



Activity Report April 2013-March 2014

I. The Universal Rights Group

The Universal Rights Group (URG) is a small, independent think tank dedicated to analysing and strengthening global human rights policy. It is the only such institution in Geneva and the only think tank in the world focusing exclusively on human rights.

The goal of the organisation is to strengthen policy-making and policy-implementation in the international human rights system by providing rigorous yet accessible, timely and policy-relevant research, analysis and recommendation, a forum for discussion and debate on important human rights issues facing the international community, and a window onto the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms – a window designed to promote transparency, accountability, awareness and effectiveness.

A key aspect of this goal is to make the international human rights system more accessible to, and to bring it into closer orbit with, policy-makers at regional, national and local levels, as well as with human rights defenders and the victims of human rights violations.

Mission

‘To generate progress towards the full realisation of the rights and freedoms contained in the universal human rights instruments through solutions-based policy research and forward-looking policy prescription, and through offering a respected platform for information-sharing and dialogue’.

Core values

The URG is guided by eight core values – the eight Is:

- **Integrity, independence and impartiality** – in order to have impact, the Group’s work must be respected and credible.
- **Impact** – everything the Group does is premised on generating impact, on supporting and strengthening human rights policy-making.
- **Innovation** – the Group aims to be ‘ahead of the curve’ in responding strategically to important and emerging issues in order to provide policy-makers with timely guidance.
- **Insight** – the Group also aims to help policy-makers understand and get to the heart of a particular issue, by offering new strategic thinking.
- **Inclusivity** – the Group aims to engage all stakeholders in its work. It promotes cross-regionalism and gender balance in everything it does.
- **Integration** – the Group’s work is premised on contributing to, supporting and improving the policy output of existing human rights structures and standards.

Our approach

The URG is designed to act as an interface for the transfer and distillation of knowledge between international human rights experts (e.g. academics, human rights defenders) and human rights policy-makers.

By bringing these two groups together and providing an open, inclusive and independent platform for information-sharing and fresh thinking on human rights policy, the URG helps to identify, understand and find solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing the international human rights community.

In order to be inclusive and representative, the URG Board, Advisory Committee and secretariat all strive for geographic balance, while the URG aims to work with countries and NGOs from all regions and all political groups.

Stakeholders

The URG seeks to inform and influence the full range of relevant stakeholders at international, regional, national and local levels.

The UN in Geneva, home to the Human Rights Council and key human rights mechanisms, is of course central to the URG's outreach. This includes all diplomatic missions (members and observers of the Council), OHCHR, Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies, civil society, business and the media. It also includes other international organisations that might not be focused solely on human rights but which (can) play a key role in promoting and protecting rights, such as the ILO, WTO, IOM, UNHCR, WIPO, IPU, and UNEP.

Notwithstanding, a principal objective of the organisation is to break 'the Geneva bubble' and the notion that 'what happens in Geneva stays in Geneva'. This means reaching out to policymakers in the General Assembly, in other (non Geneva-based) relevant UN organisations and bodies, in the regional human rights mechanisms, in foreign ministries and relevant line ministries, in national human rights institutions, in parliaments and in local civil society.

It also means working with these stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of human rights policies and mechanisms, so that the URG's work contributes to understanding and improving impact.

Programme of work

The URG's work is organised around four broad programmes. Individual projects are organised under these four programmes. The Board of Trustees, meeting at least once a year, sets the programme of work. The four programmes are:

1. In focus: human rights and religion
2. International human rights institutions, mechanisms and processes
3. Contemporary and emerging human rights issues
4. Beyond the Council – human rights protection outside the main Geneva-based international human rights institutions and mechanisms

In addition to these main programmes, URG also undertakes a number of other stand-alone projects designed to support the UN human rights pillar. These include the organisation of the Glion Human Rights Dialogue, a two-day retreat for senior policy-makers, pre Human Rights Council session press breakfasts, and the publication of opinion-editorial style articles by senior policymakers.

II. Establishment

The URG was officially registered with a permanent address on 1st April 2013. Its statutes had been adopted earlier by a provisional constitutive general assembly, as per Swiss law.

The URG's main office is located at *chemin du Grand-Montfleury 48*, 1290 Versoix, just outside Geneva. The office is in a building set aside for NGOs by the Canton of Geneva. In April 2014, the Canton of Geneva decided to cover the rental costs of the URG for a period of two years.

URG thus officially began its operations on 1st April 2013. From this time until the end of September, in addition to beginning substantive research for a number of projects, the organisation focused on institution building, including establishing its governing bodies (a Board of Trustees and Advisory Committee – see below), fundraising, appointing the secretariat, beginning an internship programme, and introducing the organisation to the representatives of states, NGOs and other stakeholder groups.

The overall goal was to create a not-for-profit association that would be small and cost-efficient, and produce work that would be relevant, useful, accessible and impactful.

Governing bodies

The URG's strategy and programme of work is developed in consultation with a Board of Trustees. The Board is composed of eminent experts and thought-leaders from around the world. An Advisory Committee, made up of respected human rights scholars, civil society leaders and journalists advises the secretariat on substantive content.

As far as possible, the URG looks to implement its projects with Board or Advisory Committee members, thus fulfilling its goal of acting as an interface between human rights expertise and human rights policymaking.

Board of Trustees

The URG has been able to gather an extremely distinguished group of experts to sit on its Board. They are:

Honorary President, President Ramos-Horta (Timor-Leste), former President of Timor-Leste and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize; Chairperson, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed (Maldives), UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives; Vice-Chair, Professor Michael O'Flaherty (Ireland), former Vice-Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee; Ms. Asma Jahangir (Pakistan), former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions; Sir Nigel Rodley (UK), Chair of the UN Human Rights

Committee, former UN Special Rapporteur on torture; Dr. Nazila Ghanea-Hercock (Iran), professor at the University of Oxford; Professor Juan Mendez (Argentina), UN Special Rapporteur on torture; Professor John Knox (US), UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment; Professor Abdullahi An Na'im (Sudan), senior fellow at the Centre for the Study of Law and Religion, former Executive Director of Human Rights Watch (Africa); Justice Sophia A. B. Akuffo (Ghana), President and Judge of the African Court of Human and People's Rights; Professor Dan Magraw (US), President Emeritus of the Centre for International Environmental Law; Professor Paul Hunt (NZ), former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, former member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Ms. Yasmin Sooka (South Africa), Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa; and Professor Heiner Bielefeld (Germany), UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion.

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee is a network of eminent scholars, thought-leaders and opinion-formers from around the world. Its membership includes:

Dr. (Ms.) Basak Cali (Turkey), Associate Professor at Koç University, Turkey; Mr. Malcolm Langford (Norway), Director of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Programme at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, Oslo, Norway; Professor (Ms.) Elizabeth Griffin (UK), Professor and Executive Director at Global Jindal University, New Delhi, India; Mr. Rolf Ring (Sweden), Deputy Director of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Lund University, Sweden; Dr. (Ms.) Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona (Chile), United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights; Professor (Mr.) Frans Viljoen (South Africa), Director at the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, South Africa; Mr. Scott Sheeran (New Zealand), Senior Lecturer and Director of the LLM in International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law programme at the University of Essex, UK; Mr. Roland Chauville (France), Executive Director of UPR Info (NGO), Geneva, Switzerland; Dr. (Ms.) Elvira Dominguez-Redondo (Spain), Senior Lecturer in Law at Middlesex University, UK; Ms. Julie de Rivero (Peru, UK), Geneva Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch; Mr. Nick Cumming-Bruce (UK), Geneva-based journalist contributing to the IHT and the New York Times; Dr. (Ms.) Rosa Freedman, author of *The United Nations Human Rights Council: an early assessment* (March 2013); Mr. Peter Splinter (Canada), Amnesty International Representative to the United Nations in Geneva; Professor (Mr.) George E. Edwards (USA), Director of the Programme in International Human Rights Law, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law; and Dr. (Ms.) Rose Nakayi (Uganda), Director, Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC), School of Law, Makerere University, Uganda.

Secretariat

The URG's programme of work is implemented by a small secretariat made up of former UN diplomats and former NGO representatives. The secretariat aims to achieve geographical and gender balance.

Mr. Marc Limon (UK), Executive Director, former Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of the Maldives to the UN in Geneva

Mr. Subhas Gujadhur (Mauritius), Director, former Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Mauritius to the UN in Geneva

Ms. Pooja Patel (India), former head of FORUM-Asia's Geneva office

URG also has an internship programme, organised in cooperation with members of the Advisory Committee. So far, it has employed four people (three women and one man) on internship contracts of between three and six months. URG is currently in talks with the University of Geneva to put in place a system (especially with regard to visas) that would allow more individuals from developing countries to undertake internships.

Presence in the Global South

In order to ensure that its work is inclusive and reflective of perspectives from all regions and from developing as well as developed countries, the URG has established small hubs or offices (at no cost) in Mauritius and Turkey. Such hubs are generally arranged through memoranda of understanding with academic institutions linked with the URG's Board or Advisory Committee. For example, the hub in Istanbul is located in Koç University. Students and researchers in these hubs contribute to URG research, and also have the possibility to undertake internships. In 2014-2015, URG will look to establish hubs in East Asia and in Latin America.

Fundraising

As a new organisation in a difficult financial climate, URG has done reasonably well in securing financial support from a range of donors. In 2013-2014, the support was received from the following governments and public entities:

- Norway – core funding.
- Denmark – core funding.
- Switzerland – programme funding.
- UK – project funding.
- Canton Geneva – project funding.
- Cite Genève – project funding.
- Private individual – project funding.

Communication and marketing

The URG aims to be ahead of the curve in terms of its use of communications (public affairs and public relations) to ensure that its work is inclusive, accessible and has impact.

In 2013-2014, URG worked with a design company, mydearagency.com, to put in place its corporate identity (including logos, colour schemes, fonts etc.), website, 'e-blasts' (electronic communications featuring URG opinion articles, activity updates, press releases etc.), corporate banners (for events), brochures introducing the URG (in English and French), report templates and info-graphics.

URG's website, universal-rights.org, went live in late November 2013. It has been extremely well received, securing 4,500 individual visits (18,000 pages viewed) by 2,500 different individual users.

URG has also created, in early 2014, accounts on Twitter (250 followers, 179 tweets) and Facebook (229 Likes), and has a page on Wikipedia.

eDelivery

In line with its founding principles, URG seeks to leverage information technology to ensure that its events, information notes, opinion pieces and policy reports are available and accessible to a wide-range of people in all regions of the world. Its events (except Policy Dialogues) are public events and are also recorded and accessible via the website and YouTube. Its 'e-blasts' notifying stakeholders about URG events, reports, opinion pieces etc., are sent electronically to over 3000 individuals. These notifications are sent every two weeks. And its policy reports and policy briefs are published electronically as well as in print, and can be read on-line in normal PDF and in interactive PDF. URG also produces weekly blog articles addressing key issues of the day.

SIM

In line with its founding principles, URG has put in place internal systems to ensure that, for each project, it will be possible to 'Show Impact & Measure' (SIM). This includes an impact analysis across relevant UN bodies, governments, NGOs and the media.

III. Launch

Official launch events

The URG held an official launch reception on 20th January 2014 at the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva, with the attendance of over 120 human rights policymakers, including three current and former Presidents of the Human Rights Council (the ambassadors of Gabon, Uruguay and Hungary), around 50 Permanent Representatives and ambassadors, state human rights experts, senior UN officials from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the ILO, the IOM, the WTO and UNHCR, NGO representatives, business representatives and members of the press.

The event featured short speeches by Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Chairperson of the URG; Sir Nigel Rodley, Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee and URG Board members; H.E. Mr. Baudelaire Ndong Ella, President of the Human Rights Council; and Mr. Craig Mokhiber, Chief of the Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch of OHCHR. The launch was used to present the URG and to express its determination to work cooperatively with all relevant stakeholders.

To ensure that in addition to offering a social occasion, the launch also provided a substantive contribution to human rights debate in Geneva, the URG event was held jointly with the launch of a major new book on human rights, the Routledge Handbook of International Human Rights Law, edited by Sir Nigel Rodley, URG Board member, and Scott Sheeran, URG Advisory Committee member. To launch the book, URG organised a panel discussion on 'The evolution of international human rights: where have we been and where are we going?' The panel was facilitated by Dr. Shaheed, Chair of the URG and featuring the authors of certain chapters including, Sir Nigel Rodley, Dr. Allehone Mulugeta Abebe, Professor Andrew Clapham, Mervat Rishmawi and Scott Sheeran. This arrangement also ensured that URG fulfilled its goal of providing an interface between academic experts and policymakers.

In addition to the Geneva launch, URG was invited by Scott Sheeran and the High Commission of New Zealand in London to participate in a joint URG-Routledge Handbook launch in the UK. This was attended by UK-based diplomats, government officials and academics.

Bilateral outreach

From November 2013 to March 2014, as part of efforts to introduce the URG to policymakers, the Chair and secretariat held over 50 bilateral meetings in Geneva, Stockholm, London, Oslo, Rabat, Doha, Washington and elsewhere. The meetings were used to explain the objectives and approach of the URG, outline the programme of work, and to express the organisation's wish to work with all delegations and NGOs from all regions. Relationships developed during the meetings have also proved invaluable in terms of ensuring that the URG's projects have impact and contribute to human rights.

During this time, URG met (usually at ambassador level) with, *inter alia*, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Botswana, Canada, Chile, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, South Korea, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, UAE, UK, Uruguay and the US.

URG also met and/or presented to a number of organisations, regional groups and political groups, including the Commonwealth, Organisation Francophone, EU, Like Minded Group, OIC, and the African Group. URG's Marc Limon also continued to participate (as an *ex officio* member) in meetings of the Article 4 Dialogue – a cross-regional group of states focused on strengthening human rights policy.

And URG proactively approached and introduced itself to a number of NGOs including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, FIDH, ISHR, UPR Info, Geneva Academy, Article XIX, Earthjustice, CIEL and Global Witness.

In 2014, URG applied for accreditation to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and will shortly apply for accreditation to the Organisation of American States (OAS). It will apply for UN ECOSOC accreditation after two years of existence (so in 2015).

IV. Implementation of the Programme of Work

From June 2013 (when URG began substantive work), the organisation has been working to implement its two-year programme of work. The overall aim of the programme of work is to strengthen the UN's human rights pillar by asking and seeking to provide answers to difficult systemic issues with crucial implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of the human rights system. For example, each year the Council produces more and more thematic resolutions, but are these resolutions having a qualitative impact on the ground? Similarly, in 2014, the Council established the fiftieth active Special Procedure mandate, but is the

horizontal expansion of the mechanism being matched by a deepening in terms of its influence on domestic human rights? And while the Council is rightly applauded for arriving at a consensus position on international efforts to combat religious intolerance, is the resulting framework (laid down in resolution 16/18) actually being implemented?

These and other questions, addressed in the URG's programme of work, may not be easy to answer, but that does not mean they should not be asked in the first place. If the international community is to make the case that the human rights system is working, is making a real difference to people's lives, and is deserving of more resources, then it is important to produce empirical evidence in support, to acknowledge shortcomings and to work together to identify ways and means of strengthening the system.

The URG's programme of work consists of seventeen individual projects across the four programmes described above. As of today, the URG has begun eleven projects, undertaking desk research and empirical analyses, organising policy dialogues, undertaking interviews and disseminating questionnaires. In line with its objectives and values, URG seeks to implement its projects in partnership with international experts and other relevant institutions (often represented on its Board or Advisory Committee).

Below is a summary of the activities undertaken between June 2013 and end March 2014, in connection with the implementation of the programme of work.

Programme 1 - In Focus: Human rights and religion

Project

Combatting religious intolerance: implementation of resolution 16/18

Project leaders

Dr. Nazila Ghanea, Oxford University and member of the URG Board; Marc Limon, URG secretariat. (Professor Heiner Bielefeld, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and URG Board member, will also advise the project).

Context

Council resolution 16/18 on combatting religious intolerance is considered one of the most important resolutions yet adopted by the body. The resolution contains an action plan of measures to be undertaken by states. The text also has important implications for freedom of religion and freedom of expression (e.g. in the context of blasphemy laws). Yet disagreements persist as to whether resolution 16/18 is being effectively implemented. URG is currently finalising a review of its implementation across 20 UN member states.

Impact

On 25th November 2013, URG hosted a Policy Dialogue bringing together sixteen delegations (Pakistan, US, Egypt, UK, Turkey, Austria, Indonesia, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Maldives, Jordan, EU, Morocco, OIC), representatives of the OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, and international experts. At the Dialogue, URG presented key findings from its five-month research project on the implementation of resolution 16/18 and proposed ways to strengthen implementation. These ideas were debated by participants in an informal, off-the-record setting, leading to a number of ideas being taken up by delegations. The Dialogue also led to a more constructive consideration of key issues during negotiations on freedom of religion and religious intolerance at the 25th

session of the Council. On 24th-25th March, URG was invited by the Government of Qatar to present initial conclusions and recommendations during the 4th meeting of the Istanbul Process. Marc Limon from the URG secretariat chaired the opening high-level panel, and Dr. Ghanaea then presented (during the same panel) URG's ideas to assembled domestic policymakers, thought-leaders and religious community leaders.

Next steps

URG's Policy Report on the implementation of resolution 16/18 will be published in May 2014. URG is currently in talks with Chile, the host of the next Istanbul Process meeting, to present the main conclusions and recommendations of the project to delegates. URG will also organise a follow-up meeting with key delegations in Geneva to strengthen implementation and to improve the linkages between the UN's work streams on religious freedom and on religious intolerance. URG is working closely with delegations from all interested regions in order to maintain a consensual approach and to secure these goals.

Project

Understanding and reconsidering religion-based reservations to the main international human rights conventions

Project leaders

Dr. Basak Cali, Koç University, and member of the URG Advisory Committee; Scott Sheeran, University of Essex, and member of the URG Advisory Committee; Marc Limon, URG secretariat.

Context

A number of states maintain reservations to the core human rights conventions because they consider some parts of the treaties to be incompatible with prevailing religious beliefs or values. Such reservations have significant negative implications for the enjoyment of human rights. Other states, supported by international experts, disagree, holding that there is no inherent incompatibility between universal human rights norms and religious values. Indeed, some states (e.g. Morocco) have been able to establish domestic processes that have led to the lifting of all religion-based reservations to key conventions.

Impact

URG has mapped all religion-based reservations to the core human rights conventions, has looked to question the assumptions underpinning them, and has drawn attention to 'best practice' domestic processes such as Morocco's. In November 2013, URG convened a Policy Dialogue with countries (both Christian and Muslim) that maintain such reservations or have experience in lifting them. This included Algeria, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Tunisia, Malta, EU, Poland and the Holy See. All delegations found that they had similar experiences and faced similar challenges in terms of reconsidering and reviewing such reservations. All delegations expressed an interest continuing to work together after the publication of the URG's Policy Report.

Next steps

The URG's Policy Report will be published in June 2014. Thereafter, URG will organise a further Policy Dialogue with the above-mentioned states, other states, relevant Special Procedures and members of Treaty Bodies, to discuss steps that can be taken at the national level to establish inclusive national processes to reconsider these reservations. This meeting in Geneva will include 'best practice' presentations from countries that have already undertaken such national processes. URG will also work with regional organisations such as

the OIC's Human Rights Commission to promote dialogue on these important yet sensitive issues.

Project

Religion, inter-religious dialogue and women's rights

Project leaders

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur and URG Chair; Subhas Gujadhur, URG secretariat. (Professor Heiner Bielefeld, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and URG Board member, will also advise the project).

Context

Many of the most important and intractable human rights challenges facing the world today are closely interlinked with religion and belief. These challenges often stem from misunderstandings about the nature of the relationship between human rights and religion. The URG project seeks to confront such misunderstandings and misrepresentations by bringing together religious leaders and thought-leaders who argue that human rights and religious belief are inherently compatible, with human rights policymakers. In particular, it will look at women's rights as a prism through which to view and understand the practical implications of the universalist-relativist debate on human rights.

Impact

URG Policy Dialogues addressing religion and human rights, together with interviews and bilateral discussions undertaken for the project, have led a number of countries to consider launching a new UN initiative on inter-religious dialogue. URG's events and Policy Report will seek to support and guide this emerging initiative.

Next steps

URG will convene two inter-religious dialogue meetings, in Istanbul in the summer of 2014, and in Geneva in the autumn, to bring together thought leaders and policymakers to address the relationship between religion and human rights, in particular women's rights.

Programme 2 – Human rights institutions, mechanisms and processes

Project

The evolution and future sustainability of the UN Special Procedures

Project leaders

Ted Piccone, Brookings Institution; and Marc Limon, URG secretariat

Context

The Special Procedures are a crucially important human rights mechanism. Much of what the international community does and seeks to do in the field of human rights depends on the work of these independent experts. And yet, as the number of Special Procedure mandates passes the 50 mark, it is important to recognise the challenges the system faces and to identify ways to strengthen its impact.

Impact

On 6th December, Brookings Institution organised a Policy Dialogue in New York on Special Procedures and human rights financing (with the missions of Norway and Turkey). On 17th January 2014, URG hosted a Policy Dialogue with states (including Latvia, Denmark, Norway, UK, Honduras, Jordan, EU, Mexico, Sweden, Peru, Thailand), Special Procedure mandate holders, OHCHR's Special Procedures Branch and NGOs. URG used the meeting to present some key findings on the growth and effectiveness of the mechanism. Following the meeting, a number of delegations agreed to work together to renew support for the mechanism in line with URG's findings. On the same day as the Policy Dialogue in Geneva, Brookings Institution presented the same key findings to staffers on the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In March 2014, URG published a joint Policy Report with the Brookings Institution. The Report presents the most detailed and comprehensive analysis ever undertaken into the contemporary effectiveness of the Special Procedure system, and makes a series of policy recommendations for all stakeholders. In late March, URG, the Brookings Institution, Norway and Turkey hosted a launch event to present the Report's main conclusions and recommendations. Over one hundred policymakers attended the event. Building on the report's recommendations, during the Council's 25th session, a group of Latin American states delivered a joint statement (see annex 1) taking up some of the Policy Report's key themes and ideas. This statement directly cited URG research and ideas¹. Over the coming months, this group is expected to expand into a Group of Friends of Special Procedures. In April 2014, URG and the Brookings Institution presented a copy of the Policy Report to Chaloka Beyani, the Chairperson of the Special Procedures Coordination Committee, and also launched the report at a high-level event in Washington DC. Finally, URG issued a press release on the report launch, which resulted in positive media coverage, for example an article in *Le Temps* (22 March 2014) entitled 'Les indispensables benevoles de l'ONU' ('The indispensable volunteers of the UN').

Next steps

In the implementation of the project, URG has worked closely with Special Procedures Branch at OHCHR, a range of states and Special Procedures themselves. As a result of this collaborative approach, URG will be in a position, over the coming months, to take steps to secure the implementation of key recommendations from the report. This will include a further Policy Dialogue, organised in consultation with OHCHR, the emerging 'Group of Friends' and the Coordination Committee, to focus on state cooperation with Special Procedures and follow-up on the implementation of Special Procedure recommendations. URG will also, in consultation with OHCHR, organise a capacity-building session for new mandate holders. Finally, OHCHR has shared the URG-Brookings Policy Report with all mandate-holders and has placed it on the mechanism's intranet site.

Project

Growth, effectiveness and impact of Council resolutions

Project leader

Subhas Gujadhur, URG secretariat

Context

¹ Joint statement by Costa Rica, Honduras, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay. Delivered under agenda item 5 at the 25th session of the Human Rights Council.

Since the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006, there has been a prodigious increase in the body's output. For example, in 2013 the Council produced 107 resolutions and held 13 panels. These figures look likely to increase further in 2014. And yet insufficient attention has been paid to whether the Council and its methods of work have the capacity to deal with and adequately follow-up on this output, and to whether they are having a qualitative impact on the ground.

Impact

In October 2013 and in January 2014, URG hosted two Policy Dialogues on the issue of the methods of work of the Council, and the growth and effectiveness of Council resolutions. Participants in the two Dialogues included: Gabon (Presidency of the Council), Norway, Turkey, Morocco, EU, Chile, Mexico, Switzerland, Tunisia, Maldives, Austria, Organisation Francophone, OHCHR (Human Rights Council Branch), US, Egypt (Like Minded Group - LMG), Ethiopia (African Group), Argentina, France, Germany, Pakistan, China and Angola, Human Rights Watch and International Service for Human Rights. At the end of the meeting, a number of the state delegations, from different regions and political groups, agreed to work together to find a common consensus-based approach to the issues raised. Subsequent to the Dialogues, during the 25th session of the Council, URG organised an event with Norway and Turkey on methods of work and output of the Council. This was also addressed by the President of the Council and attended by over one hundred delegations. URG also joined OHCHR is speaking at an event (13th March) on methods of work convened by Egypt, Russia, Indonesia and Ecuador. URG also provided empirical information on the Council's output to countries from all regions. As a result of these inclusive efforts, during the 25th session, 63 countries from all regions and all political groups joined a consensus-based joint statement delivered by Norway and Turkey on methods of work and the growth, effectiveness and impact of Council resolutions (see annex 2). URG played a key role in providing content and generating cross-regional support for the statement.

Through these efforts and for the first time in the Council's history, the efficiency and effectiveness (as opposed to the widening) of the Council's work took centre stage at the Council's 25th session, and became one of the main points of debate. Moreover, whereas in the past (e.g. in 2006, 2011), issues related to the Council's methods of work proved extremely divisive, in 2014 states were able to adopt a consensual approach, backed up by accurate information and data. This demonstrates the potential of URG's approach of strengthening policy through evidence-based dialogue.

Next steps

URG has already begun following-up with the President of the Council, the Human Rights Council Branch at OHCHR and relevant state delegations on next steps. For example, ensuring that the President's calendar of initiatives reflects state decisions on the bi-annualisation and tri-annualisation of resolutions. URG's Policy Report will be published in May 2014, including policy recommendations. URG will work with interested delegations and other stakeholders to take forward ideas and recommendations contained in the Report. Two ideas that it is likely to take forward in 2014 are to compile a 'good resolution guide' for delegations, and to organise a capacity-building/best practice meeting.

Project

Treaty Body Reform: what does it mean for you?

Project leaders

Christen Broecker, Jacob Blaustein Institute; Professor Michael O'Flaherty, URG Vice Chair

Context

In April 2014, the General Assembly adopted a resolution marking the close of an intergovernmental process of review and reform of the international human rights Treaty Bodies. This built on a wider process of review and reform initiated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The outcome of the reform exercise has significant implications for the functioning of the Treaty Body system and thus for the fulfilment of the obligations contained in the international human rights conventions. It is important for all stakeholders (states, Treaty Body members, NGOs, victims) to be fully aware of these implications.

Impact

In March 2014, Professor Michael O’Flaherty authored a ‘By Invitation’ article for URG (circulated to over 3000 global policymakers) analysing the reform outcome. In April, a follow-up article from Christen Broecker was published (by URG) immediately after the adoption of the final resolution by the General Assembly. These were designed to help delegations in Geneva, as well as other stakeholders, understand the implications of the reforms.

Next steps

At the end of April/early May, URG together with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland will convene an open meeting, for all delegations and NGOs, to outline and discuss the outcome of the Treaty Body reform and its practical implications for reporting states, Treaty Body members, NGOs and victims. In May, URG will publish a Policy Brief analysing the reform process and its outcome.

Project

UPR, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures: A Connectivity Study

Project leaders

Roland Chauville, UPR Info; and Pooja Patel, URG secretariat

Context

The establishment of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was one of the key innovations of the Human Rights Council. The UPR is generally seen to have been a success, although the second cycle and the degree to which it focuses on and encourages implementation of recommendations will be key to its long-term effectiveness (this is the focus of another URG project). The success of UPR has raised a number of questions about its relationship with other main mechanisms of the human rights system, especially Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures. For example, is UPR supporting or undermining these other mechanisms, and what is the evidence for this?

Impact

In March 2014, URG organised a Policy Dialogue with states, OHCHR officials (from UPR, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures sections), NGOs and Michael O’Flaherty. The aim of the meeting was to understand the different ways in which UPR is interacting with other human rights mechanisms, and to discuss ways in which the relationship can be strengthened. The Policy Dialogue revealed unease, in some quarters, about the impact of UPR on the other mechanisms, but also allowed such concerns to begin to be addressed.

Next steps

A joint URG-UPR Info Policy Report will be published in May/June 2014.

Project

The UPR second cycle: implementation or beauty contest?

Context

The UPR's first cycle, in which the human rights situation in all countries was reviewed and recommendations for improvement made, is generally considered to have been a success. However, many observers believe that the future credibility of the mechanism will be determined by the second cycle, which is supposed to focus on the implementation of first cycle recommendations. This raises the question: is the second cycle living up to this expectation?

Impact

In March 2013, URG presented initial views and findings on the UPR second cycle at an international human rights seminar in Rabat, organised by the Government of Morocco. URG provided best practice examples and advice to participants, including governments, members of parliament, national human rights institutions and NGOs, on how to approach second cycle reporting and implementation. In early April, URG also addressed a seminar in Moldova organised by the Organisation Francophone, explaining to around forty states and thirteen NHRIs about the UPR second cycle and offering information, empirical statistics and advice.

Next steps

URG is currently undertaking a detailed empirical analysis of the second cycle of the UPR to assess the degree to which it is focusing on the implementation of first cycle recommendations. This will include an analysis of national reports, NGOs reports, working group interactive dialogues, second cycle recommendations and second cycle outcomes. This analysis will be circulated to all stakeholders as a contribution to strengthening the second half of the UPR second cycle, and future cycles.

Other projects

In addition to the above projects under the 'Human rights institutions, mechanisms and policies' programme, URG has also begun to implement (including conducting primary and secondary research) the following:

- **Communicating with the international human rights system: a victim's perspective.** (Co-authored with Elvira Dominquez-Redondo, URG Advisory Committee member).
- **Human rights financing in the UN system: 5% in 5 years?** (Co-authored with Michael O'Flaherty, URG Board member).

Programme 3 – Contemporary and emerging human rights issues

Project

Environmental human rights defenders: emerging challenges and solutions

Project partners

UN Independent Expert on human rights and the environment, UNEP, Global Witness, Human Rights Watch, Earthjustice, URG

Context

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, environmental and land use human rights defenders (EHRDs) are a group of growing importance and at particular risk. A Global Witness report in April 2014 noted a sharp rise in the number of deaths of EHRDs around the world.

Impact

On 12-13 March, URG organised a regional consultation at UNEP Geneva bringing together 18 EHRDs from Africa and Europe, plus relevant international organisations, mechanisms and NGOs including the UN Independent Expert on human rights and the environment, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, the UN Special Rapporteur on toxic waste, OHCHR, UNEP, Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch, WWF International, Article 19, Amnesty International, the International Service for Human Rights, Global Witness, International Land Coalition, Earthjustice, Justlaw and Waterlex. During the consultation, EHRDs delivered personal testimonies relaying their experiences and the challenges they face. Participants then discussed possible international policy responses to better support EHRDs and their work.

Moreover, at the conclusion of the consultation, URG together with UPR Info and OHCHR organised two capacity-building programmes for African EHRDs: one on engaging with the UPR process; and one on how to communicate with the international human rights mechanisms.

Next steps

Two further regional consultations, held in cooperation with other project partners, will be held in May in Bangkok (for Asian EHRDs), and in the US in the autumn (for EHRDs from the Americas). Thereafter, URG and its partners will work together to implement the ideas and policy recommendations coming out of the consultations – with the aim of offering useful and practical support and help to EHRDs.

Other projects

In addition to the above projects under the 'Contemporary and emerging human rights issues' programme, URG has also begun to implement (including conducting primary and secondary research, and holding events) the following:

- **Human rights implications of disaster induced cross-border displacement.** (Co-authored with Jane McAdam, University of New South Wales). On 20th March 2014, URG together with the Nansen Initiative² and the Swiss, Norwegian and Costa Rican governments organised a side-event on the subject (during the 25th session of the Council). URG is also now confirmed as a key partner of the Nansen Initiative and will lead on human rights related aspects of the process.
- **Human rights and the post-2015 Development Framework.** On 10th March 2014, URG together with the African Union, OHCHR, RADDHO and the government of Egypt, organised a side-event on 'the post 2015 development agenda – Africa and the right to development' (during the 25th session of the Council). The meeting

² An intergovernmental process designed to strengthen international policy responses to cross-border disaster-induced displacement.

included interventions by the President of the Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ambassador of Ethiopia (coordinator of the African Group), Ambassador of the African Union, President of the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights, and the President of RADDHO. URG also organised a side event with Gabon (in March) on sustainable development and human rights.

- Leveraging new technology to strengthen the international human rights mechanisms.

V. Other projects

In addition to actions implementing its programme of work, URG also undertakes other activities designed to strengthen the UN's human rights pillar and to improve transparency and public accountability in the human rights system – bringing it closer to the people it is mandated to protect.

Project

Glion Human Rights Dialogue

Context

In January 2014, URG began work on the organisation of a new retreat-style meeting on human rights in the Lake Geneva region. The Glion Human Rights Dialogue, organised in partnership with the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, will bring together senior human rights decision-makers and international experts to discuss 'big picture' human rights policy issues in an informal, off-the-record setting. The Dialogue is designed to understand and bring fresh thinking to bear on key challenges and generate practical and implementable ideas and recommendations for future action. The 2014 Dialogue will be held in Glion, Switzerland, from the 13-14 May, and will include the participation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, senior OHCHR staff, UN Resident Coordinators, current and former Special Procedures mandate holders, current and former Treaty Body members, heads of major NGOs and state representatives. The 2014 Dialogue will mark the 20th anniversary of OHCHR and will focus on 'OHCHR and the international human rights system: the next 20 years'.

Impact

The Glion Human Rights Dialogue will have a major impact on the future of international human rights policy, providing a launch pad for a range of high-level actions designed to address key challenges for the future of the human rights pillar. This includes actions to address the financing of the pillar, to strengthen the implementation of human rights recommendations and obligations, and to look at the status and integration of human rights within the UN architecture, especially in the context of the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Council.

Next steps

The Glion Human Rights Dialogue will be held from 13-14th May 2014. The outcome of the meeting will include a series of top-level recommendations that will form the basis of a roadmap for implementation between now and 2016 (ten year anniversary of the Council).

Project

Pre-Council press breakfasts

Partners

URG and United Nations Office at Geneva Correspondents Association (ACANU)

Context

Media awareness and, as a consequence, public awareness of the Human Rights Council is notably low. To a significant extent, this is the result of the often technical and inaccessible nature of the Council's programme of work and a traditional low-level of interaction between correspondents and diplomats. In order to respond to both challenges and in-so-doing improve public interest in and awareness of the work of the Council and its mechanisms, URG organises (in partnership with ACANU) before each session of the Council, a press breakfast bringing together around 15 journalists and 5 states (different states each time). During the breakfast, state representatives brief journalists on 3-4 of the key issues to watch out for during the Council session, and then answer questions. The meeting is off-the-record, designed to provide journalists with a sense of the key issues to monitor and report on during the session.

Impact

The first pre-Council press breakfast was held on 26th February 2014 and was heavily oversubscribed by journalists, demonstrating their desire for more information on the Council and their enthusiasm for covering sessions in more detail. The following media outlets participated: Mexican News Agency, Reuters (2), Anadolu Agency, NHK, The Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Le Temps, International New York Times, Weldreporter, Estado Sao Paulo and freelance (2). Participating states were Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Turkey and the US. The breakfast was chaired by Dr. Shaheed, Chair of the URG, Gabriela Sotomayer, Chair of ACANU, and Nick Cumming-Bruce, New York Times correspondent and member of the URG Advisory Committee. In a follow-up meeting after the first press breakfast, ACANU's Chair noted that the journalists found the meeting extremely useful and followed-up on many of the stories. A full assessment of the articles generated is being undertaken.

Next steps

Further press breakfasts will be organised before the 26th and 27th sessions of the Council. Diplomats from different regions will be invited to these events.

Project

Supporting universal engagement with the Council through technical assistance and capacity building

Context

The URG believes that in order to be effective, human rights policy must be crafted and implemented with the full engagement of all states and relevant NGOs. It thus undertakes actions to strengthen the capacity and engagement of developing country delegations, especially Small Island States and Least Developed Countries. This includes actions to improve the functioning of UN Trust Funds such as the LDC-SIDS Trust Fund, and training sessions.

Impact

On 19th February 2014, URG co-hosted, with the governments of Morocco and the Netherlands, a meeting on the operationalization of the LDC-SIDS trust fund. The aim of the meeting, which included OHCHR, Mauritius, Maldives, Norway, US, Germany, Ireland and

Peru, was to promote awareness around and the effective operationalization of the fund. As a contribution to this goal and as a result of the meeting, URG helped delegations draft a cross-regional statement, delivered at the 25th session of the Council, with 87 cosponsors from all regions. This again demonstrates URG's strength of working with all countries from all regions to achieve common goals.

As noted elsewhere in this report, URG has also contributed to numerous training sessions during 2013-2014, including for African human rights defenders, African government officials and NGOs, and Francophone diplomats and government officials.

Project

Survey of global business opinion and perception on human rights

Partners

Economist and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), DLA Piper (international law firm)

Context

To support the full implementation of the 'Protect, Respect, Remedy' framework, it is important and useful to have a regular assessment of what multinational businesses are doing to integrate human rights into their business strategies, the importance that they attach to human rights, and what more they can and would like to do. Such an assessment would provide useful information for UN and national policymakers would help promote awareness of the Ruggie Principles and would promote deeper implementation through highlighting best practice and creating positive competition among businesses.

Next steps

In 2014, URG, the EIU, DLA Piper and one or more additional partners will conduct a survey of 400 global CEOs to understand their opinions, perspectives and plans in the area of human rights. This will be published as an Economist Special Report, and is expected to generate considerable media attention.

Project

Executive Reports on Human Rights Council sessions

Context

Until now, no NGO has produced a concise, fact-based and neutral assessment report on the key debates and outcomes of regular sessions of the Human Rights Council. After URG's establishment, many Council delegations, especially from developing countries, approached the secretariat and said such an independent analysis and report would be useful for them. Thus, at the end of the 25th session, URG produced such a report and distributed it electronically to all missions in Geneva and New York, and to NGOs, the media, etc.

Impact

Many delegations, especially from Africa and Asia, contacted URG after the report was distributed to note its utility and to say that they had used it as a basis of their reports to capital.

Next steps

URG will produce similar reports, slightly expanded, for future sessions of the Council.

Project

Opinion-editorials by international human rights policymakers and thought-leaders

Context

URG seeks to provide a platform for policymakers and opinion-leaders to share information and ideas with other stakeholders and to generate debate. In 2014, it therefore constituted its 'By Invitation' series of opinion-editorial style articles. These are published on the URG website and distributed electronically to over 3000 people around the world.

Impact

In 2014, 'By Invitation' op-eds were published on:

- 'Looking ahead to the Council in 2014' (18th January), by H.E. Mr. Baudelaire Ndong Ella, President of the Human Rights Council.
- 'The General Assembly process to strengthen the human rights Treaty Body system' (12th February), by Professor Michael O'Flaherty, URG Board member.
- 'Building a 'Cooperative Council' – recalling the universal spirit of 1946-1948 (6th March), by Susan Waltz.
- 'Outcome of the review of the human rights Treaty Bodies' (9th April 2014), by Christen Broecker, Associate Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute.

Project

URG Insights (blogs)

Context

The URG secretariat produces regular 'URG Insight' blogs on pressing issues of the day that relate to or touch upon issues covered in its programme of work. These attempt to offer new information (especially empirical analysis), and ideas on human rights policy.

Impact

During 2013-2014, blogs were written on: why a human rights think tank?; strengthening policy through dialogue; human rights financing – the UN's little pillar; human rights and the sustainable development goals; post 2015 development agenda and the right to food; the emerging struggle over the Council's prerogatives; 'clean slate elections threaten the future of the Council'; and human rights and the post 2015 development agenda.

Annex 1 - Joint statement by Costa Rica, Chile, Honduras, Peru and Uruguay

Thank you Mr. President,

Mr. President, the Human Rights Council receives the support of the work of several mechanisms and bodies whose contributions are essential for the task of protecting and promoting Human Rights around the world, providing, with their expertise, guidance to States and other actors.

The Special Procedures is one of these mechanisms. Our countries strongly support their work as a fundamental pillar in gathering information and collecting and providing views, specific recommendations, best practices and thematic contributions that are considered by this Council.

Nevertheless, we are mindful that the system and particularly the Special Procedures face challenges. At the end of this session, the number of active Special Procedure mandates will pass fifty for the first time in the history of the UN. At the same time, the number of mandate-holders will reach seventy-four. Evidence³ projects that, based on current growth rates, the number of Special Procedure mandates will reach the one hundred mark in 2030.

These numbers reflect the success, over nearly fifty years, of the Special Procedure mechanism which has grown from humble origins to become, in former Secretary-General Kofi Annan's words: "the jewel in the crown" of the international human rights system. But the establishment of the 50th mandate should also give all of us in this room pause for thought to see how best to comply with the aims of the HRC. In this sense, it is important to give thought to and explore ways to face challenges and be more effective.

A robust programme of work in the Human Rights Council, and a large number of mandates which results in more interactive dialogues, makes it difficult to enable in genuine dialogue and have substantive interaction with Special Procedures. Increasingly, delegations and civil society don't have enough capacity to absorb and act on the plethora of reports produced by the system to translate them into action on the ground and to profit from the expert advice and sharing of information, to strengthen national capacities regarding the promotion and protection of all Human Rights and fundamental freedoms for all. The additional load of work also results in inadequate follow-up of reports and resolutions. Subsequently, as the awareness of human rights issues continues to grow, we realize the system will expand and extraordinary or voluntary contributions will not suffice if we do not strengthen the UN regular budget for the HR pillar, for Special Procedures support at the Office, including resources for technical assistance.

In the same vein, we could consider, for example, if it makes sense for thirty mandates to present two reports each year – one in Geneva and one in New York, if we are appointing the best people and ensuring geographic and gender balance, if we are improving the synergies between Geneva (HRC) and New York (UNGA) as well as, more generally, continue to promote the HR mainstreaming in the whole UN system. Additionally, how can we improve the communication procedure to secure redress and remedy for victims?

Mr. President,

³ Analysis conducted by the Universal Rights Group

Since the foundation of the Special Procedures system, States have moved to create a range of different types of mandates, covering thematic as well as country issues, and mandate-holders themselves have constantly innovated and pushed forward the boundaries of their work in order to help address Human Rights challenges all around the world. Today's Human Rights Council and its current mandate-holders are heir to key moments in history and to the 'jewel in the crown' of the human rights system. It is therefore our responsibility as States, to work together over the coming months and years to ensure that the system is as effective as possible, and is able to deliver on its promise to people around the world.

Thank you Mr. President.

Annex 2 – Cross-regional statement on improving working methods in the Human Rights Council

Mr. President,

I am honoured to make this statement on behalf of 63 states.

The Human Rights Council has proven its relevance and ability to contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights around the world. It continues to respond to a wide range of important human rights challenges, takes decisions that make a difference, including on technical assistance and capacity building, and establishes mandates that secure promotion and protection of human rights in many difficult and complex areas and circumstances, cross-regional agreements on sensitive issues, have also demonstrated the ability of the Council to bridge differences.

The signatories of this statement note, however, that this success has come with its own set of challenges.

First: The Council's program of work has reached its limits in terms of available time.

Second: The proliferation of resolutions may reduce their quality and impact on the ground, especially in the absence of more effective implementation.

Third: Draft resolutions are sometimes presented too late during sessions, preventing adequate analysis and consultation and thereby reducing the opportunity for States to provide input on the adopted texts.

Fourth: The effective implementation of the high number of Council initiatives depends on adequate resources.

Fifth: The overlap between the work of the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee is increasing, raising questions as to the optimal use of time and resources.

Some telling facts:

- 1) The 24th session of the Council witnessed a record number of resolutions and decisions: 39. 2013 also saw a record number of texts: 107 in total.
- 2) The length of resolutions is also increasing. The average length of resolutions (word count) has increased by over 25% in the last two years. The preamble of a resolution has come to represent over 40% of the text.

Analysis shows that in 2012-2013, over 40% of human rights resolutions in New York and Geneva had some degree of substantive overlap, and 13% of resolutions were almost identical.

- 3) The number of panels per year has almost doubled since 2009.

Mr. President,

It is important for all delegations to work together, in a spirit of compromise and consensus, to respond to these challenges, bearing in mind Council resolution 5/1 on the institution-building package of the Human Rights Council and resolution 16/21 and its annex on the Review of the work and functioning of the Human Rights Council.

With that in mind the cosponsors to this statement share the common ambition to take the following voluntary steps, without prejudice to the rights of states as provided for by paragraph 117 of the annex to Council resolution 5/1.

- In line with paragraphs 48 and 49 of Resolution 16/21, show restraint in resorting to resolutions, and look to table recurring thematic resolutions on a biennial or triennial basis. This shall be without prejudice to urgent issues and to scheduled mandate renewals..
- In line with paragraph 117 of the annex to resolution 5/1 and paragraph 52 of resolution 16/21, notify delegations of draft texts before or at least during the first week of the session.
- Shorten the length of resolutions and avoid repetition
- In line with paragraph 117 of resolution 5/1 minimize unnecessary duplication of initiatives with the GA/Third Committee, seeking not to run overlapping resolutions on the same subject in the same calendar year.
- Take into account the capacity constraints of the Council and the resource constraints of OHCHR when launching new initiatives.
- Make better use of the other work formats mentioned in paragraph 115 of 5/1, such as seminars and round tables.

Thank you.