



Activity Report 1st January - 31st December 2016

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. Now with offices in Geneva (UN), New York (UN), and Bogota (Latin America), the URG is the only think tank in the world focusing exclusively on human rights.

The goal of the organisation is to strengthen policy making, implementation and impact across 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, and the wider UN human rights pillar (in Geneva, New York, and domestically) – 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. NGOs, 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 Group, and Secretariat all strive for geographic balance, while the URG aims to work with States 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 UNDP Geneva, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, IPU, ICRC, 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 the Security Council, 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, in national media, 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 greater understanding and impact.

Programme of work

As per the URG’s Statutes, the Board of Trustees, meeting at least once a year, sets the organisation’s programme of work.

The URG’s first two-year programme of work ran from 2014-2015, and ended in December 2015.

In January 2016, URG began a new programme of work. The duration of the programme of work was changed to three years (so 2016-2018) and, upon a decision of the Board, was restructured as a 'Global Strategic Plan.'

As previously, the new Global Strategic Plan (programme of work) is structured around four broad programmes. Individual projects are organised under these four programmes.

The four programmes for 2016-2018 are:

1. In focus: human rights implementation and impact
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; regular inter-sessional retreats and brainstorming sessions with Council members; 'Inside Track' pre-Council briefing primers; 'Council reports' summarising the outcome of regular Council sessions; the construction of the yourHRC.org web-portal designed to increase transparency around the work and voting of Council members, and around Council elections; the development of URG online tools, including resolutions and voting portals; and the publication of opinion-editorial style articles by senior policymakers.

Finally, URG is occasionally contacted by third parties (e.g. governments, international organisations, NGOs) to undertake a specific project on a 'consultancy' basis. URG accepts such commissions where the project is consistent with its principles and programme of work.

II. Institutional developments

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 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.

The URG's main office is located at *Chemin du Grand-Montfleury 48*, 1290 Versoix, just outside Geneva. In April 2013, the Canton of Geneva decided to cover the rental costs of the URG for a period of two years. That period came to an end in April 2015.

Near the end of 2016, URG entered into an agreement with the *Ralph Bunche Institute (RBI) for International Studies, at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York*. The address is *365 5th Avenue, New York, NY10016-4309*. As part of that agreement, which also covers collaboration in research and events, the RBI agreed to provide URG with permanent office space in New York. This meant that, as of January 2017, URG would have a permanent presence in New York – to help the organisation cover the General Assembly, Security Council and other UN organisations based at headquarters. By having offices in Geneva and New York, it is hoped the URG will help bridge the 'New York – Geneva divide.'

Also in late 2016, Ms Mariana Montoya Pineda, a URG consultant, began work to establish an office and permanent presence in Bogota, Colombia. This first permanent regional presence is designed to enable URG to focus on the domestic impact of the UN human rights system – starting with the Latin American region.

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 Group, 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 Group 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. At the beginning of January 2016, the members of the Board were:

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 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), UN Special Rapporteur, former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions; Sir Nigel Rodley (UK), former 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), former 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), Chair of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa; Professor Heiner Bielefeld (Germany), former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion; and Ms Catarina de Albuquerque, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation.

In early 2016, Professor Abdullahi An Na'im resigned from the Board. Dr. Shaheed sent a letter thanking him for his service.

In April 2016 (after the period covered by this annual report), Dr. Shaheed, as chair of the Board of URG, wrote to all Board members to inform them of Professor An Na'im's resignation, and to propose extending an invitation to Professor Christof Heyns to join the Board.

Professor Heyns is a highly respected human rights expert and practitioner. In addition to those posts he has held at the UN, he is Professor of Human Rights Law and Director of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa at the University of Pretoria. He has advised a number of international, regional and national entities on human rights issues. He also teaches human rights law at Oxford and at American University, Washington DC. He has been a Humboldt Fellow in Heidelberg, Germany, and a Fulbright Fellow at Harvard Law School.

The Board of Trustees approved this invitation in April and Professor Heyns officially joined the Board at the end of that month.

The URG Board met for its annual meeting (via conference call) on 13th October 2016. During the meeting, the Board approved the 2015 accounts and activity report. Update letters, on the activities of the URG, was sent to the Board in April and July 2016.

Advisory Group

The Advisory Group (formerly known as the Advisory Committee) is a network of eminent scholars, thought-leaders and opinion-formers from around the world. Members receive URG publications and information, and have the possibility, on an *ad hoc* basis, to contribute to projects of interest. 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), former 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), former 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), former 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), former 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; Dr (Ms) Rose Nakayi (Uganda), Director, Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPPEC), School of Law, Makerere University, Uganda; Ms Julie Gromellon (France), former Permanent Representative of FIDH to the UN; Professor (Mr) Michael Ramsden (UK), Chinese University of Hong Kong; Dr (Ms) Sejal Parmar (UK), Central European University, Budapest; and Ms Heather Blake (UK), former UK Director, Reporters without Borders.

Secretariat

The URG's programme of work is implemented by a small secretariat. The secretariat aims to achieve geographical and gender balance.

As of end December 2016, the composition of the URG secretariat (Geneva) was as follows:

- Mr Marc Limon (UK), Executive Director
- Ms Hilary Power (UK), Policy Analyst
- Ms Olivia Bebe (Denmark), Policy Analyst
- Ms Mariana Montoya Pineda (Colombia), Consultant

Moreover, as already noted, at the end of 2016, URG opened a new office in New York, US. That office, which will begin its work in 2017, is headed by:

- Ms Rose Parris Richter (US), Senior Policy Analyst and Director (New York)

URG also has an internship programme, organised in cooperation with members of the Advisory Group. So far, under the Geneva internship programme, it has employed over twenty-five people (nineteen women and six men) on internship contracts of between three and six months. Effort is made to provide internship opportunities for people outside Western Europe. So far this has included individuals from Turkey, Mauritius, Hong Kong/China, India, Denmark, Colombia, Greece, Ireland, UK, US, and Romania.

Presence in the Global South

As noted above, in 2016, URG took steps to establish a permanent office in Colombia. The office will be formally opened in January 2017, under the name Universal Rights Group Latin America and the Caribbean (URG LAC), and will aim to improve knowledge and awareness about the UN human rights system in countries of the Latin American region, and to help

understand and strengthen the implementation / impact of international human rights obligations, commitments and recommendations at national and local levels.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that its work is inclusive and reflective of perspectives from all regions and from developing as well as developed countries, in 2016 URG maintained small hubs or offices (at no cost) in Mauritius, Hong Kong (at Chinese University of Hong Kong), and Turkey (Koç University).

Such hubs are generally arranged through *memoranda of understanding* with academic institutions linked with the URG's Board or Advisory Group. Students and researchers in these hubs contribute to URG research, and also have the possibility to undertake internships.

Fundraising

As a new organisation in a difficult financial climate, URG continues to do reasonably well in securing financial support from a range of donors. In 2016, support was received from the following governments and public entities:

- Norway – core funding.
- Denmark – core funding.
- Switzerland – programme funding.
- Australia – project funding.
- Germany – project funding.
- Morocco – project funding.
- Netherlands – project funding.
- Spain – project funding.
- Singapore – project funding.
- UK – project funding.
- Canton Geneva – project funding.
- CTI – consultancy.
- Commonwealth – consultancy.
- East-West Management Institute – consultancy.

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 2016, URG continued to work with the design company mydearagency.com to develop its website, emailers, brand, reports, etc.

URG's website, universal-rights.org, went live in late November 2013. It has been extremely well received. In 2016, there were over 35,000 individual sessions, by 20,000 individual users (55% new users), with 78,000 individual page views.

At the end of 2016, URG added a new tool to its 'URG online toolbox' – namely, an expanded resolutions portal that now also includes all General Assembly Third Committee resolutions since 2006.

Regarding social media, URG maintained accounts with Twitter (over 1,960 followers, 7,100 tweets) and Facebook (1,900 followers, 1,900 likes).

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.

URG sends out information on new policy reports, 'By invitation' blogs, and events on a regular basis. It also sends out a monthly e-newsletter summarising all relevant information about publications, events, blogs, and tools. Emailers are sent electronically to over 5,000 individuals. URG's 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.

Due to demand from its stakeholders, URG now, as a matter of course, also publishes all its reports in hard copy. These are mailed to all missions in Geneva and New York, to members of the URG Board, to selected foreign ministries, NGOs, international organisations, businesses, and the media.

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. Implementation of the Programme of Work

Between January 2014 and December 2015, the URG implemented its first two-year programme of work.

In the last quarter of 2015, the URG secretariat consulted with members of the Board, ambassadors and other diplomats, NGOs and UN officials to gather ideas for a new three-year programme of work (2016-2018). As per a decision of the Board, this new programme of work was renamed a 'Global Strategic Plan' (GSP). The new draft GSP was presented to the Board at the end of 2015, and was also the focus of a working dinner with selected Board members and senior Geneva ambassadors, hosted by the Permanent Representative of Turkey in December 2015. The new programme of work, presented as a Global Strategic Plan, was adopted by the Board in late 2015.

The 2014-2015 programme of work consisted of seventeen individual projects across four programmes. 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).

The 2016-2018 GSP comprises 17 projects across four broad programme areas.

Below is a summary of the activities undertaken between January 2016 and end December 2016, in connection with the implementation of the 2016-2018 GSP.

Programme 1 - In Focus: human rights implementation and impact

Project 1

National implementation structures and indicators: how do States translate international human rights norms into local reality, and how to measure progress?

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Context

The project is adopting a 'bottom-up' approach to understanding how, and to what extent, States implement international human rights obligations and recommendations at domestic level, and will seek to replicate good practice and provide counsel to UN mechanisms and processes designed to support domestic implementation (e.g. follow-up and capacity-building processes).

Impact

One of the main rationales for the establishment of the URG was to 'break the Geneva bubble' and understand the impact and relevance of international human rights systems and policy at national/local level. With this in mind, Programme 1, including Project 1, continues a long-standing commitment on the part of URG to understand and strengthen domestic effectiveness and impact. For example, in 2015, URG worked closely with the then President of the Human Rights Council, including by organising a retreat in Berlin, to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN's human rights pillar. In 2015 and 2016, URG, together

with Norway and Switzerland organised the second and third Glion Human Rights Dialogues, which also addressed questions of domestic implementation and impact.

Through these and other URG activities, improving 'human rights implementation and impact' has become a key policy objective of the Human Rights Council (and the wider UN system) in 2016. Indeed, events such as the third Glion Human Rights Dialogue helped create momentum behind what some are calling the 'new human rights implementation agenda.'

URG's project 1 – together with projects 2 and 3 - is designed to capture, understand and further promote this new implementation agenda. As part of that effort, during 2016, URG worked with Portugal, Georgia, Morocco, Denmark, Paraguay, and around 15 other States, to establish a new UN Group of Friends on human rights implementation and impact. In 2017, the Group of Friends (of which URG is a member) will undertake activities in Geneva, New York and regionally, to empower domestic stakeholders to implement UN human rights recommendations. In the context of project 1, a key focus of this URG work will be to support the quantitative and qualitative expansion of so-called 'National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up' (NMRFs) or, as they were termed at Glion III, 'Standing National Implementation Coordination, and Reporting Structures,' (SNICRS).

In 2016, URG helped launch a global survey of NMRFs and related guidelines by OHCHR. URG also conducted a research visit to Georgia, to assess its NMRF and the role of parliament, NHRI and NGOs with implementation. Also in 2016, URG published a number of op-ed blogs by senior UN officials and government representatives, on the evolution on NMRFs.

Next steps

In 2017, URG, working with Portugal and other interested States, will organise a first meeting of the Group of Friends, to set its programme of work for the year. This will include high-level statements during the High Level Segment of the 34th session of the Council, a cross-regional statement on implementation and impact, and the organisation of regional consultation workshops on the development of NMRFs. The first such workshop is expected to be convened in Georgia.

URG will also work with States such as Norway, Switzerland, Denmark and the UK to ensure that the project complements related initiatives such as 'Vision 2021,' reform of the Council's actions under item 10, the 'Race to the Top' initiative, and the new initiative (with which URG is also involved' on 'human rights and the SDGs.'

Project 2

Critical analysis of the role of development partners (including UN Country Teams, bilateral donor States) in the implementation of UN human rights recommendations: what is a rights-based approach to overseas development assistance and programming, and does it work?

Project leader(s)

Olivia Bebe

Context

The project will aim to identify and map emerging strategies adopted by development partners to promote sustainable development by supporting developing countries with the

implementation of priority recommendations received from the UN human rights mechanisms. The project will also seek to identify, understand, and promote the replication of good practice in this regard.

Impact

The role of development partners in supporting and strengthening the domestic implementation of UN human rights recommendations was also a key issue for discussion at the third Glion Human Rights Dialogue (Glion III). During a meeting organised by URG in February 2016, with the Permanent Mission of Thailand, it became clear that UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams, UNDP, OHCHR, and bilateral donors are taking a range of increasingly sophisticated steps to integrate UN human rights recommendations into their on-the-ground development programming.

Next steps

In 2017, URG will work with interested States and other stakeholders, including OHCHR and UNDP, to better understand and coordinate these evolving approaches – and to develop good practice principles of an effective ‘rights-based approach to development assistance.’

Project 3

The role of national human rights institutions (NHRIs), parliaments and local civil society in promoting, monitoring and reporting on domestic compliance with international human rights norms

Project leader(s)

Olivia Bebe

Project partners

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI); Commonwealth / Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Context

At present there is little meaningful follow-up on the domestic implementation of UN human rights recommendations. Where there is follow-up reporting, it tends to be dominated by States (e.g. national UPR reports, State reports to Treaty Bodies), and thus often lacks independence, balance, and critical analysis. Project 3 aims to rectify this by working with national human rights institutions (NHRIs), parliamentarians and domestic civil society to build capacity at national level, so that local actors can play a more effective role in holding States accountable against their international human rights obligations.

Impact

During 2016, URG organised a policy dialogue with the Permanent Mission of Morocco, during which a number of NHRIs and parliamentarians reflected on their roles (actual and potential) in strengthening domestic implementation, monitoring and reporting. Over the course of the year, URG also began discussions with GANHRI about a joint project. Finally, during 2016, URG conducted research on worldwide examples of good practice in terms of parliamentary involvement in, support for, and oversight of, human rights implementation. This was part of a project undertaken with the Commonwealth.

Next steps

URG is expected to officially launch a joint project with GANHRI in 2017.

Programme 2 – Contemporary and emerging human rights issues

Project 4

Corruption and human rights: designing effective UN interventions

Project leaders

Marc Limon, URG; and Angela Barkhouse, Kroll

Context

Corruption is one of the most important causes and consequences of human rights violations. Yet, until now, it has been largely ignored as a human rights issue. This is especially significant in terms of the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG16. Project 4 aims to strengthen the role of the Human Rights Council and the wider UN human rights system in the global fight against corruption, by developing evidence about the human rights consequences of corruption, by developing political narratives about the importance of human rights in the fight against corruption, and by offering counsel on the establishment of new types of UN human rights mechanisms to help combat corruption.

Impact

During 2016, URG began work with a private sector company, Kroll, to create computer algorithms to calculate the impact of corruption, across a range of internationally protected human rights (especially economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development), across a range of UN member States. That initial step, part of a UK funded project, is nearing completion (as of January 2017).

Also in 2016, URG participated in a panel discussion, organised by Switzerland, on corruption and human rights. During the debate, URG presented its project and its initial ideas.

Furthermore, with a view to understanding the impacts of corruption on the ground, as well as the steps being taken by governments to mitigate those impacts, in 2016 the URG conducted field missions to Argentina, Colombia, and Guatemala; and began preparing further country missions to Tunisia and Honduras (for 2017).

Next steps

In 2017, URG aims to use that impact assessment as an evidence base for regional events, including in Latin America. Over the course of the year, URG analysts will complete a series of research visits to Guatemala, Honduras, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Tunisia. During 2017, URG will also produce a Policy Report on corruption and human rights, containing recommendations for Council/UN action.

Project 5

Human rights and sustainable development: understanding and strengthening the contribution of the international human rights system to the realisation of the SDGs 'leaving no one behind'

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Project partner

Danish Institute for Human Rights (TBC)

Context

The Declaration on the Right to Development turned 30 years old in 2016, yet remains as divisive as it was at the time of its adoption. This is disappointing when one considers the importance of the basic premise of the Declaration – that individual human beings should be the central subjects of development, and should have equal access to the benefits of socio-economic progress. The 2016 agreement on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the SDGs, premised on ‘leaving no one behind,’ are based on a similar premise, and offer a new opportunity and a common point of departure for States and other stakeholders to understand the links between human rights and development, understand the role of the UN human rights system in contributing to sustainable development and the realisation of the SDGs, and identify gaps in that contribution.

Impact

During 2016, URG began work with a number of States, including Chile and Denmark, to create a new Group of Friends to take forward an initiative on ‘human rights and the SDGs’ – at the Council and, possibly, also at the General Assembly. The initiative will aim to build a programme of work to leverage the practical links, between the UN human rights system and the SDGs, with the aim of maximising the UN human rights pillar’s contribution to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. In September 2016, URG and Denmark hosted a working lunch with a cross-regional group of ambassadors, to discuss the initiative and how to take it forward in a non-politicised manner. The following countries were, *inter alia*, present at the meeting: Argentina; Brazil; Chile; China; Cuba; Denmark; Ecuador; Fiji; Germany; Portugal; South Africa; UK; and the US.

Next steps

In March 2017, at HRC34, Chile and the core group will formally launch the initiative, delivering a cross-regional statement. Later in 2017, URG, the Government of Denmark, and the Danish Institute are expected to convene an open-ended consultation to seek the views of all States, NGOs, UN experts, etc. on how to maximise the Council’s contribution to the realisation of the SDGs for all people in all countries.

Project 6

Environmental human rights defenders: emerging challenges and solutions

Project leaders

Marc Limon, URG secretariat; John Knox, URG Board of Trustees

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 2015 noted a sharp rise in the number of deaths of EHRDs around the world.

Impact

In March 2014, 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.

In October 2016, the URG participated in a panel debate on the situation of EHRDs hosted by the UNEP at International Environment House. During the event, URG shared the results of the research and consultations carried out during 2015 and 2016, and presented a pilot of a new web portal that URG has designed to support EHRDs.

URG's work on EHRDs has coincided with increasing attention to the issues they face on the part of a wide range of stakeholders: State delegations in Geneva; UN Special Procedures; Treaty Bodies; and NGOs.

Next steps

URG will publish its Policy Report on the situation of EHRDs in March 2017. URG will also launch a new web portal on EHRDs in March 2017.

Other projects / new projects

In addition to the above projects, URG has also continued to work to finalise other projects from the first two-year programme of work, and/or to pursue the implementation of recommendations generated by those projects:

- **Religion-based reservations to the main human rights conventions (ready for publication in 2017).**
- **Combatting global religious intolerance: the implementation of Council resolution 16/18.** In follow-up to URG's project on combatting intolerance, in 2016, URG supported Singapore with the organisation of the 6th meeting of the Istanbul Process (in Singapore), and thereafter prepared a report of the meeting for distribution in Geneva and New York in 2017.

Programme 3 – Human rights institutions, mechanisms and processes

Project 7

The development of a comprehensive and coherent 'Prevention Strategy' at the Human Rights Council: the implementation of paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Context

'Prevention' has become a key focus for the Human Rights Council in 2016-2017. With recognition that the international community was not able to prevent the humanitarian disaster that is Syria, has come a determination to act, in the future, to better prevent crises, rather than merely to react to them. Yet, to date, States have failed to consider how to

practically realise operative paragraph 5f of the Council's mandate (GA resolution 60/251) on prevention. The proposed project will seek to distil what 'prevention' means, and how an effective prevention strategy can be developed by the Council and by the wider UN.

Impact

Although the potential value of prevention has long been recognised at the UN, the concept had largely dropped off the Council's agenda in recent years. That changed in 2016, thanks largely to the work, in the context of the Glion Human Rights Dialogue, of Norway, Switzerland and the URG. During Glion III, a high level opening panel on prevention, featuring the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, reflected on the importance of finally implementing paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251. During further discussions in Glion, States identified key building blocks of a human rights 'prevention strategy.' Already in June and September (at the 32nd and 33rd sessions of the Council), States began to actively put those building blocks into place. For example, in June, Ireland presented a cross-regional statement proposing a set of 'trigger' criteria to guide Council members on which situations merit preventative action.

By early 2017, prevention had become one of the key policy proprieties of the Human Rights Council and the wider UN. In his first speech to the Security Council, the new Secretary-General identified the prevention of violations as a key priority, while at HRC34, the High Commissioner for Human Rights said that "prevention is not only a priority for the Council and the UN, it is THE priority."

Next steps

In 2017, URG will continue to push member States to put in place a robust and practical prevention strategy, including, potentially, through a new resolution implementing paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251. Prevention will also be the main focus of Glion IV.

Project 8

Early analysis of UN human rights Commissions of Inquiry: a new protection mechanism for the 21st Century

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Partner(s)

Ted Piccone, Brookings Institution

Michael Kirby, COI DPRK

Context

Commissions of Inquiry (COIs) are a relatively new mechanism. Yet over recent years their profile and importance has grown significantly, as they have looked into situations of violations in North Korea, Syria, Libya, Eritrea and elsewhere. The project seeks to assess the impact of these new mechanisms and analyse whether they are succeeding in their stated goal of securing accountability. It will also seek to identify emerging methodological good practice.

Impact

In early 2016, URG and the Brookings Institution brought together around 60 experts on COIs, including a large number of Commissioners, as well as victims and their

representatives, to consider the achievements and challenges of COIs. A key question was: are they fulfilling their key role of securing accountability of serious human rights violations?

Next steps

In 2017, URG will publish its Policy Report, with Brookings – one of the first objective assessments of this new mechanism.

Project 9

UPR, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures: A Connectivity Study

Project leader(s)

Subhas Gujadhur

Context

The establishment of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was one of the key innovations of the 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

URG is in the process of completing its research on the complex interactions between the three main human rights mechanisms.

Next steps

A URG Policy Report will be published in the first half of 2017.

Project 10

Towards the UPR third cycle: lessons learned from the mechanism's formative years

Project leaders

Subhas Gujadhur and Marc Limon

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 third cycle, which is supposed to focus on the implementation of earlier recommendations and the measurement of impact. This raises the question: is the UPR living up to expectations and what lessons can we draw to inform any reforms that need to be brought ahead of the third cycle?

Impact

In July 2016, URG published its Policy Report on 'Towards the Third Cycle of the UPR: Twist of Stick?'

In February 2016, URG, together with the Permanent Mission of Turkey, organised a policy roundtable (lunch) with a cross-regional group of 16 ambassadors, to consider the

achievements and weaknesses of the UPR during the first two cycles, and to look ahead to the third cycle.

In June, URG, together with the Permanent Mission of Canada, held a roundtable workshop reviewing the first two cycles, and looking ahead to the third cycle. During the meeting, URG presented its report and key recommendations.

In September 2016, URG wrote to all Ambassadors in Geneva, outlining succinct plans to improve the functioning of the UPR in the third cycle.

Also in autumn 2016, URG participated in an OHCHR meeting to strengthen guidelines for domestic NGOs and NHRIs, to improve the focus of third cycle reports to the UPR.

Next steps

Ahead of the first sessions of the third cycle in 2017, URG will write again to all Missions to highlight steps that might be taken to strengthen the mechanisms effectively, especially by 'leading by practical example.'

Project 11

Communicating with the international human rights system: a victim's perspective

Project leader

Hilary Power

Partner

Dr. Elvira Domínguez-Redondo, Associate Professor of Law at Middlesex University

Context

The system of communicating with international human rights mechanisms has evolved steadily over many decades. Today, the system is highly complex and lacks proper coordination. There are serious questions as to its accessibility for people on the ground and as to its effectiveness in actually helping people.

Impact

In 2016, URG finalised its analysis of the effectiveness of the three main UN human rights petitions systems, both in their own right and collectively.

Next steps

In early 2017, the URG will publish the results of this two-year research project, drawing heavily on the input of the above mentioned policy discussion, as well as over 40 interviews with a range of key stakeholders, including the victims of human rights violations and HRDs.

A launch event will allow for the discussion of the findings, and the URG will work with relevant stakeholders to take some of the key recommendations generated forward.

Project 12

Understanding and measuring the impact of country-specific Special Rapporteurs: South Africa, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala

Project leaders

Hilary Power and Marc Limon

Partner

Amnesty International, JBI

Context

In 2016, many States, especially States of the Like Minded Group (LMG) openly question the value of country-specific Special Rapporteurs. They claim these mandates serve no useful purpose, as they do not enjoy the cooperation of the State concerned, and thus can never work. They also claim that country mandates are a tool of the West, used to attack developing countries. To respond to these arguments, the URG's project will look at the early history of the Special Procedures system, which emerged in Southern Africa and Latin America, as a tool, originally put in place by developing countries (not the West) to shine a light on serious human rights violations, and secure accountability for the victims.

Impact

In 2016, URG, Amnesty International and JBI conducted necessary historical and archival research.

Next steps

In February 2017, the sponsors will convene a first regional consultation in Latin America, with many of those individuals, from the UN, from States and the representatives of victims, who were centrally involved in events around the creation of the early mandates. The event will be held in Uruguay.

Later in 2017, a second regional consultation will be held in South Africa.

Thereafter, information from the events will be 'brought back' to Geneva and used to rebalance the debate about the utility of country Special Procedures.

Project 13**Understanding and measuring the impact of Special Procedures economic, social and cultural rights mandates****Project leader**

Mariana Montoya

Partner

Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR-CU), Columbia University, New York

Context

Over recent years we have seen a significant increase in the number of Special Procedures mandates, yet relatively little work on understanding their effectiveness and impact. This neglect has been especially noticeable in the area of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR). With that in mind, the URG's project will look to understand and measure the on-the-ground impact of ESCR Special Procedures mandates, with a particular focus on Latin America. It is hoped that this work will help strengthen the credibility of the Council and its mechanisms, but also allow stakeholders to learn lessons about the nature of impact and how all Special Procedures mandate-holders can strengthen their positive influence on the on-the-ground enjoyment of human rights.

Impact

During 2016, URG conducted a literature review, a desk analysis of existing documentation, and the identification of case studies that will be explored in more depth during 2017 through country missions, and interviews with mandate-holders and relevant domestic stakeholders.

Next steps

In the first quarter of 2017, the URG and the ISHR-CU will conduct interviews with mandate-holders and, based on information provided by those mandate-holders about where they claim to have had the most impact, will then undertake country missions to further analyse those claims and objectively measure and understand impact.

Thereafter, information from the events and the final report will be 'brought back' to Geneva and New York, and used to enrich the debate about the impact and work of the thematic Special Procedures.

Programme 4 – Human rights institutions, mechanisms and processes

Project 14

Candidates for UN Secretary-General: where do they stand on human rights?

Project leader

Marc Limon and Mariana Montoya

Context

The selection and appointment process of the UN Secretary-General has been the focus of regular criticism over the years, due to its lack of transparency and inclusivity. Although the formal inter-governmental decision-making process has not changed, in 2016, for the first time, reforms were introduced to open the process up to wider participation and scrutiny, by, *inter alia*, asking the candidates to provide vision statements, convening informal dialogues and 'town hall' meetings, and allowing civil society and the media, in addition to States, to engage with the candidates.

Impact

During the summer of 2016, the URG conducted a human rights-based assessment of the candidates competing to fill the post of UN Secretary-General. It launched a policy brief presenting an overview of the selection and appointment procedure of the UN Secretary-General, and a summary of each candidate's experience, commitments, and pledges/vision in the area of human rights. Because human right is one of the three pillars of the UN system, it was vital that States take such information into account when selecting the best individual for this vital post.

Other projects / new 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 project from the organisation's second three-year programme of work:

- **The Catalytic Council: strengthening the relationship between the UN's human rights and security pillars**

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, brings 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 ('Glion I') was held in Glion, Switzerland, from the 13th-14th May 2014. It marked the 20th anniversary of the creation of OHCHR and focused on 'OHCHR and the international human rights system: the next 20 years.'

The 2015 Dialogue ('Glion II') was held from 5th-6th May 2015, and focused on the 'Human Rights Council at 10: improving relevance, strengthening impact.'

The 2016 Dialogue ('Glion III') was held from 3rd-4th May 2016, and focused on 'Human rights implementation, compliance and the prevention of violations.'

Ahead of Glion II and Glion III, URG organised a series of three preparatory policy dialogues, designed to allow for initial discussions and to feed ideas into the retreat. These were co-organised with the Permanent Missions of Mexico, Morocco, and Thailand.

Impact

The Glion Human Rights Dialogues have become, in a short space of time, the main informal retreat-style forum for discussing the challenges of the Human Rights Council and the wider UN human rights pillar. By including all relevant decision-makers and stakeholders, the Dialogues also now have a track record of seeing ideas and proposals from the retreat actually implemented. For example, ideas developed in the context of Glion I, II, and III, included: decentralising OHCHR and creating regional hubs; convening regular informal Council briefings with the High Commissioner; develop 'trigger' criteria to guide Council members on situations that may merit prevention action; expanding the annual calendar of human rights initiatives; improving the Council's website; presenting 'hybrid' resolutions; developing a voluntary pledge on methods of work; and creating a process for the regular review, rationalisation and improvement of mandates. These ideas are now being implemented and realised.

Moreover, the first three Glion Dialogues, more broadly speaking, have played a pivotal role in setting the contours of the major debates and initiatives at the Human Rights Council. Important current work on prevention, on building a new 'implementation agenda,' on bringing greater efficiency and effectiveness to the Council's methods of work, on bringing OHCHR closer to people on the ground (i.e. the Change Initiative), on reform of item 10, etc. all started out as discussions and ideas generated during the Glion Dialogues.

Finally, the Glion Dialogues have inspired the last two Presidents of the Council to hold similar retreats, one in Berlin and one in Evian. These two retreats took the same format and covered much of the same ground as the Glion retreats, taking forward many Glion recommendations and ideas.

Next steps

The 2017 Dialogue ('Glion IV') will be held from 18th-19th May 2017 and will focus on 'The Prevention of Human Rights Violations.'

Norway, Switzerland, and URG will publish a report from the Glion IV meeting in September 2017, and will hold events to promote key conclusions and proposals ahead of the 36th session of the Council and the autumn 2017 session of the Third Committee in New York.

Project

Pre-Council press breakfasts

Partners

EU 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 the EU and ACANU) before each session of the Council, a press breakfast bringing together around 15 journalists and 5 States (different states each time). During the breakfasts, State representatives brief journalists on 3-4 of the key issues to watch out for during the Council session, and then answer questions. The meetings are off-the-record, designed to provide journalists with a sense of the key issues to monitor and report on during the session.

Impact

URG and ACANU have now organised ten press breakfasts, with the participation of a range of ambassadors including from: EU, China, UK, US, Mexico, Indonesia, Egypt, Switzerland, and Pakistan. The breakfasts tend to be 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 regularly participate: Mexican News Agency, Reuters, Anadolu Agency, NHK, The Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Le Temps, International New York Times, Weldreporter, FAZ, Estado Sao Paulo, AP, AFP, and Voice of America.

Next steps

Further press breakfasts will be organised before future sessions of the Council.

Project

Media engagement with the Human Rights Council and survey of public perceptions

Partners

Germany, Canton Geneva

Context

In October 2014, URG conducted a first global survey of public perceptions of the Human Rights Council as refracted through the world's media. The survey was published in October and was widely read and commented upon in Geneva.

Impact

Throughout 2016, URG conducted a major media engagement project that saw around 30 journalists from around the world travel to Geneva to follow regular sessions of the Human Rights Council. The visits included capacity-building and training elements. URG also, in 2016, conducted a full media perception survey, building on the pilot project. The results of the survey were published in December 2016.

Project

Friday Exchange

Partners

Denmark

Context

In February 2016, URG with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark launched a new diplomatic initiative in Geneva: the 'Friday Exchange.' The Friday Exchange is a series of quarterly informal policy dialogues (small roundtable discussions) designed to allow States (ambassador level) from all regions to exchange opinions, bridge differences and identify common ground on some of the most difficult and intractable contemporary issues facing the Human Rights Council and the wider UN human rights pillar. The Friday Exchange aims to provide an informal 'safe space' (Chatham House rule) for States to understand each other's positions, reflect upon obstacles to consensus, and identify practical solutions. In-so-doing, the Exchange will support the work and effectiveness of the Council and the wider UN human rights system, drive progress on key human rights questions facing the international community, and promote inter-State and inter-regional understanding and cooperation. Friday Exchange meetings seek to secure the participation of delegations from each UN region, as well as from different political groups. Within those parameters, efforts are made, for each meeting, to invite those States most implicated by the issue(s) or initiative(s) under discussion.

Impact

Throughout 2016, URG held four Friday Exchanges (three in Geneva, one in New York) on a range of difficult issues facing the Council and the wider UN human rights pillar, including *inter alia*, promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities; women's rights; the relationship between the Council and the GA's Third Committee; and the right to development and the SDGs.

Next steps

URG, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark will continue to host Friday Exchanges in 2017 and 2018.

Project**Support for the ratification and implementation of the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs)****Partners**

Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI)

Context

In April 2016, URG launched a project to support the implementation of, and realisation of the goals of the CTI: universal ratification and strengthened implementation of the UNCAT.

Impact

The URG supported this goal in three main ways: it provided support for CTI's first diplomatic delegation visit to Grenada and St Lucia in July; it developed a set of tools on UNCAT ratification specifically designed for SIDS and LDCs; and it organised a major regional conference on the challenges to, and benefits of, UNCAT ratification and implementation for Pacific Small Island Developing States, hosted by the Government of Fiji in partnership with URG, APT and CTI, held in Natadola, Fiji in October 2016.

Next steps

URG will continue to support CTI's efforts in achieving universal ratification of the UNCAT, in 2017.

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, from the 25th session onwards, URG has produced end of session reports and distributed them electronically to all missions in Geneva and New York, and to NGOs, the media, etc.

Impact

Many delegations, including from Africa, Asia, and the West, have contacted URG after the distribution of reports to note their utility and to say that they had used it as a basis of their reports to capital.

Next steps

URG will continue to improve and refine the end of session reports.

Project**'Inside Track' pre-Council briefing papers****Partner**

Singapore

Context

In order to improve transparency and accessibility, especially for Small State delegations and NGOs, URG began to produce, in September 2015, regular pre-session primers or briefing papers, to explain key issues, debates and initiatives expected at the session. URG has so far produced six such 'Inside Track' primers.

Impact

URG and Singapore have received positive feedback from delegations, especially Small State delegations. 'Inside Track' is now considered to be THE go-to resource for stakeholders ahead of Council sessions.

Next steps

URG will continue to improve and refine the primers. Six 'Inside Tracks' will be published in 2017 and 2018.

Project

Opinion-editorials by international human rights policymakers and thought-leaders (URG Insights)

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 2014-2015, it therefore constituted its 'By Invitation' series of opinion-editorial style articles. These are published on the URG website and distributed electronically to over 4,000 people around the world.

Impact

In 2016, URG published 'By Invitation' op-eds from, *inter alia*: the Council President; UN Special Rapporteurs; government ministers, Council members (ambassadors and experts); NGO leaders; academics; etc.

Project

Human Rights Council Presidency retreats

Partner

Presidency of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR

Context

In 2015, the German Presidency of the Council initiated a new annual retreat for members of the Human Rights Council (ambassador level). URG was engaged to provide substantive input into the retreat and to facilitate the discussions.

In 2016, the Republic of Korea Presidency of the Council decided to continue the tradition, and organised a retreat in Evian, France. URG was again engaged to support the event and provide substantive input.

Impact

The first retreat focused on the issue of improving the 'efficiency and effectiveness' of the Council's working methods. The second focused on 'strengthening dialogue and cooperation at the Council.'

Next steps

It is not known whether the 2017 Presidency will also convene a retreat.

Project

New Human Rights Council members' retreat

Context

With the Permanent Mission of the UK, URG organises an annual half-day retreat for new (incoming) members of the Council (expert level). These are held each January and are designed to provide an informal space to share information on the Council, and to look ahead at key issues expected to come up at the Council that year.

Impact

The first retreat took place in January 2015, and the second in January 2016.

Project

HRC resolutions portal

Context

To support transparency and accountability at the Human Rights Council, URG undertook a major project to put all Council resolutions in an easily searchable database – accessible via the URG website.

Impact

This has proved to be a unique and popular resource – with hundreds of hits every week and regular positive feedback from delegations and NGOs. In 2016, URG expanded the portal to also include resolutions of the Third Committee of the General Assembly.

Project

HRC voting portal

Context

To support transparency and accountability at the Human Rights Council, URG undertook a major project to put all votes on Council resolutions in an easily searchable database – accessible via the URG website.

Impact

This has proved to be a unique and popular resource, and has facilitated a wide range of related initiatives to improve transparency and accountability.

Project

yourHRC.org

Partner

Norway

Context

To support transparency and accountability around the actions, engagement, cooperation and voting of members of the Human Rights Council, in thereby to improve the functioning

of the Council, URG, in partnership with Norway, has developed a new web portal: 'yourHRC.org.'

Through yourHRC, users can search for and analyse the performance of every Council member, past and present.

Linked with yourHRC.org, URG and Norway also produce two related products: a Human Rights Council election guide (providing information about candidates); and a Human Rights Council end of year report (containing objective information about the Council's work and output).

These two publications have been key reference documents for those interested in the Council and in Council elections.

Impact

YourHRC.org and the election guides were launched in the company of Norwegian ministers and a wide range of diplomats in both Geneva and New York. The 'HRC in 2015' report was launched in Geneva in the presence of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who made a short intervention. The 'HRC in 2016' was launched at an event in the UN, together with the Economist's 'World in 2017.' URG has widely circulated the web portal and associated guides digitally via its email circulation list of over 5,000 contacts, and on social media. As at 28th February 2017, 4,450 users had clocked around 20,962 page views on the website. This represents a doubling of users and visits from one year previously. The reports have also been sent to all missions and other key stakeholders in Geneva in hard copy.

For the first time, it is now possible for all interested parties to access centralised information about how Council member States are engaging and cooperating with the Council and its mechanisms.

Next steps

URG will improve yourHRC.org over 2017, and will develop regular email alerts: 'Know yourHRC members' and Know yourHRC candidates.'

Though its election guide, URG will continue to seek to increase transparency surrounding elections to the HRC, through its publications and events in both Geneva and New York.