the **Republic of Albania.**” Recommendations from UN Human Rights and other UN agencies were presented by the Resident Coordinator to the Albanian Parliament on 25 November. This advocacy effort helped to prevent the adoption of amendments with the potential to limit freedom of expression and human rights activism.

Many human rights violations committed in the **DRC** in the context of restrictions on democratic space were documented before, during and after the December 2018 elections. Following commitments made by President Tshisekedi to improve the human rights situation, there was a widening of democratic space. The most visible sign of this positive development was the release of political prisoners, the return of political exiles and the holding of several peaceful demonstrations. In this context, UN Human Rights observed a 26 per cent decrease in the number of human rights violations related to democratic space compared to 2018 (from 1,054 in 2018 to 778 in 2019).

P6

The voice of people affected by decisions, particularly victims and those who face discrimination, is more clearly heard.



In the **Republic of Moldova**, UN Human Rights created a network for a group of 15 mothers of children from across the country with various types of disabilities, empowering them to advocate both for the rights of their children and for their own rights as caregivers. The mothers supported by UN Human Rights benefited from psychological counselling sessions with a professional psychologist to help them process any difficulties of having a child with disabilities and to feel empowered for conducting advocacy actions. Several capacity-building events that were conducted by UN Human Rights further enhanced their capacity to advocate for the rights of children with disabilities. The group of mothers became a platform for promoting human rights by engaging in dialogue with State authorities, making television appearances and drafting advocacy documents to raise key issues faced by children with disabilities and their family members. In particular, the members of the platform highlighted some of their challenges in exercising the right to health at an event that included participants from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection and 11 mass media outlets.

In **Serbia**, over 30 OPDs and CSOs contributed to public discussions on the drafting of the new National Strategy on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities 2020-2024. The drafting of the new Anti-Discrimination Strategy relied on inputs from CSOs through discussions and questionnaires; consultations that were held between CSOs and the Government on the draft Anti-Discrimination Law in 2019; consultations that were held between the Government, CSOs and women’s organizations on the parameters of the new Strategy on Eradicating Domestic Violence; and the coordination and framing of the critical inputs of OPDs to the Family Law amendments regarding the legal capacity regime. UN Human Rights contributed to achieving this result by helping to create space for CSOs in policymaking processes.

In **Guinea-Bissau**, UN Human Rights significantly contributed to the meaningful participation of rights-holders, especially women and discriminated groups, in selected public processes. Following the mentoring efforts of UN Human Rights, which targeted a core group of 41 HRDs, including 19 women, on human rights monitoring and elections and early warning, the Human Rights Defenders Network monitored the presidential elections in all regions of the country, in November and December, to identify and address threats of human rights violations. In addition, six networks of CSOs were mobilized with the assistance of the European Union, UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNIOGBIS. The networks received support from the Peacebuilding Fund for the joint development and monitoring of an electoral Code of Conduct for the presidential elections, to establish a situation room to identify and monitor possible risks and to provide early warning on threats to the electoral process. The situation room was set up during the first and second rounds of the presidential elections, in November and December. The

civil society initiatives were lauded by stakeholders for their significant contribution to a peaceful environment for the presidential elections and the reduction in post-electoral social conflicts. Those capacities were also developed in relation to the legislative elections held in early 2019.

P7

Public recognition that human rights and accountability make important contributions to effective responses to violence, including terrorism and violent extremism, increases.



Under the MoU between UN Human Rights and the **Tunisian** Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and through engagement with the Independent High Authority of Elections (ISIE), UN Human Rights sensitized approximately 800 imams who are responsible for Friday prayers regarding their obligation to maintain a principle of neutrality during electoral campaigns. In August, UN Human Rights organized a series of regional meetings aimed at enhancing the role of religious actors to facilitate free, honest, transparent and peaceful elections in 2019. UN Human Rights organized four interactive sessions on free speech in the context of countering hate speech and the partiality of imams in the electoral context. The MoRA and the ISIE have since reported that, thanks to the sensitization discussions that were conducted with UN Human Rights' support, they observed no major violations of the principle of neutrality of mosques or incitement to hatred by imams during the electoral period. Through two additional workshops and bilateral meetings that were undertaken within the same framework, UN Human Rights and the MoRA consulted with the trade union of imams and the Tili Foundation, a local CSO with expertise in the education of imams, in order to develop a three-year strategic plan to implement the MoU.

JOB SHADOWING AT THE REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



© Mostafa Hakawati

Mostafa Hakawati, 17

“Human rights in Lebanon are viewed as a dead end. I remember the look in my parents’ eyes when I told them I wanted to pursue a career in human rights and law. They were proud to have a son who wanted to make things right, but they were worried about the practicalities.

For my school’s job shadowing day, I had the opportunity to visit the UN. I didn’t think I’d be lucky enough to be placed in my field of interest, but I was chosen to shadow at the UN Human Rights Regional Office for MENA. When I arrived, I had low expectations that I would take part in anything significant, but the UNV working on Bahrain gave me an immediate crash course on international human rights mechanisms. I was mesmerized! As I interacted with the team, I realized that this was the world where I belonged. I was struck by the productivity that was generated in the span of a day! From 8-9 March, I witnessed the closure of a three-year project and several officers working on individual cases.

What resonated with me the most, however, took place at a panel discussion on Lebanon’s Law No. 105 for the missing and forcibly disappeared. While

there, I looked up and saw a picture of Mehieddine Hashisho, my father’s uncle, who was kidnapped during the Lebanese Civil War. Although the Office didn’t know about this when I was selected, I was deeply touched to see his picture on display. I knew that he hadn’t been forgotten and that his rights and those of his family hadn’t been abandoned. I listened in on the discussions and talked to people who were engaged in the rights of the forcibly disappeared, including human rights officers from the UN Human Rights headquarters, international experts, heads of international and local organizations, ministers and deputies.

These experiences helped me to decide that I want to strive for a better future through human rights. I look forward to joining the community that is working to make this dream a reality.”