



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
SPECIAL PROCEDURES

SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS, INDEPENDENT EXPERTS & WORKING GROUPS

SPECIAL PROCEDURES

COUNTRY VISITS

WHAT ARE SPECIAL PROCEDURES COUNTRY VISITS?

Country visits are a key mandated activity through which special procedures mandate holders can protect and promote human rights. They provide an essential opportunity to enhance human rights awareness at the country, regional and international levels.

At the invitation of a State's government, special procedures mandate holders undertake country visits in accordance with their specific mandate and the Terms of Reference for country visits to assess the country's human rights situation at the national level, including the country's specific institutional, legal, judicial, administrative and human rights situation.

During these visits, mandate holders meet with all relevant stakeholders, including national and local authorities; members of the judiciary and parliamentarians; the national human rights institutions, if applicable; civil society organizations and victims of human rights violations; the UN and other inter-governmental agencies, to obtain direct and first-hand information on the human rights situation under review.

After each country visit, mandate holders present country visit reports to the Human Rights Council in which they present their findings and provide recommendations to assist the State concerned in the fulfilment of its international human rights obligations.



Information related to past and upcoming country visits can be found at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures-human-rights-council/country-and-other-visits>

HOW ARE COUNTRY VISITS INITIATED?

Country visits are initiated either at the request of a mandate holder or at the invitation of a State government. A mandate holder may send a request for a country visit to a State government. A State government may also spontaneously invite a mandate holder to visit the country without having received a prior country visit request from that mandate holder (or from his or her predecessors). A visit can only take place with the agreement of the State and mandate holder concerned.

As of January 2024, 129 UN Member States and 1 non-Member Observer State have extended a standing country visit invitation, which means they are, in principle, prepared to receive a visit from any thematic mandate holder.

TERMS OF REFERENCE GOVERNING COUNTRY VISITS

In 1998, the special procedures adopted Terms of Reference for country visits by mandate holders to States and territories reflecting the need for freedom of movement, freedom of inquiry, in particular contacts with central and local authorities of all branches of government; confidential and unsupervised contacts with civil society, including non-governmental organizations, private institutions, media, witnesses and other private persons; and full access to all places of detention and interrogation as considered necessary for the fulfilment of the mandate concerned. The Terms of Reference also require assurances by the government that no persons who have been in contact with mandate holders will suffer reprisals and intimidation as a result of their engagement.



In 2016, the Terms of Reference were revised at the annual meeting of special procedures to reflect the developments that occurred since 1998 and are available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/SP/ToRs2016.pdf>

PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING COUNTRY VISITS

The preparation of country visits is carried out on the basis of close consultation and cooperation between the mandate holder and the State concerned, as well as with relevant UN entities. Arranging meetings with public authorities remains the responsibility of the State. Meetings with civil society and other stakeholders are arranged directly by mandate holder with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN country team. Mandate holders will issue a media advisory before the country visit outlining its key objectives.

During these visits, mandate holders obtain first-hand information by meeting with all relevant stakeholders. Mandate holders usually organize a meeting with the relevant government authorities at the beginning and the end of the country visit. At all stages of a country visit, mandate holders seek to establish a constructive dialogue with the government authorities and all other stakeholders to advance human rights at the country level.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF COUNTRY VISITS

At the end of a country visit, special procedures mandate holders typically hold a press conference during which they share their preliminary findings on the human rights issues observed during the visit, usually called the “end-of-mission statement”.

Subsequently, mandate holders present country visit reports to the Human Rights Council in which they highlight their findings and provide concrete recommendations to assist the State and other actors concerned in the fulfilment of the State’s international human rights obligations. The presentation of the country visit report to the Human Rights Council also provides a key opportunity to elevate the discussions on the human rights situation of a specific country to international level and for the mandate holder and the State concerned to engage in an important follow-up dialogue.

In addition to providing technical advice that enables States to fulfil their international human rights obligations, recommendations by mandate holders are sometimes also relied on by other UN bodies and human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review and Human Rights Treaty Bodies.



The **Universal Human Rights Index** also compiles recommendations by various UN human rights mechanisms, including mandate holders, to specific countries. It is available at:

<https://uhri.ohchr.org>



Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights meeting stakeholders during a country visit to Bangladesh, May 2023

FOLLOW-UP TO COUNTRY VISITS

Follow-up, which is central to the cooperation and dialogue between mandate holders and States, is an important part of special procedures' ongoing work to promote and protect human rights. Mandate holders seek to enhance the effectiveness of country visits by, among other things:

- *Undertaking following-up activities, such as follow-up questionnaires, reports, visits, the convening of meetings and consultations;*
- *Presenting follow-up reports to the Human Rights Council; and*
- *Cooperating with relevant partners.*

Efforts have been made to make the work and the recommendations of the special procedures more visible and accessible in order to facilitate follow-up. Mandate holders work with States and other stakeholders to ensure follow-up to their assessment and recommendations, and with the UN, including UN country teams, to ensure the integration of their advice and recommendations into the work of the UN. A non-exhaustive list of follow-up activities is contained in the addendum to the annual report on special procedures. Special procedures also resort to a combination of tools and networks to foster implementation and collaborate with other mandates, human rights mechanisms, and other parts of the UN system, including UN country teams.

National partners and actors are key to driving the recommendations forward, and mandate holders have encouraged national level mobilization to ensure that there is systematic follow-up.

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Further information on country visits, including on forthcoming country visits and country visits since 1998, is located at:
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/CountryandothervisitsSP.aspx>



Some mandate holders issue **calls for input** prior to the country visits. They can be found at:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input-listing>



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