

# **Presentation of the “2009 Report on Activities and Results” High Commissioner's opening remarks**

**Geneva, 28 May 2010  
Room XX, Palais des Nations**

## **Introduction**

I am pleased to have this opportunity to present to my Office’s “2009 Report on Activities and Results.” The report, copies of which have been circulated to all permanent missions with additional copies available in the hall today, is something we prepare on a voluntary basis and reflects our commitment to transparency and accountability. In addition to today’s presentation for Member States I will be presenting the report to representatives of civil society at a special briefing convened on 11 June, during the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. The report is available for download to the general public via the OHCHR website.

The product of an internal evaluation exercise conducted right across the Office at the end of every calendar year, this report sets out in the spirit of transparency and in some detail the work we carried out last year and the progress we believe we made towards the achievement of the expected accomplishments set out in our Strategic Management Plan for the last biennium.

As in past years, it also includes a full breakdown of income and expenditure, as well as detailed information on funding sources. I trust it will provide a useful reference document for Member States, the donor community, civil society and the general public, all of whom have a stake in the quality and impact of the work we do.

## **Focus on results**

The release of a report of this kind is a chance to pause and reflect on what we have been able to achieve and the challenges we have faced along the way. We have made a conscious effort in the report to identify and describe the concrete outcomes of our work, to provide as many practical examples possible of the impact of our activities on the level of human rights protection.

In doing so, I am conscious of the fact that we are rarely if ever entitled to claim complete credit for a particular outcome, and that our contribution is typically one factor among many others that helps make change possible. Nevertheless, I believe OHCHR can make a difference, sometimes a decisive difference, whether through our work in support of UN human rights bodies and mechanisms, through our political engagement with Member States, or through the work carried out by staff in our 55 field presences.

The report before you contains many examples that illustrate this point: laws enacted or improved; institutions strengthened; treaties ratified; commissions of

inquiry and other accountability mechanisms established; and initiatives taken to widen access to justice and basic services and participation in decision-making by the most marginalized groups in society. These represent real, measurable advances in the level of human rights protection that complement the improvements we continue to see and encourage in international human rights institutions and legal frameworks, including in the context of the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review, the work of the special procedures and the treaty bodies.

### **A few developments from 2009**

I am going to pick out a few developments from last year, while encouraging you to refer to the report for a more comprehensive picture of progress.

First, the UPR, which not only continues to show great promise but increasingly, as we are now well over the halfway mark in the first cycle of reviews, is starting to bear fruit. Last year another 48 countries went through UPR and the participation rate was 100 per cent. 16 countries benefited from financial assistance from the Voluntary Fund established to support participation in the process and my Office organized seven regional training sessions to help States and other stakeholders prepare. I appreciate very much the constructive spirit in which countries have engaged in this process – both as subjects under review and as participants in the discussion – and I also commend the hard work and high standards of my own staff who support the process, including through the compilation of background documentation. We need to make sure the focus is now fixed firmly on implementation and critical in this regard will be the way Member States approach the second round of reviews, an issue that was discussed, I understand, at last weekend's meeting in Rabat. I urge States to update the guidelines for reporting in light of the required focus on implementation of recommendations from the first round. In the meantime, I welcome the initiative of several countries that have already undergone their first review to provide public updates on progress in implementing recommendations and encourage other countries to follow this example of good practice.

Secondly, the Durban Review Conference, which, as you know, could so easily have unravelled completely but which ultimately produced a solid outcome, thanks to goodwill, patience and compromise on the part of Member States and, I like to think, the contribution we as an Office were able to make by bringing forward technical, expert advice and ideas and doing all we could to depoliticize discussions. I am proud of the Outcome Document that States adopted and look forward to providing every support we can to help States to honour their commitments to combat racism within their own societies. In follow-up, we have already taken several steps, including the enhancement of the Office's Anti-Discrimination Unit, increased support for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the development of a proposal to organize workshops in each region on incitement to hatred, details of which have already been shared with Member States at briefings held in Geneva and New York. I was also pleased to be able to launch, in South Africa on Human Rights Day last year, OHCHR's own worldwide public information initiative designed to

highlight the scourge of discrimination and mobilize governments and civil society alike to confront it in all its forms.

Third, the renewed effort by members of the treaty bodies to accelerate harmonization and streamlining of working practices and identify ways to further strengthen the treaty body system. I have seen myself and hear constantly from my own staff how stretched the system has become in recent years, as the number of treaties and ratifications has increased, increasing in turn the volume of reporting and the workload of both the treaty bodies and the staff assigned to support them. I welcome the fact that the latest initiative to strengthen the system and overcome some of these growing pains, which began in Dublin at a meeting I personally attended, is being driven by the experts themselves and we look forward to lending whatever support we can. Key to the success of this process, I believe, is that it is bottom-up, inclusive and transparent, and I look forward to it generating ideas with the aim of strengthening the treaty body system as a whole while easing the burden on States. My hope would be that by the end of 2011 we would have compiled sufficient suggestions to enable us to move forward.

Fourth, the special procedures system had its busiest year to date with more mandates, more travel to countries, more involvement in debates in the Council and more outreach, whether through the media or through engaging civil society, than ever before. With the establishment of a new mandate on cultural rights, the special procedures now comprehensively cover all sets of rights. Supporting them in their efforts to undertake their activities with full independence remained important last year and will be a focus of the current review of the Council. Good progress has been made and should continue in improving coordination among mandate-holders, including through the work of the Coordination Committee, which we support, and in ensuring complementarity among the various expert and intergovernmental mechanisms – the special procedures, the treaty bodies, and the UPR. This should also be emphasized in relation to activities to follow up on the recommendations of these mechanisms.

With respect to human rights mainstreaming, my office led interagency consultations to develop a mechanism to further strengthen efforts to mainstream human rights into UN operational activities for development. As a result, the UNDG established on 30 November 2009 a dedicated mechanism (UNDG-HRM) chaired by OHCHR to further strengthen system-wide coherence, collaboration and support for Resident Coordinators and UN country teams in mainstreaming human rights. The main objectives of the mechanism is to further pursue institutionalization of mainstreaming efforts and partnerships with UN agencies including on thematic issues, developing national capacities and follow-up to recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms at the request of countries. This development has been strongly supported by all Agencies, Programmes and Funds.

The last development I want to highlight is in the field, where in 2009 we established three additional regional offices or centres – one in Doha, serving Southwest Asia and the Arab Region, another in Santiago, serving South America, and a third in Brussels, serving Europe. I travelled to both Doha and Brussels to officially

inaugurate our offices there and was encouraged by the reception we received not just from the host governments in each case but from other governments and from NGOs in the region. With the opening of these new presences, we have moved closer to achieving our goal of a global network of regional offices that between them cover all parts of the world and make available to all countries human rights expertise and technical cooperation. These offices are intended to become part of the long-term human rights infrastructure—a resource for all countries and a conduit between the standard-setting work that goes on here in Geneva and the efforts of governments and civil society to translate those standards into increased levels of human rights protection on the ground.

## **Funding**

I will end my remarks with some comments on funding. Much of the work we describe in the report was funded from voluntary contributions and I want to emphasize here the importance I place not just on the level of contributions but on encouraging contributions, regardless of amount, from as many Member States as possible, as a significant sign of their support.

The importance of voluntary funding is self-evident. Even after the increases of recent years, the funds approved by the General Assembly under the United Nations regular budget are simply inadequate to support a fully-effective, properly resourced human rights program with the capacity both to service UN human rights bodies and mechanisms here in Geneva and to actively assist with protection, capacity-building and technical cooperation at the country level.

Were we to rely on the regular budget alone, the Office would be less than half its present size and we would have to turn down most requests we receive from countries seeking technical cooperation. Our research capacity would be severely restricted and we would be unable to play anything like the role we currently play in respect of mainstreaming human rights within the UN system and generating guidance materials and methodological tools for use by UN partners, civil society and governments. Even our capacity to service the Council, special procedures and treaty bodies, already stretched, would be compromised.

So we rely on the goodwill and support of Member States to provide the additional funding we need to do our work properly. Donors may contribute to the cost of any of the activities and Funds we set out in our Strategic Management Plan, although we encourage them to give us as much flexibility as possible in determining allocation.

In 2009, voluntary contributions amounted to just over \$118 million, of which 56 per cent, the highest proportion ever recorded, was completely unearmarked. Voluntary contributions paid for more than 60 per cent of our global expenditure and some areas of our programme, in particular the running costs of some of our field presences, were funded entirely from voluntary contributions. Almost all areas, including those that also received substantial funding under the regular budget, benefited from the additional resources that such contributions provide.

I draw some satisfaction from the fact that last year, despite the impact of the global financial and economic crisis, most of our donors were able to maintain or in a few cases even increase their support to the Office. Overall the level of voluntary contributions slipped only very slightly in U.S. dollars compared with 2008 and actually rose slightly measured in donor's own currencies. That is testament to the strength and durability of the support of our donors. Even so, there is no room for complacency: our funding needs continue to grow in line with the demands upon us and this year and next are likely to be our toughest years yet for fundraising, as aid budgets in donor countries come under increasing pressure.

Moreover, I am less than satisfied with the degree of diversity in our current funding base. I have used every opportunity of bilateral contacts and meetings with regional groups to appeal for contributions and I do so again today. I appreciate very much the support of the 69 Member States that made a contribution last year, but I regret very much the absence from our donor table of the 123 other Member States.

So I would like to ask all of you here today to pass on to your Governments this simple message: this is your human rights programme; it belongs to all Member States. We count on your support and one important and visible way you can demonstrate that support is through a voluntary contribution to OHCHR. Starting today, let's show the true breadth and diversity that I know exists for our human rights programme among Member States.

I will leave it there but I encourage your questions—on the report or on any aspect of our work. I have with me sitting at the podium most of my senior management team, including directors responsible for our work in support of the Council, special procedures and the treaty bodies, our work in the area of research and the right to development, and our field work. They are here to help answer your questions and I look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions. Thank you.

ENDS