

CONCEPT NOTE

THE ROLE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IN PROMOTING THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PACIFIC REGION AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

“Discussions linked to sustainable development are also now taking place under multiple Council agenda items – with resolutions adopted under agenda items 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10. This trend highlights the importance the Council is placing on the SDGs, and emphasizes just how important the 2030 Agenda is to the realization of interconnected human rights.”

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[Michelle Bachelet](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019

I. Background

Since its adoption, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been gaining visibility at all levels of international discourse.¹ The UN Human Rights Council is no exception. The linking of these two agenda’s should come as no surprise, especially when research has shown that over 90% of SDG targets can be linked to obligations codified in one of the nine core human rights treaties.²

Between September 2015 and September 2019, the Human Rights Council held 13 regular sessions, during which it adopted a total of **425 texts** (including resolutions, decisions and President’s statements and excluding UPR outcomes decisions) on all of its 10 agenda items.

A total of **186** texts mentioned the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs, representing **44%** of the total number of all adopted texts. Of those documents, **eight** specifically referred to the 2030 Agenda in the title, this number has **not changed** since last year, i.e. no new resolutions mentioning SDGs in their title have been adopted in 2019. **178** documents mentioned the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs in the body of the text, which 41.% of all adopted texts. Reference to the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs was made in **237 preambular** and in **187 operative** paragraphs of these resolutions and decisions.

¹ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([A/RES/70/1](#))

² <https://www.humanrights.dk/>

Most mentions appear in resolutions adopted under **agenda item 3 (89.5%)**. However, references to Agenda 2030 have become more diversified and have appeared in resolutions adopted under agenda items **2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10**.

The prevalence of SDGs/2030 Agenda references varies across Council sessions. From 2016-2019, the number of HRC resolutions referring to SDGs/2030 Agenda for the June sessions tends to be higher than for texts adopted in the other two regular sessions, i.e. March and September. Generally, the number of HRC resolutions referring to SDGs/2030 Agenda **peak during the June sessions**. In addition, there has been an increase in references to specific targets and indicators, compared to more generic references in earlier resolutions.

Reports by the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the OHCHR

Out of a total of **305 reports by the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the OHCHR** presented at the regular sessions during 2016-2019, **148** contained specific references to the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs, representing **49%** of the total number of reports presented during this timeframe. A **downward trend** can be identified with the highest number of reports mentioning SDGs peaking at 40 in 2017.. So far September 2019 saw the **lowest percentage** of reports referring to the SDGs since 2016 with only 35% of reports referencing the 2030 Agenda, compared with 70% last September.

Comprehensive domestic efforts directed at implementing the 2030 Agenda. More and more States translate and integrate the SDGs into their domestic policies. For example, Samoa has an online Agenda 2030 implementation platform, which is also linked to the tracking of implementation of their human rights recommendations ‘

Additionally might be interesting to mention that several states are not explicitly mentioning SDGs and SDG targets in the UPR. Same for treaty body concluding observations. While the 2030 Agenda is just a political declaration and therefore non-binding to States. Human rights treaties ratified by States due have a binding nature. Therefore, more and more actors are recognising that the UN human rights mechanisms can function as an accountability instrument for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

II. Human Rights Council resolutions dealing with SDGs in 2019

In 2019, the Council adopted **42** resolutions mentioning SDGs that concerned a variety of topics, including, inter alia, the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, contemporary forms of slavery, climate change, and indigenous peoples. Among those, there are **five key resolutions** that we have identified as having the largest potential impact on SIDS and LDCs and to the implementation of which SIDS and LDCs could contribute the most:

1. Human rights and climate change.³

This resolution recalls the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its commitment to leave no one behind, including, inter alia, its Goal 13 on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. It also makes the explicit connection between poverty eradication and climate change resilience and the promotion and protection of human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities who are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of climate change. In this regard, the resolution takes note of the interrelated reports of three Special Procedures, including the Special Rapporteur on the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable [environment](#) and their report focusing on climate change and human rights, as well as their report on [air pollution](#) and human rights; the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and their report on the interlinkages between the human rights relating to [climate change and poverty \(more information about this report below\)](#); and the Special Rapporteur on the right to food focusing and their report on the right to food in the context of [natural disasters](#).

2. The right to food.⁴

This resolution recalls the Sustainable Development Goals on ending hunger, achieving food security, improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (GOAL 2) and on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (GOAL 1). It recognizes that the number of hungry people in the world is unacceptably on the rise and the vast majority of hungry people live in developing countries. It further recognizes the contributions of peasants and other people working in rural areas in all regions of the world to development and in ensuring the right to food and food security, which are fundamental to attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights.⁵

This resolution, again, makes a very strong connection between sustainable development and human rights in the context of the eradication of poverty. In particular, it reaffirms that the existence of extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, emphasizing that eradicating poverty is a global challenge, an indispensable requirement and an overarching priority for sustainable development. While welcoming the progress achieved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the resolution notes that it has been uneven across countries and regions. It calls upon all countries to promote sustainable development, to enable better enjoyment of human rights, to achieve gender equality and to realize people-centred development, i.e. development of the people, by the people and for the people. It reaffirms the commitment of all States to ending

³ [A/HRC/RES/41/21](#)

⁴ [A/HRC/RES/40/7](#)

⁵ [A/HRC/RES/41/19](#)

poverty and emphasizes that eradicating poverty is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development and an overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda.

4. The effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.⁶

This resolution stresses the determination expressed in the 2030 Agenda to assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and to address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress. It further recognizes that debt relief can play a key role in liberating resources that should be directed towards activities consistent with attaining sustainable growth and development, including poverty reduction and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore, debt relief measures should be pursued vigorously and expeditiously, ensuring that they do not replace alternative sources of financing and that they are accompanied by an increase in official development assistance.

5. [Promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(37/24\)](#)

III. Intersessional activities of the Human Rights Council

In March 2018, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 37/24 on the promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the resolution, the Council decided to organize two one-day intersessional meetings for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/HRC/RES/37/24). Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 37/24, [the first intersessional meeting](#) was held on 16 January 2019. The second meeting will take place on [3 December 2019](#).

⁶ [A/HRC/RES/40/8](#)

Possible questions for discussion

1. Which actions can your delegation commit to in order to increase the number of references in documentation issued by the Council and, as a result, to increase international visibility of the 2030 Agenda?

1bis. Has your delegation included references to the implementation of human rights obligations and recommendations in their VNR when undergoing a voluntary review of progress on Agenda 2030 implementation at the High Level Political Forum. Or to which degree would such an inclusion be feasible.

1ter. Has your delegation aligned implementation of the SDGs with the implementation of UN human right recommendations, such as UPR recommendations. For example does your national SDG implementation plan also reference relevant human rights recommendations. Or alternatively, does your UPR national action plan link to specific SDG targets.

2. What is the connection between resolutions on the topics mentioned above and one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals?

3. How can domestic implementation of Sustainable Development Goals help your country with implementation of human rights obligations and recommendations? Please, provide examples with three different Goals.
