

Check against delivery

DAC Chair: Contribution to the inter-sessional meeting on technical cooperation and capacity-building in the field of human rights

Date: 20 April 2023

Time: 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Via Zoom from Paris

6 minutes opening remarks (appr. 900 words)

- I am delighted to participate – although remotely – in this panel discussion. As some of you may know, I was the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva, from 2013 to 2018, often participating in discussions of the Human Rights Council – and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
- It is good to be back, although now with another mandate as Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. The 31 members of the DAC last year, in 2022, provided more than 200 billion USD in Official Development Assistance (ODA), amounting to 0.36 % of GNI. DAC members provide more than 80 % of all voluntary contributions to the UN Development System.
- The DAC members see ending poverty and reducing inequalities as a matter of human rights. **Human rights are thus an integral part of the development agenda** and DAC has long worked on Integrating Human Rights into Development¹. DAC recognises the intrinsic and instrumental value of human rights, and the global human rights regime, as a normative and operational framework for development actors.
- DAC members seek to walk the talk, putting funding behind their commitments, having delivered over the past 5-6 years more than **USD 1 billion year on year directly** in human rights support. But this figure does **not** account for the substantially higher DAC investments

¹ *Integrating Human Rights into Development: Donor Approaches, Experiences, and Challenges* from 2016 is a joint paper between OECD and the World Bank that consolidates the findings and research compiled in 2006 and 2012 with key developments and activities that have occurred in the subsequent years.

in social sectors and economic development that are also part of integrating human rights in development efforts.

- In 2021, DAC members (including the EU Institutions) **committed USD 69.3 billion in ODA towards social sectors**, amounting to 40% of their total bilateral ODA. Additionally, they committed USD 24.6 billion in aid to and through civil society organisations, amounting to 14.2% of their total bilateral ODA.
- With this **assistance, DAC Member States contribute to ensuring access to critical human rights**, including access to education and health care. The substantial portion of ODA channelled through civil society organisations contributes to building inclusive societies where citizens are empowered to take part in shaping their societies and are thus also part of the support for human rights.
- Yet, again and again, we see successive and sometimes systemic threats to the human rights agenda – including grave situations recently in Ethiopia, and also in Myanmar. Adding to this, we saw how the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries was used to backtrack on human rights, most recently in Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine, and recent events in Iran.
- With an **estimated 2.8 billion people living in countries currently classified as autocratic**, we should all be concerned about the shrinking space for democracy and accountability, the growing polarisation, government manipulation of rule of law and elections, the digital spread of disinformation and the increasing use of new technologies to surveil and suppress citizens.
- **DAC’s work** program of recent years has therefore been replete with rights-based development initiatives, ranging from its **community of practice on poverty and inequalities** examining how to maximise the focus and impact of ODA on reducing poverty and inequality – to the **OECD DAC Governance Network’s** body of work on inclusive governance.

- Likewise, the DAC **Network on Gender Equality** has explored great efforts to strategies for better enabling women's economic and political empowerment. We've been pushing - and will continue to push - for reinforced democratic rights and freedoms and to strive to create space for more effective citizen engagement in development practices.
- DAC Members recognise that the rise of autocracies and the growing restrictions on civic space undermine fundamental freedoms and human rights - and diminish the enabling environment for civil society. For this reason, among others, in 2021, the DAC signed off on a new **Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society** in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance to shore up the critical role that civil society can play in advancing human rights. The DAC is advocating for human rights-based development changes, including I note, through the submission of information to, and participation in, working group sessions of UPRs.
- DAC's Governance Network is also looking at **the role of ODA in autocratic contexts** to ensure that we stay the course in delivering much-needed development aid, while at the same time ensuring that this does not give legitimacy to oppressive regimes. The Governance network has launched a new program of work on ODA support for public interest media - which are facing new and existential threats - and yet are often the first line of defence against government suppression.
- The DAC is doing a part - modest though it may be - in the context of growing needs. But, again, on this as on other leading geopolitical and global agendas, we are surely *greater as a whole than as the sum of our respective parts*. Therefore, it gives me great pleasure today to recognise and celebrate the UPR and to maintain and reaffirm our own contribution and commitment to this collective agenda, and where we can redouble our efforts to support human rights protection and promotion.

Check against delivery

- If nothing else, it is our job to ensure that the protection and promotion of human rights in developmental contexts, as elsewhere, are given the priority attention that they are deserving.