

Participation (P)

Enhancing participation and protecting civic space



PUBLIC MOBILIZATION



Global campaigns

9.7 million followers on social media (across all UN Human Rights platforms, 27% more than in 2019)

376,000 mentions of #StandUp4HumanRights

548 video stories (including 138 video messages from the High Commissioner)

120 feature stories (UN Human Rights website and social media)



In the field

700 advocacy campaigns

6,000 press releases/statements

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH MATERIALS



Universal Human Rights Index

48,594 unique visitors to the website (a 32% increase from 2019)



Publications

6.19 million visits to online publications (a 27% increase from 2019)

Over **42,875** printed materials dispatched (to 30 countries)

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS



With CSOs

950 women's rights organizations

450 youth-led organizations

370 organizations of persons with disabilities



Human Rights Day

Almost **600 million** views of GIFs (created with GIPHY)

32.4 million persons reached through a photo challenge ("The World Is In Our Hands," with photographer Justin Wu)

ENGAGEMENT WITH UN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS



HRC and UPR Voluntary Trust Funds

10 delegates of States supported to attend UPR reviews (out of a total of 28 States reviewed)

108 requests processed by the HRC Help Desk for Small States (during regular sessions of the HRC)



Intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the UN

New cases/developments from **45** countries



Social Forum

1,000 participants (from 100 countries, with a focus on "Combating poverty and inequalities")

Empowering young people to participate in the promotion of their rights

The right to participation is one of the most important principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Yet, a “[Global survey on youth and COVID-19](#)” conducted by UN Human Rights, ILO and other partners demonstrated that young people have been hit hard by the pandemic. In particular, respondents from 112 countries, 18-34 years of age, observed the impacts of COVID-19 on their right to participation in public affairs and peaceful protests.

Consequently, many young people channelled their creativity into countering the spread of the virus and raising awareness in their communities. Respondent Nikhat Akhtar, from India, wrote, “I am fighting against the spread of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19.”

As noted by a report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on youth and human rights, “Investing in young people’s rights and empowering youth can lead to more equal societies and positive social change” (A/HRC/39/33). To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools. During the year, UN Human Rights worked to ensure that human rights were more relevant, accessible and useful to young people in the Asia-Pacific region, enabling them to play a vital role in their own development and that of their communities.

In the Pacific, the Office built the capacity of 25 youth representatives to use the international human rights mechanisms and fight for stronger climate action. Sunishma Singh, of the Fiji Youth Council, participated in this initiative: “Knowing

there are human rights mechanisms out there that can be used to hold States and private sector actors accountable for the climate crisis strengthens my resolve to fight for climate action,” he said. Singh and his peers are leading movements to participate in and guide the political debate on climate change.

In Cambodia, UN Human Rights and six youth rights associations organized the Youth Human Rights Champion Competition. Six youth groups, with participants aged 15-23 years, were selected to produce two-minute videos on human rights that are relevant to them, including the right to vote, the right to education of sex workers’ children, the right of vulnerable groups to participate in public affairs, the rights of migrant workers and equality between women and men. The videos can be accessed on the [UN Human Rights-Cambodia Facebook page](#).

In Papua New Guinea, UN Human Rights and the HRA partnered with a CSO to launch an innovative initiative in selected schools entitled “Human Rights Games,” enabling students to learn about and promote their rights.

The voices, creativity and engagement of young people can help shape more inclusive, equal and resilient societies. UN Human Rights is taking steps to make their fundamental right to participate and be heard a reality, including in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.



Launch of the Kedar Human Rights Cup in selected schools of Papua New Guinea. The event commemorates the role of UN Human Rights Adviser Kedar Poudyal. © OHCHR

Highlights of pillar results

Participation (P)

Participation of rights-holders and their representative organizations, reflecting the diversity of society and ensuring those most underrepresented are involved, is key to realizing the promise of human rights for all people. When civil society engages freely and actively in policy development and implementation, policies are more informed, effective, efficient and sustainable. Furthermore, civil society is

generally the closest point of assistance for victims of human rights violations and provide legal, medical, social and financial support. Major obstacles to civil society participation exist at all levels, including within UN forums, and shrinking civic space creates a major gap in the promotion and protection of human rights. While new technologies facilitate the expansion of civil society networks, they also create

new avenues for control of civil society movements and speech, often under the pretext of security. UN Human Rights is uniquely placed to monitor and protect civil society space and the international human rights mechanisms rely heavily on civil society to collect information and support the implementation of their recommendations.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

P1 – ENABLING NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK for civil society

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



RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS

Spotlights: Disabilities Women Youth


UN Human Rights served as a bridge between **civil society and social media platforms**. In February, the Office helped bring together NHRIs, journalists, human rights defenders and social media platforms, with a view to identifying key obstacles to online civic space and new avenues through which they can be addressed. These efforts led to more regular engagement between tech companies and human rights organizations. It also established **channels of communication with social media platforms**, enabling UN Human Rights to engage in advocacy regarding content moderation and communicate its concerns about incitement cases.

As a result of advocacy undertaken by UN Human Rights, the Government of **Bolivia** published Decree 4236, on 14 May, which **derogated provisions of Decree 4231 that limited freedom of expression in the context of COVID-19**. The previous Decree allowed authorities to file criminal complaints against those who failed to comply with quarantine orders or disseminated information that allegedly had the potential to put public health at risk or provoke uncertainty among the population. The Office issued public messages, conducted advocacy meetings and sent a technical document to authorities that highlighted the incompatibility of Decree 4231 with the right to freedom of expression, provided in article 19 of ICCPR, due to its violation of the principles of necessity, proportionality and legality.

In **Mauritania**, a decree was adopted, in July, on the **establishment of an observatory on the rights of women and girls**. UN Human Rights advocated for this result through consistent engagement with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Family Welfare. In addition, UN Human Rights undertook a study and organized a technical workshop on the subject.

UN Human Rights collaborated with the co-chairs of the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Working Group to organize **consultative dialogues with civil society** actors to gather their views and ensure the **Libya Peace Dialogue Forum (LPDF)** proceedings were **inclusive and rights-**

based. A number of principles were incorporated into the LPDF road map, including the importance of achieving equality between women and men and pursuing comprehensive national reconciliation based on the principles of transitional justice. Firm commitments were undertaken to secure the increased engagement of women in these processes. For instance, a quota was established to ensure that women are selected for a minimum of 30 per cent of ministerial and deputy appointments. The LPDF road map was unanimously accepted by participants and annexed to the outcome document of the Forum.

 In **Kyrgyzstan**, as part of an ongoing programme supported by UN Human Rights to increase the **participation of underrepresented groups in public life**, 23 persons (14 women, nine men, including nine persons from ethnic minorities and six persons with disabilities) completed a three-month internship programme in a number of State and municipal bodies of the Issyk-Kul region. The State Personnel Service proposed that the programme be formally established.

P2 – PROTECTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

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



UN Human Rights finalized a **guidance document for the UN system on preventing and addressing reprisals**. In June, the Office organized a consultation with UN partners and distributed the guidance for further refinement and use by UN actors in various contexts, such as peace operations, work on counter-terrorism, development and international finance. The Office also mapped the engagement of Member States and civil society with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies to provide guidance and enhance the protection measures of Member States.

In a landmark development that was spearheaded by UN Human Rights, with support from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the UN adopted a **Guidance Note on the promotion and protection of civic space**. The Guidance Note recognizes civic space as a threshold issue for the successful implementation of all three pillars of the United Nations and commits all parts of the system to taking steps to promote and protect civic space. The launch of the Guidance Note, in December, was attended by more than 800 civil society representatives from around the world.

With support from UN Human Rights, the **Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and association** raised awareness about 164 situations, including 24 cases related to **laws or draft laws that could have a negative impact on the right to association** and on trade unions, including in Bulgaria, Guatemala, Honduras, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Tanzania and Ukraine. The Government of Ireland acknowledged the legitimate concerns regarding the 1997 Electoral Act and committed to the establishment, by the end of 2021, of an independent Electoral Commission, which will review the Act in its totality.

Throughout the year, UN Human Rights in **Colombia** coordinated its work with the Office of the Ombudsperson, resulting in the issuance of **50 early warnings concerning attacks against human rights defenders**. Furthermore, the enhanced collaboration between State entities, including the Office of the Procurator General and the Office of the Ombudsperson, resulted in enhanced analysis of early warning responses and the promotion of **coordinated actions by authorities**. UN Human Rights provided technical assistance to ensure the compliance of these processes with international human rights standards.

P3 – PUBLIC SUPPORT for CIVIC SPACE

Business, policymakers and the public at large increasingly value and support civic space.



A particularly relevant issue in 2020 was the crucial **role of civil society in the context of COVID-19**. The High Commissioner and other senior UN Human Rights officials regularly advocated for enhanced access to reliable information and space for the expression of critical views as key elements of an effective response to the pandemic and efforts for building back better.

In May, UN Human Rights developed a **Guidance Note on civic space and COVID-19**, which was translated into four languages and widely disseminated (it was downloaded approximately 5,000 times by visitors from over 80 countries).

P4 – ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

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



In **Azerbaijan**, UN Human Rights supported the provision of **free legal assistance to members of vulnerable groups**, in cooperation with the Ombudsperson and the Bar Association. As a result, 982 individuals (486 women, 496 men), including unemployed persons, persons with disabilities, older persons, pensioners and internally displaced persons (IDPs), received legal assistance during the year. The services primarily focused on social and economic rights, including social security, labour and property rights and the rights to health and education.

UN Human Rights provided support to the **“WE” Women Human Rights Defenders Network**, which was established with the support of the Office in 2019 and unites 40 WHRDs from 14 countries in the **Middle East and North Africa region**. In 2020, the Network organized a regional online symposium on inequalities between the rights of women and men under nationality legislation. The Network also disseminated recommendations to the media, religious and community leaders and legislative bodies.

P5 – CIVIC SPACE MONITORING

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



Advocacy undertaken by UN Human Rights contributed to more effective **actions from EU regional institutions in response to threats to civic space**. The European Democracy Action Plan, the EU Strategy for the Effective Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU Digital Strategy, all of which were adopted in 2020, recognize the need to protect civic space in Europe, both offline and online.

In **Costa Rica**, the Office worked closely with the judiciary to move forward with a **protocol for investigating human rights violations against human rights defenders**. UN Human Rights supported the adoption of a comprehensive protection policy that includes opportunities for participation, early warning, the provision of training to State agents and overall guidelines on crimes committed against HRDs. In **El Salvador**, the Office supported the development of **legislation** that provides a definition of HRDs and establishes relevant **protection mechanisms**, in line with recommendations issued by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. In November, the Legislative Assembly discussed a draft version of the legislation with CSOs.

P6 – PEOPLE HAVE a VOICE

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



In the **Republic of Moldova**, UN Human Rights supported the creation and functioning of an **NGO Task Force on COVID-19 and Human Rights**, which included 56 national and local CSOs, including from the Transnistria region. The work of the Task Force resulted in **contributions to policy and programme design and implementation** and was conducive to a better understanding of the needs of vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

Somalia's 2019 ratification of CRPD opened the avenue for the **increased engagement of persons with disabilities in public processes** that are related to the protection of their rights. In Somaliland, UN Human Rights supported civil society to conduct consultations aimed at revising the Somaliland Disability Policy as a contribution to the drafting of disability legislation that is in compliance with CRPD. The Office supported the Federal Ministry of Women and Human Rights in Mogadishu to conduct consultations on the Persons with Disabilities Bill, which is ready to be tabled before the Cabinet.

The Office contributed to the **protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia** by supporting the use of **human rights-based protocols**, which were developed with indigenous authorities and the Ministry of the Interior, to facilitate the implementation of the peace agreements in the territories of indigenous peoples and communities of people of African descent, such as the Nasa people, the Renacer Negro Community Council, the Greater Community Council of the Comprehensive Farmers' Association of Atrato and the Bari people.

In **Guatemala**, UN Human Rights supported youth-led organizations to promote positive human rights change. It organized a regional meeting with youth leaders from 11 organizations in the eastern part of Guatemala, resulting in the establishment of the Connected Youth Initiative. Similarly, the Office supported the creation of the **Youth Human Rights Defenders Network**, which unites 26 organizations and offers a space for dialogue and technical assistance on the human rights of youth, with a focus on participation and the right to education and work.

P7 – Human rights RESPONSE to VIOLENCE

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



UN Human Rights released a series of animated videos entitled "Human Rights Explained" as part of a **campaign to raise awareness of and support for human rights among Cambodian youth**. The campaign reached 744,800 Facebook users and the videos were shared with youth organizations, some of which used them in training activities. The Office also worked with six youth organizations on a Young Human Rights Champion Competition to recognize youth support for human rights issues. Participants aged 15-23 years produced six videos on a variety of topics, including the right to vote, the participation of persons with disabilities, the equal right to work for women and men, migrant workers and discrimination against the children of sex workers and former prisoners. The videos were posted on the UN Human Rights - Cambodia Facebook page, resulting in approximately 2.1 million reaches and 101,000 engagements.

Under the MoU between UN Human Rights and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in **Tunisia**, the Office supported the **creation of a Monitoring Unit** within the Ministry to receive, analyse and report on **complaints about alleged human rights violations committed by or against imams and professional worship staff**. While the Unit originally focused on Muslim clerics, additional advocacy by the Office resulted in the extension of its mandate to cover Christian and Jewish clerics. Moreover, a hotline was created to enable clerics who are victims of violations to contact the Unit. In 2020, the Monitoring Unit issued its first quarterly report, which provided quantitative and qualitative data that are disaggregated by gender.

Supporting Syrian civil society actors in their struggle to claim and defend their rights



Jalal Al Hamad, Syrian lawyer and activist. © Photo courtesy of Jalal Al Hamad

“I had to leave because there was an execution order against me,” said Jalal Al Hamad, a Syrian lawyer. Jalal was 25 in 2011 and the war in Syria was in its early stages.

The young man left government-controlled Damascus to reach Deir Ezzor, an area in north-eastern Syria that was an opposition stronghold at the time. When ISIL took control of the zone, he began to fear for his life. Forced to flee again, he arrived in Gaziantep, in neighbouring Turkey.

Nearly 10 years later, Jalal’s country has been ripped apart by a war that shows no sign of ending. Countless women, men and children have been killed or injured and millions have fled. Last year, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted, “During the early years of this murderous conflict, when the casualties were in the tens, then hundreds, then thousands, the world showed considerable concern about what was happening. Now, airstrikes kill and maim significant numbers of civilians several times a week and the response seems to be a collective shrug.”

While the war in Syria fades away from the spotlight, people like Jalal continue to work tirelessly to raise awareness about the ongoing severe human rights violations in the country.

Jalal is now the Director of Justice for Life, an organization established in 2015 with teams inside and outside Syria that monitor events and human rights violations in the Deir Ezzor region. As a result of

interviews with victims and witnesses, the CSO documented hundreds of violations, including killings under torture, extrajudicial killings and disease and malnutrition as a consequence of besiegement.

Jalal’s desire to speak out against such atrocities stemmed from a need to provide a balanced voice. “I wanted to address these violations objectively and neutrally and to be the voice of victims.”

Justice for Life engages with the international human rights mechanisms to report its findings, including the Human Rights Council. The organization recently signed an MoU with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes Under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011. UN Human Rights has interacted extensively with Jalal and his colleagues to monitor the human rights situation in north-east Syria and promote human rights-based approaches to their programming and advocacy efforts.

“We have become a hub for victims,” said Jalal. “Men, women and children are coming to us without fear. This building of trust in the community has been a major success factor, which we hope will help us achieve the ultimate goal: justice.”



At an event to celebrate International Youth Day, Zaira Begg from the Fiji Youth Council presents a mural that was designed and painted by young leaders from across the region, highlighting what climate action and resilience during the pandemic means to Pacific youth. © OHCHR