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**Human Rights Council**

**Fifty-second session**

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 10

**Technical assistance and capacity-building**

 Report of the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights[[1]](#footnote-2)\*, [[2]](#footnote-3)\*\*

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|  *Summary* |
|  The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 18/18, in which the Council invited the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights to present a comprehensive report on the Board’s work on an annual basis, starting from the twentieth session of the Council. Pursuant to Council resolution 36/28, the present report is submitted to the Council at its fifty-second session, in March 2023. It provides an update on the work of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund since the previous report of the Chair of the Board ([A/HRC/49/93](http://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/49/93)). |
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 I. Introduction

 A. Background

1. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, established by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1987/38, receives voluntary contributions from Governments, organizations and individuals. The objective of the Voluntary Fund is to provide financial support for technical cooperation aimed at building and strengthening national and regional institutions, legal frameworks and infrastructure that will have positive long-term impacts on the implementation of international human rights standards.

2. The Board of Trustees has been operational since 1993, and its members are appointed by the Secretary-General for a three-year term, renewable once. The mandate of the Board is to assist the Secretary-General in rationalizing and improving the technical cooperation programme. It meets twice a year and reports on its work to the Secretary-General and the Human Rights Council. Its current members are Azita Berar Awad (Islamic Republic of Iran) (Chair), Morten Kjaerum (Denmark), Nozipho January-Bardill (South Africa), Santiago Corcuera-Cabezut (Mexico) and Valeriya Lutkovska (Ukraine). The position of Chair is held on a rotational basis, covering at least two sessions of the Board and an annual Human Rights Council oral update. The Board elected, at its fifty-third session, Ms. Berar Awad as the new Chair starting from 1 April 2022.

 B. Mandate

3. The refocused approach of the Board is set out in the annual report of the Secretary-General to the Human Rights Council.[[3]](#footnote-4) The Board, during the period under review, continued expanding opportunities for proactive specific guidance on technical cooperation in the field of human rights, including support provided through resources of the Voluntary Fund to assist States in developing their national capacities to promote the effective implementation of human rights obligations and animating the sharing of good practices among Member States.

4. As members also of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review, members of the Board offer policy guidance and advice to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to enhance the effectiveness of technical assistance and financial support to States in implementing the recommendations made in the context of the universal periodic review and other international mechanisms. In 2022, the Board continued supporting the efforts made by OHCHR to optimize the provision of guidance to United Nations partners for the implementation of the universal periodic review outcomes and compilation of good practices in the use of that mechanism. The universal periodic review and other international human rights mechanisms continue being important entry points with Member States and provide valuable guidance for the United Nations and OHCHR initiatives in supporting them.

5. During 2022, the increased demand for OHCHR in-country presence and support continued, including requests by Member States for support by OHCHR regional offices, where OHCHR does not have an in-country presence; requests by United Nations country teams for the deployment of human rights advisers to United Nations resident coordinators’ offices; and other types of technical support projects. The Board is very much encouraged by the increasing number of requests by States, including at sessions of the Human Rights Council, for technical cooperation and advisory services, either from OHCHR alone or in collaboration with other United Nations entities.

6. The Board continued facilitating the sharing of experiences, inspiring and encouraging States to expand partnerships with OHCHR and often with other United Nations entities and bilateral partners in order to receive advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights. The Board is particularly pleased about the increasing willingness of Member States to share good practices and results achieved through human rights technical cooperation with OHCHR and other United Nations partners, as well as with bilateral, regional and international partners. This has been reflected by member States and observers of the Human Rights Council and national partners with whom the Board met, as well as in relevant Council resolutions, such as the recently adopted resolution 51/34. In 2022, the Board continued to provide advice to OHCHR and other United Nations partners on ways to strengthen technical cooperation, including as part of the Secretary-General’s proposals to reform the United Nations.

7. The Board, within the scope of its mandate to facilitate support for technical cooperation programmes and initiatives aimed at strengthening the protection of all human rights, including economic, civil, cultural, political and social rights, continued discussing with OHCHR and States ways to enhance partnerships to address the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and other global crises, in particular widening inequalities and climate change; and to build programmes that address the costs of the existing human rights gaps.

 II. Activities of the Voluntary Fund and the Board

8. In spite of the continued challenges involved in travelling in 2022, the Board was able to hold sessions in countries in which OHCHR had a presence. Country visits and in situ discussions with OHCHR field presences, United Nations entities and national and regional partners are key tools for the Board to continue providing sound policy advice on technical cooperation programmes at the country and regional levels.

9. The Board held its fifty-fourth session in New York from 16 to 18 May 2022. Originally postponed because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the session served to provide advice and views on the contribution of United Nations technical cooperation and advisory services and programmes to enhancing in-country respect for human rights, as part of United Nations system-wide efforts to promote sustainable development and to sustain peace. During the session, the Board discussed with the Deputy Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a wide range of experts and partners the issue of how human rights had been integrated into technical cooperation as part of the Secretary-General’s development and peace and security reforms.

10. The fifty-fifth session was held in Fiji from 6 to 8 December 2022, resuming the Board’s in-person visits to countries in which OHCHR had a field presence. The session was focused on reviewing the technical cooperation and advisory services provided by OHCHR to enhance in-country respect for human rights in the Pacific region. At that session, the Board discussed with the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Director of the OHCHR Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division, experts and partners the issue of support for programmes run by OHCHR regional offices and their relevance in responding to the specific needs of countries, including through the collaboration of OHCHR with United Nations country teams in the region.

11. The sessions were chaired by Ms. Berar Awad. The Board also reviewed the status of implementation of the workplan and cost plan for the Voluntary Fund, including the status of implementation of the funding covering the Fund’s cost plan for 2022. At its fifty-fifth session, the Board endorsed the proposed workplan for 2023.

12. During the sessions, the Board highlighted the rapidly evolving environment for technical cooperation in the field of human rights and the opportunities provided by initiatives, such as the Secretary-General’s call to action for human rights and Our Common Agenda, to reinvigorate the important role human rights have to play in the provision of technical assistance to Member States to ensure sustainable development, and the institutional capacity-building necessary to ensure peaceful and resilient societies. The Board stressed the relevance and importance of providing adequate and sustainable funding for technical cooperation, for continued support for national and regional efforts to advance the enjoyment by all of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, in particular considering the damage caused, in terms of the lives lost and the detrimental effect upon the enjoyment of human rights of billions of people, by the impacts of global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, widening inequalities and climate change.

 A. Fifty-fourth session

13. The fifty-fourth session of the Voluntary Fund and the seventeenth session of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review were held in New York, from 16 to 18 May 2022.

14. That was the first time that the Board had organized a session in New York, allowing it to conduct in-depth discussions with relevant parts of the United Nations with key responsibilities across the three pillars of the Organization. The objectives of the fifty-fourth session were: (a) to learn from the different approaches that were taken to integrate human rights into the respective United Nations frameworks and processes, as well as the different ongoing organizational reforms (management, peace and security and development); and (b) to measure progress and exchange ideas on how the technical cooperation that OHCHR provided could further promote those efforts. The session was held as a hybrid session: three members of the Board participated in person, while two members had to connect virtually to the meetings of the session.

15. The meetings took place as the social and economic cost of the COVID-19 pandemic was being fully analysed and measured and as recovery efforts were being formulated. The Board observed that, while the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple crises and widespread gender-based violence, had significantly set the human rights agenda back, they had also presented new opportunities for addressing often poorly implemented social, economic and cultural rights, mostly affecting poor and vulnerable communities.

16. Through direct discussions and exchanges with a cross section of senior officials at OHCHR, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Development Coordination Office, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and civil society organizations, the Board could avail itself of progress made in integrating human rights in United Nations operations, the innovative approaches introduced and the remaining challenges. Drawing in particular from the experience the Board had gathered during the past 16 sessions visiting in-country and regional offices, the Board shared its views and guidance on the role of technical cooperation programmes in the field of human rights at country level in contributing to the acceleration and/or deepening of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and their relevance for sustained peace.

17. When the Board met with the Deputy Secretary-General, an overall review was made of progress achieved. Possible pathways forward to strengthen and mutually reinforce technical cooperation efforts deployed by various parts of the system were discussed.

18. The Board also reviewed the frameworks that had been developed by the United Nations in recent years to set out a vision for the future of the Organization in its different areas of work. Discussions centred mostly on the Secretary-General’s call to action for human rights, launched in February 2020, and Our Common Agenda, launched in September 2021.

19. The Board observed how OHCHR had effectively demonstrated to development partners in New York the complementarity between the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights (including their universal nature, both in terms of the coverage of rights and in terms of the countries covered) and the importance of human rights to advance the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda. The Board was pleased to observe how that vision had been articulated in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development adopted by the General Assembly in 2020.[[4]](#footnote-5)

20. The Board welcomed the innovative approaches deployed by OHCHR, including by embedding senior human rights officers in key departments in New York, to lead the reform efforts. The Board observed how, as a result of those efforts, as well as through different elements of the management and accountability framework adopted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group in 2019, the integration of human rights in various system-wide operational guidance on programming and monitoring progress at the country level, such as in the guidance on the elaboration of common country analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, had been achieved, enhancing technical cooperation in the field of human rights at the country level and opening up new spaces for human rights programmes to be integrated in Peacebuilding Fund projects.

21. The Board also noted the close partnerships with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The Secretary General’s call to action for human rights, supported by OHCHR and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, had been catalytic in garnering commitment by United Nations entities to put human rights at the forefront in seven key areas (rights at the core of sustainable development; rights in times of crisis; gender equality and equal rights for women; public participation and civic space; rights of future generations, especially climate justice; rights at the heart of collective action; and new frontiers of human rights). From the various meetings, however, it was clear that, to integrate human rights fully, sustained efforts were needed to expand and deepen the work under way in all the above areas.

22. Partnering with the United Nations Development Programme had been key in providing support to strengthen national human rights institutions, sharing good practices in relation to United Nations country team engagement with the universal periodic review and developing guidance on integrating human rights in voluntary national reviews. There is room for further collaboration with several United Nations entities in strengthening the work of United Nations country teams in these areas.

23. The Board observed that OHCHR had managed to establish a broader space for its technical cooperation support, including in terms of accessing pooled funds like the Human Rights Mainstreaming Multi-Donor Trust Fund (Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund) and the Peacebuilding Fund.

24. The Board welcomed the positive results found by the 2021 independent evaluation of the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund (a key contributor to the Voluntary Fund’s support for human rights advisers) and the multi-year results framework developed by the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund for 2022–2025, which, in addition to including increased deployment of human rights advisers to United Nations country teams, included the continuation of key programmes on technical cooperation on human rights in the field and the development of new initiatives. For example, the results framework envisages continued support for the surge initiative, which was highlighted by the Board as a useful tool in its report submitted at the forty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council,[[5]](#footnote-6) and the continuation of collaboration between OHCHR and the United Nations Development Programme to enhance United Nations country team support for countries on the universal periodic review, integrating human rights in voluntary national reviews and strengthening national human rights institutions. Tools such as the recently issued compilation of good practices by United Nations country teams in using the universal periodic review and the upcoming guidance on human rights in voluntary national reviews (both funded by the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund) are indispensable tools for United Nations country teams.

25. In the case of the Peacebuilding Fund, OHCHR expanded its participation in projects from only 4 in 2016 to 14 in 2021, with a total of almost $50 million allocated by the Fund to OHCHR projects since 2009. The Board recommended further deepening of that partnership.

26. The Board appreciated the candid discussions on the progress made in implementing the guidance provided to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams on how to integrate human rights into country programming. A recent review by a United Nations Sustainable Development Group inter-entity group led by OHCHR found that approximately 60 per cent of common country analyses integrated human rights, however, the percentage dropped to 46 per cent for cooperation frameworks. In particular, the Board discussed with the Deputy Secretary-General the issue of the additional steps that could be taken to accelerate the translation of the guidance into action, including by the resident coordinators, as well as the reforms of the entire United Nations development system and the expected outcomes.

27. Three areas were identified as having a high potential for OHCHR to deepen the integration of human rights in the work of United Nations country teams.

28. The first area is expanding in-country support for United Nations country teams – not only through the deployment of additional human rights advisers, which have become a key resource for resident coordinators but also through other targeted support. Remote expert support tailored to the specific country situation, such as that provided by the surge initiative economists, was highlighted as most useful. Short-term deployments to enhance analytical or programmatic capacities at key moments when opportunities or threats arose was also seen as a form of assistance to explore further. OHCHR Emergency Response Teams are a good example of how this support might be organized. It was noted that, while the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund had included those initiatives as part of its 2022–2025 multi-year results framework, many of those proposals had yet to be translated into funded programmes to be implemented in countries.

29. Another significant area to deepen collaboration with United Nations country teams is in leveraging recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms to advance their analysis, advocacy and programming. Key to advancing on this front is the provision of more streamlined information on recommendations, clustering them and orienting United Nations country teams towards the most relevant areas to prioritize for their analysis and programming. The practice established during the third cycle of the universal periodic review whereby the High Commissioner for Human Rights writes a letter to the Government concerned, with the resident coordinator in copy, that contains a matrix of clustered recommendations was seen as a good practice to expand on during the fourth cycle of the review, which started in 2022.

30. The third area proposed for greater collaboration is providing support for resident coordinators to advocate for human rights in complex situations, coordinating actions more closely between the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Development Coordination Office and OHCHR.

31. With respect to Our Common Agenda, the Board feels that it is important for OHCHR to engage and contribute actively in the preparation of summits and intergovernmental discussions on issues related to it, such as the Transforming Education Summit (September 2022), the Sustainable Development Goals Summit (September 2023), the Summit of the Future (September 2024), the World Social Summit (expected to take place in 2025) and the more recent proposal by the Secretary-General to hold biennial summits among the Group of 20, the Economic and Social Council and international financial institutions, ensuring that human rights maintain a central role in these discussions.

32. The Board was concerned that, in the ongoing discussion on the rule of law and corruption under Our Common Agenda, human rights did not figure prominently. Given how relevant those discussions are in shaping the future agenda of the Organization, the Board felt that OHCHR should seek to ensure that human rights maintain a central role in those discussions.

33. In all these summits and discussions, it is of the utmost importance that OHCHR ensure that the global threat of growing inequalities remains a central issue. To that end, the Board felt that more could be done to build on the proposed agenda for equality that was put forward at the forty-fourth session of the High-level Committee on Programmes in 2022. It is also crucial that OHCHR ensure that human rights are a key component of the proposals for the United Nations system-wide contribution on progress beyond gross domestic product that is being prepared, as the outcome of such discussions could have a profound impact on technical cooperation on economic and social rights and the integration of these rights in the policies and strategies of international financial institutions.

34. The Board also noted the potential for maximizing synergies with other pooled funds, such as the Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, recommending that OHCHR enhance internal mechanisms to make sure it could benefit from those Funds’ resources when opportunities arose, without unnecessary delay. Both Funds have significant experience in integrating human rights; the Peacebuilding Fund having provided funding for human rights activities implemented by OHCHR in 14 countries during 2021.

35. The Board held several discussions, with all relevant United Nations departments, reviewing the integration of human rights in the peace and security and humanitarian activities of the United Nations and OHCHR support for such activities. The Board encourages more work to further expand on the concept of prevention and on the relevance human rights have in preventing crises, building resilient and inclusive societies and protecting development gains. In this regard, the Board recommends the compilation, analysis and dissemination of concrete examples of how resident coordinators, special representatives of the Secretary-General and humanitarian coordinators have leveraged human rights strategically with adequate support from OHCHR. OHCHR should invest more in reaching out to resident coordinators in humanitarian and peace contexts, to deepen the contribution of human rights in these situations. The Board believes more investment can be made in investigating promising practices to provide evidence that adopting inclusive and sustainable approaches contributes to preventing violent conflict and other crises.

36. The Board finds it equally important to ensure funding for technical cooperation efforts carried out by human rights components of United Nations peace missions and/or other relevant human rights field presences to contribute to the integration of human rights in the prevention of crises and in peacebuilding efforts, noting that regular budget funding is generally inadequate for technical cooperation. Opportunities might exist in pooled funds for more technical cooperation work. For example, the participation of OHCHR in the Peacebuilding Fund and in preventive efforts by the peace and security pillar, such as those related to women and youth, provide a basis for a more strategic approach to peacebuilding efforts.

37. In terms of transitions between situations in countries, the Board believes OHCHR should outline better how its different types of in-country presences can be leveraged at different moments of a cycle (rising tensions/risks, crisis and post-crisis), so as to identify how technical cooperation could help lay the groundwork for more strategic transitions from one form of response to another.

38. In numerous discussions in New York, the Board found universal understanding of the usefulness of the universal periodic review as a tool for United Nations operations across its pillars (the Sustainable Development Goals and United Nations country teams, peace missions and humanitarian operations). Recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review that are accepted by the State concerned, in combination with recommendations from treaty bodies and special procedures, are important tools for integrating human rights in United Nations activities on the ground, which include an analysis of a country’s challenges, in different programming efforts, and in advocacy before Governments and the general public on advancing human rights.

39. The Board believes that, while there is clear guidance for United Nations country teams to track recommendations from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms as part of common country analysis, cooperation frameworks and joint workplans, more advocacy by OHCHR is required to reach out to other United Nations system agencies. This could include discussions at the highest levels, with respective heads of agencies and even governing boards, if necessary, as well as collaborative information-sharing among entities/agencies at the technical level, to ensure United Nations agencies and country teams fully integrate, and report on the implementation of, the universal periodic review recommendations in their programmes.

40. The Board notes its full appreciation for the final debriefing session co-convened and co-organized with the Government of Luxembourg, with the participation of Member States, to understand better how OHCHR is addressing key challenges on the ground through its technical cooperation efforts. The interest shown in concrete country examples illustrated how OHCHR has been able to use its convening role at the country level to build trust and promote dialogue between Governments and civil society, particularly as civic space is shrinking, and to address key economic and social rights challenges in specific contexts. The participating Member States welcomed the video address by the President of the Human Rights Council, in which he emphasized the importance of technical cooperation and assistance in the implementation of universal periodic review outcomes and recommendations and those of other human rights mechanisms, and greater use of the Council’s sessions to discuss good practices in technical cooperation on human rights issues in the field.

41. The Board recommends that OHCHR enhance its messaging on the progress that it is making, through technical cooperation, including as part of discussions on agenda item 10 of the Human Rights Council. It also encourages OHCHR to harness the potential of peer-to-peer learning, by developing forums for OHCHR field presences to share experiences across countries, including the convening of global webinars to discuss some of the issues presented in the present report.

 B. Fifty-fifth session

42. The fifty-fifth session of the Voluntary Fund and the eighteenth session of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review were held in Suva from 6 to 8 December 2022. The session in Fiji aimed at reviewing the technical cooperation and advisory services provided by OHCHR to enhance in-country respect for human rights in the Pacific region. The sessions in Suva were the occasion of the first ever visit by the Board to the Pacific region. They served, in particular, as a means to focus on the support provided to small island developing States and on the relationship between human rights, climate change and environmental transition.

43. The session was held as a hybrid session with both in-person discussions with OHCHR partners in Fiji, as well as virtual meetings with selected partners in Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Samoa; and different divisions and units in OHCHR in Geneva and the human rights advisers in Papua New Guinea and Samoa.

44. In its first visit to the Pacific region, the Board was particularly sensitive and further sensitized to the specific characteristics and requirements of planning and delivering technical cooperation in small island developing States. Two issues are of particular importance and should be emphasized from the outset. First, the fragmentation and long distances between localities and islands, including within the same country, and weak communication infrastructure in many places have challenging logistical, outreach and financial implications, both for national institutions and the United Nations. Second, the issue of capacity among national institutions that handle multiple portfolios with limited human and technical resources is a real concern, including with respect to the follow-up and reporting on ratified treaties and recommendations accepted during the universal periodic review process. The Board recommends that special attention be placed on providing adequate and innovative solutions by the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, with the support of the OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia in Bangkok and relevant units at headquarters in Geneva, to tackle these two challenges. In this context, the Board particularly appreciated the excellent reports developed by OHCHR on the situation of human rights in different countries in the region and on human rights defenders.

45. The Board particularly commended the significant inroads made by the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific to mainstream human rights in the recently adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the Pacific region, and its support for the three United Nations multi-country teams based in Fiji, Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia. The Board sees the establishment of the new United Nations Human Rights Theme Group and the broader Human Rights Coordination Group with partners in regional organizations and civil society, and the cross-cutting inclusion of human rights and gender equality in the Cooperation Framework for the Pacific region, as excellent examples of what United Nations country teams can do to adequately integrate human rights into their technical cooperation programmes. The Board noted with satisfaction the Cooperation Framework’s provisions for: (a) establishing linkages with human rights recommendations and reporting; (b) dedicating attention so as to leave no one behind; (c) ensuring active and meaningful participation in decision-making; and (d) monitoring of human rights indicators to ensure accountability.

46. The Board also noted the successful partnerships built by OHCHR within the region, with some leading to funding arrangements with other United Nations entities. For example, OHCHR started three joint United Nations programmes on: (a) economic/digital transformation, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Office for Project Services (through the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund); (b) the rights of persons with disabilities, in cooperation with the Resident Coordinator Office in Fiji; and (c) the Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security Programme II, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the International Labour Organization, the Platform on Disaster Displacement and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Other cooperation arrangements include the continuing partnership with the Pacific Disability Forum, which has been expanded in the context of the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, which OHCHR co-leads with the International Labour Organization and the Resident Coordinator Office/multi-country office based in Fiji. With the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Pacific Community, the partnership on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Learning Exchange has led to successful outreach and advocacy with Member States and civil society.

47. The establishment of the OHCHR Emergency Response Team reinvigorated existing partnerships with the resident coordinators’ offices, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, including in Fiji. Strategic partnerships have also been pursued with the Pacific Human Rights Defenders Network to engage civil society and other stakeholders.

48. The Board noted with satisfaction the resident coordinators’ commitment to human rights and their strong appreciation of the important role played by the human rights advisers deployed to offices in Papua New Guinea and Samoa who work closely with stakeholders in coordination with the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific. The Board recommends the deployment, if at all possible, of a third human rights adviser to the Federated States of Micronesia, thus covering the current configuration of all three United Nations multi-country offices in the Pacific region.

49. Another important area of attention that the Board highlighted was the need for tailored solutions for countries to develop their national institutional capacities to promote and protect human rights. As noted above, Governments of small island developing States in the Pacific region (like other such small island developing States) have limited capacity to report to treaty bodies, follow up on the implementation of universal periodic review recommendations or engage with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The region has the lowest number of ratifications of human rights treaties overall (while acknowledging the good record of some countries) and the lowest number of country visits and communications by special procedures; and several countries are chronically behind in submitting even initial reports to some treaty bodies. Among the countries of the region, with the exception of Australia and New Zealand, there is only one country, Samoa, that has a national human rights institution that has been accredited A status, while the one in Fiji has B status and the one in Tuvalu remains unaccredited. There are few functioning national monitoring, implementation and reporting mechanisms to follow up on human rights recommendations. The Board noted, nonetheless, the important role played by the offices of some ombudspersons in addressing human rights concerns despite the considerable economic constraints and logistical challenges.

50. The support provided by OHCHR is particularly important in this regard, given the absence of a regional human rights system. Civil society organizations in the Pacific region have relied, for example, on the universal periodic review mechanism and special procedures to raise their concerns. The Board recommended that OHCHR strengthen creative models of support, for example in helping to form a collaborative network of national human rights institutions and ombudsperson institutions to overcome the limited capacity in each island State; a model that could also act as the basis for a future regional mechanism in the Pacific.

51. The Board also noted with appreciation the strong partnerships developed by the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific with regional institutions, such as the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum and the University of the South Pacific, as entry points for helping foster a regional perspective and cooperation in the field of human rights.

52. An overarching priority across the region is that of climate change and environmental transitions. The magnitude of the challenges that the region is confronting because of the effects of climate change, putting the very existence of some countries at risk, is forcing countries to tackle a whole new set of human rights issues, which are, however, not always framed as human rights questions. The implementation frameworks of regional strategies, such as the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, could further develop this articulation with the support of OHCHR.

53. The recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by the General Assembly in a resolution adopted in 2022,[[6]](#footnote-7) in which it called upon Member States, international organizations, businesses and other stakeholders to scale up efforts, including through the full implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements under the principles of international environmental law, is an important milestone in international human rights law. This and other recently adopted resolutions further reinforce the key area of climate justice in the Secretary-General’s call to action for human rights and provide OHCHR with an opportunity to reframe the issue in human rights terms. The Board noted the action taken and recommended further expansion in supporting the States of the Pacific region in their claims for climate justice in relation to the right to development; advocating for human rights principles in discussions on climate transitions; integrating human rights considerations into United Nations support for early warning, emergency prevention and disaster reduction and response; integrating human rights norms and standards into United Nations support on issues of migration and mobility, including displacement, caused by biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental degradation; and providing guidance and support to ensure that the climate financing made available to States in the Pacific region is used optimally to reach those furthest behind.

54. In addition to the multilateral engagement, the Board recommends expanding technical cooperation efforts by OHCHR in support of countries’ efforts. The programme of the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific designed to amplify the voices of people experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and the support provided for the development of a regional Pacific Islands Forum framework on climate mobility, together with the International Organization for Migration and the International Labour Organization, are good examples that could be further followed-upon.

55. The recent Human Rights Council resolution on the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands,[[7]](#footnote-8) requesting OHCHR to provide technical advice and support in addressing the health and environmental effects of nuclear weapons testing conducted in the Marshall Islands, is equally important in demonstrating the value that human rights can bring to resolving the environmental challenges in the region. The Board welcomed the action taken by OHCHR to strengthen technical expertise through the deployment of a dedicated expert to the Resident Coordinator Office in the Federated States of Micronesia.

56. The Board highly recommends that OHCHR step up its own technical capacity and support in the region on economic and social rights. The region is particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, both in social and economic terms, with a strain on weak health systems still prevalent today in many of the islands and a dramatic decrease in income from key economic sectors, such as tourism and fisheries, and remittances. High rates of unemployment among youth and the prevalence of informal work and a very low fiscal space are just some of the areas that OHCHR should help address through a human rights lens, in partnership with other United Nations entities, as envisaged in the Cooperation Framework for the Pacific region. Particular attention needs to be paid to the practices of extractive industries, including those exploring the possibility of deep-sea mining, given the potential impact on people.

57. The Board was particularly alarmed by the high rates of violence against women and children recorded in the region, in particular in the domestic sphere. Such issues require United Nations system-wide action, including OHCHR added value and focus on the norms and standards established on such topics, and recommendations for the countries of the region by mechanisms like the universal periodic review. The Board noted the proactive approach that OHCHR had taken to support various government institutions on those issues, for instance: the collaboration with UN-Women in Fiji in assisting the country’s working group on ending violence against women and girls and holding consultations on the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls. The Board also apprised itself of a major police training programme in Fiji, carried out by OHCHR in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, involving the training of some 2,000 police officers on gender-based violence and follow-up processes, and of progress made to establish a dedicated human rights cell within the police force.

58. The prevalence of issues of discrimination against different groups at risk of being left behind, such as persons with disabilities, LGBTI+ persons and ethnic minorities, demonstrates the urgent need for increased awareness-raising at societal level on the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, as well as for legal, judicial and other accountability mechanisms to operate more effectively to guarantee prevention, protection and redress. The Board noted the leadership that the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific had exercised, together with the human rights advisers deployed in Samoa and Papua New Guinea, to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, LGBTI+ communities and other discriminated groups. The Board believes OHCHR should deepen its work to address harmful practices, such as the use of claims of witchcraft as justification for violence and killings in Papua New Guinea.

59. The Board was informed about declining respect for the rule of law, including the weaker role played by parliaments, disrespect for the court system and other accountability mechanisms, and barriers in the realization of the right of access to information. The Board finds that the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific plays an important role in monitoring these developments and assisting in upholding and furthering the basic principles of the rule of law.

60. The Board welcomed the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the first seminar organized by the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific, to launch the global campaign to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights announced by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Board believes that the campaign provides an excellent opportunity for OHCHR to launch a new round of advocacy efforts to promote dialogue and deepen understanding on the compatibility of the human rights framework with Pacific values, customary law and community rights, as well as to demystify some regional beliefs and practices that may be harmful to the rights of discriminated and disadvantaged groups.

 III. Technical cooperation

 A. Technical cooperation in the field of human rights: key components of sound technical cooperation programmes

61. The Board notes with appreciation the references in Human Rights Council resolutions, most recently in 51/34, to the contribution that the Voluntary Fund and other funds make to the development of national capacities to promote the effective implementation of the human rights obligations and commitments of States, as well as those highlighting the contribution the Board makes in identifying the components of technical cooperation and examples of good practice.

62. These components of technical cooperation and examples of good practice serve to encourage States to solicit and benefit from the technical cooperation capacities of OHCHR. As the sessions in New York and Suva demonstrated, there is much interest in peer-to-peer learning and exchanges on concrete technical cooperation activities provided by OHCHR. The Board welcomes the fact that, as part of follow-up to Human Rights Council resolution 51/34, the Council will be holding, before its fifty-third session, a half-day intersessional meeting on the theme of “technical cooperation and capacity-building in the Human Rights Council: taking stock of the past for a better discharge of this mission in the future”. The Board hopes to contribute to these efforts to identify and reflect on the achievements made and obstacles faced by technical cooperation in the field of human rights and to share best practices and experiences in this regard.

63. 2023 will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Board welcomes and supports the Human Rights 75 initiative of OHCHR in this regard and believes that highlighting the important role technical cooperation plays in the field of human rights can be a key ingredient.

64. The Board has also been adding its voice to the many warnings over the last three years regarding the devastating effects that COVID-19, growing inequalities and climate change are already having on the human rights of millions of people around the world, and the threat that these pose to humanity if we leave them unaddressed or inadequately addressed. Human rights, including the rights of future generations, provide the appropriate framework to address these issues. The recent outcomes from the human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies, special procedures and the universal periodic review, provide critical specific recommendations that can be the basis for triggering the required transformations on all three fronts.

65. As outlined in Our Common Agenda, global cooperation needs to look ahead to the next 25 years and advance towards an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism to better respond to humanity’s most pressing challenges. This requires significant changes in the technical cooperation offered by OHCHR and other United Nations entities. The Board continues to advocate for technical cooperation programmes based on the universality and indivisibility of all human rights – economic, civil, cultural, political and social rights – including both elements for the protection and the promotion of human rights, linking the monitoring and analysis of how countries are meeting their human rights obligations and commitments with programmatic action to close the gaps identified; any separation of these two aspects is artificial, as both are naturally interrelated.

66. Finally, the Board has continued to advocate for technical cooperation programmes to be formulated and implemented with the broadest possible participation of all elements of society. Decisions on policies and programmes that do not reflect the voices, realities and rights of those left behind, in particular, have been shown to be not only unsustainable but also harmful in perpetuating long-standing patterns of discrimination and marginalization that prevent the development of peaceful and resilient societies. Technical cooperation and advisory services should continue to promote and protect participation and civic space. OHCHR and other United Nations entities will need to update programmatic priorities and methods to strengthen their capacities for outreach to the different parts of society, in particular, the most disadvantaged and disempowered groups, expanding their support to countries in ensuring broad participation in relevant policies and programmes, in a coordinated way.

 B. Measuring the results of technical cooperation and the response of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

67. The Board, during its sessions in New York and Suva, once again appreciated how the performance monitoring system of OHCHR continued to prove to be relevant and timely to plan, monitor and assess the status of implementation of programmes. The Board has particularly appreciated how the system has expanded opportunities to optimize the efforts of the various parts of OHCHR in integrating all the tools and possible contributions across planning entities. The Board encourages OHCHR to continue to support use of the system for programme information analysis and for sharing practices and ideas, as well as lessons learned, across its presences around the world and to update the system as necessary for it to be in line with the changes in programming brought about by United Nations reforms.

 IV. Status of funding and donors

68. At its fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions, the Board was provided with updates on the overall financial status of the Voluntary Fund. It discussed and analysed the status of implementation of the workplan for the Voluntary Fund for 2022. An analysis of funding trends between 2012 and 2022 (see annex I) shows a small decrease in 2022. The continued strong support for the Voluntary Fund is a good reflection of the strategic vision and enhanced capacity of OHCHR to communicate the crucial results achieved in supporting States. The financial resources continue to be welcomed by the Board, as they are very much needed to maintain support for States, as the requests for support continue to expand. The Board emphasizes once again the importance of unearmarked funds, which provide the flexibility and predictability OHCHR requires to respond to the needs and demands of the human rights situations on the ground.

69. As at 31 December 2022, the Voluntary Fund had received total income of $21,193,591, comprising paid contributions for 2022, pledges receivable, miscellaneous income and interest. Contributions in 2022 were slightly lower than in previous years and less than expected due to the funding shortfall of the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund. In previous years, the reserves had built up to ensure greater stability of the programmes that the Board wished to support and, accordingly, a more ambitious budget had been prepared. In 2022, the total expenditure of the Voluntary Fund amounted to $25,063,270. When it became clear that a few large contributions would not be received, expenditure was managed, restricting the gap between contributions received in 2022 and expenditure to $3,869,679. This allowed OHCHR to limit the use of reserves to secure an adequate balance to ensure the continuity of work in 2023. The reserve balance of the Voluntary Fund amounted to $20,368,288 as at 31 December 2022. The lower contributions from Member States to support the deployment of human rights advisers under the United Nations Sustainable Development Group framework was of concern to the Board.

70. In 2022, the Voluntary Fund provided resources for technical cooperation programmes designed to build strong human rights frameworks at the national level in 69 regions, countries and territories (up from 64 in 2021), through 53 human rights advisers and human rights mainstreaming projects in Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Congo, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, the Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Mozambique, Myanmar (based in Bangkok), Nepal, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as in the South Caucasus region (Georgia); seven human rights components of peace missions in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, Mali and Somalia; and six country and stand-alone offices in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mexico, the Niger and the State of Palestine.

71. The Voluntary Fund enabled the expansion of in-country human rights expertise, in particular by deploying human rights advisers through the joint United Nations Sustainable Development Group’s framework and by responding to increased demands for OHCHR to have an in-country presence. The funding has allowed allocations to support its work on inequality and expand assistance to the country offices in Burkina Faso and the Niger. With the support of the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR facilitated national efforts to incorporate international human rights standards into national laws, policies and practices, with a particular emphasis on providing support for policies and practices aimed at addressing inequalities. The support for follow-up to the recommendations made by international human rights mechanisms, in particular in the context of the third cycle of the universal periodic review, have also expanded.

72. OHCHR continued to enhance its technical cooperation and advisory services to support the efforts of Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda. Programmes financed by the Voluntary Fund have benefited from the enhanced technical capacity that OHCHR has provided through its surge initiative and, in 2023, the Fund will continue its financial support in this area. Finally, the Voluntary Fund provided seed funding for technical cooperation projects of the surge initiative. For example, in Mongolia, the initial findings of a study focused on the right to housing of persons with disabilities was presented during a consultative meeting and will feed into the implementation of the new cooperation framework. The Voluntary Fund has also contributed to the establishment and strengthening of national structures, institutions and capacities to ensure adherence to international human rights standards, including national human rights institutions. Detailed information on income and expenditure under the Voluntary Fund, its financial status in 2022 and a list of donors and contributors are contained in the annexes to the present report (see annexes II–IV).

73. Through its sessions in 2022, the Board has continued to cooperate with OHCHR External Outreach Service to maximize opportunities to expand the visibility of the results of OHCHR support through technical cooperation. Outreach events, for example during its sessions, provide a useful way for the Board to communicate its views and observations and engage partners to expand the donor base of the Voluntary Fund and support, in particular, the work in the region. There is growing interest on the ground in the Board’s findings and suggestions regarding engagement with OHCHR on technical cooperation and Board members are increasingly invited to share experiences and their views on lessons learned across regions.

 V. Main findings and recommendations

74. **In its last report, the Board focused on the impact of COVID-19 as an important area for technical cooperation in the field of human rights. The continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the new global challenges of inflation, food security and shrinking fiscal spaces and debt crises in many countries, are exacerbating inequalities and taking their toll on the most vulnerable in society and merit continued attention through technical cooperation. In the present report and through its session held in Fiji, the Board has placed a particular emphasis on the challenges of climate change and environmental transition and opportunities to address them.**

75. **With the recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by the General Assembly in a resolution adopted in 2022 and its call upon Member States, international organizations, businesses and other stakeholders to scale up efforts, including through the full implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements under the principles of international environmental law, as a matter of international human rights law, the Board sees an important opening for further expansion of human rights technical cooperation on the environment, including by: supporting Governments and civil society organizations in their claims for climate justice in global forums, in accordance with the principles of the right to development; advocating for human rights principles in discussions on climate transitions, in close coordination with the new Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change; integrating human rights considerations into United Nations support for early warning, emergency prevention and disaster reduction and response, including through OHCHR engagement in the humanitarian space; integrating human rights norms and standards in United Nations support on issues of migration and mobility, including displacement, caused by biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental degradation; and providing guidance and support in ensuring that the climate financing made available to small island developing States is used optimally to reach those furthest behind. The Board’s visit to Fiji highlighted the potential to expand OHCHR technical cooperation, with a human rights perspective, in the field of environmental transition in collaboration with other partners.**

76. **At the session in New York focusing on the United Nations reforms, the Board identified a high potential for OHCHR to deepen the integration of human rights in the work of United Nations country teams by expanding in-country support for them – not only through the deployment of additional human rights advisers, who have become a key resource for resident coordinators and the country teams, but also through other targeted support. Remote expert support tailored to the specific country situation, such as that provided by the surge initiative economists, was highlighted as most useful. Short-term deployments to enhance analytical or programmatic capacities at key moments when opportunities or threats arose was also seen as a form of assistance to explore further. OHCHR Emergency Response Teams are a good example of how this support might be organized. It was noted that, while the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund had included those initiatives as part of its 2022–2025 multi-year results framework, many of those proposals had yet to be translated into funded programmes to be implemented in countries.**

77. **Another significant area to deepen collaboration with United Nations country teams is in leveraging the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms to advance the United Nations country team’s analysis, advocacy and programming. Key to advancing on this front is the provision of more streamlined information on recommendations, if possible, clustering them and orienting United Nations country teams towards the most relevant areas to prioritize for their analysis and programming, so as to reduce the burden that they face when trying to navigate the numerous recommendations countries receive. The practice established during the third cycle of the universal periodic review whereby the High Commissioner for Human Rights writes a letter to the Government concerned, with the resident coordinator in copy, that contains a matrix of clustered recommendations was seen as a good practice to expand on during the fourth cycle of the review, which started in 2022.**

78. **In order to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of the technical cooperation in the field of human rights provided to countries, the Board recommends that OHCHR, and other relevant United Nations entities, strengthen their capacities for support at the regional level. In the case of OHCHR, during their visit to Fiji, the Board witnessed the growing demand from Member States for assistance in adopting a human rights-based approach to the policies being developed, together with several good practices that could be emulated in other regional offices in response to that growing demand, including: (a) the strengthening of specific thematic capacities in the regional office through the expansion of the number of thematic experts on the office’s staff, made possible through joint programmes and joint efforts carried out with other United Nations entities; (b) a closer synergetic collaboration between the regional office and the human rights advisers deployed in the region, to facilitate greater coverage in that region, and closer collaboration with the United Nations country teams there; (c) a significant investment in working with the resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in the region, including in ensuring the adequate inclusion of human rights in their common country analyses and cooperation frameworks; and (d) the delegation of authority on administrative, financial and human resource management, which enables decentralized and expanded support for OHCHR field presences in the region. Smart arrangements such as these are particularly relevant when supporting small island developing States in overcoming their specific challenges and vulnerabilities.**

79. **The Board notes with appreciation the acknowledgement by the Human Rights Council and States of the usefulness of its contributions. It is also encouraged by the increasing number of requests from States for OHCHR in-country support. The Board also welcomes the contributions achieved through the various financial instruments managed by OHCHR in 2022, including the voluntary funds. It continues to emphasize the importance of ensuring sustainability, predictability and flexibility of resources, while also underscoring the need to expand the funding basis for OHCHR so that it has the flexibility and adaptability necessary to cover the overall OHCHR programme. The Board would like to thank donors who have increased their contributions to the Voluntary Fund through these challenging times and, in particular, those ensuring multi-year commitments. Looking forward to 2023 and beyond, the Board believes that pursuing joint technical cooperation projects through pooled funds like the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund and the Peacebuilding Fund will broaden the range of issues that OHCHR can address with these innovative proposals. The Board also noted the potential for maximizing synergies with pooled funds, such as the Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, recommending that OHCHR enhance internal mechanisms to make sure that it could benefit from those Funds’ resources when opportunities arose.**

80. **The Board calls upon Member States that contribute to the Voluntary Fund and to the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review to continue their financial support for technical cooperation activities in the field of human rights, including by increasing their contributions to both Funds and their regular budget allocations for the work of OHCHR in the field. The celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action are important milestones, which should serve as moments of reflection for Member States regarding the achievements and challenges in providing adequate and sustainable financing for the technical cooperation in the field of human rights that our world requires today.**

 Annex I

 Contributions to the Voluntary Fund and expenditure trends
(2012–2022)

Annex II

 Cost plan of the Voluntary Fund for 2022





Annex III

 Financial status of the Voluntary Fund (2022)



Annex IV

 Donors and contributors (2022)



1. \* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect recent developments. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. \*\* The annexes to the present report are circulated as received, in the language of submission only. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [A/HRC/16/66](http://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/16/66). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. General Assembly resolution 75/233. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [A/HRC/46/70](http://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/46/70). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See General Assembly resolution 76/300. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See Human Rights Council resolution 51/35. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)