OHCHR’s approach to field work

Background

The work of human rights field presences on the protection and promotion of human rights is carried out with support from OHCHR headquarters, in cooperation with UN partners in the field, Government actors, regional organizations, civil society and national human rights institutions (NHRIs). In keeping with the coherence agenda of the UN, OHCHR provides senior United Nations officials of other entities with strategic advice regarding human rights matters when they engage with particular Member States and regional organizations.

Based on dialogue with national counterparts, the Office’s activities at country level (through headquarters or field presences) aim at preventing and reducing human rights violations. This occurs mainly through strengthening national protection systems, ensuring that Government authorities are aware of their human rights obligations, and designing effective remedies to overcome obstacles to the realization of human rights. Through its programmes in the field, OHCHR likewise seeks to ensure that national authorities and civil society actors have the capacity to address human rights concerns and are better informed about international human rights standards and how to translate these into laws, regulations and policies, ensuring that rights-holders are better protected and empowered. In particular, OHCHR supports efforts to establish or strengthen justice and accountability mechanisms at national level, including better monitoring and investigation and redress of violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

In 2011, OHCHR established, in agreement with the Government, a Country Office in Tunisia and was laying the foundations for a Regional Office for North Africa. OHCHR also deployed Human Rights Officers within the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). At the end of 2011, OHCHR was running or supporting 58 field presences.
**Types of field presences**

OHCHR field presences fall into two categories: stand-alone presences and collaborative arrangements. The first category comprises those offices, namely country, stand-alone and regional offices, under the direct supervision of OHCHR. The second category comprises field presences with double reporting lines, namely, human rights components of peace or political missions who report to the Head of the mission and the High Commissioner and human rights advisers (HRAs) in United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) who report to the UN Resident Coordinator and the High Commissioner. The decision to establish an OHCHR country, stand-alone or regional presence is made with the concerned Government, taking into account the overall human rights situation, security considerations, the presence and role of other international actors on the ground, as well as available human and financial resources, administrative arrangements and the scope of activities to be undertaken.

**Country and stand-alone Offices**

OHCHR country and stand-alone offices are established on the basis of a standard agreement between OHCHR and the 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 13 country or stand-alone offices, namely, 11 country offices in Bolivia, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Togo, Tunisia and Uganda and two stand-alone offices in Kosovo and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The mandate of the Office in Nepal was not renewed by the Government of Nepal at the end of 2011 and the Office will therefore draw down its operations in early 2012.

**Regional Offices and Centres**

Regional offices are similarly established on the basis of an agreement with the host Government and in consultation with other countries in the region. These offices focus on cross-cutting regional human rights concerns and play an important role in supporting Governments in their engagement with the UN human rights mechanisms (treaty bodies, special procedures and Universal Periodic Review (UPR)). They work closely with regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations and with civil society. Regional offices complement the expertise of OHCHR country offices by providing support on institutional and thematic issues. In addition to the regional offices, OHCHR has regional centres that are established in accordance with General Assembly resolutions and imbued with a specific mandate. Regional offices and centres are funded by both the UN regular budget and voluntary contributions.

OHCHR has 12 regional presences comprised 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 (Beirut), Central Asia (Bishkek), Europe (Brussels), Central America (Panama City) and 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). A regional office for North Africa is expected to be located in Cairo. Pending a final decision by the Egyptian authorities, regional activities are temporarily being conducted from Tunisia.

**Human rights components of United Nations Peace and Political Missions**

OHCHR supports human rights components of peacekeeping and political missions by providing expert advice, technical assistance and functional support on human rights issues. The Head of a human rights component in a peace or political mission is the representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the mission country and has a dual reporting line: one to the Head of the peace mission and one to the High Commissioner. Based on Security Council resolutions, human rights components of peace missions typically focus on:

- Observing, investigating, documenting and reporting on the human rights situation;
- Ensuring that peace processes promote justice and equity;
- Preventing and redressing violations of human rights, with a focus on the protection of civilians and transitional justice;
- Building human rights capacities and institutions; and
- Mainstreaming human rights into all UN programmes and activities.

Most human rights staff in peace missions are contracted by the Department of Field Support which services peacekeeping and special political operations. OHCHR provides guidance and technical advice to the human rights components, and contributes to some technical cooperation activities through its voluntary contributions. The Office also participates in interdepartmental technical
assessment missions for the design, establishment and reconfiguration of peace operations.

Fifteen UN peace missions incorporate human rights promotion and protection into their mandated work, namely in: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur) and Timor-Leste.

Human Rights Advisers in United Nations Country Teams

Human rights advisers are deployed at the request of UN Resident Coordinators on behalf of the UNCTs. Advisers assist the Resident Coordinators, Heads of UN agencies, and members of UNCTs to integrate human rights in their programming strategies and implementation and build and strengthen national human rights capacities. Other functions include:

- Advising and providing training to independent national human rights institutions;
- Advising duty-bearers on how to promote UN normative values;
- Building networks with, and providing practical support to, civil society actors; and
- Providing operational support to human rights training and/or national capacity-building activities.

Human rights advisers are normally funded through extrabudgetary contributions. In some instances, cost-sharing agreements have been concluded with UNDP and in other cases, these posts have been funded by the Action 2 programme (which has been superseded by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Human Rights Mainstreaming Mechanism (UNDG-HRM) since November 2009).

OHCHR has 18 human rights advisers in Chad, Ecuador, Great Lakes (based in Burundi), Honduras, Kenya, Madagascar, Moldova, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Serbia, Sri Lanka, the Southern Caucasus (based in Tbilisi and covering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine.

Headquarters Support to Field Operations

At the end of 2011, 123 staff worked at headquarters in the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division. The Division during the past year has fully implemented its new structure, with three Branches to allow a more thorough coverage of geographic regions: the Americas, Europe and Central Asia Branch; the Asia-Pacific and Middle East Branch; and the Africa Branch. The Peace Mission Support and Rapid Response Section, the National Institutions and Regional Mechanisms Section and the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD) Universal Periodic Review Team reinforce headquarters' support to the field and other UN partners on the ground. Internal coordination for country-based initiatives, including with the treaty bodies, special procedures, the Human Rights Council, the UPR and thematic areas, has been further strengthened.

Cooperation with Humanitarian Agencies

At global level, OHCHR integrates human rights considerations and advocates for the adoption of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) into the strategies and policies of humanitarian initiatives through its engagement in a number of inter-agency mechanisms. These include the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and other humanitarian processes, such as the IASC Sub-Working Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning, the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs, the Global Protection Cluster Working Group, the Humanitarian Coordinators Group and the Protection Capacity Steering Committee (ProCap). At field level, as a member of Humanitarian Country Teams and Protection Clusters, OHCHR is increasingly involved in humanitarian preparedness and response activities in both conflict crises and natural disasters, including by participating in the development of Common Humanitarian Action Plans, Flash Appeals and Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAPs). OHCHR’s participation in CAPs has benefited from more coordinated support from headquarters and streamlining within budgetary and strategic planning processes. In addition, OHCHR currently leads inter-agency Protection Cluster efforts in Fiji, Haiti, Nepal, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Timor-Leste, while field presences are active members in Protection Clusters in many other countries. In May 2011, OHCHR endorsed an office-wide Strategy and four-year Action Plan for its engagement in humanitarian action to make the Office a more predictable, timely and effective actor in humanitarian preparedness and response.