



Activity Report 1st January - 31st December 2018

I. Universal Rights Group impact in 2018

2018 saw the Universal Rights Group (URG) continue to consolidate its central position in influencing and shaping international human rights policy. In 2018, core URG priority issues, introduced and set out three years ago in URG's second biennial programme of work, became the **key priorities** of the Human Rights Council (Council), the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the wider UN human rights pillar. Moreover, URG's wider work on Council reform, on strengthening the connections between the UN's human rights pillar and its security and development pillars, and on developing a more 'positive narrative' about UN human rights, also played a determinate role in **shaping the debate** in 2018 in Geneva, New York and in capitals. Finally, in 2018, URG significantly scaled-up its human rights **capacity-building and technical assistance** work, both for developing countries – especially Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – and for local human rights NGOs and human rights defenders.

At the beginning of 2016 URG published its second two-year global strategic plan/programme of work. That document proposed projects in a number of key areas that were not, at that time, on the Council's agenda – or even on the Council's radar. Those issues were:

- Building a new global human rights 'Implementation Agenda' - driving progress in national systems for the implementation of UN human rights recommendations, and for reporting thereon; exploring the roles of other national actors (e.g. parliaments, NHRIs, civil society); and mobilising international support for implementation.
- Operationalizing the Council's prevention mandate (paragraph 5f of GA resolution 60/251), and strengthening the links between the UN's human rights pillar and its security pillar.
- Reforming the delivery of international human rights technical assistance and capacity building support.
- Demonstrating that States' human rights obligations and their sustainable development commitments (i.e. the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs) are complementary and mutually reinforcing, and strengthening links between the UN's human rights pillar and its development pillar.
- Measuring and showing the impact, on the ground, of the UN human rights system; and using evidence of impact and 'impact case studies' to help build a new 'positive narrative' about the work and delivery of the Council and the wider international human rights system.
- Reform and strengthening of the Council/UN human rights pillar – both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness/impact.
- Improving transparency and public accountability regarding State cooperation with the UN human rights system.

- Improving the membership of the Council, in particular by making the body more accessible to Small States.
- Driving normative progress in 'new' or emerging issues, such as human rights and climate change, environmental human rights defenders, and corruption and human rights.

In 2018, each and every one of these issues/ideas moved to the very top of the UN human rights agenda.

Regarding **implementation**, in 2018 URG continued to work with over 40 States - members of the Group of Friends on national implementation – to power the global development of 'national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up' (NMIRFs), and to involve other national stakeholders (e.g. parliaments) in the process of implementation. This 'Implementation Agenda' is now a top priority of the Council and of OHCHR – as is the link between improved human rights implementation and reporting, and the realisation of the SDGs 'leaving no one behind.'

"We can – we must – push forward with the implementation of States' commitments. Norms [...] are vital, but they must be applied. I am convinced that by building up national institutions, we can ensure powerful constituencies for rights, which can contribute to making rights real."

Inaugural address by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Human Rights Council (10 September 2018)

On the latter point, in 2018 URG worked with Denmark, Chile and the group of friends on '**human rights and the 2030 Agenda**' to secure the adoption of a new resolution in Geneva, through which the Council decided to establish a platform to help States, especially developing States, leverage the mutually-reinforcing nature of human rights and the SDGs. This link between human rights and the 2030 Agenda has also become one of the main priorities of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. The issue featured prominently in her inaugural speeches to the Council and to the GA.

"The 2030 Agenda makes the direct road from discrimination to inequality and under-development absolutely clear. It opens a tremendous opportunity for greater integration of human rights goals, including the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, into national policies and the work of the UN."

Inaugural address by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Human Rights Council (10 September 2018)

"The entire 2030 Agenda, which is rooted in the right to development and all other rights, can only be achieved with a focus on human rights – by seeking out and fixing the root causes of insecurity; reducing inequalities; ensuring stable, transparent and inclusive institutions; and eliminating pervasive discrimination."

Speech by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Third Committee of the GA (15 October 2018)

Regarding **prevention**, in 2018 Norway, Switzerland, Colombia and Sierra Leone, working with URG, secured agreement on a new UN resolution on the operationalization of the Council's prevention mandate. With the resolution, States decided to appoint three independent experts to lead a process of consultations to shape a new prevention strategy at the Council and across the UN human rights pillar. Those consultations will take place in 2019, (URG will continue to be centrally involved). Prevention has also become one of the top priorities of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (indeed, her entire 2019 strategy is placed under the overall theme of prevention) and of the Secretary-General. Throughout 2018, both leaders used keynote speeches to draw attention to the Council's prevention mandate. Also in 2018, URG organised, with Switzerland, events in New York designed to link the Council's prevention mandate with the Secretary-General's wider prevention agenda, and with the UN's security pillar.

"We can promote more multilateralism, more cooperation, more dialogue, more consensus and more coordinated action. We can build new strategies and stronger tools for prevention, early intervention and also accountability."

Inaugural address by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Human Rights Council (10 September 2018)

"The strong value of the early warnings generated by human rights monitoring has been amply demonstrated... But – and I want to emphasise this point: the human rights system is not a Cassandra, correctly predicting crises yet unable to prevent them. It is a force for prevention. When it is backed by the political will of key actors, effective, sustained human rights work prevents, mitigates and helps to resolve conflict: this is the essence of what we do."

Speech by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Third Committee of the GA (15 October 2018)

Regarding strengthening international **capacity-building and technical support** for national human rights implementation (as well as SDG progress), again thanks – in part - to the work of URG, in 2018 international (bilateral and multilateral) development partners took an increasing interest in the human rights 'Implementation Agenda.' Today, bilateral development agencies and multilateral organisations including the World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNICEF, working with URG, are all deeply involved in efforts to support human rights implementation, and thereby to help achieve the SDGs by 2030. In April 2018, Norway and URG organised a first meeting of development partners, in Oslo, on the issue of how to better mobilise ODA in support of human rights/SDG implementation. A second meeting of the group (Oslo+1) will be held in Stockholm in 2019. Moreover, in 2019, URG together with Norway and Singapore, will bring forward proposals for reform of 'item 10' – i.e. the Council's own systems for delivering human rights technical assistance and capacity-building support.

"The recommendations of the Treaty Bodies, the Council's Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review, are increasingly integrated into coordinated tools, to enable better adoption by States, UN Country Teams and other actors."

Inaugural address by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Human Rights Council (10 September 2018)

Through these and other projects, including the organisation of the annual Glion Human Rights Dialogue (with Switzerland), URG played a central role in **shaping the international human rights debate** in 2018. In particular, URG helped shape the current priorities of the High Commissioner, the Secretary-General and States at the Human Rights Council (and in the GA) to build a 'positive narrative' about the work, delivery, and on the ground impact of the UN's human rights pillar. This narrative emphasises the objective measurement of progress, and the identification of case studies highlighting national improvements in the enjoyment of human rights. It is also designed to help 'bridge' the Geneva-New York divide, by improving understanding, in New York, about the multifaceted work of the UN's human rights pillar. As one participant noted at the fifth Glion Human Rights Dialogue in May 2018: 'it is necessary to change perceptions of the Council in New York, especially among developing country delegations, from one of trouble causer to one of trouble shooter.'

"The new reforms underway at the United Nations present an opportunity to advocate, as powerfully as we can, that a human rights approach be at the centre of the work of our UN partners."

Inaugural address by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Human Rights Council (10 September 2018)

At a normative level, priority issues of the URG, including human rights and climate change, environmental rights, protecting environmental human rights defenders, human rights and corruption, and technology and human rights, have moved to centre stage in 2018-2019, both in terms of the Council's agenda and relevant strategy documents of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

"[In the years ahead] we will strengthen our work to prevent conflict, violence and insecurity; help expand civic space; and help broaden the global constituency for human rights. We will also seek greater understanding of the human rights dimensions of climate change; the digital space; inequality; corruption; and the displacement and movement of people. And we will focus strongly on the 2030 Agenda, highlighting the human rights of women, young people, and persons with disabilities."

Speech by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to the Third Committee of the GA (15 October 2018)

Through its work on making the Council more accessible for developing countries, especially LDCs and SIDS, URG has helped re-orientate the body and the UN human rights system as a whole towards a greater focus on **practical on the ground delivery**, towards leveraging ODA to help **developing countries** comply with their international human rights obligations, and towards securing real improvements in the enjoyment of human rights in the developing world. Moreover, and linked to this point, in 2018 URG undertook a significant expansion of its 'in-country' work and engagement, especially (again) in developing countries. This included capacity-building workshops and other activities, for State officials, NGOs and human rights defenders, in countries including: Fiji, Republic of Korea, Tunisia, Colombia, Guatemala, Nepal, Samoa, and Zambia. This is part of URG's on-going strategy to 'break the

Geneva bubble’ and to make universal human rights and the UN human rights system understandable, relevant and meaningful to individual rights-holders on the ground.

Finally (for this short introduction – more information on the URG’s impact in 2018 can be found in subsequent sections of this report), URG has continued, throughout 2018, to play a predominant role in Geneva and New York in efforts to drive **reform** of the Council and the UN human rights pillar, to make it more efficient, effective and relevant to people on the ground.

Building on URG’s December 2017 conference on strengthening the Council, organised with the Netherlands and the UK, in 2018 URG helped guide the President of the Council’s reform efforts, including short-term measures proposed in February 2018, consultations held in Ljubljana in the autumn, and the adoption of new **efficiency** measures in December. These efficiency measures were the culmination of steps begun in 2015 with a first efficiency drive launched by the German Presidency of the Council and URG, as well as an earlier initiative kick-started in 2014 by Norway, Turkey and the URG.

In order to shift this debate towards **effectiveness**, in 2018 URG and Switzerland developed a new policy report on the GA’s 2021-2026 review of the Council. This sought to present ideas on the nature and scope of possible Council contributions to that review, and to identify key areas where the effectiveness and impact of the body might be strengthened in the future.

Lastly, building on the December 2017 Council strengthening conference, in 2018 URG worked with the Netherlands and the UK to establish a new ‘contact group’ of States on **Council membership**. The Group will primarily work to improve the diversity and inclusivity of the Council and its membership, by making the body more accessible to Small States, especially LDCs and SIDS.

II. Endorsements

The following are quotes from a few of the many countries, especially developing countries, which URG has worked with, in Geneva, New York and at national-level, in 2018:

"The Universal Rights Group has been the source of great support for SIDS missions in Geneva. The Human Rights Council's programme of work places significant burdens on small delegations, and the URG provides a vital resource base and source of analysis. Without the URG and its work, it would be very difficult for Small State missions, with their resource and capacity constraints, to access and engage with the Council. The ability of the URG to understand and empathise with these capacity concerns has also been a key to its effectiveness in Geneva."

H.E. Ms Nazhat Shameem Khan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Fiji

"URG provides vital insight and new thinking on how to improve the relevance and delivery of the UN's human rights pillar. Their work, including in areas such as combatting religious intolerance and discrimination, is well-respected and well-trusted amongst delegations in Geneva, and provides important support to help all countries participate fully in Council sessions and other relevant UN meetings, to the benefit of their citizens and their rights."

H.E. Mr Tahir Andrabi, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan

"I greatly appreciate the work of the URG, and its support on helping States, especially developing States, engage more effectively with the UN human right system, especially the Human Rights Council. Its policy reports, website, tools and meetings are essential resources both for new diplomats and for well-established delegates."

Mr Yibza Aynekullu Tesfaye, Minister-Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Ethiopia

"URG is an important partner for the secretariat of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and does vital work at the UN in Geneva, especially in promoting the implementation of the UN action plan to combat religious intolerance, hatred and discrimination as set down in Council resolution 16/18 (through the Istanbul Process). URG's studies, reports, expertise and experience in this area are very much appreciated by the OIC."

H.E. Ms Aissata Kane, Deputy Permanent Observer of the OIC in Geneva

"What I find interesting and welcome regarding the work of the URG is that while endeavouring to contribute to the promotion of human rights worldwide it also tries to involve all stakeholders and to listen to all views without distinction. I believe this is a commendable way to establish fruitful dialogue on different issues related to human rights."

H.E. Mr Walid Doudech, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tunisia

"The Universal Rights Group makes a very positive contribution to the work of the Human Rights Council. It provides tools, thought-provoking analysis and space for formal and informal dialogue and cooperation between States, NGOs, independent experts and UN officials. This helps encourage a dynamic work environment in multilateral fora for the promotion and protection of human rights."

H.E. Ms Socorro Flores Liera, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mexico

"We have been collaborating with URG since 2015 to support the work of Small States in Geneva. We have partnered to introduce the informative and popular Council primer 'The

Inside Track, ' produced a report of the 6th Istanbul Process meeting in Singapore, and jointly developed (also with the IMPACT Trust) a free open source digital tool (IMPACT OSS) to help governments better track and implement their human rights commitments. We look forward to working with URG to introduce more impactful, practical and innovate initiatives to support fellow developing countries and members of the Forum of Small States in future."

H.E. Mr Foo Kok Jwee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Singapore

III. The Universal Rights Group

The 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 (regional office for 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, by 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, 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.

Support for developing countries

As an independent think tank (as opposed, for example, to an advocacy NGO), URG seeks to work with States (usually via their missions in Geneva and New York) from all regions, to provide them with objective information, analysis and recommendation, and thus help them strengthen their engagement with the international human rights system, and thereby work effectively with that system to improve the enjoyment of human rights on the ground.

Because much of its work is premised on making the UN human rights system accessible to all States, as well as on building State capacity to engage fully with the system, URG’s work is particularly popular among developing countries, including Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). URG produces a number of tools specifically designed to support Small States (e.g. the ‘Inside Track’ pre-Council primer) and regularly delivers training seminars in Geneva and New York for LDCs and SIDS delegations.

Moreover, as well as working with these States in Geneva and New York, URG is increasingly engaging them at national-level, via the organisation of capacity-building workshops in countries such as Colombia, Fiji, Nepal, Samoa, Tunisia, and Uruguay. URG also increasingly organises in-country capacity-building workshops for human rights civil society / human rights defenders, across Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe.

URG is unique among human rights NGOs in this focus on helping developing countries, especially LDCs and SIDS, to engage more fully and effectively with the international human rights system – thereby improving the enjoyment of human rights on the ground, and driving progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Geneva, New York and beyond

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, UN Women, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, IPU, ICRC and UN Environment.

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 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 (current) 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 (in Geneva and New York), 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 policy dialogues with Council members; 'Presidential retreats' organised with the presidencies of the Human Rights Council; annual retreats for new members of the 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.

IV. 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 has had 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: *Graduate Center of CUNY, 365 5th Avenue, New York, NY10016-4309*.

By having offices in both 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. In 2018, the new offices, created to help engage and empower national-level stakeholders and rights-holders across the Latin American region, was formally constituted under Colombia's freedom of association law, with a permanent address at: *Calle 69 A # 5-59, Casa 69, segundo piso, Bogotá D.C., Colombia*.

This first permanent regional presence is also 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 2018, 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), Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, former Vice-Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee; Ms Asma Jahangir (Pakistan), UN Special Rapporteur, former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions; 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 February 2018 Ms Asma Jahangir passed away. URG's Chair made a statement of condolence and also wrote to Ms Jahangir's family.

On 4 July 2018, Professor Michael O'Flaherty informed the Chair of his intention to resign from the Board (as Vice Chair) due to conflicting professional obligations. The Chair thanked Professor O'Flaherty for his service and duly informed the other members of the Board.

On 17 July, the Board invited Mr Pablo de Greiff, former UN Special Rapporteur on transitional justice and Senior Fellow at New York University to join the Board. The invitation was accepted.

On 19 September, the Board invited Ms Yvette Stevens, former Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN in Geneva and Chair of the Group of Experts on the operationalization of the Council's prevention mandate to join the Board. The invitation was accepted.

Former Board members are: Professor Abdullahi An Na'im (Sudan), Sir Nigel Rodley (UK), Ms Asma Jahangir (Pakistan), and Professor Michael O'Flaherty (Ireland).

During 2018, the Board met officially (annual meeting) on 13th March and, *inter alia*, adopted the 2018-2019 programme of work / Global Strategic Plan. In May 2018, the URG Secretariat

circulated – by letter - the 2017 audited financial report and activity report for the approval of the Board. The financial report and activity report were adopted under the silence procedure – with confirmation expected at the next Board meeting. In December 2018, the secretariat circulated an end-of-year letter updating the Board on important developments in 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) Başak Çali (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; 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; Professor (Mr) Michael Ramsden (UK), Chinese University of Hong Kong; and Dr (Ms) Sejal Parmar (UK), Central European University, Budapest.

Secretariat

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

As of end December 2018, the composition of the URG secretariat (Geneva) was as follows:

- Mr Marc Limon (UK), Executive Director (Geneva)
- Ms Charlotte Marens (Belgium), Policy Analyst (Geneva)
- Ms Mariana Montoya Pineda (Colombia), Consultant (Bogota)
- Ms Danica Damplo (US), Policy Analyst (New York)
- Mr Ben Greenacre (UK), Fellow (Geneva)

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 35 people (23 women and 12 men) on internship contracts of between three and six months. Efforts are 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, Kenya, South Africa, Denmark, Colombia, France, Greece, Spain, 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, three Fellows have been employed, one from Peru, one from Belgium, and one from the UK.

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 2018, support was received from the following governments and public entities:

- Norway – core funding.
- Denmark – core funding and project funding
- Switzerland – project funding.
- Germany – project funding.
- Netherlands – project funding.
- Singapore – project funding.
- UK – project funding.
- CTI – consultancy.
- Commonwealth – consultancy.
- World Resources Institute (WRI) – project funding (LAC office).
- CODECA – consultancy (LAC office).

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 2018, 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 2018, there were 34,459 individual users (up from 25,000 in 2017), showing that the site has become a key resource for those interested in international human rights policy. These users participated in 47,951 individual sessions (up from 45,400 sessions in 2017). There were over 74,000 individual page views in 2018.

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 2018, URG undertook a rebranding / refresh of its website (covering all three editions). This was completed in November 2018, and the new-look site is now live. In 2019, URG will also rebrand its policy reports.

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); a voting portal (to review the voting patterns of Council members); URG Analytics (automatic graphs and analysis of trends); and Inside Track. The website also links to two other URG administered sites: www.environment-rights.org and www.yourHRC.org.

yourHRC.org went live in late October 2015. Since its launch, yourHRC.org has received 185,190 individual visitors who have participated in over 205,000 individual sessions. In 2018, the portal was visited 82,767 times (up from 67,183 in 2017). In 2018, the portal had, on average, 7,460 visitors per month (up from 6,397 in 2017).

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, and a second, about implementation, in 2018.

Regarding social media, URG maintains accounts with Twitter (over 3,800 followers across the three offices, and over 16,000 tweets and retweets) and Facebook (2,441 followers, 2,399 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.

URG in the press

In 2018, URG, its work and ideas featured regularly in major newspapers, magazines and newswires, including the Economist, the Financial Times, the Guardian, and Reuters. Some of the articles can be read here:

<https://www.universal-rights.org/urg-in-the-press/>

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 and Facebook.

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 select 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.

V. Implementation of the Global Strategic Plan

The 2018-2019 GSP comprises 17 projects across four broad programme areas.

Below is a summary of the activities undertaken between January 2018 and end December 2018, in connection with the implementation of the current 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. The project also aims to provide a space for States to share – and replicate - good practice, and aims to provide advice to States (especially developing countries), UN mechanisms and development agencies, about how to strengthen domestic implementation, reporting and impact.

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 main policy objective of the Council and the wider UN system. The third Glion Human Rights Dialogue, and URG's 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 GSPs, have been key drivers of this new global human rights 'Implementation Agenda' – now referred to regularly by senior UN figures including the UN Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the President of the Human Rights Council.

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 2018, URG worked with Portugal and around 40 other States (mainly developing countries), to further develop a 'Group of Friends' on human rights implementation and impact/NMIRFs. In 2018, the Group of Friends (of which URG is a member) organised regular meetings in Geneva to exchange good practice in the establishment of NMIRFs, delivered joint statements on implementation at the Council, delivered 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. The first of those regional consultations, which will also adopt a first-ever set of international principles on NMIRFs, will take place in Fiji in April 2019.

In 2018, URG, together with the Bingham Centre and Bristol University, also developed and launched a global online survey to track the emergence and development of NMIRFs. This is currently being diffused (via the Group of Friends) and the results will be analysed in 2019.

In a related development (see project 5 below for more details), in 2018 URG worked with Chile, Denmark, Rwanda, Ecuador, Thailand and others to highlight the linkages between human rights and the SDGs. This initiative, which led to the adoption of a Council resolution in March 2018, includes a heavy emphasis on NMIRFs, and their utility for both human rights and the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, in 2018, URG worked with IT specialists and programmers (IMPACT OSS Group) to 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. The software was launched during a URG event on 'digital tools to support human rights' held in November 2018.

The software, called IMPACT OSS, is based on a central national database of UN recommendations, and is linked to a public website (to promote public transparency and accountability). It is given to States free of charge as a practical contribution to the global 'Implementation Agenda.' So far Samoa's Government, New Zealand's NHRI, and Singapore's Mission to the UN in Geneva use IMPACT OSS. Fiji's Government is now also looking to install it.

Next steps

In 2019, URG will continue to drive, with Portugal, the work of the Group of Friends on domestic implementation and impact/NMIRFs.

This will include continued efforts to provide each and every UN Member State with recommendations, via the UPR, on the establishment and/or strengthening of NMIRFs, the dissemination of the global survey on the emergence and characteristics of NMIRFs, and the organisation of regional consultations on NMIRFs, starting with a Pacific meeting in Fiji in April 2019. The latter meeting will include the adoption of a first-ever set of international principles on NMIRFs.

Later in 2019, URG will publish the results of its global survey of NMIRFs, and will continue to work with bilateral and multilateral development partners (see project 2 below) to strengthen their engagement with NMIRFs (for the benefit of human rights, rule of law, and the SDGs).

Project 2

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

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon, Charlotte Marres

Context

The project aims to 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

In April 2018, URG organised, with Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a first meeting (in Oslo) of bilateral and multilateral development partners, to share good practice in the development of 'rights-based approaches' to ODA, to share information on the development and utility of NMIRFs, to discuss how human rights obligations and 2030 Agenda commitments are mutually-reinforcing, and to develop ideas on the 'democratisation of implementation' – i.e. the idea that national implementation should be an inclusive exercise (involving parliaments, the police, NGOs, NHRIs, etc.)

The meeting included representatives from the development agencies of: Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK; and from UN agencies and programmes including OHCHR, UNFPA, UNDP, UNDOCO, and UN Women. It also included NHRI representatives from Africa, and NGOs from the global South.

Next steps

A second meeting (Oslo+1) will be held in Stockholm in May 2019, hosted by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The aim will be to mobilise overseas development assistance (ODA) to support the global 'Implementation Agenda' and the realisation of the SDGs.

Project 3

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

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Project partners

Commonwealth / Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Context

At present, the national implementation of UN human rights obligations and commitments (via the implementation of recommendations from the UPR, Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies) is usually driven by bureaucratic processes within government. Yet for these recommendations to be effectively implemented (and reported on), all relevant national stakeholders must be involved. For example, over 50% of UPR recommendations require new legislation or legislative amendment in order to be implemented, meaning parliamentarians must be consulted and involved. Likewise, in order to have transparent, balanced and objective reporting on progress with implementation, NHRIs and NGOs must necessarily be involved at every stage of the 'implementation-reporting cycle.'

URG's project 3 is designed to fully understand and leverage the roles of parliamentarians, NHRIs and NGOs in the human rights implementation-reporting cycle, as a key means of

developing strong and inclusive NMIRFs, and driving progress in the domestic enjoyment of human rights, and the realisation of the SDGs.

Impact

In November 2018, URG, together with the Commonwealth, launched a policy report outlining the results of its analysis of the role of parliaments in implementation, oversight and reporting. The research covered parliaments and parliamentarians in Asia, Africa and the Pacific, and included draft regional principles of the role of parliaments in implementation and oversight. The report was launched in Geneva and London, alongside the Commonwealth, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), OHCHR and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

During its 38th session in June 2018, the Council considered a report by the High Commissioner on 'The contribution of parliaments to the work of the Council and its Universal Periodic Review,' submitted pursuant to Council resolution 35/29. In the report, the High Commissioner for Human Rights proposed, for the first time, universal principles for the role of parliaments in implementation, oversight and reporting. These principles built on ideas contained in the regional principles covered in URG's policy report. URG also participated in a June workshop organised by the IPU and OHCHR on the question of how to scale-up parliamentary involvement/engagement with the UN human rights system, and with implementation.

In February 2018, URG together with the Global Alliance for NHRIs (GANHRI) and the Permanent Mission of Australia held a panel discussion at the UN on 'The role of national human rights institutions in promoting, tracking and reporting on domestic compliance with international human rights norms.'

Next steps

Parliamentarians, NHRIs and NGOs will all be invited to and fully involved in the regional consultations on national implementation/NMIRFs, which URG will organise, with partners, in 2019. The roles of these groups / individuals with implementation will be covered in the draft regional principles of NMIRFs that are expected to be adopted during the regional consultations.

URG will also continue to work with the Global Alliance for NHRIs (GANHRI) in 2019, to better understand and strengthen the role of NHRIs implementation, both in their own right and as a 'bridge' between civil society and government.

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, by offering counsel on the establishment of new types of UN human rights instruments and mechanisms to help States combat corruption, and by drawing attention to the emergence of 'Global Magnitsky laws' – new human rights accountability mechanisms (now present or under development in the US, Canada, UK and the EU) designed to secure individual accountability for serious human rights violations and corruption.

Impact

During 2018, URG continued to work with a private sector company, Kroll, to create and apply computer algorithms to calculate the impact of corruption across a range of internationally protected human rights (especially economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development), and across 180 UN member States. A policy brief containing the results of this analysis was published in May 2018, at an event organised with the Permanent Mission of the UK.

The policy brief was designed to 'make the case' for why the Council and the UN human rights system should take the issue of corruption seriously, and should develop real solutions/mechanisms to a) provide technical assistance to States that wish to tackle corruption but lack the capacity to do so effectively, and b) to hold those accused of serious human rights violations linked to corruption to account. Activities across both tracks, including events, articles by international thought-leaders, and URG Inside blogs, continued throughout 2018.

Corruption and human rights, including its links to the SDGs and attacks against environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs), is now a priority 'emerging issue' for the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, and for the Council, (for example, in March 2018 Denmark tabled a resolution on the links between torture, human rights and corruption).

In late 2018, to mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands gave a speech to other EU ministers calling for strengthened action on corruption on human rights, including a heightened focus on securing accountability for human rights violations linked to corruption. He said this was the key 'missing piece' in the jigsaw of realising the rights set down in the Universal Declaration, and called for a European 'Magnitsky act.' Other EU ministers supported this call.

Next steps

After the 40th session of the Council, URG will work with interested States (e.g. the Netherlands) to begin discussions about the emergence of Magnitsky laws around the world, and what this means for the UN human rights protection system and for accountability.

URG will also publish, in 2019, a final policy report presenting case studies from around the world showing how States' have adopted rights-based approaches to tackling corruption. The report will also analyse the effectiveness of international support for the anti-corruption strategies of these States.

Finally, in 2019 URG will continue to work with the Council's core group on human rights and corruption to adopt a strong resolution on the subject – a resolution that may put in place new mechanisms to help States effectively prevent and combat corruption. This would build on the strong UN resolution on the subject from 2017, which URG worked on with members of the core group including Argentina and the UK.

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

In 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 also includes Azerbaijan, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Portugal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, 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.

The momentum built by these steps continued to gather pace into 2018. In March 2018, the group of friends, with support from URG, presented a new draft Council resolution on human rights and the SDGs. The draft took forward URG proposals to create an inter-sessional 'platform' or 'space' at the Council where States can share experiences on how they are taking forwards human rights implementation in a manner that also drives progress with the realisation of the SDGs; and then to link that 'platform' with the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the SDGs in New York. The resolution was finally adopted by consensus as resolution 37/24.

A first inter-sessional meeting under the resolution was held at the Council in January 2019, with the participation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Assistant Secretary-Generals, Mary Robinson (former President of Ireland and former High Commissioner for Human Rights), Jeffrey Sachs (economist), and over 500 representatives from States and civil society. The day before the inter-sessional meeting, URG, Denmark and Chile organised a welcome reception for participants. Over one hundred ambassadors and other senior officials were in attendance.

The inter-sessional meetings on human rights and the SDGs are expected to become an annual part of the Council's programme of work (each January). Each meeting will focus on the links between human rights and those SDGs due to be considered at that year's HLPF.

In late 2018, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights used her inaugural speeches to the Human Rights Council and to the GA (see Part I of this report) to identify human rights and the SDGs as one of her top priorities for her term in office.

Next steps

The outcome report of the inter-sessional meeting was adopted by the Council in March 2019, and transmitted to the HLPF. URG will work with Chile, Denmark and the group of friends to organise an event in New York, ahead of the HLPF in July, to draw attention to the Council's report. Talks are also on-going about perhaps including 'human rights' as part of the formal HLPF agenda.

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 are at particular risk. Various reports by the NGO Global Witness have noted a sharp rise in the number of deaths of EHRDs around the world.

Impact

In 2014, URG played a key role in bringing the situation of EHRDs to the attention of the international community when it organised a regional consultation at UNEP Geneva bringing together 18 EHRDs from Africa and Europe, plus relevant international organisations, mechanisms and NGOs. 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.

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).

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.

During 2017 and 2018, URG LAC, with the support of the UN, Spain, and WRI, organised a number of regional workshops for EHRDs in the Latin American region. These were designed to inform them of their rights, explain how they can access international help and support, present the environment-rights.org web portal, and raise international awareness of their plight. The meetings also sought to identify concrete ways in which civil society organisations and the UN can contribute to create a safe and enabling environment for EHRD. The workshops have been a major success – helping to build the capacity of, and support the work of, around 50 EHRDs. URG LAC has also helped build a global network for NGOs dedicated to supporting EHRDs and their work. As a result of these efforts, since December 2018, URG LAC, with the support of local and international NGOs, has been designing and building the first 'Directory of Support Organisations working with Land and Environmental Defenders.' A pilot of this tool will be launched in early 2019.

In late 2017/early 2018, 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.

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). The most recent illustration of this heightened interest was Norway's decision in 2018 to focus its regular resolution on human rights defenders at the

Council (due to be tabled at HRC40 in March 2019) on the subject of EHRDs. During HRC40, States, UN experts and NGOs organised a range of side events on issues of human rights, environmental protection, and EHRDs. This made clear that the situation of EHRDs is now at the very top of the Council's agenda.

Next steps

Further regional workshops in Latin America – for both EHRDs and governments – are planned for 2019. URG would like to expand these efforts to other regions in 2019 – especially Africa and Asia, and to further improve and disseminate the environment-rights.org resource portal.

Other projects / new projects

In addition to the above projects, URG has also continued to work on the implementation of recommendations generated through earlier projects, including:

- **Religion-based reservations to the main human rights conventions.** This policy report was published in May 2017. In 2018/early 2019, URG organised a regional meeting of human rights defenders and women's rights NGOs from North Africa and the Middle East, to discuss how to use the international human rights conventions, including CEDAW, and campaigns against reservations to those treaties, to drive progress in women's rights. The workshop was a great success. The results were shared with Geneva diplomats and NGOs during a panel discussion organised in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Germany in late January 2019.
- **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 worked with Singapore to organise the sixth 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 2018, URG 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. In late 2018, URG agreed to work with the EU and Denmark to organise a 'stock-taking meeting' for the Istanbul Process in Geneva (this will take place in April 2019).

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’ became a key focus for the Council in 2018. 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. Shortly after URG, Norway and Switzerland began to push for the operationalization of the 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 Council, build an effective prevention strategy (including new processes and mechanisms) across the UN’s human rights pillar, 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 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. The original draft of these ‘Irish Principles’ (a term coined by the URG) was developed by URG analysts.

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 has been to ensure the support of a cross-regional group of States for this vital initiative.

Most importantly, at the 38th session of the Council in June 2018, the core group, with the support of URG, drafted and tabled a resolution on the operationalization of the Council's prevention mandate. The final resolution, adopted by a vote, puts in place a process of consultations in Geneva and New York, overseen by a group of three experts. The outcome of these talks, due to take place over the course of 2019, will be a series of action-orientated proposals for the better use of existing processes and mechanisms, and the development of new processes and mechanisms for prevention.

From a situation where, in 2016, the Council's prevention mandate (i.e. paragraph 5f) was almost completely absent as a discussion point at the UN, today it has become one of the very highest human rights priorities for States, OHCHR and the UN as a whole. In 2018, it has continued to dominate the speeches of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Secretary-General, and high-level government representatives at the Council and the GA (see Part I of this report).

If the 2019 process is successful, it has the potential to transform the way the Council works to address violations, and to significantly enhance the body's effectiveness.

Next steps

In 2019, URG will work closely with the group of three experts and OHCHR, to contribute to the process of consultations (expected to start in April). This will include submitting: graphics designed to explain the Council's prevention mandate and dispel myths; the economic/business case for prevention; and ideas for improved prevention processes and mechanisms at the Council, across the human rights pillar, and between that pillar and the UN's development and security pillars.

Project 8

Human Rights Council reform: efficiency, effectiveness and membership

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Partner(s)

Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, UK, Council Presidencies

Context

URG has continued, throughout 2018, to play a predominant role in Geneva and New York in efforts to drive **reform** of the Council and the UN human rights pillar, to make it more efficient, effective and relevant to people on the ground.

Building on URG's December 2017 conference on strengthening the Council, organised with the Netherlands and the UK, in 2018 helped guide the Council President's reform efforts, including short-term measures proposed in February 2018, consultations held in Ljubljana in the autumn, and the adoption of new **efficiency** measures in December. These efficiency measures were the culmination of steps begun in 2015 with a first efficiency drive launched by the German Presidency of the Council and URG, as well as an earlier initiative kick-started in 2014 by Norway, Turkey and the URG.

In order to shift this debate towards **effectiveness**, in 2018 URG and Switzerland developed a new policy report on the GA's 2021-2026 review of the Council. The 'Vision 2021' report sought to present ideas on the nature and scope of possible Council contributions to the GA's review, and to identify key areas where the effectiveness and impact of the Council might be strengthened in the future.

Lastly, building on the December 2017 Council strengthening conference, in 2018 URG worked with the Netherlands and the UK to begin to establish a new 'contact group' of States on **Council membership**. The Group will primarily work to improve the diversity and inclusivity of the Council and its membership, by making the body more accessible to Small States, especially LDCs and SIDS. Related to this last point, in 2018, URG continued to support the UN Trust Fund for LDCs and SIDS – providing capacity-building sessions to over 20 delegates at all three sessions of the Council.

Impact

URG is a leader, in Geneva and New York, on Council reform and strengthening, as well as on linking the UN's human rights pillar with the other two pillars of the Organisation.

In 2018, URG's efforts since 2015 to improve the efficiency of the Council, which have been taken forward with States including Norway, Germany, Netherlands and UK, began to pay dividends. For the first time in the history of the Council, the 38th and 39th sessions witnessed significant drops in the number of resolutions tabled and adopted – allowing delegations more time for dialogue and to focus on implementation and impact. URG's ideas also shaped the 2018 Council President's reform package, adopted in December.

In 2018, URG also played a key role in moving debate, at the Council, from efficiency to effectiveness. The 'Vision 2021' report together with discussions around the 2021-2026 GA review in the context of the fifth Glion Human Rights Dialogue have helped guide State thinking on how the Council could usefully contribute to the GA's deliberations. In February and March 2019, the Senegalese Presidency of the Council issued non-papers to States calling for consultations on many of the points raised in the Vision 2021 report.

Finally, on the issue of membership, in 2018 two SIDS - Bahamas and Fiji - were elected to the Council, as was another important Small State – Iceland. These countries are expected to play a key role in strengthening the delivery of the Council. Moreover, Marshall Islands announced its candidacy for the term 2020-2022.

Next steps

In early 2019, the Contact Group on membership will meet for the first time and adopted its terms of reference. It will hold a reception for SIDS and LDCs during HRC40.

In 2019, URG will publish its Vision 2021 report, and will hold a launch event during HRC40.

Project 9

Critical analysis of UN human rights Commissions of Inquiry

Project leader(s)

Marc Limon

Partner(s)

Ted Piccone, Brookings Institution
Michael Kirby, former 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 will also analyse new accountability developments, including the establishment of international, impartial and independent mechanisms (IIIM) on the situations in Syria and in Myanmar.

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. In 2018, URG hosted, with the Global Centre for R2P, an international conference on latest developments with COIs and other Council accountability mechanisms (including IIIMs).

Next steps

In 2019, 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.

Project 10**UPR, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures: A connectivity study****Project leader(s)**

Mariana Montoya and Marc Limon

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 compliance 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 2019.

Project 11

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

Four key recommendations from the URG's policy 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 12

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

Project leader

Marc Limon

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 2019, URG will work to ensure that thinking on the future of the three communications procedures features in discussions on the operationalization of the Council's prevention mandate.

Project 13

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.

In 2018, URG, together with Christof Heyns of the University of Pretoria and a number of African researchers, conducted research on the historical impact of the early Special Procedures focused on Apartheid South Africa.

Next steps

In 2019, the research on the impact of Special Procedures in Africa and South America will be published in a combined policy brief.

Project 14

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 there has been 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.

In 2018, URG and Columbia University completed further research to understand, at a deeper level, the impact of ESCR Special Procedures across a number of 'case studies' identified during initial research (in 2017).

Next steps

A new policy report and a series of short videos will be published in 2019, with events in Geneva and New York designed to showcase the impact of ESCR Special Procedures. The report will also provide current mandate-holders with a compendium of best practices and recommendations to help them better fulfil their mandates.

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 (from 2014-2017) in partnership with the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, and later (from 2018-) with the Government of 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.'

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

Ahead of Glion II, III, IV, and V, 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/Senegal and Thailand.

URG, with Switzerland, also organises annual launch events (now in both Geneva and New York) to present the outcome reports of each Glion Dialogue.

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 five 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, on formulating a Council contribution to the GA's 2021-2026 review, and on strengthening the links between the three pillars of the UN, etc., all started out as discussions and ideas generated during the Glion Dialogues. Regarding prevention, discussions at Glion III and IV helped inspire the Secretary-General's, the High Commissioner's and the Council's current prioritisation of prevention.

Finally, the Glion Dialogues have inspired three of the last four Presidents of the Council to hold similar retreats, one in Berlin, one in Evian and one in Ljubljana. These three retreats took the same format and covered much of the same ground as the Glion retreats, taking forward many Glion recommendations and ideas. All of these presidential retreats have been organised in cooperation or coordination with the URG.

Next steps

The 2019 Dialogue ('Glion VI') will be held from 20th-21st May 2019 and will focus on 'Towards 2026: perspectives on the future of the Human Rights Council.'

Switzerland and URG will publish a report from the Glion VI meeting in September 2019, and will hold events to promote key conclusions and proposals ahead of the 42nd session of the Council and during the autumn 2019 session of the Third Committee in New York.

Project

Appointment of new 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, during 2018 URG published 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 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.

Finally, following the appointment of Michelle Bachelet, URG published a number of articles analysing her early speeches to seek clues as to her likely approach.

Impact

URG's articles have catalysed a wide-ranging debate, in Geneva and New York, about the mandate of the High Commissioner. The new High Commissioner has prioritised the issues, strategies and general approach set forward in the 'Glion V' outcome report.

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 3 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 fourteen 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 Paulo, AP, AFP, and Voice of America.

Next steps

Further press breakfasts will be organised in 2019, 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

URG is expected to begin a new project in 2019, to bring journalists from developing countries to the Council in order to strengthen global media interest, and support freedom of expression in those countries.

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 2018, URG held four Friday Exchanges on a range of difficult issues facing the Council and the wider UN human rights pillar, including *inter alia*: combatting religious intolerance, hate speech and extremism (in Geneva); Human Rights Council elections and membership (Geneva); strengthening the UN's human rights pillar (New York); and corruption as a human rights concern, and the emergence of Magnitsky laws (Geneva).

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 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 2018, URG continued to work with the CTI project to support the universal ratification and strengthened implementation of the UNCAT.

Impact

In 2018, the URG supported this goal by working with CTI to organise a capacity-building workshop for Pacific Island States – to be held in Fiji.

Next steps

The Pacific workshop will be held in January-February 2019.

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 conducted a redesign in February 2019. Six 'Inside Tracks' will be published in 2019 and 2020.

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 2018, 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 2018, Slovenia organised a retreat in Ljubljana, in coordination with URG and taking forward many of the debates and ideas from Glion V.

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. The 2018 retreat continued discussions on Council efficiency reforms and on preparations for the GA's 2021-2026 review.

Next steps

It is not known if the Senegalese Presidency of the Council will organise a retreat in the autumn of 2019.

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, the second in January 2016, the third in January 2018 and the fourth in January 2019.

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.

Impact

YourHRC.org and the election guides have been launched in the company of Norwegian ministers and a wide range of diplomats in both Geneva and New York. The 'HRC in 2018' report was launched in Geneva with speeches from the Ambassador of Mexico and the Editor of the Economist. The Economist's 'World in 2019' was also presented at the event. The yourHRC.org 'Guide to the Human Rights Council elections – 2018' was also launched with events in Geneva and New York (hosted by the Permanent Mission of Iceland).

URG has also published the 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 2018, URG and the Netherlands established a new Contact Group on membership.

Next steps

URG will further improve yourHRC.org over 2019, 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.