**52nd session of the Human Rights Council**

**High-level panel discussion on UPR Voluntary Funds:   
achievements, good practices and lessons learned over the past 15 years and optimized support to States in the implementation of recommendations emanating from the fourth cycle**

***Concept note*** *(draft as of 13 February 2023)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **1 March 2023, 4 to 6 p.m. Palais des Nations,** [**Room XX**](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE60057CB67/(httpRooms)/4C2700FCE9684AD780256EF9005A65FE?OpenDocument&unid=BAE3AF717207A5AF80256EF80049C552)**, Geneva and online platform (Zoom)** *(will be broadcast live and archived on* [*https://media.un.org/en/webtv*](https://media.un.org/en/webtv)) |
| **Objectives and mandate:** | In paragraph 4 of its resolution 51/30, the Human Rights Council decided to hold a high-level panel discussion during its 52nd session, fully accessible to persons with disabilities, and focusing on the achievements, good practices and lessons learned by the two voluntary funds during the implementation of their mandates over the past 15 years, and reflecting on further optimization of the use of these funds to facilitate the participation of developing States, particularly least developed countries and small island developing States, in the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review (UPR), and to support them in the implementation of recommendations emanating from the fourth cycle. The main conclusions and recommendations of the high-level panel discussion will be presented in a report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to the Human Rights Council at its 53rd session in June/July 2023.  **In accordance with Council resolution 51/30 and on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the high-level panel discussion will gather high representatives of international organizations and relevant development actors to**:   * Take stock of the achievements of the two voluntary funds during the implementation of their mandates and reflect on avenues for optimization of use of the funds to facilitate participation of developing States, particularly the least developed countries and small island developing States, in the fourth cycle of the UPR and to support them to implement recommendations from the fourth cycle; * Showcase good practices of implementation of recommendations by States also supported by the voluntary funds on implementation, promoting reflection on key elements for replicability and sustainability, including in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); * Reflect on lessons learned during the past fifteen years with a view to ensuring greater support to States by the United Nations system and the international community, thus ensuring greater positive impact of the UPR mechanism on the ground. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Václav Bálek**, President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statements:** | **Ms. Amina Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations *(video message)*  **Ms. Nada Al-Nashif**, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **Panellists:** | * **H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations Office at Geneva * **Ms. Susanna Moorehead**, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development * **Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (TBC) * **Ms. Mona M’Bikay**, Executive Director of UPR Info |
| **Background:** | The Human Rights Council adopted by consensus, on 7 October 2022, resolution 51/30 entitled “Strengthening the voluntary funds for the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council”, which was co-sponsored by 73 States. The resolution also welcomed the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the UPR and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the UPR. The resolution also requested to further strengthen the regular budget-funded dedicated capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner to implement the mandates of the two voluntary funds, including by scaling up the dedicated capacity of the Universal Periodic Review Branch (UPRB) in each OHCHR Regional office during the fourth cycle of the UPR. It further encouraged all States to consider contributing to the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the UPR and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the UPR.  The UPR is a unique process, which involves a review of the human rights records of all United Nations Member States. Based on the principle of equal treatment for all countries, the UPR relies for its content on the work of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, special procedure mandate holders and on recommendations by OHCHR and the entire United Nations system. The essential contribution of regional human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations ensure that the reviews capture all critical protection concerns. During the review, States have the opportunity to declare the actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights. As a universal peer-review mechanism with the objective of improving the human rights situation on the ground through nationally owned processes, the UPR relies on cooperation and constructive dialogue and it builds on sovereign decisions made with respect to recommendations that States receive and then commit to support and implement. The UPR has successfully completed the first three cycles with a 100 per cent participation by States. Significant developments and achievements can be highlighted, including an increasing number of recommendations received (an average of 230 recommendations per review) that are sharper, actionable, time-bound and measurable; greater follow-up action and implementation of accepted recommendations; and increased dialogue of Governments with Parliaments, and other stakeholders, including NHRIs and NGOs.  The Secretary-General, in launching the Call to Action for Human Rights in February 2020, referred to a “new practical guidance to every UN country leader around the world to strengthen our platforms of cooperation to address human rights challenges utilizing the power and potential of the Universal Periodic Review”. *The* [*Practical Guidance: Maximizing the use of the Universal Periodic Review at country level*](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf) (available in all United Nations languages [[العربية](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance_AR.pdf) | [中文](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance_CH.pdf) | [English](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf) | [Français](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance_FR.pdf) | [Русский](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance_RU.pdf) | [Español](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance_SP.pdf)) was finalized in August 2020 and provides advice on how United Nations entities at country level can engage in the UPR process to support progress by Member States on human rights and the SDGs, as well as on prevention and sustaining peace agendas. As a roll-out of the UPR Practical Guidance, a [Repository of [UN good practices on how the Universal Periodic Review process supports sustainable development](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/UPR_good_practices_2022.pdf)](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/UPR_good_practices_2022.pdf). It was developed by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), OHCHR and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) and launched in 2022, showcasing how the United Nations system has used the UPR to support SDG implementation and address relevant human rights issues and concerns. It details concrete action in 18 country contexts to advance the SDGs with human rights at their core.  It should also be noted that since its establishment, the [Voluntary Fund for Participation in the UPR](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/trust-fund-participation) facilitated the attendance of 112 States’ participants, 39 per cent from least developed countries (LDCs) and 32 per cent from small island developing states (SIDSs). The UPR swiftly adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by establishing hybrid modalities and remote participation initially in November 2020 which were later adopted by the HRC in early 2021. The modalities resulted in an increased participation in the mechanism.  Since its establishment, the [Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the UPR](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/trust-fund-implementation) has supported projects in 76 countries throughout all regions of the world, yet especially in countries in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and Eastern Europe, and has allowed for the organization of 8 regional workshops to promote the sharing of good practices. (<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/2022-07-05/UPR-VF-Implementation-full.pdf>)  In 2022, the overlapping context of the start of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review and the fifteenth anniversary of the Voluntary Funds provided a good opportunity for Member States, United Nations entities and other stakeholders to collectively reflect on the achievements, good practices and lessons learnt from the implementation of UPR recommendations. Side events were organized in Geneva, in the margins of 51st session of the Human Rights Council, and in New York, during the 77th session of the General Assembly, to take stock of the achievements of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the UPR in ensuring the implementation of UPR recommendations and promote access by States to the financial and technical assistance available.  ([www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session41/2022-11-07/2022-11-03-Flyer-UPR-event.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session41/2022-11-07/2022-11-03-Flyer-UPR-event.pdf))  In the general debate under agenda item 6, held during the 51st session of the Human Rights Council on 30 September 2022, many speakers called for increased technical cooperation and capacity-building for an effective implementation of UPR recommendations, as well as sharing good practices of UPR related implementation. On 17 October 2022, an informal consultation on “strengthening and optimizing of the UPR in view of its fourth cycle” was convened by the Permanent Representatives of Armenia and Morocco. Main issues emerging from the discussion pointed to a general recognition that the UPR is a universal and highly successful mechanism that fully complies with the institution-building package, that emphasis on the implementation of accepted UPR recommendations should be matched by increased support from the United Nations system and integration in the UNSDCFs in the fourth cycle, that development assistance and forms of North-South/South-South cooperation should be increasingly available to States, at their request, to implement recommendations, and that both UPR Voluntary Funds should be strengthened. The voluntary practice of mid-term reporting was encouraged as well as using the general debate under agenda item 6 as a platform to share good practices and express the need for possible technical and financial assistance. |
| **Outcome:** | Main issues discussed during the high-level panel, its conclusions and recommendations, will be compiled in an OHCHR report to be submitted to the Council at its 53rd session. The report will also consider the conclusions and recommendations of the high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming devoted to the UPR and held at the 37th session\* in February 2018 as well as the High Commissioner’s report submitted to the Human Rights Council in the following year (A/HRC/41/25).\*\* |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States or observers, 1 national human rights institution and 2 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have two minutes to ask panellists questions or to share relevant national experiences. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates unable to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). |
| **Accessibility:** | In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel discussion will be webcast and made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcast during the discussion. Participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>) during the event itself. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in *The accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/accessibility>). |
| **Background documents:** | [Human Rights Council resolution 51/30](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/51/30) of 7 October 2023 on strengthening the voluntary funds for the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council  Information and documents about the UPR TFs, including the HRC yearly reports, the UPR Practical Guidance; the Repository of UPR Good Practices, as well as UPR related partnerships with Parliament (IPU, OIF), NHRIs (GANHRI) and NGOs (UPR Info) may be found at: [www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-main](http://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-main) |

\* In a summary prepared by OHCHR UPR Branch, it was emphasized that all speakers underlined the fact that the UPR was a critical tool of the Human Rights Council and United Nations Member States. The panel discussion identified the need for strong coordination of implementation efforts at the national level, with a widespread support for national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. Discussions also focused on the complementarity between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UPR. There was a great potential for better and more focused use of human rights recommendations in system-wide action across the United Nations in support of the Secretary-General’s new emphasis on prevention, as well as the 2030 Agenda. The panel identified the UPR as a unique opportunity for countries to ground national development programmes and policies in human rights and to move forward the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations system at the national level is well placed to support these efforts, including through a short list of clear priorities in the UNSDCF, a stronger United Nations Resident Coordinator providing leadership and engagement by all United Nations country teams, less fragmented and more pooled funding from donors, and a stronger accountability of the United Nations towards Member States. The panel discussion also highlighted that the UPR allows for a discussion on cross-border impacts and regional issues in the context of the SDGs, as well as highlighting areas for North-South and South-South cooperation. Panel discussion also highlighted that the international donor community could better leverage the UPR. The OECD/DAC members could increasingly use the UPR as an important tool in coordinating bilateral development assistance - specially in priority countries - by leveraging UPR accepted recommendations. The webcast of the HRC37 high-level panel discussion is available at: [Panel discussion on Human Rights Mainstreaming - 3rd Meeting, 37th Regular Session Human Rights Council | UN Web TV](https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1g/k1g1i4gu3l)

\*\* “72. Greater transparency in identifying human rights needs will mobilize the United Nations system and the international community to provide greater assistance and support through ODA and existing trust funds. Peer reviews carried out by the OECD Development Assistance Committee could take into account human rights recommendations, notably from the universal periodic review, especially when countries that are recipients of ODA are ready to undertake reforms in follow-up to recommendations they have supported. Recommending States could ensure that their development cooperation entity is actively involved in such implementation efforts in States that are recipients of ODA. 73. The resulting compact between Governments, the United Nations system and the international community on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, with human rights at their core, is crucial to the success of the prevention agenda of the Secretary-General and of the Sustainable Development Goals. The enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights through the implementation of recommendations made by human rights mechanisms and their integration into the Sustainable Development Goals will no doubt contribute to addressing the root causes of human rights violations, while immediately reinforcing the three pillars of the Charter of the United Nations.” Report of the High Commissioner A/HRC/41/25, paragraphs 72-73.