



Activity Report 1st January - 31st December 2017

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, improving the effectiveness of the international human rights system, and securing improved implementation and impact at national level – thereby contributing to the full enjoyment of human rights and to sustainable development. Now with offices in Geneva (UN Office at Geneva), New York (UN headquarters), 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, an inclusive platform for dialogue 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.

The URG is increasingly focused on the question of how to better translate universal norms into improved local reality by strengthening the implementation, by States (especially developing States), of their international human rights obligations and commitments; and by empowering national human rights stakeholders, including human rights defenders, civil society, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and parliamentarians to monitor State progress and hold governments to account.

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, through helping to build the human rights capacity of States (especially developing States), and through offering a respected and inclusive 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 and national 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, UNFPA, UNICEF, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, IPU, ICRC and UNEP.

Regarding diplomatic missions, URG makes a concerted effort to work with, and ensure its analyses and ideas are accessible to and may be taken forward by, developing country delegations, especially Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This is reflective of and aims to support the universality the human rights.

The URG is also increasingly active at UN headquarters in New York, especially in the context of the work of the General Assembly’s Third and Fifth Committees, the Security Council, the Peace-building Commission, and the High Level Political Forum for the SDGs. In 2017, URG established a small permanent office in New York to coordinate this outreach.

Notwithstanding this UN-focused work, a principal objective of the URG is to break 'the Geneva bubble' and the notion that 'what happens in Geneva stays in Geneva'. This means reaching out to policymakers and other stakeholders at national level (especially in developing countries), including foreign ministries and relevant line ministries, national human rights institutions, parliamentarians, journalists, human rights defenders and local civil society representatives, to ensure that universal norms are effectively translated into improved local realities, that universal human rights obligations and commitments are translated into better national laws, policies and practice, that human rights defenders are supported and protected in their work, and that the victims of human rights violations may receive remedy and redress. This increasing URG focus on the national level reality of human rights explains URG's decision, in 2017, to establish an office in Bogota, Colombia, to cover the Latin American region.

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 covering 2016-2017 and, upon a decision of the Board, was restructured as a 'Global Strategic Plan.' In January 2018, URG adopted a new two-year Global Strategic Plan, carrying forward some important projects (e.g. on implementation and prevention) and introducing new ones.

The 2018-2019 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 promotion and 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; quarterly 'Friday Exchange' cross-regional roundtables, held under the Chatham House rule, to consider and find common ground on especially sensitive or controversial human rights issues; pre-Human Rights Council session press breakfasts; regular inter-sessional retreats and brainstorming sessions with Council members; 'Presidential retreats' organised with the presidencies of the Human Rights Council (URG has organised such retreats with the German and Korean Council Presidents); annual retreats for new members of the Human Rights Council; 'Inside Track' pre-Council briefing primers; 'Council reports' summarising the outcome of regular Council sessions; the construction of the yourHRC.org web-portal and associated reports, 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 was originally located at *Chemin du Grand-Montfleury 48, Versoix* (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. In late 2017, due to the increased demands on its Analysts to participate in meetings and events in Geneva (in and around the UN), URG decided to move offices – securing a new, improved and better-located space at the *Maison de la Paix* in Geneva (close to the UN). URG Geneva's new address as of (officially) 1st February 2018 is: *Maison de la Paix, Building 5, Chemin Eugene-Rigot 2E, 1202 Geneva*.

In 2017, 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 (CUNY)*. 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. The address is *365 5th Avenue, New York, NY10016-4309*.

By having offices in Geneva and New York, it is hoped the URG will help bridge the 'New York – Geneva divide.'

Also in 2017, Ms Mariana Montoya Pineda, a URG consultant, began work to establish an office and permanent presence in Bogota, Colombia. The address is: *Calle 69 A # 5-59, Casa 69, segundo piso, Bogotá D.C., 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.

In 2016, URG made a formal application for UN ECOSOC consultative status. The application was approved by ECOSOC's NGO Committee in February 2018, and confirmed by ECOSOC member States in April 2018.

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 2017, 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; Justice Sophia A. B. Akuffo (Ghana), President and Judge of the African Court of Human and People’s Rights; Professor Christof Heyns (South Africa), member of the UN Human Rights Committee, former Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions; 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.

Sadly, in January 2017 Sir Nigel Rodley passed away after a short illness, and following a long and distinguished career in the field of international human rights law. URG published a message by its Chair, Dr Shaheed, marking Sir Nigel’s passing and extending the organisation’s condolences to his family. Dr Shaheed also attended the funeral. In February 2017, URG, together with other NGOs with a connection to Sir Nigel, including the APT, ICJ and Amnesty, organised a memorial reception.

Former Board members are: Professor Abdullahi An Na’im (Sudan), and Sir Nigel Rodley (UK).

During a URG Board meeting (via conference call) of December 2016, the Board approved the 2015 audited accounts and activity report. Update letters, on the activities of the URG, were sent to the Board in January and March 2017. The URG’s 2016 audited accounts and activity report were sent to Board members in March 2017 and approved under the written procedure. This was confirmed (by vote) during a subsequent Board meeting on 13th March 2018.

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; 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; and Dr (Ms) Sejal Parmar (UK), Central European University, Budapest.

In 2017, Ms Heather Blake (UK), former UK Director, Reporters without Borders, resigned from the Group due to conflicting professional commitments.

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 2017, the composition of the URG secretariat (Geneva) was as follows:

- Mr Marc Limon (UK), Executive Director (Geneva)
- Ms Olivia Bebe (Denmark), Policy Analyst (New York)
- Ms Charlotte Marens (Belgium), Researcher (Geneva)
- Ms Mariana Montoya Pineda (Colombia), Consultant (Bogota)

As already noted, in 2017 URG opened a new office in New York, US. In autumn 2017, Ms Olivia Bebe moved to New York to head the new office.

URG also has a paid internship programme, organised in cooperation with members of the Advisory Group and partner universities. So far, under the Geneva paid internship programme, it has employed over thirty people (twenty-three women and seven men) on internship contracts of between three and six months. Effort is made to provide internship opportunities for people outside Western Europe. So far, URG interns have hailed from the following countries: Turkey, Mauritius, Hong Kong/China, India, Denmark, Colombia, France, Greece, Ireland, UK, US and Romania.

In 2017, URG initiated a new 'Fellowship' programme in Geneva, designed to provide entry-level professional opportunities for recent university graduates (minimum Masters level). The Fellowship provides work experience in the field of international human rights, and allows the Fellows to 'learn by doing'. So far, two Fellows have been employed, one from Peru and one from Belgium. At the end of the one-year Fellowship, the Belgian national (Charlotte Marres) was offered a full time post with URG Geneva.

Presence in the Global South

As noted above, in 2016, URG took steps to establish a permanent office in Colombia. The office was formally opened in 2017, under the name Universal Rights Group Latin America and the Caribbean (URG LAC), and aims 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. In addition to this work on implementation and impact, URG LAC also focuses, in particular, on the issues of environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs), and corruption and human rights.

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 2017 URG maintained small regional hubs (at no cost) in Mauritius, Hong Kong (at the 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 relatively new organisation in a difficult financial climate, URG continues to do reasonably well in securing financial support from a range of donors. In 2017, 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.
- IUCN – project funding.
- CTI – consultancy.
- Jacob Blaustein Institute (JBI) – project funding.
- Kroll - private sector project support
- Commonwealth – consultancy.
- Slovenian civil society – capacity-building 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 2017, 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. In the meantime it has become one of the world's key online resources for those interested in human rights. In 2017, there were 25,800 individual users (up from 20,000 in 2016), many of whom were new users. These users participated in 45,400 individual sessions (up from 35,000 sessions in 2016). There were over 96,000 individual page views (up from 78,000 in 2016).

In 2017, URG expanded the universal-rights.org website into three versions or editions – one for URG Geneva, one for URG New York, and one for URG LAC (in Spanish).

In addition to news, new policy reports, information on events, etc., the website offers users, free of charge, a set of useful human rights tools including: a resolutions portal (where users can search for and access thousands of UN human rights resolutions); and a voting portal (to review the voting patterns of Council members). The website also links to two other URG administered sites: www.environment-rights.org and www.yourHRC.org.

URG is increasingly producing short videos to explain key human rights issues and present URG research. The aim is to make the universal human rights system more accessible and understandable to non-experts. A first video, introducing the international human rights system, was released in 2017.

Regarding social media, URG maintains accounts with Twitter (over 2,672 followers, 11,000 tweets) and Facebook (2,196 followers, 2,172 likes). In 2017, URG's New York and Colombia offices also established their own Twitter accounts (the URG LAC account tweets in Spanish). Separate Twitter accounts and Facebook pages have also been established to promote and strengthen the impact of www.yourHRC.org and www.environment-rights.org.

URG translates some of its policy reports and articles into Spanish and French.

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 such as the Friday Exchange or pre-Glion preparatory dialogues) are public events and are now made available to people around the world in 360 degree interactive streaming via Periscope.

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 ('URG Update') 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 Global Strategic Plan

The 2016-2017 GSP comprised 17 projects across four broad programme areas.

Below is a summary of the activities undertaken between January 2017 and end December 2017, in connection with the implementation of the 2016-2017 GSP.

Programme 1 - In Focus: human rights implementation and impact

Project 1

National mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRFs): how do States translate international human rights norms into local reality, and how to measure progress?

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Context

The project adopts a 'bottom-up' approach to understanding how, and to what extent, States implement international human rights obligations and recommendations at domestic level, and seeks 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 promote 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.

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). Indeed, the third Glion Human Rights Dialogue, and URG's subsequent programme on domestic implementation and impact, have been key drivers behind the emergence of a new global human rights 'Implementation Agenda' – now referred to regularly by senior UN figures including the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the President of the Human Rights Council. During the 37th session of the Human Rights Council, two high-level panel debates also focused on the 'Implementation Agenda'. The 'keystone' of this 'Implementation Agenda' is the emergence and development of 'national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up' (NMIRFs) – again something driven and popularised through URG's work.

URG's project 1 – together with projects 2 and 3 - is designed to capture, understand and further promote this new 'Implementation Agenda,' especially focusing on the global development of NMIRFs. As part of that effort, during 2017, URG worked with Portugal, Georgia, Morocco, Denmark, Norway, Paraguay, Fiji, Botswana and around 30 other States (mainly developing countries), to establish a new UN Group of Friends on human rights implementation and impact/NMIRFs. In 2017, the Group of Friends (of which URG is a

member) organised regular meetings in Geneva to exchange good practice in the establishment of NMIRFs, agree joint statements on implementation for delivery at the Human Rights Council, deliver advanced questions and recommendations on NMIRFs to all reporting States under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and begin to coordinate a process of regional NMIRF consultation meetings.

In 2017, URG helped launch a global survey of NMIRFs and related guidelines by OHCHR, and organised a NMIRF workshop with OHCHR and the Group of Friends – to encourage more States (especially developing countries) to establish or strengthen NMIRFs. URG also continued its research into the development and functioning of NMIRFs, including through field visits. In 2017, URG concluded its work following a field visit to Georgia, and also conducted field visits to Pacific Island States (especially Fiji, Tonga and Samoa), and to Slovenia (to advise NGOs on engaging with implementation). Also in 2017, URG published a number of op-ed blogs by senior UN officials (e.g. from UNFPA) and government representatives, on the evolution on NMIRFs. This included one article by the UN Development Group (UNDG) on UN support for NMIRFs.

Finally, in 2017, URG began work with IT specialists and programmers (IMPACT OSS Group) to produce and launch new software to help States better coordinate the implementation of UN human rights recommendations, measure impact, and more easily report back to the UN on progress. This software is based on a central national database of UN recommendations, and is linked to a public website (to promote public transparency and accountability). This software will be given to States free of charge, as a practical contribution to the global 'Implementation Agenda.'

Next steps

In 2018, URG will continue to drive, with Portugal, the work of the Group of Friends on domestic implementation and impact/NMIRFs. This will include the creation of platforms to allow States, especially developing States, to share experience and good practice on NMIRFs, the elaboration of joint statements to the Human Rights Council and, in June 2018, the tabling of a first ever UN resolution on national human rights implementation. URG will also continue to work with the Group of Friends, OHCHR and the UNDG to organise a process of regional meetings to push the quantitative and qualitative development of NMIRFs. The first of these meetings is expected to take place in Asunción, Paraguay - home to SIMORE, a pioneering NMIRF. In May 2018, URG will organise, with OHCHR, a workshop to help States build and develop NMIRFs.

In 2018, URG, together with Chile, Denmark, Rwanda, Ecuador and others, will promote global awareness of the inter-linkages and synergies between the domestic implementation of human rights obligations, and the domestic implementation of the SDG targets. This will include the drafting and tabling, in March 2018, of a new Human Rights Council resolution, (see project 5).

In June 2018, URG together with the IMPACT OSS Group will launch IMPACT OSS during an event in Geneva, and make it available for free to all States (especially developing countries) and NHRIs. Already a number of States and/or NHRIs have expressed their wish to be 'pilot' countries for IMPACT OSS, including Colombia, Rwanda and the UK.

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)

Marc Limon

Context

The project aims 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 (often in concert with the implementation of SDG goals and targets). The project seeks 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 a key issue for discussion at the third and fourth Glion Human Rights Dialogues (Glion III and Glion IV). In 2017, URG worked closely with OHCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and the secretariat of the UN Development Group (UNDG), and held a number of meetings with the development agencies of countries such as Sweden and Switzerland, to shape the evolution of 'rights-based approaches' to development, so that such approaches might focus more squarely on supporting the implementation of States' international human rights obligations and commitments. URG also worked with the UNFPA to disseminate and popularise a new UNDG report on national human rights tracking systems / NMIRFs.

Next steps

In 2018, URG and Norway will organise a first meeting of a new group of international development partners. Through this meeting and group, the aim will be to mobilise overseas development assistance (ODA) to support the global 'Implementation Agenda.'

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)

Marc Limon

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

In late 2016 / early 2017, 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 began a joint project with GANHRI to mobilise NHRIs to hold governments accountable against their international human rights obligations and commitments, including in coordination with domestic civil society. URG also began working with some individual NHRIs (e.g. the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission) to build 'shadow' IMPACT OSS systems.

Finally, during 2017, 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. The report will be published in 2018. URG has also continued to work with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on domestic implementation issues. Partly as a result of this, and URG's wider work on implementation, the latest IPU Global Strategy includes the 'Implementation Agenda' as one of the organisation's human rights priorities.

Next steps

In early 2018, URG will organise a joint event with GANHRI to launch their joint project on the role of NHRIs in supporting, monitoring and independently reporting on State implementation. URG will also address a regional meeting of South Asian NHRIs on the issue of their role in promote domestic compliance and accountability. Moreover, URG will work with specific NHRIs to further develop their role vis-à-vis implementation, including by putting in place a 'shadow' IMPACT OSS system. NHRIs and GANHRI will also participate in meetings and events organised in the context of project 2 (above) – with development partners.

URG will also publish its report on parliamentary engagement with the 'Implementation Agenda' in 2018, and will continue to build momentum around this with the Commonwealth and with the IPU.

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 particularly significant in terms of the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including 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 instruments and mechanisms to help combat corruption.

Impact

During 2017, URG worked with a private sector company, Kroll, to create and apply computer algorithms to calculate the impact of corruption upon a range of internationally protected human rights (especially economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development), and across 180 UN member States. The final analysis will be ready for publication in early 2018. URG has also undertaken field research to investigate how different States/governments have adopted a rights-based approach to tackling corruption. This included visits to Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and, Guatemala, and in-depth research on Tunisia and Honduras. This research will feed into URG recommendations to States about how to mobilise the UN and regional human rights systems to lead the fight against corruption, especially grand corruption.

At the same time, URG worked with Argentina and the UK to drive progress on corruption and human rights at the Human Rights Council, especially through the core group of States on the subject. In 2017, Argentina and the UK joined the core group and - with the support of URG – were able to secure a significantly strengthened UN resolution on human rights and corruption at the Council. The resolution called for a robust UN response to corruption, and decided to convene an inter-sessional workshop for States in June 2018, to exchange good practice on rights-based approaches to the fight against corruption.

Also in 2017, URG participated in a number of Council panel discussions on corruption and human rights.

Next steps

In May 2018, URG will publish a policy brief presenting the results of its computer modelling of the human rights impacts of corruption. It will present the brief ahead of the June Council inter-sessional meeting on corruption and human rights. Thereafter, URG will work with Argentina and the UK to drive and shape a robust UN human rights response to corruption – including through new international instruments and/or mechanisms. Ideas in this regard will be presented in a number URG policy report (building on the abovementioned policy brief).

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 partners

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Danish Institute for Human Rights

Context

The Declaration on the Right to Development turned 30 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,’ is based upon a similar ideal. The SDGs 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. Ultimately, it is important that the international community understands the complementary and mutually reinforcing nature of international human rights obligations and commitments, and the SDG targets, so that States can make progress in both areas in an integrated and ‘joined-up’ way.

Impact

During 2017, URG worked with a number of States, including Chile and Denmark, to build 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. This Group, which now includes Azerbaijan, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Portugal, Rwanda, Thailand, Uruguay, OHCHR and the URG, then built 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 March, June and September, the Group delivered joint statements at the Human Rights Council.

In June 2017, the Group of Friends hosted an open-ended consultation (organised by URG) on this issue for over 100 States, plus relevant parts of the UN secretariat, NGOs and NHRIs. The consultation introduced the concept and then heard from a number of case studies, including China, Germany and Ecuador, about how they are working at national level to drive ‘joined up’ progress on human rights and the SDGs.

Next steps

In March 2018, the Group of Friends will table a draft resolution on human rights and the SDGs at the Human Rights Council, designed to acknowledge the inter-related and mutually reinforcing nature of human rights obligations and the SDGs, to link the work of the Human Rights Council with the High Level Political forum (HLPF) on the SDGs in New York, and convene annual platforms at the Human Rights Council designed to provide space for States to exchange good practice on achieving progress with the 2030 Agenda and with human rights implementation.

Also during 2018, URG, the Danish Institute and the Group of Friends will organise regional meetings, or make use of existing regional fora (e.g. UN Economic Commissions), to reinforce the synergies, a national level, between human rights implementation and SDG implementation.

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 2016 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 Special Rapporteur 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. One proposal was to construct a web portal to provide information to, guidance for, and tools to be used by, EHRDs. This was the first ever UN-level meeting focused explicitly on the situation of EHRDs. Indeed, at the time, the very notion of EHRDs as a particularly at-risk group was contested (by States and NGOs).

In 2016 and 2017, URG participated in panel debates on the situation of EHRDs hosted by the UNEP at International Environment House in Geneva. During the events, URG presented a pilot of a new web portal that URG has designed to support EHRDs.

In 2017, URG published a major new policy report on the situation of EHRDs, authored by Professor John Knox, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment. The report was presented at a launch event at the UN Human Rights Council, with the participation of Professor Knox, EHRDs themselves, OHCHR, UNEP and around 50 States (including States, such as Brazil and Honduras, where EHRDs are at particular risk).

Also in 2017, URG participated in an international conference on the global situation of EHRDs at Oxford University in the UK. URG presented its policy report and an advanced version of its new EHRD portal. As one result of this conference, the Guardian newspaper (UK) began a series of articles on the situation of EHRDs around the world.

Later in 2017, URG launched (in English and Spanish) www.environment-rights.org - a new web portal designed to help EHRDs. The portal is sponsored by URG, UNEP, OHCHR and various NGOs. This was the first time UNEP had ever publicly sponsored a human rights project.

In autumn 2017, URG and John Knox joined the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) in organising a one-day seminar about EHRDs – so that Sweden's ODA might be leveraged to better support and protect them, especially in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. It was recognised that EHRDs are vital for the achievement of the SDGs.

During the last part of 2017, URG LAC, together with the UN and Spain, organised a first regional workshop (in Bogota) for EHRDs from Latin America. This was designed to inform them of their rights, explain how they can access international help and support, present the [environment-rights.org](http://www.environment-rights.org) web portal, and raise international awareness of their plight. The workshop was a major success – helping to build the capacity of, and support the work of,

around 50 EHRDs. Further regional workshops in Latin America – for both EHRDs and governments – are planned for 2018. URG would like to expand these efforts to other regions in 2018 – especially Africa and Asia.

URG's work on EHRDs has coincided with an enormous increase in global attention to the plight of EHRDs, and a major increase in international determination to protect them and support their vital work (vital for human rights, environmental protection, and the achievement of the SDGs). In 2014, URG was the first organisation to use the phrase 'environmental human rights defenders.' At that time, there were also no specific protection systems, and no networks of EHRDs. Today, the international community is fully seized of this issue, and the work and risks faced by EHRDs is the focus of high levels of public interest (see, for example, the annual Goldman Prize, the outcry over the death of Berta Caceras in Honduras, the Guardian's year-long EHRD campaign, etc.)

Importantly, in late 2017, States of the Latin American region adopted a new regional (binding) agreement on environmental rights, with a particular focus on EHRDs. Around the same time, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued an advisory opinion, in response to an inquiry presented by Colombia, on States' human rights obligations related to the environment. These are very significant developments, driven in part by URG's work on the issue.

Next steps

In 2018, URG will continue to promote the environment-rights.org web portal in Latin America, and also, hopefully, in Asia and Africa, and organise regional capacity-building workshops for EHRDs. URG will also support UNEP's new Environmental Rights Initiative (ERI) – itself a direct consequence of URG's and John Knox's work on EHRDs. ERI was launched in March 2018 during a UNEP-OHCHR-URG event. URG will also continue to work with John Knox who intends to call for the international declaration of a new universal right to a clean and healthy environment. Norway may also use its next Human Rights Council resolution on human rights defenders (in March 2019) to focus on the situation of EHRDs.

Other projects / new projects

In addition to the above projects, URG has also continued to work to finalise other projects from earlier programmes of work, and/or to pursue the implementation of recommendations generated by those projects:

- **Religion-based reservations to the main human rights conventions.** This policy report was published in May 2017. URG organised a panel debate to consider the implications of 'religious reservations' for universal human rights. In 2018, URG is planning to organise regional meetings to encourage States to put in place domestic processes that may lead to the lifting of such reservations.
- **Combatting global religious intolerance: the implementation of Council resolution 16/18.** In follow-up to URG's project on combatting intolerance, in 2016 and 2017, URG supported Singapore to organise the 6th meeting of the Istanbul Process (in Singapore), and thereafter to prepare a report of the meeting for distribution in Geneva and New York. URG also organised an open meeting to launch the report and 'bring the results' of the Singapore meeting back to the UN in Geneva. In 2017, URG also continued to work with the quartet of key supporting States (Pakistan, Turkey, UK and US) to drive the implementation of the 16/18 action plan, and maintain consensus at the Human Rights Council. This included, as in previous years, a meeting of all key States in February.

Programme 3 – Human rights institutions, mechanisms and processes

Project 7

The development of a comprehensive and coherent ‘prevention policy’ at the Human Rights Council: the implementation of paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Context

Thanks largely to the third and fourth Glion Human Rights Dialogues, ‘prevention’ has become a key focus for the Human Rights Council in 2016-2017. With recognition that the international community was not able to halt or effectively respond to humanitarian disasters in places such as Syria, Yemen and Myanmar, has come a determination to act, in the future, to better *prevent* such crises from developing in the first place, rather than merely react to them. Shortly after URG, Norway and Switzerland began to push for the operationalization of the Human Rights Council’s prevention mandate, the new UN Secretary-General announced that building a UN-wide prevention agenda would be his main priority while in Office.

Against this backdrop, URG, working with countries including Norway, Switzerland, Sierra Leone and Colombia, has taken concrete steps to operationalize the Council’s prevention mandate (contained in operative paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251). URG’s on-going project on prevention seeks to distil and secure agreement between States as to what ‘prevention’ means in practice for the Human Rights Council, build an effective prevention strategy (including new processes and mechanisms) at the Council, and link the Council’s prevention actions to the UN Secretary-General’s wider prevention strategy.

Impact

Although the potential value of prevention has long been recognised at the UN, the Human Rights Council’s prevention mandate was largely ignored for the first ten years of the body’s existence. That changed in 2016, thanks largely to the work, in the context of the Glion Human Rights Dialogues, 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 at Glion IV, States identified key building blocks of a human rights ‘prevention strategy.’

The outcomes of the Glion Human Rights Dialogues have in turn driven progress at the Human Rights Council itself. For example, at the 32nd and 33rd sessions of the Council, Ireland presented cross-regional statements proposing a number of ‘trigger’ criteria to guide Council members on which situations merit preventative action (these have become known as the ‘Irish Principles’ – a term coined by the URG). At the 36th and 37th sessions of the Council, URG supported Norway, Switzerland, Sierra Leone and Colombia to draft, negotiate and deliver (on behalf of 69 and 72 States respectively) two joint statements on the operationalization of paragraph 5f. These statements laid out the sponsors’ thinking on the issue and their plans for action. A key objective of the URG and the main sponsors is to

ensure the support of a cross-regional group of States for this vital initiative. A resolution on the operationalization of paragraph 5f is planned for 2018.

Today, prevention is one of the key policy priorities of the Human Rights Council and the wider UN system. In his first speech to the Security Council, the new Secretary-General identified the prevention of human rights violations as his number one 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.” This was echoed at HRC37, when the President of the General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights all focused their high-level statements on the issue of prevention – and the particular role of the Human Rights Council in that regard. For his part, the Secretary-General noted that: “full respect of human rights is the best strategy for prevention,” and commended the Glion Human Rights Dialogue, and the efforts of States to operationalize the Council’s prevention mandate.

Next steps

In 2018, URG will continue to support States to fully operationalize the Council’s prevention mandate. This will include support for a new joint statement at HRC37 setting out the ideas and intentions of the main sponsors, and a resolution at HRC38. URG will also produce, in 2018, a new policy report on the ‘economics of prevention’ – making a fiscal case for the international community to invest in primary and secondary prevention (especially via the Human Rights Council). Finally, URG will continue to take steps to position the operationalization of paragraph 5f within the Secretary-General’s wider prevention agenda – including by drawing links with the sustaining peace initiative in New York.

Project 8

Critical analysis of UN human rights Commissions of Inquiry

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Partner(s)

Ted Piccone, Brookings Institution

Michael Kirby, Chair, COI DPRK

Context

Since the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the number, profile and importance of Commissioners of Inquiry (COIs) has grown significantly, as they have looked into situations of violations in North Korea (DPRK), Syria, Sri Lanka, Libya, Eritrea, Palestine, Myanmar and elsewhere. URG’s project seeks to assess the impact of these new mechanisms and analyse whether they are succeeding in their stated goal of securing accountability for serious human rights violations. The project adopts a victim’s perspective – i.e. are COIs delivering for victims and their families?

Impact

In 2016, URG and the Brookings Institution brought together around 60 experts on COIs, including a large number of Commissioners, ICC investigators, OHCHR officials, NGOs, 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? In 2017, URG undertook wide-ranging research (including

interviews with victims and their representatives, NGOs and COI commissioners) into the evolution and effectiveness of COIs. URG also regularly spoke at Human Rights Council events on this subject.

Next steps

In 2018, URG will publish its Policy Report with Brookings – this will be one of the first objective assessments of Human Rights Council COIs ever conducted. The Report will provide an evidentiary basis for driving improvements to UN accountability mechanisms. URG will also organise a major international conference with the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) on the role of COIs in prevention.

Project 9

UPR, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures: A connectivity study

Project leader(s)

Mariana Montoya

Context

The UN human rights system has three main ‘mechanisms of implementation’ or ‘compliance mechanisms’: the Treaty Bodies, the Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Each of these three mechanisms has different characteristics and strengths, and all three represent complementary parts of a single UN human rights compliance system. But how do they fit together, how do they interact, and what are the main challenges they face, as a single system, in promoting implementation, reporting and accountability?

URG’s ‘connectivity study’ is the first comprehensive assessment of the interactions between, and complementarity of, the three mechanisms.

Impact

URG’s work in this area is leading the international human rights community, in Geneva but also – crucially – at national level, to perceive of and understand the three main human rights mechanisms not as institutionally separate (with States forced to engage with each individually) but rather as three complementary parts of a single system. This is especially important in the context of the ability of States to effectively implement the recommendations generated by each (for example by clustering recommendations to make the exercise more manageable), monitor compliance and report on progress.

Next steps

A URG Policy Report will be published in the first half of 2018.

Project 10

Towards the UPR third cycle: lessons learned from the mechanism’s first two cycles

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 second and third cycles, which are 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 during the third cycle?

Impact

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

In 2017, URG continued to host events, and speak at other meetings, on the UPR and whether it is indeed 'delivering' – especially in the context of answering the question: is the UPR third cycle securing implementation of previous recommendations?

Also in 2017, URG participated in OHCHR meetings to strengthen guidelines for domestic NGOs and NHRIs, to improve the focus of third cycle reports to the UPR; and in a workshop organised with Slovenian civil society (in Ljubljana), about how they can more effectively hold the Government to account for the implementation of accepted UPR recommendations.

Four key recommendations from the 2016 report are being taken forward by States: the use of advanced questions and recommendations to encourage States to establish single national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRFs); the delivery of technical advice and capacity-building support to help domestic NGOs and NHRIs hold governments accountable for, and more effectively report on, the implementation of UPR recommendations; strengthening the oversight role of parliaments regarding government implementation of UPR recommendations; and moving UPR outcome adoptions out of regular sessions of the Human Rights Council and into specially-convened plenary sessions at the end of UPR Working Group meetings (this is being considered in the context of the on-going Human Rights Council strengthening process).

Next steps

URG will continue to promote recommendations presented in its report, especially in the context of the new global human rights 'Implementation Agenda' (see earlier in this activity report).

Project 11

Petitioning the international human rights system: a victim's perspective

Project leader

Marc Limon

Partner

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

Context

The system of petitioning the UN human rights protection system, via the three main communications procedures (i.e. the Treaty Body procedures, the Special Procedures, and the Council Confidential Complaints Procedure) has evolved steadily over many decades. Today, the system is highly complex, often confusing 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 the victims of human rights violations.

Impact

In 2017, URG completed a major quantitative and qualitative analysis of the three main communications procedures. This was the first comparative analysis of all three communications procedures since the 1970s. In the autumn of 2017, URG together with Denmark presented its findings and recommendations at an event in Geneva. The event, which focused on the needs of victims, was attended by over 120 policymakers, and considered sweeping reforms of the system.

Next steps

In 2018, URG will reach out to a number of developing countries to ask them to lead on UN efforts to reform and strengthen the overall UN human rights petitions system, in order to make it more visible, accessible and responsive to the victims of human rights violations, especially in developing countries.

Project 12

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

Project leaders

Mariana Montoya and Marc Limon

Partner

Amnesty International, Jacob Blaustein Institute (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 looks 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 2017, URG, Amnesty International and JBI, in cooperation with the UK Embassy to Uruguay, held a major international conference in Montevideo looking at the historic impact of the early UN Special Procedures in Latin America. The event brought together many of the original mandate-holders, UN officials, victims groups (e.g. victims of disappearances in Chile and Argentina) and States involved. It found that these early mandates had a major impact in Latin America, combatting impunity, driving justice for victims and, ultimately, helping to bring down a number of regional dictatorships.

Next steps

In 2018, 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 and Catarina d'Albuquerque, URG Board member

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

In 2017, URG and Columbia University completed field research in Latin America, investigating and seeking to measure the impact of a number of ESCR Special Procedures mandates on government policy and practice, and on the enjoyment of ESCRs. Later in 2017, URG and Columbia University held an international conference in New York, bringing together a number of current and former mandate holders, academic experts, and civil society representatives – to validate the research findings and draw conclusions.

Next steps

A new policy report and a series of short videos will be published in 2018, with events in Geneva and New York designed to showcase the impact of ESCR Special Procedures. The report also intends to provide current mandate-holders with a compendium of best practices and recommendations to help them better fulfil their mandates.

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 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 core 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.'

The 2017 Dialogue ('Glion IV') was held from 15th-16th May 2017, and focused on 'The operationalization of the Human Rights Council's prevention mandate.'

Ahead of Glion II, Glion III and Glion IV, 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 (including all Council member States, from all regions) and stakeholders, the Dialogues also now have a track record of generating new ideas and, crucially, of seeing those ideas actually implemented. For example, ideas developed in the context of Glion I, II, and III, included: decentralising OHCHR and creating regional hubs (leading to the High Commissioner's 'Change Initiative'); convening regular informal Council urgent briefings with the High Commissioner; developing '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; developing a voluntary pledge for new Council members; creating a process for the regular review, rationalisation and improvement of mandates; constructing a new global

'Implementation Agenda' and encouraging States to establish national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRFs); driving reform of the Council's capacity-building and technical assistance mandate under item 10; and operationalizing the Council's prevention mandate (under paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251). These ideas are now being implemented and realised – driving major improvements in global human rights.

Moreover, the first four 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. Regarding prevention, discussions at Glion III and IV predated and partially inspired the Secretary-General's prioritisation of prevention.

Finally, the Glion Dialogues have inspired two of the last three 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. In 2018, the Slovenian President is expected to also hold such a retreat. All of these presidential retreats have been organised in cooperation with the URG.

Next steps

The 2018 Dialogue ('Glion V') will be held from 30th-31st May 2018 and will focus on 'The place of human rights in a reformed UN.'

Switzerland and URG will publish a report from the Glion V meeting in September 2018, and will hold events to promote key conclusions and proposals ahead of the 39th session of the Council and the autumn 2018 session of the Third Committee in New York.

Project

Human Rights Council strengthening process

Partners

Netherlands, UK, Rwanda, Mexico and Latvia

Context

Building on the Glion Dialogues, URG's work on Council efficiency (e.g. its report on HRC resolutions, panels, etc.), URG's work with the German, Korean and now Slovenian Presidencies of the Council, and against a background of resources pressures at the Council, in 2017 URG began work with a core group of States determined to identify short-term and long-term measures to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and membership of the Council.

As a first step, in December 2017, URG and the core group convened a one-day conference on 'Human Rights Council strengthening,' attending by around 110 States and 10 NGOs, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In early 2018, URG will also present the outcome of that meeting at the General Assembly in New York.

Impact

This initiative has had a major impact on the Council and its work, and on how the Council is viewed by key UN member States, including the US. The outcome of the 1st December

meeting has set the agenda for Council reform efforts in 2018. The incoming Council Bureau has taken the outcome of that meeting and has launched a year-long process to identify short-term and long-term efficiency measures (URG is supporting the Bureau).

Moreover, as a result of this URG-led strengthening process, US 'demands' for wholesale reform of the Council's agenda, its election rules and its methods of work have given way to a more nuanced stance emphasising a 'balanced agenda,' more transparent elections, and a more sensible Council programme of work. Importantly, for the moment, despite its threats to walk away, the US remains a member of the Council.

Finally, key URG priorities and agendas, notably on implementation, prevention and item 10 reform, have become the keystones of the 'effectiveness' reforms being pursued by the UN's membership and by NGOs. And the URG-Norway yourHRC.org project, with its emphasis on transparency, inclusivity, and diversity of membership, has driven proposed reforms of HRC elections.

Next steps

URG will continue to support the Bureau with its strengthening process in 2018. URG will also support the Presidency with his 2018 Council members retreat. With the core group, URG will switch the focus, in 2018, to a more substantial review and reform effort in the context of the 2021 review of the Council by the General Assembly. This is the focus of the 2018 Glion Human Rights Dialogue.

Project

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.

Since the appointment of Antonio Guterres, URG has published a number of analyses to assess whether he is living up to the human rights pledges he made during the campaign. URG has also published a number of articles by senior international thought-leaders on whether the new Secretary-General is committed to, or is side-lining, human rights.

Project

Process for appointing the next High Commissioner for Human Rights

Project leader

Marc Limon

Context

The selection and appointment process of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, like the pre-2016 procedure for appointment the UN Secretary-General, has been the focus of regular criticism due to its lack of transparency, meritocracy and openness. At the same time, States, NGOs and others, appear to have lost sight of the fullness and diversity of the High Commissioner's mandate as set by the General Assembly in 1993 – basing their views on whether a given High Commissioner (and candidates for the post) is 'good' or 'bad' on a narrow understanding of the mandate (e.g. does he/she regularly publicly criticise States).

With this in mind, in late 2017 URG began to publish a series of articles, by different thought-leaders, offering a more nuanced appraisal of the mandate of High Commissioner Zeid, exploring the nature of the original mandate, and calling for the process to select the next High Commissioner to reflect that understanding. URG also gathered a coalition of NGOs from around the world to write a letter to the Secretary-General (to be sent in 2018) calling for a more transparent, meritocratic, and open selection process – to help select the best candidate, and to provide the next High Commissioner with greater legitimacy and authority.

Impact

URG's articles have catalysed a wide-ranging debate, in Geneva and New York, about the profile of the next High Commissioner. The Secretary-General is said to be considering reforms to the selection process after receiving URG's letter on behalf of 50 NGOs.

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.

Impact

URG and ACANU have now organised twelve press breakfasts, with the participation of a range of ambassadors including from: EU, China, UK, US, Mexico, Indonesia, Egypt,

Switzerland, and Pakistan. The following media outlets regularly participate: Mexican News Agency, Reuters, Anadolu Agency, BBC, NHK, The Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Le Temps, International New York Times, Weldreporter, FAZ, Estado Sao Paolo, AP, AFP, and Voice of America.

Next steps

Further press breakfasts will be organised in 2018, with ACANU.

Project

Global media interest in the Human Rights Council

Partners

Germany and Canton Geneva

Context

In 2016, URG conducted a global media survey of coverage of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms. This sought to map such coverage both quantitatively and qualitatively over time, and in comparison with other parts of the UN system. The results were published in 2016/2017.

Impact

In 2017, URG, together with the Permanent Mission of Germany, and OHCHR, organised a retreat, with States and the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, to consider the findings of the survey and discuss how to better communicate the UN human rights system. The event has led to a wider discussion of this issue, including in the context of preparations for the 2021 review of the Human Rights Council.

Next steps

The question of how to better communicate the work of the Human Rights Council and OHCHR, their successes, and their impact, will be a key focus of Glion V in 2018.

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

During 2017, URG held three Friday Exchanges on a range of difficult issues facing the Council and the wider UN human rights pillar, including *inter alia*: combatting religious discrimination, intolerance, and stigmatisation: corruption as a human rights concern: making the case and building a meaningful Human Rights Council role; and is the Human Rights Council having a positive impact on protecting civil society space at domestic level?

Because they include all key State actors on a given issue, from all regions and all political groups, Friday Exchanges – even though they have no formal outcome – have helped shape a number of debates, and forge agreement between States on previously contentious and controversial issues. A good example was the 2016 Friday Exchange on the ‘right to development’. As a result of that meeting, States agreed that the SDGs represent a ‘common point of departure’ for understanding the relationship between human rights and development. This led to the 2018 resolution led by Chile and Denmark on ‘Human rights and the SDGs’ – and to a general thawing of this previously divisive debate.

Next steps

URG, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, will continue to host Friday Exchanges in 2018 and 2019.

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 2017, URG continued to work with the CTI project to support the universal ratification and strengthened implementation of the UNCAT.

Impact

In 2017, the URG supported this goal in three main ways: it provided support for a CTI mission to the Caribbean; it organised and participated in a CTI mission to the Pacific (specifically covering Fiji, Samoa and Tonga); and it helped organise the 2017 annual meeting of the CTI Group of Friends in New York.

Next steps

URG may continue to support CTI in 2018 – TBC.

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**What are the human rights priorities of world governments?****Context**

Each year, the High-level Segment of the Human Rights Council's March session, and the High-level Segment of the General Assembly, offer an unparalleled opportunity to assess the key priority human rights issues and situations for world governments.

Impact

Each year, URG analyses the content of hundreds of speeches given by world leaders (presidents, prime ministers, ministers, etc.) at the General Assembly and the Council – identifying key themes and situations. URG then produces 'word clouds' summarising those priorities.

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 nine 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 2018 and 2019.

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 5,000 people around the world.

Impact

In 2017, 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.

In 2017, the El Salvador Presidency of the Council did not organise a retreat.

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.' Both helped drive reforms of the Council and have fed into the Council's current strengthening process.

Next steps

The Slovenian Presidency of the Council is expected to organise a retreat in the autumn of 2018.

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. The latest took place in January 2018.

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 youHRC.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.

A series of email alerts ('know yourHRC candidates') were also sent out during 2017 to all State delegations to the UN in Geneva and New York – presenting at-a-glance data on the candidates for the 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 2017' report was launched in Geneva in the presence of the Deputy 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.

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

YourHRC.org has also powered heightened interest in Council elections and membership amongst States and in OHCHR. The High Commissioner for Human Rights now regularly uses his update at the start of Council sessions to offer a yourHRC.org-type assessment of the performance of member States and candidates. Moreover, the on-going Council strengthening process seeks, *inter alia*, to build on yourHRC.org by focusing attention on the membership and election criteria set down in GA resolution 60/251; while in 2017, the Netherlands delivered a Council joint statement on membership, and Australia began to prepare a 'new members pledge.'

Next steps

URG will further improve yourHRC.org over 2018, improving its 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 Council, through its publications and events in both Geneva and New York.