



GLION HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE

Glion Human Rights Dialogue 2018 (30-31 May 2018)

The place of human rights in a reformed United Nations

Concept Note

Immediately after taking Office in January 2017, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced his intention to introduce wide-ranging reforms to the way the UN works and how it delivers on its mandate.

The Secretary-General's reforms focus on three key areas: UN management (Secretariat); the development system; and the UN's peace and security architecture. Through these reforms, the Secretary-General aims to create a '21st century UN' that is better equipped to address the complex contemporary challenges facing humankind.¹ This means reducing and eventually eliminating the fragmentation between the UN's three pillars, and striving for a more flexible and efficient Organisation.

And human rights?

It has been repeatedly acknowledged that 'development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing,'² and that 'the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms must be considered as a priority objective of the United Nations in accordance with its purposes and principles.'³ Notwithstanding, there are, today, question marks over the degree to which the central importance of human rights is reflected in the Secretary-General's current reform agenda. Hence, it would seem timely to engage in an inclusive process of reflection to consider the place of human rights in a modern, reformed UN.

¹ Secretary-General's remarks to Economic and Social Council on Repositioning the UN Development System to Deliver on the 2030 Agenda, 5 July 2017

² UNGA resolution 60/251, PP6

³ Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, para 4,





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Such considered reflection would aim to contribute to and support the Secretary-General's reforms, and help realise key objectives including, inter alia: greater UN system-wide coherence, a heightened focus on prevention, and coherent support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It would be premised on a conviction that each of the three pillars of the UN is of equal importance and should be treated with equal emphasis, and that all three pillars are inter-connected and mutually reinforcing.

Regarding prevention for example, it can be more effectively realised if the human rights and development pillars work hand-in-hand to deliver human rights capacity-building support and technical assistance, which will in turn help build domestic human rights resilience. Similarly, by strengthening the UN's human rights architecture, and promoting the implementation of States' human rights obligations and commitments, the international community can contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, a recent study by the Danish Institute for Human Rights has shown that over 90% of the SDG targets are directly anchored in international human rights instruments.⁴

In parallel to the Secretary-General's broad reform plans, member and observer States at the UN Human Rights Council have been engaged in discussions about how to strengthen the international human rights system's efficiency, effectiveness and impact. These reflections, in particular those driven by Dutch-led discussions on Council strengthening and (in the context of efficiency) a Council Bureau-led process of consultation, include proposed actions in the short, medium and long-term to improve the work and delivery of the human rights pillar, and in particular of the Human Rights Council. They also seek to reflect upon and strengthen the interconnectedness of human rights with the other two pillars of the UN. Moreover, the next intergovernmental review of the Human Rights Council's status, which will decide whether it should become a main or remain a subsidiary body of the UN, is due to take place between 2021 and 2026.

⁴ <https://www.humanrights.dk/our-work/sustainable-development/human-rights-sdgs>





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Fifth Glion Human Rights Dialogue

Against this backdrop, the fifth Glion Human Rights Dialogue (Glion V) will consider the position of the human rights pillar in the current process of UN reforms. It will also discuss possible steps, in Geneva, New York and in the field, to strengthen the interconnectedness of human rights, development as well as peace and security. In-so-doing Glion V will seek to complement and contribute to existing processes, including those led by the Netherlands⁵ and the Council Bureau. It may also provide useful analysis and ideas for the next UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Glion V preparatory dialogues and retreat will focus, in particular, on three main themes/sub-themes:

1. Human rights in the Secretary-General's reform agenda

- a. What is the place of human rights in the Secretary-General's current reform proposals covering UN management (secretariat), the development system, and the UN's peace and security architecture?
- b. What are the implications for human rights of these reforms?
- c. How can a stronger focus on human rights contribute to supporting the achievement of the Secretary-General's reform objectives?

2. Reform of UN's human rights architecture

- a. What is the 2021-2026 review by the General Assembly? What would a status upgrade of the Human Rights Council mean? Does the review necessitate a preparatory exercise by the Human Rights Council?
- b. What are the practical consequences of the Council's subsidiary status for the efficiency and effectiveness of the international human rights system, for UN-wide coherence, and for the enjoyment of human rights by individual people on the ground?

⁵ Together with Latvia, Mexico, Rwanda and the UK.





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- c. What are the practical consequences of the historic imbalances in the UN's regular budget for human rights, but also for peace and security, and for sustainable development?
- d. In terms of the budgetary resources it does command, is the human rights pillar striking the right balance between protecting human rights, by investing in responding to situations of serious human rights violations and securing accountability on the one hand, and promoting human rights and preventing violations, by investing in capacity-building and resilience-building on the other?

3. Delivering on-the-ground impact, and communicating success and relevance.

- a. Where has the human rights pillar (Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, Treaty Bodies, OHCHR) had a positive impact on the enjoyment of human rights on the ground, and also, by extension, on peace and security and sustainable development?
- b. What lessons can we glean from such positive impact case studies in terms of how the international community can improve the human rights pillar's ability to generate and measure on-the-ground human rights impact, and to communicate success?
- c. How can UN wide coherence be further strengthened so that the entire UN system, especially those parts operating at national level (e.g. the Resident Coordinator system and UN Country Teams), is delivering as one in the field of human rights?

