



**Oral statement by Ms. Mariclaire Acosta
Member of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Technical
Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights (VFTC)¹**

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Item 10
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President,

Deputy High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

**Distinguished representatives member and observer States of the Human Rights
Council and of civil society**

Thank you for your opening comments, Deputy High Commissioner, Ms. Flavia Pansieri. I would like to thank you on behalf of the Chair of the Board of Trustees², who has been unable to attend the session today, and of its members, for the excellent support received and collaboration in the accomplishment of the Board's mandate under the leadership of the High Commissioner, Ms. Navi Pillay. We look forward to having possibilities to continue working closely with Ms. Pillay in a future role.

I present this report to the Human Rights Council, following resolution 18/18, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights (VFTC).

The VFTC, established by the Commission on Human Rights, is the second largest trust fund administered by OHCHR. The Fund provides financial support for international technical cooperation at the field level to build and strengthen national capacities, including national institutions and civil society, for improved domestic implementation of international human rights standards. Requests for technical cooperation in the field of human rights, as supported by the Voluntary Fund and otherwise, continue to

¹ In relation to the presentation of the Annual Report of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, A/HRC/26/51 of 24 June 2014 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

² The Board's five members, appointed by the Secretary General from the five geographic regions, are Lin Lea Lim (Malaysia), Fatima Mbaye (Mauritania), Sozar Subari (Georgia), Christopher Sidoti (Australia) (current Chair) and myself, Mariclaire Acosta Urquidi (Mexico). The Board's Chairpersonship rotates annually among its members and I will take over the responsibility from Mr. Sidoti at the end of the month following the decision of the Board during its last session in Mexico City.



increase, in part as a result of States' wish to implement recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review. For that reason the Board's mandate was extended in 2013 to cover as well the work of the Voluntary Fund on Technical Cooperation and Assistance of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR Trust Fund on Technical Cooperation).

During the reporting period the Board commenced to implement its new responsibilities under the UPR Trust Fund holding specific focused sessions during the two Board sessions and actively providing advice and suggesting courses of action regarding its operationalization. The Board has particularly stressed the importance of ensuring the sustainability of the impact of funded projects as well as the need to identify adequate avenues for the active engagement of civil society, especially non-governmental organisations and national human rights institutions, in State UPR follow-up efforts³.

In managing and overseeing the two Funds we have found relevance and complementarities, reflecting the strategic decision to extend the Board's mandate.

Excellencies,

The Board's role has changed significantly since its establishment. As endorsed by the Council in 2008, the Board offers advice to the High Commissioner and her Office on policy and strategy in technical cooperation in the field of human rights.

In 2013 and in this current year, the Board had numerous opportunities to provide this advice in the course of the preparation of the OHCHR 2014-2017 Management Plan, the first of this nature covering a four-year period. Further, in accordance with its practice since 2012, the Board held one of its two annual sessions in a location where the High Commissioner has a field presence, enabling Board members to acquire more direct knowledge of the nature and effectiveness of the High Commissioner's technical cooperation work at the country level.

The Board's report today covers its thirty-eight and thirty-ninth sessions and updates the use of the Fund during the period under review, supplementing the annual report to the Human Rights Council.

³ The most consolidated up-date on the use of this Fund can be found in the report to the Council A/HRC/26/54.



At its thirty-eighth session, held in Geneva in November 2013, the Board was briefed on and contributed to the final stages of the preparation of the 2014-2017 OHCHR Management Plan and discussed with OHCHR's geographic and thematic sections relevant aspects of the technical cooperation programme pertinent to each of the thematic strategies. Furthermore, the Board examined further the mechanisms in place through the OHCHR Performance Monitoring System to monitor and report on technical cooperation results under each of the thematic strategies, focus areas and type of field presences receiving support from the VFTC and reviewed the Fund's financial information and projected allocations for 2014. During the session the Board received also an up-date on the main developments at the Human Rights Council in the area of technical cooperation.

Measuring impact at the country level and monitoring programme implementation are becoming less challenging for OHCHR as all of its presences and all Headquarters structures move to using the online performance monitoring system, which was designed to plan, monitor and report on results for the entire OHCHR programming cycle. The Board commends OHCHR and its staff for its efforts during the period under review to continue investing in the system. The upgrades implemented since the last briefing to the Board, including the financial module, as well as the efforts to ensure full use of the system by Headquarters structures also, were assessed very favorably by the Board. The system is proving a critical contribution for OHCHR to be a fully results-based organization, transparent and accountable to all stakeholders. The Board encourages the UN Secretariat to consider OHCHR's tool as a good practice to be taken into consideration when developing Results Based Management systems.

The thirty-ninth session of the Board of Trustees was held in the field, in Mexico, in February 2014. This year the Board was keen to visit an OHCHR presence in Latin America for the first time to see for itself the commonalities and differences in approach and to learn from the Office's experience in the region. The OHCHR Office in Mexico is fully funded by the VFTC.

The Board found that OHCHR priorities in Mexico are in line with what the national partners requested and expected and that the Office continues to be seen, more than ten years after its establishment, as a critical and reliable contributor for all partners interviewed. The Board considers that, while the current programme remains relevant to



the human rights context in the country, the Office would benefit from strengthening its efforts, together with the relevant state institutions at both federal and state levels, to continue translating specific needs into concrete capacity building actions, including in relation to the free, prior and informed consent principle in relation to land, natural resources and territories for indigenous peoples and the situations of migrants and of victims of human rights violations in their access to justice and reparation, in particular for victims of enforced disappearances. The Board takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to the Government of Mexico and relevant partners for the excellent support provided and dialogues held during the visit.

While in Mexico, the Board also had an opportunity to review technical assistance and cooperation projects being funded by the Trust Fund for UPR Implementation with focused discussion on overall policy guidance in this area. The Board was pleased to see that provision of technical assistance funded from the Trust Fund were being made in line with the Board's proposed broad principles for technical cooperation last year. The Board was able to provide inputs into OHCHR's current thinking on how to support States in implementing UPR outcomes as well as the recommendations of all international human rights mechanisms. More detailed information on the operationalization of the Voluntary Fund for UPR Implementation is accessible in the OHCHR written annual update A/HRC/26/54.

The Board considers its field visits strategically critical for its work and mandate. It has so far managed to visit in-situ programmes by two types of field presences, namely country or stand-alone Offices and Human Rights Advisors. It will explore a visit to a Human Rights Component of a Peace Mission as a priority for the field visit of 2015. As demonstrated recently in Mexico, in-country discussions are particularly helpful in identifying in concrete terms the priority areas for further technical cooperation work, challenges and best practices by the Office and for the Board to be able to fulfil its policy and strategic advisory role.

As I have mentioned, Board Members participated actively, at the invitation of the Office, in the preparation of the new OHCHR four-year plan. Through this process, the Board was able to analyze the technical cooperation components of each of the six OHCHR thematic priorities and to offer views and advice on effective avenues for the Office to continue strengthening its technical cooperation work within each region as an



integral part its overall programme. The Board noted in particular the significant progress achieved through this exercise in recognizing that strengthening democratic society is a long lasting investment for development. It welcomed the new thematic strategy “Widening the democratic space” and its sharp focus on strengthening and building national human rights capacities as a critical means to the prevention of human rights violation and conflicts, which ultimately has been proved critical to sustainable economic development.

The Board was pleased to see in the plan the specific focus on some critical human rights issues and concerns where OHCHR has substantive expertise, such as the particular situations of individuals and groups facing discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity and the persons defending them. The Board is encouraged to observe that its contributions throughout the entire strategic planning process had been taken into account. The Board remains committed to continue providing advice in the implementation phase of this plan.

The Board had the opportunity during this reporting year to pay particular attention to the Office’s efforts in ensuring integration of gender and women’s rights dimensions throughout its technical cooperation programmes. The Board was able to identify and advise on the challenges and possibilities experienced by field presences in this area; best practices in the implementation of technical cooperation generally and the design and implementation of the strategies for the integration of gender and women’s rights components through all the technical cooperation work of the Office for each specific region. For example, the Board found particularly notable the regional expertise in the Americas in addressing gender based killings (femicide), in particular the development of protocols for their investigation and the innovative ways of support to other field presences and States in the region to develop similar protocols, particularly those receiving support from the VFTC. The Board found equally encouraging the strategies of the Gender Adviser in Beirut in providing countries in the region and the UNCT with expertise in the area of women’s participation and legal grounds for gender equality. Finally the Board welcomed initiatives undertaken by the Regional Adviser in Dakar to advise governments on nationality laws and issues around women's political participation.



The Board is convinced that these increased interactions at various levels have furthered its capacities to contribute more effectively to the technical cooperation efforts of the Office, including strengthening its strategy, policy and practice.

Excellencies,

Last year the Board proposed some principles for effective technical cooperation in the field of human rights. We would like to continue elaborating specifically on each of those key components.

The first of the components of effective technical cooperation described is its basis in the universality and indivisibility of all human rights and includes both the protection and the promotion of human rights. This is the key objective of technical cooperation – better promotion and protection of human rights. The second component, building and strengthening national frameworks and institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, is the strategy and methodology for achieving the key objective.

The term ‘national frameworks and institutions’ is an inclusive term that incorporates the whole range of mechanisms available to States to fulfil their international human rights obligations including the rule of law, legal and political accountability, democratically elected parliaments, independent courts and independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs), national development institutions, just to mention a few. Technical cooperation appropriately addresses the strengthening of these systems. The strategy of each field presence, no matter what its nature, must therefore be to ensure that national frameworks and institutions are built in a sustainable manner that will provide the best possible promotion and protection of human rights and that these institutions are able to continue their functions once the technical support being provided comes to an end, a reality in view of the limitations of resources and the increasing demands from all regions of the world.

Whatever specific approaches are taken, the priority strategy for effective technical cooperation has to be building and strengthening national institutions and frameworks. Only in this way can the international community that has directly or indirectly provided the technical cooperation ensure that it has long term benefit. Only in this way can the individual State that has sought international assistance acquire the capacity to ensure itself its full compliance with its international human rights obligations. The Board is of



the view that the newly established thematic priority on widening the democratic space provides a solid framework to support States in these endeavours and hopes it would attract necessary resources to be adequately implemented.

Excellencies,

In 2013 the Fund continued to provide resources for technical cooperation to build strong human rights frameworks at national level.

During the period 1 January to 31 December 2013, the VFTC continued to provide resources totalling USD20.3 million for technical cooperation to build strong human rights frameworks at national level. In 2013, USD7 million were received in earmarked contributions. Therefore OHCHR allocated USD11.9 million from unearmarked resources to cover the VFTC's expenditure.

Through the VFTC, assistance was provided in a wide range of substantive technical cooperation areas in 33 different countries and territories. This includes support to 16 human rights advisers,⁴ 11 human rights components of peace missions⁵ and 6 country offices.⁶ The details of these are provided in the 2013 annual report of the VFTC and the OHCHR Annual Report 2013.

Despite the tangible results of the technical cooperation work of OHCHR in many parts of the world and the Board's continuous appeals, the financial situation of the Fund remains regrettably of a serious concern with its reserves being further depleted because of the increasing demands and the continuing lower level of donations.

The Board takes this opportunity to encourage contributions to the Fund from a wide range of donors, including traditional donors, States that benefit from the Fund, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, philanthropic trusts and individuals. Their contributions to the Fund are critical to continue efforts to respond positively to the increasing demands.

⁴ Chad, Ecuador, Honduras, Kenya, Madagascar, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Maldives, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste, South Caucasus (Georgia) and Ukraine.

⁵ Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur (Sudan), Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

⁶ Bolivia, Kosovo*, Mauritania, Mexico, State of Palestine**, and Togo. Reference to Kosovo* should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo. Reference to Palestine** should be understood in compliance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/19



The Board expresses its deep appreciation for the quality of assistance we receive from our Secretariat and also from offices of the OHCHR, with particular thanks to the field presences visited. We are encouraged by the deep commitment and high level of competence of so many of those we work with and so many of those we meet during the course of our work.

I thank you.

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