



Highlights of results



UN Human Rights team visiting Mayan weavers in Santiago Sacatepéquez, Guatemala. The Office purchased and distributed 3,000 masks featuring traditional weaving patterns to support local economic development, protect collective intellectual property rights and help fight COVID-19. © OHCHR

COVID-19 response and recovery: “Build Back Better”

Three lessons of COVID-19 – by the High Commissioner

Before we begin our discussion of the Office’s work on key aspects of the pandemic, let me outline what I see as the three lessons of COVID-19 to date.

LESSON ONE

COVID-19 zeroed in on the social and economic fractures created by gaps in human rights protection. As a result of these fault lines, the pandemic moved through societies with accelerated speed, unmasking the profound fragilities created by discrimination and inequalities – not only for the individuals concerned, but for everyone. If those fractures had been fixed, the scale of the medical pandemic, and the vast socio-economic shocks it created, could have been less devastating. Long-standing failures to eradicate discrimination, address inequalities and **prioritize the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights**, made societies exceedingly vulnerable.

LESSON TWO

The pandemic clearly demonstrated the powerful and effective protection that is afforded by human rights-based policies and measures. Some countries could count on pre-existing systems to deliver affordable and accessible health care

and well-established social protections to shield people from the worst impacts of the economic and social aftershocks. These investments provided practical, life-saving relief. Sound protection systems are not necessarily expensive or the reserve of wealthy countries. In 2017, ILO showed that a universal social protection scheme that includes allowances for all children, maternity benefits for all women with newborns, benefits for all persons with severe disabilities and universal old age pensions will cost an average of 1.6 per cent of a developing country’s GDP.¹

Secretary-General Guterres has repeatedly emphasized that the UN’s COVID-19 response must be grounded in human rights because **human rights-based solutions are effective**. The New Social Contract must tackle the roots of inequality by combating discrimination, establishing universally accessible services, including quality education, and giving fair opportunities to all. In repairing the damage that has been done, we need to rebuild just, sustainable and environmentally friendly economies and respect for the human rights of every member of society.

¹ See Isabel Ortiz and others, *Universal social protection floors: costing estimates and affordability in 57 lower income countries*, ESS –Working Paper No. 58, Social Protection Department, ILO (2017).



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LESSON THREE

Our world will be stronger and more resilient when we can count on **cooperation and solidarity between nations** that is based on mutual support. Without these international and multilateral bonds, the poorest will be set further back and everyone, to varying degrees, will suffer.

In the following section that is dedicated to our COVID-19 response, we summarize and give examples of the extensive body of work our teams undertook in 2020. We will continue this work and strive to do better, because delivering on human rights recommendations means helping to create more sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies in order to build a better future.

Adapting to COVID-19: UN Human Rights in 2020

COVID-19 has hit societies at their core, with deep and devastating social, economic and political impacts. It has exacerbated existing gaps in human rights protection, leading to increased poverty, exclusion and violence and deepening inequalities. It has led to restrictions on fundamental freedoms and civic space. It has set back progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as key climate goals. As the pandemic surged forward, UN Human Rights ramped up its support to embed effective, human rights-based policies in pandemic responses by States, UN partners, UN Country Teams and other stakeholders. Our monitoring was strengthened to enable a clear focus on the vulnerable people who are most likely to be left behind. Detailed checklists and other evidence-based tools were created to contribute to easily adaptable and immediately effective policies. In every region, we delivered targeted, practical guidance and assistance. We also laid out pathways to ensure that as societies begin to rebuild from this crisis, their recovery efforts can focus on constructing more resilient systems – systems that advance people’s rights and dignity and better protect everyone from harm, including harm resulting from climate change.

“With COVID-19, a fast-moving and global health crisis has collided with many slower, and more entrenched, political, social and economic crises around the world. The first lesson of the pandemic is its demonstration of the profound value of human rights-based approaches. Long-term discrimination and inequalities have severely undermined the resilience of all of society – and we need to address them, now.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Michelle Bachelet**



On 10 December 2020, UN Human Rights celebrated Human Rights Day by reaffirming the importance of placing human rights at the heart of the recovery to build back the world we want. © OHCHR

Human rights at the heart of the response: Key figures

GUIDANCE AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT



UN system guidance

1 comprehensive UN-wide policy brief (on COVID-19 and human rights)

18 focused UN policy briefs and technical documents (on COVID-19 impacts on vulnerable groups and on thematic and geographical issues)



UN Human Rights guidance

12 targeted guidance notes (with recommendations for governments, UN bodies and others)



Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19

The Surge Initiative contributed operational advice to

59 countries (on integrating ESCRs, SDGs and human rights-based macroeconomic analyses into responses)

MONITORING AND REPORTING



Data and analysis

10 specific indicators developed (to assess COVID-19 human rights impacts)



Human rights trends and good practices

1 COVID-19 information management tool created



Persons in detention

At least **267,500** people benefited from urgent releases/alternatives to detention

AWARENESS-RAISING AND ADVOCACY



Human Rights Day #RecoverBetter

90 million people reached



Engagement by human rights mechanisms

30 country infographics (with recommendations)

Human Rights Council **1st** virtual informal conversations (with the HC and SPs); **1st** decision undertaken by silent procedure

Treaty bodies **5** detailed guidance notes, **8** legal opinions and **1** toolkit on treaty law and jurisprudence

Special procedures **124** press releases, **206** communications, **15** reports and **13** tools

ADJUSTING WORKING METHODS



Human Rights Council and UPR Working Group

Annual programme of work completed (remotely or in a hybrid format)



Treaty bodies

8 (out of 10) migrated their work online



Human rights training

Approximately **58%** of workshops delivered online

Our COVID-19 response: Examples of UN Human Rights actions

COVID-19 provided an unprecedented opportunity to work collectively to situate human rights principles at the heart of response and recovery efforts. UN Human Rights enhanced its monitoring, reporting and advocacy efforts to address human rights concerns during the crisis. It provided technical advice on laws and policies, issued thematic guidance notes and delivered virtual capacity-building. Field presences documented an array of promising practices that were adopted to alleviate the negative effects of the crisis, particularly those of a socio-economic nature, and could be used to build more equal, inclusive and sustainable societies.

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND GROUPS

The virus may not discriminate, but unequal societies do. Data collected in 2020 showed that people who were already left behind were more likely to be infected by and die of COVID-19. They were also the hardest hit by the socio-economic consequences of the crisis. UN Human Rights contributed to assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on different population groups, building disaggregated data sets and informing policy solutions, with a focus on consolidating accessible health care and social protection systems.



Inequalities



UN Human Rights organized an outdoor exhibition in Kyiv City Centre for Human Rights Day. The exhibition portrayed people in vulnerable situations during COVID-19 and those who helped them, such as this nurse from eastern Ukraine. © Zhenya Pedin

UN Human Rights mapped the needs of groups with unequal access to social protection and health care in Serbia, Ukraine and other European countries – including **Roma people, persons with disabilities, homeless people and LGBTI persons**. Field presences monitored the situation of **older persons and migrants**, including those trapped on the borders between two countries or held in centres for migrants in Bolivia, Guatemala or Panama. In West Africa, rapid gender assessments were carried out in nine countries to collect quality data and inform the adoption of sound policies. The Office advocated for inclusive social protection schemes and integrating lessons learned from the crisis into the European Union Green Paper on Ageing and the European Union Disability Strategy.

A coordination mechanism created between Kyiv City authorities and civil society to address homelessness in the context of the pandemic compiled targeted recommendations that were issued in relation to the human rights impacts of COVID-19 in Ukraine. Stories of vulnerable people and those who helped them were released through key media outlets and on social media platforms to raise awareness about their situation.



Ameriyah neighbourhood, Baghdad. Twenty murals ranging from 20 to 45 metres were painted on more than half a kilometre of walls in the city, raising awareness about COVID-19 and providing instructions on caring for ill family members at home. © OHCHR-Iraq

UN Human Rights produced a Guidance Note on COVID-19 and women's rights. It was used to raise awareness about gender-based violence (GBV) in countries such as Cambodia, Iraq and Syria and to advocate for support services and the availability of shelters during quarantines and lockdowns, for instance, in Liberia. The Office supported the creation/strengthening of hotlines in Latin America (Colombia, Costa Rica) and the provision of legal aid for GBV survivors (Mexico). In Cambodia, when 30,000 factory workers (mostly women) were subjected to quarantine, UN Human Rights provided support to create safe spaces for women and children in quarantine centres.

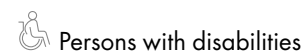
Standard operating procedures (SOPs) on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were developed and disseminated in Liberia during lockdown. In Baghdad, 20 murals were painted across the city to increase public awareness regarding human rights concerns that emerged with the spread of COVID-19, such as an increase in the prevalence of GBV and stigma and discrimination directed towards sick persons.



UN Human Rights staff visiting a childcare facility in the Gambia for children who were removed from the streets. © OHCHR

In Western Africa, UN Human Rights worked with talibé children in street situations, where they were forced to beg and faced exposure to violence and COVID-19 infection, to integrate them into a family environment. The Office and its partners provided support to childcare facilities and families in six countries. At the global level, the Office collaborated with ILO and others to conduct an online survey on youth and COVID-19, which indicated that actions undertaken by youth during the pandemic were key to supporting vulnerable groups, fighting misinformation and saving lives. In Serbia, the Office and a local partner reached 800,000 people through an online campaign to raise the awareness of youth on the human rights impacts of COVID-19.

More than 2,000 talibé children were reintegrated into their families and 3,000 children were provided with support in childcare facilities (in the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger and Senegal).



The Head of the UN Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific with Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, members of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation and other partners celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2020. The theme was “Building Back Better.” © OHCHR

UN Human Rights engaged with many stakeholders for an inclusive COVID-19 response to address concerns linked to access to health care and the disruption of services for **persons with disabilities**. The Office raised the awareness of authorities and offered technical assistance, including in Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Montenegro, the Russian Federation, Togo and in the Pacific region. In Guinea, theatre performances were organized with three coalitions of organizations of persons with disabilities to raise awareness about the impacts of COVID-19 on this group of individuals.

A protocol developed to ensure the full accessibility of virtual hearings held by the Constitutional Court of Guatemala on COVID-19 and persons with disabilities was disseminated for use by other public authorities.

PROTECTING PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

A vibrant civil society is essential to building back better. In the context of COVID-19, UN Human Rights helped to ensure that all affected people were informed and able to participate in shaping policies that impact on their lives. The Office took steps to protect civic space and human rights defenders (HRDs). It also recalled the importance of ensuring data protection and privacy while using new technologies, such as COVID-19 contact tracing applications.



In December 2020, UN experts expressed alarm at the ‘naming and shaming’ of COVID-19 victims in Cambodia, noting that the publication of personal information about individuals who had tested positive is a breach of privacy. © OHCHR

By using **new technologies** and through remote monitoring, UN Human Rights documented hundreds of COVID-19-related incidents of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, religious intolerance, hate speech and incitement to hatred in over 50 countries. The Office ran campaigns to **counter false or misleading information** as the pandemic set off a wave of disinformation that fueled fear, prejudice and posed risks to public health, including in Cambodia and in the Middle East and North Africa region. In Southern Africa, the Office engaged actors with different opinions in public debates about the crisis.

In the context of increasing disinformation, the Office created a dedicated COVID-19 web page to disseminate information in Cambodia, in Khmer and English. In Liberia, UN Human Rights supported awareness-raising by civil society on COVID-19 and human rights through radio spots and on social media platforms.



On Human Rights Day, in Conakry, the Head of UN Human Rights met with defenders of the rights of persons with albinism. © OHCHR

UN Human Rights engaged in advocacy to support the ability of experts, medical professionals, journalists and **human rights defenders** to speak without fear or censorship. Across all regions, the Office built the capacities of CSOs and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) to integrate human rights into activities aimed at curbing the spread of the virus and its negative impacts. In cooperation with the NHRI in Morocco, and with contributions from NHRIs in Jordan, Mauritania and the State of Palestine,² the Office organized a training on the role of NHRIs in MENA countries to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of COVID-19.

Provisions to limit freedom of expression in the context of COVID-19 were repealed from emergency decrees that were adopted in Bolivia. In a landmark development, spearheaded by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and UN Human Rights, the UN adopted a system-wide Guidance Note on the promotion and protection of civic space.



As the Bolivian Government closed its borders on 25 March 2020, UN Human Rights ensured the application of a human rights-based approach to assistance provided to migrants at the Tata Santiago quarantine camps at the border with Chile. © OHCHR

UN Human Rights contributed to making **information accessible and available for all** – in multiple languages, including in indigenous languages, and accessible formats for persons with disabilities, for instance in the Gambia, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, Tanzania and Tunisia. In several countries, such as the Central African Republic, Colombia, Honduras, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, the State of Palestine, Thailand, Uganda and Ukraine, media campaigns took place to raise awareness on the impacts of COVID-19 on human rights, with a focus on groups such as HRDs, migrants, domestic workers and persons with albinism.

In Honduras, the advocacy campaign to prevent discrimination against migrants and returnees in the context of COVID-19 reached 255,000 Facebook users and produced 325,000 impressions. The Office at headquarters organized 19 global webinars on human rights-based responses to COVID-19.

² All references to the State of Palestine should be understood in compliance with General Assembly resolution 67/19.

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

As emergency measures were adopted by many countries, UN Human Rights raised awareness to ensure that restrictions were necessary and proportionate and that they were applied fairly and humanely, with a focus on safeguarding public health. The Office called for immediate action to be taken to prevent COVID-19 from sweeping through places of detention and confinement, including immigration and pretrial detention facilities.



Prevention



Senior police officers from the Police Special Response Unit and the Human Rights Cell during a human rights training facilitated by UN Human Rights on the prevention of torture and use of excessive force, including in the context of enforcing states of emergencies, at the Fiji Police Academy, in October 2020. © OHCHR

UN Human Rights monitored **law enforcement** and assessed the legality and proportionality of emergency measures to ensure that they did not unnecessarily limit the rights to freedom of expression or assembly and were not applied indiscriminately. The Office delivered technical assistance and training on various topics, including the role of prosecutors, police conduct in enforcing curfews and emergency restrictions, assessing legal aspects of restrictions and reporting on violations of measures (for instance in Angola, Fiji, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Maldives, the State of Palestine and Zambia).

Revised regulations related to court hearings were adopted in Ukraine to allow remote participation, thereby ensuring access to justice during the pandemic. Guidance Notes on access to justice and the deprivation of liberty in the context of COVID-19 were widely distributed among judges, prosecutors and lawyers and in detention centres in the State of Palestine.



Prevention



Mobile court session of the Makamba High Court, in Burundi, in May 2020. © OHCHR

UN Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Human Rights called on governments to explore options for release and alternatives to detention to mitigate the risk of contagion in **places of detention**, with a focus on the release of those who were most vulnerable, including children and persons with health conditions, low-risk profiles or imminent release dates and those detained for offences not recognized under international law. In Chile, the Attorney General urged prosecutors to consider alternatives to pretrial detention. In Mexico, an amnesty law was adopted by the Congress.

Seven mobile court sessions were held in Burundi, resulting in the expedition of 206 cases and the release of 89 detainees, including seven women and one child. UN Human Rights advocacy efforts contributed to the release of detainees in many countries around the world, including 30,000 in the Southern Africa region, 17,500 in Iraq, 7,700 in Sudan, 3,900 in Libya, 2,773 in Honduras, 2,710 in Senegal and 1,326 in Somalia.

REDUCING NEGATIVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

As it became clear that the crisis would have long-lasting and profound effects on people's lives, UN Human Rights worked to address inequalities and ensure rights-based approaches were applied to COVID-19 responses and recovery efforts. The Office advocated for fiscal stimulus and social protection packages aimed at those least able to cope with the crisis, with a view to building back better and advancing human rights, implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and protecting the right to a healthy and sustainable environment.

 Inequalities



Kirkuk, Iraq – In July and August, 140 volunteers distributed 28,500 posters across 18 governorates with human rights awareness messages.
© OHCHR-Iraq

To combat the increase in inequalities generated by the pandemic, UN Human Rights enhanced its work on **economic, social and cultural rights** (ESCRs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its **Surge Initiative**. Support from ESCR and development specialists was provided to field presences to address the impacts of COVID-19 on those rights and to engage with UN Resident Coordinators (RCs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs), in line with the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights and his vision for a New Social Contract. The Office designed surveys, undertook analyses, developed methodologies and presented policy options to curb inequalities aimed at enhancing revenue generation, social spending and social protection, for instance in Argentina, Cameroon, Madagascar, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Tunisia and Ukraine.

The Surge Initiative contributed guidance to 59 countries, including through 27 seed funded projects and 30 UNCT COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs) and Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs). The seed funded projects were initiated to reinforce human rights-based analyses, the use of disaggregated data and the formulation of policy options to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups.

INTEGRATING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UN RESPONSE

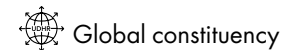
COVID-19 exposed and exacerbated inequalities within and among countries, necessitating an increase in international cooperation. UN Human Rights supported the UN system in applying a human rights-based approach (HRBA), including in relation to the right to development, in its response to COVID-19 and in Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).



In Ukraine, Alla, an 85-year-old woman with a disability, lost her pension bank card and had to travel to government-controlled territory to get a new one. She was stuck in ‘the grey zone’ because she did not have a smartphone to install the ‘Act at Home’ self-isolation application that is required to enter the territory. © OHCHR

At the request of the UN Crisis Management Team, UN Human Rights developed 10 thematic human rights **indicators** to support immediate UN socio-economic, health and humanitarian responses to COVID-19 and address issues of discrimination and inequality. The Office helped UNCTs and UN partners integrate an HRBA into their policies and programmes, for instance in Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Uruguay. The indicators were also used to collect data for CCAs and UNSDCFs and as a basis for advocacy with governments.

The Office developed a Checklist for a Human Rights-Based Approach to Socio-Economic Country Responses to COVID-19 in cooperation with UNDP and the UN Development Coordination Office. The Checklist, which contains suggested actions, tools and resources, was used by UNCTs to integrate human rights into socio-economic impact assessments, responses and recovery plans and to ensure that No One was Left Behind.



A meeting of the Human Rights Council during the pandemic. © OHCHR

UN Human Rights provided advice to ensure human rights were integrated into SERPs in the context of COVID-19. The Office stepped up its efforts to mainstream the **right to development**, highlighting the need for international solidarity on issues such as access to medicine, medical equipment and vaccines, closing digital divides, climate action, financing for development and global governance. In West Africa, the UN Regional Gender Group, led by UN Human Rights, provided guidance to the UNCTs on the gender dimensions of the pandemic.

A panel discussion held at the forty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council on COVID-19 and the right to development enabled the exchange of good practices of global solidarity during the pandemic, such as South-South cooperation to deploy health-care professionals and ensure access to essential medical products. Within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Task Team on Leaving No One Behind, Human Rights and the Normative Agenda, UN Human Rights coordinated a review of 109 SERPs in terms of human rights mainstreaming.

Voices from UN Human Rights staff in the field



“When it comes to work, [physical] distancing has a huge impact. Human rights work is all about the people and the bonds we create,” said Ricardo Neves, a UN

Human Rights staffer working in Mexico. Amid the pandemic, the Office continued to shed light on the situation faced by HRDs and journalists by supporting national protection mechanisms and assisting all of those affected by emergency measures. A total of 51 HRDs from 13 States took part in an awareness-raising campaign that reached 340,000 Facebook users.



“COVID-19 exacerbated all of the issues we had pointed out before the pandemic: the intersectionality of certain factors like poverty, level

of education and the lack of access to health services,” said Nwanneakolam Vwede-Obahor, former Head of the UN Human Rights East Africa Regional Office. The Office addressed issues linked to stigmatization and discrimination, monitored states of emergency with CSOs partners and worked on risk communication and community engagement.



“This has been an enormous learning experience, especially in

fulfilling the unique mandate that UN Human Rights has in the field: to ensure that human rights are not forgotten, even in these restrictive times and in states of emergency across the globe,” said Milan Markovic, Human Rights Adviser in Serbia. The Office closely monitored the restrictive measures adopted during the pandemic, in collaboration with local organizations, and advocated with the Government to mitigate the impact of restrictions on vulnerable groups.



“The restrictive measures adopted to fight COVID-19 in Iraq heightened

the risk of domestic violence, while at the same time substantially reduced the ability of victims to report abuse and seek effective shelter, support and access to justice,” said Danielle Bell, Head of UN Human Rights in Iraq. The Office redoubled its advocacy efforts to contribute to the protection of women against violence and increase accountability, including through the adoption of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law.



“Since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have seen a diminishing of

the civic and democratic space in Cambodia where freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association are being met with a deepening intolerance of dissent and repression by the Government,” said Sally Soen, a UN Human Rights staffer in Cambodia. The Office developed ways to support and protect HRDs and CSOs, such as maintaining direct contacts with them through secure communication platforms or by increasing its advocacy with the Government for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

COVID-19 Tracker: Leveraging information to build back better

In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis cast a long shadow over human rights across the globe and required UN Human Rights to increase its situational awareness around the many human rights concerns that arose. The Office took proactive steps to track COVID-19-related issues of concern and transform itself into an organization that employs technology to effectively work with data and develop analytics. This resulted in enhanced collaboration across UN Human Rights and informed strategic decision-making.

EARLY PHASE AND BUILDING THE TRACKER

At the onset of the crisis, human rights concerns were quickly emerging. The UN Human Rights Emergency Response Section immediately began monitoring the media and analysing secondary data to identify trends and design data visualizations for the internal COVID-19 Task Force.

As information needs evolved, the team adapted its work. “We failed fast, learned and altered our approach as required,” noted Mark McCarthy, Head of the Information Management and Data Analytics Unit. The team set up a prototype COVID-19 Tracker, which was initially used to store data from open source media monitoring efforts and field inputs for the UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC). Three areas were defined to capture and organize information: issues of concern (trends, risks, early warning); mitigating measures undertaken

by governments and others; and actions undertaken by UN Human Rights.

Building this tool was central to supporting integrated analysis as mandated by the Secretary-General’s Prevention Platform. The Tracker provided human rights officers and content experts with a structured way to gather, extract and analyse data. It also enabled the Office to produce two-page visual snapshots with regional information on key human rights concerns, which were prominent contributions used by the Crisis Management Team that was hosted by WHO.

EMBEDDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN COVID-19 RESPONSES

By December, the Tracker had identified over 3,100 issues of concern, 1,900 mitigating measures and 1,050 UN Human Rights actions related to the pandemic. The data were leveraged to provide case samples, enhance the Office’s reporting and respond to a wide range of requests from various partners. For instance, “This helped to draft a UN Human Rights report on COVID-19 for the March 2021 session of the Human Rights Council,” said Human Rights Officer Chitralkha Massey. Further, it was used by UN Human Rights to encourage States, UN partners and other stakeholders to incorporate human rights into their pandemic responses.

This innovative tool made it possible for UN Human Rights to track a global situation in near real-time, for the first time. It improved internal access to information and fostered cooperation. It also supported evidence-based decision-making and engagement with external actors. Moreover, the Tracker highlighted good practices that could be replicated across countries to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on human rights and build back better.

“The Tracker enabled UN Human Rights to gather and provide timely information and analysis on the human rights impacts of COVID-19 and the required responses by all relevant stakeholders. It also helped to illustrate the Office’s key message that a human rights approach is indispensable to overcoming the crisis,” concluded Reem Mazzawi, Human Rights Officer at the UN Human Rights Executive Office.



COVID-19 Tracker interactive dashboard with a view of a UN Human Rights actions data set. © OHCHR

Implementing the OMP in 2020

The priorities, strategies and targets of UN Human Rights are set out in the OHCHR Management Plan (OMP) 2018-2021. The Plan provides a robust results framework and is based on six Pillars, four Shifts and three Spotlights. This framework remained relevant throughout the COVID-19 crisis and simultaneously provided the needed

flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. This led to the decision to extend the current OMP until 2023 and to update some elements. Extending and updating the OMP will ensure that results continue to be consolidated while providing us with the opportunity to re-calibrate our focus in response to the human rights impacts of the COVID-19 crisis

and ensuring that important initiatives such as the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, the Common Agenda and other recent developments are included. This extension will also align future OMP cycles with the High Commissioner's mandates.

The Secretary-General's Call to Action: Human rights at the centre of the United Nations

The Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights has been a key catalyst for the Office, which is co-leading the implementation of the initiative with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG). UN Human Rights played a central role in launching strategic initiatives across all seven thematic areas, which are backed by an extensive institutional architecture that includes 35 UN entities. The UN's expertise and operational reach will ensure that the Call to Action achieves its transformative potential and facilitates the realization of practical results for people around the world. This necessitates a strengthening of the UN leadership on human rights across the system, particularly at the country level. To that end, Assistant Secretary-General Brands Kehris and Volker Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, worked together to spearhead regional dialogues with Resident Coordinators in order to further advance the objectives of the Call to Action. Efforts to generate the collective engagement of the UN system were accompanied by outreach to Member States and civil society to raise awareness about the Call to Action and to ensure that it will be implemented in a collective manner and will bring about actual human rights improvements with real impact for all people.

OMP 2018-2021 at a glance



Overview of progress made towards achieving OMP results in 2020

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic generated significant challenges in terms of programme delivery and demands for working on new and pressing issues. The data that follow are based on self-assessments undertaken by 115 reporting entities regarding their level of progress, notably in reference to a shift, a spotlight population or the country results that were set as targets for 2021.

REPROGRAMMING TO RESPOND TO THE PANDEMIC

UN Human Rights found creative solutions to continue implementing its planned work in the context of COVID-19. In fact, the challenges posed by the global pandemic to the respect for and observance of human rights led to the reprioritization of its work to address new concerns. It also resulted in the adoption of new working methods and a new focus within existing work streams. The Office provided extensive policy and technical advice to ensure that human rights were situated at the heart of the response and recovery efforts of States, UN partners, NHRIs, civil society and others and that targeted actions were implemented to support vulnerable groups.

Various activities of the international human rights mechanisms were particularly affected, such as country visits by special rapporteurs and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT) and the reviews of State Party reports by the human rights treaty bodies. In lieu of country visits, the special procedures followed up on reports related to previous visits, engaged with HRDs and other stakeholders and drafted thematic reports with an emphasis on trends and new challenges. The human rights treaty bodies held online sessions, including several that facilitated the delivery of testimonies by victims or their families, to maintain the consistent protection of rights-holders. Across the organization, a number of meetings, briefings, consultations and trainings were held virtually or in hybrid forms, as feasible. Despite the many challenges of online meetings, such as lack of equipment/connectivity of partners, poor IT literacy or fears of surveillance, the meetings offered the potential for much broader participation, irrespective of the location of participants.

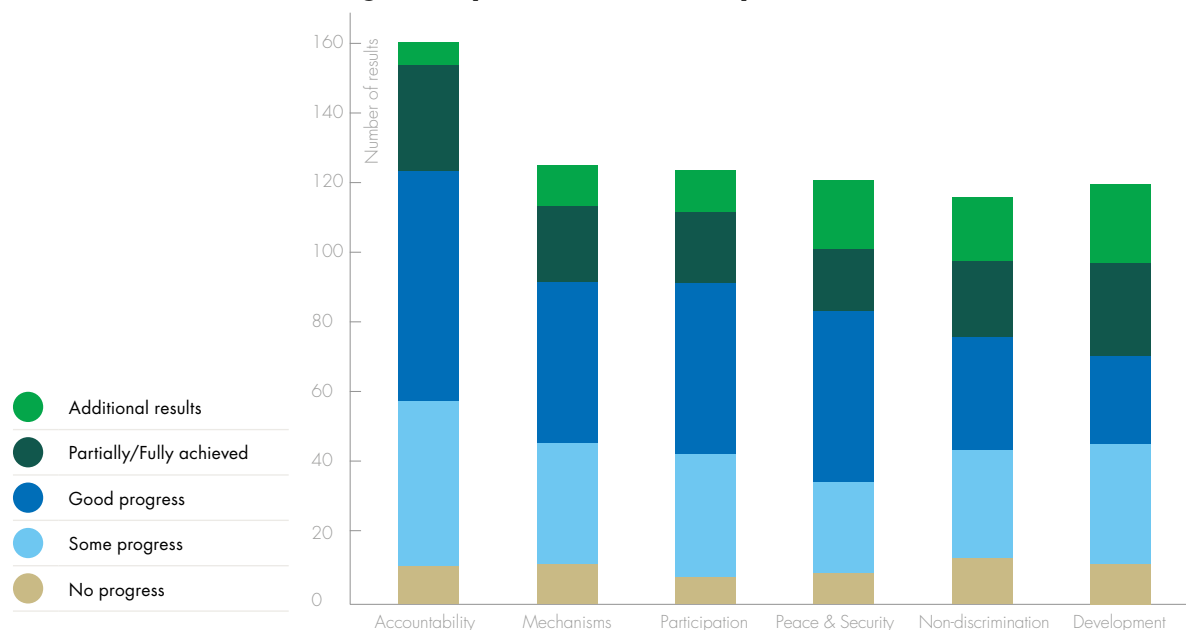
Movement and travel restrictions significantly affected the capacity of UN Human Rights to carry out field monitoring missions to collect data, document and report alleged human rights violations. The

Office adapted by increasing its remote monitoring and support to local partners for the monitoring and investigation of situations of concern.

PROGRESS TOWARDS COUNTRY RESULTS

From the updates on progress made towards the achievement of country results, we note that the number of results reported as partially or fully achieved continued to increase in 2020, with positive signs that the results set for 2021 would be achieved (from 105 in 2019 to 139 in 2020). The results for which no progress or some progress was reported were related to funding and staffing constraints, challenges emanating from complex political contexts and COVID-19 (from 29 in 2019 to 60 in 2020). On the other hand, the year 2020 saw a higher number of reported “additional results” (from 39 in 2019 to 77 in 2020), demonstrating that reprogramming enabled the Office to effectively adapt to the circumstances generated by the pandemic. The Development, Peace and Security and Non-discrimination Pillars saw a higher increase in the number of additional results.

Progress reported under each pillar in 2020



CONTRIBUTIONS TO SHIFTS AND SPOTLIGHT POPULATIONS

Four shifts are identified in the 2018-2021 OMP, contributing to: (1) the **prevention** of conflict, violence and insecurity; (2) the expansion of **civic space**; (3) a broadening of the **global constituency** for human rights; and (4) the exploration of emerging human rights concerns identified as “**frontier issues**.” This last shift has five sub-thematic categories, namely, **climate change**, digital space and **emerging technologies**, **corruption**, **inequalities** and **people on the move**.

The spotlight populations identified in the OMP are **women**, **youth** and **persons with disabilities**.

“Prevention” and “civic space” were the major shifts selected by reporting entities in 2019-2020. Unlike the situation in 2019, there was a significant increase in the selection of the “inequalities” and “global constituency” shifts in 2020.

As in previous years, “women” was the most commonly selected spotlight population. This was followed by “persons with disabilities” and “youth.”

Specific results related to the shifts and spotlight populations are highlighted throughout the report.

Mechanisms (M)

Increasing implementation of the outcomes of the international human rights mechanisms



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (HRC) AND UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)



HRC panels

14 discussions held (including on COVID-19 and the right to development, climate change, the rights of persons with disabilities and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration)



UPR mid-term reports

7 documents submitted (on the implementation of recommendations issued during the 2nd and 3rd UPR cycles)

TREATY BODIES



Experts

172 treaty body experts



Recommendations

39 concluding observations (and 142 lists of issues prepared)



General comments

4 new comments (on trafficking in women and migration; science and economic, social and cultural rights; racial profiling; and peaceful assembly)



Individual complaints

317 new communications registered (by 8 treaty bodies, with 239 views and decisions adopted)



Capacity-building

2,446 State officials trained (to engage with the treaty bodies, with participants from 61 countries)

SPECIAL PROCEDURES



Special procedures mandates

44 thematic
11 country-specific



Standing invitations Extended by

127 States (to thematic mandates)



Reports

166 presented to the General Assembly/HRC (64 on country visits)



Communications

681 communications sent (to 152 States and 76 non-State actors)
433 replies received

REPORTING AND FOLLOWING UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS



National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up

46 newly established and/or strengthened

Children's rights in the Pacific: An historic treaty body session in Samoa

“For many years, we spoke and dreamed of holding a session outside Geneva,” said Luis Pedernera, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). “This week, that dream became a reality. It’s an historic moment,” he said of the Committee’s extraordinary outreach session that was held in Samoa, in March. During the session, the Committee met with government officials, UN entities, civil society, NHRIs and children to discuss the situation of children’s rights in the Pacific.³

Like all other UN human rights treaty bodies, the Committee usually meets in Geneva, Switzerland. Yet, the Pacific is the region most adversely affected by its remoteness from Geneva. Since 2016, six of the seven State Party reviews from the region have been conducted via video link. During the 2020 consultations on the treaty body system’s review process, participants stressed the importance of regional sessions to increase domestic stakeholder accessibility, enhance the visibility of the treaty body system and more closely interact with national and regional human rights systems.

The CRC session in Samoa represents the first regional-level session held by a UN human rights treaty body, the first time

an official meeting of the Committee was moderated by children and the first time that sign language interpretation was used for all meetings.

During the session, the Committee reviewed the situation of the rights of the child in the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu and held a preparatory meeting for a future review of Kiribati, enabling State Party delegations to hold in-person, constructive dialogues with the Committee. In addition, the Committee met with a broad range of stakeholders, including more than 100 children and passionate child HRDs, to discuss pressing issues in the region, such as climate change and child

rights to participation, education, health and freedom from violence.

Audrey, 16 years old, moderated a discussion on children’s right to health and explained that the session taught her that children’s views matter. “During this session, we learned that we have the right to be heard [and that] children’s opinions, perspectives and problems should be voiced.”

Chair Luis Pedernera added, “We hope [the children] were able to understand how much the Committee appreciates their contributions and that this is just the beginning of strong and meaningful participation of children from the region in our work.”



Child moderator during the official session dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. © OHCHR

³ The session was co-organized by UN Human Rights with the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) of the Pacific Community (SPC), the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) and UNDP in Samoa, the Government of Samoa and UNICEF Pacific, with financial support from the RRRT SPC and its donors (Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom), the Government of Samoa and the RCO in Samoa.

Highlights of pillar results

Mechanisms (M)

The international human rights mechanisms – composed of the Human Rights Council (HRC), with its special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and the treaty bodies – are the backbone of UN Human Rights' work. Their analyses, monitoring and interactions with States and stakeholders

help to identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities in relation to all rights. Through their actions and recommendations, they provide the basis for engagement with States and other actors and support duty-bearers to comply with their obligations and rights-holders to claim their rights. UN Human Rights

provides secretariat support to these mechanisms and supports States in honouring their obligations. Through their procedures and country visits, the international human rights mechanisms give a voice to vulnerable persons and groups at the national level.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

M1 – NATIONAL MECHANISMS for REPORTING and FOLLOW-UP

National institutionalized structures facilitate an integrated and participatory approach to reporting to the international human rights mechanisms and implementation of their recommendations.



RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS

Spotlights: Disabilities Women Youth

UN Human Rights, through its Treaty Body Capacity-Building Programme and its field presences, provided technical assistance to support the **establishment or strengthening of National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRFs)** in Benin, Botswana, Cambodia, Egypt, Eswatini, Haiti, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Malaysia, Namibia, Peru, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Saint Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Venezuela. In particular, support from the Office to Eswatini and to Tonga resulted in the official establishment of NMRFs in 2020. In Sudan, in July, a draft ministerial decree and a road map on the creation of an NMRF were prepared. In August, Peru adopted an intersectional protocol to improve the inter-institutional coordination for the implementation of its international human rights obligations and to facilitate collaboration with civil society. This instrument will pave the way for the creation of an NMRF.

In the Republic of Moldova, Thailand and Uzbekistan, UN Human Rights supported the roll-out of the **National Recommendations Tracking Database (NRTD)**. In Tunisia, the Office supported the creation of the [NMRF website](#), which will host the NRTD and facilitate interactions with CSOs.

UN Human Rights provided extensive technical assistance in various countries for the **submission of State reports to the international human rights mechanisms**. A number of long overdue State Party reports were submitted with support from the Office, including Côte d'Ivoire's initial report under the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Guinea's initial report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Somalia's initial report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Somalia also submitted its UPR mid-term report.

M2 – ENGAGEMENT with human rights MECHANISMS

Civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and non-traditional actors, particularly those working on emerging human rights issues (frontier issues), increasingly engage with the international human rights mechanisms and use their outcomes.





UN Human Rights supported the increased **engagement** of stakeholders **with the UPR Working Group**. For instance, with support from the Office, 126 CSOs from across Somalia submitted a joint report for their country's third UPR review and a coalition of 27 CSOs submitted a first alternative report on Jamaica. These efforts resulted in the submission of a first report by Rohingya civil society groups in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps on the situation of Rohingya people in Myanmar. In addition, UN Human Rights offered assistance for the submission of joint UNCT reports for UPR reviews.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the Office supported a network of CSOs that are active in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to submit a 'spotlight report' to complement the country's first **Voluntary National Review (VNR) report**. The Office also provided technical assistance on the role of CSOs in the **National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)** in South Africa, including by supporting the drafting of a research paper by the African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF) on the subject.

Advocacy efforts by UN Human Rights and its partners contributed to the **recognition of the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) to examine individual complaints in Mexico**. This represents a major breakthrough for the application of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Furthermore, the Mexican Senate ratified the **Escazú Agreement** on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, a valuable tool to support HRDs in their struggle against the degradation of the environment.

In April, UN Human Rights supported the Special Rapporteur on the rights to **freedom of peaceful assembly and of association** to issue a **set of indicators** to guide governments when designing and implementing measures to tackle the spread of COVID-19. The indicators were developed taking into account 185 submissions received from representatives of governments, CSOs, women, indigenous communities, youth groups and trade unions from 79 countries.

 The **Committee on the Rights of the Child**, with support from the Office, launched a **web page** for children that provides a simple overview of the Committee's mandate and activities and information on how children can share their views and contribute to its work. A **child safeguarding** procedure was adopted to ensure a safe environment for engagement with children.

 In Mozambique, UN Human Rights provided guidance to **organizations of persons with disabilities and older persons** to engage with the international human rights mechanisms. As a result, umbrella organizations representing these groups submitted their first report in anticipation of the country's third UPR cycle. In the State of Palestine,⁴ the Office coached disability counsellors and disability outreach staff in selected CSOs on the application of an HRBA to disability and identified connections between provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

⁴ All references to the State of Palestine should be understood in compliance with General Assembly resolution 67/19.

M3 – USE of MECHANISMS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Policymakers, legislators and courts make increased use of the outcomes of the international and regional human rights mechanisms.



The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences advocated for the decriminalization of abortion, including through country visits, recommendations, letters and amicus curiae briefs. In December, **Argentina** adopted a **law legalizing abortion** in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy and the **Republic of Korea** decriminalized abortion.

In **Uzbekistan**, the **Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** was adopted and signed in October and came into force in January 2021, in line with the country's UPR action plan. As a follow-up to the Human Rights Committee's concluding observations, UN Human Rights supported the drafting of an **NGO Code** by civil society experts, which was shared with the Parliament and the Government. A number of recommendations issued by the international human rights mechanisms were incorporated into the **National Human Rights Strategy**, which was adopted in June.

On 16 June, the Supreme Court of **Spain** handed down a **judgment** on the issue of **age determination of unaccompanied migrant children**. In the ruling, the Court cited the views of CRC in its Communications No. 16/2017 and 22/2017, which establish that identity documents should be considered valid unless they have been challenged through judicial means. The Supreme Court also followed the Committee's reasoning that: 1) the person who alleges to be under the age of 18 should be considered as a child until proof to the contrary is obtained; 2) an individualized assessment of age needs to be conducted in light of the circumstances of each case; 3) when a person holds an identity document, s/he cannot be treated as an undocumented migrant; 4) a refusal to undergo medical tests to determine that person's age cannot in itself be considered proof that the person is an adult; and 5) the physical appearance of a person cannot prevail over identity documents, unless those documents are proven to be invalid.

In May, the President of **Chad** enacted **anti-terrorism legislation** that **abolished** the previous dispositions that allowed the **death penalty**. As an outcome of the country's third UPR cycle, the Government committed to abolishing the death penalty and ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR-OP2).

In **Mexico**, UN Human Rights provided legal advice to the Supreme Court, tribunals, prosecutors and the NHRI, contributing to the enhanced **use of international human rights law and jurisprudence in court** proceedings and decisions, including in relation to seven emblematic cases in 2020. For instance, in the case of Misael Zamora, an HRD working on environmental issues and the rights of indigenous peoples, the charges against him were withdrawn after UN Human Rights submitted a legal brief that outlined relevant international human rights standards.

M4 – DEVELOPMENT of INTERNATIONAL LAW

International human rights mechanisms contribute to the elaboration of international law and jurisprudence, in particular in the context of emerging human rights concerns (frontier issues).



On 4 November, the **Human Rights Committee** adopted a **landmark decision**, which found **Italy** responsible for the death of 200 **migrants** in the Mediterranean Sea in 2013. The events occurred in international waters and involved an Italian naval ship and a nearby sinking boat carrying more than 400 adults and children. The Committee found that Italy failed to **protect the life of the victims**. It also considered that although the victims were not on Italian territory, they had established a special relationship of dependency with Italy when the first distress calls were made by the victims to Italian authorities, due to their proximity to the Italian coast and because they were affected by the decisions of the Italian authorities that were reasonably foreseeable in light of Italy's relevant legal obligations. The Committee called for an independent and timely investigation.

In May, the Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants published a **Joint Guidance Note on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the human rights of migrants**. The Guidance Note urges States to set up mechanisms to review the use of immigration detention in order to reduce the number of people being held to the lowest possible level and to secure the immediate transfer of families with children and unaccompanied or separated children from immigration detention facilities to non-custodial and community-based alternatives, with full access to rights and services. They are also urged to ensure the inclusion of migrants in economic recovery policies.

With support from UN Human Rights, the **human rights treaty bodies** issued **four new general comments and recommendations**: 1) General Recommendation No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)); 2) General Comment No. 25 on science and economic, social and cultural rights (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)); 3) General Recommendation No. 36 on preventing and combating racial profiling by law enforcement officials (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)); and 4) General Comment No. 37 on article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Right of peaceful assembly (Human Rights Committee).

M5 – EFFECTIVENESS of international human rights MECHANISMS

International human rights mechanisms are increasingly effective in promoting and protecting human rights.



In November, UN Human Rights supported the **first hybrid session** of the **UPR Working Group**, during which pre-recorded video statements and online connections with the capitals were introduced. Despite the challenging circumstances caused by COVID-19, including the implications of the digital adaptation, the thirty-sixth session of the UPR Working Group was a success. A total of 250 delegates from capitals participated in the session and interacted with an average of 100 States. The hybrid format enabled an enhanced participation of delegates from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). A **video** was produced to showcase this success.

Joint efforts and advocacy undertaken by the mandates on the sale and sexual exploitation of children and on the right to privacy contributed to the **European Parliament's** adoption of **legislation**, allowing a temporary derogation from certain provisions of the Privacy and Electronic Communications Directive 2002/58 with regard to the use of technologies for the processing of personal and other data to **combat child sexual abuse online**.

UN Human Rights facilitated the **virtual engagement of international human rights mechanisms in 65 interactive dialogues** that were held in the **Third Committee** at the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. This resulted in the adoption of more than 37 human rights-related resolutions. Moreover, the Office supported the organization of virtual meetings between special procedures country mandates and Member States, CSOs, victims and other interlocutors.

Preventing enforced disappearances and locating victims during the COVID-19 pandemic

On 4 May, as part of the opening of the eighteenth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, Maria Nohemí Barbosa recounted the story of her son, John Alexander, who went missing in Mexico in 2014. Due to COVID-19-related restrictions, this was the first time that a human rights treaty body had opened a virtual session.

Committee Chair Mohammed Ayat noted that organizing a virtual session presented challenges. No simultaneous interpretation was available and the 10 Committee members were based in multiple time zones, from Peru to Japan. Nonetheless, “victims of enforced disappearance must know that, while the pandemic can make some situations more difficult, the Committee is still available to assist.”

At the end of the year, CED registered its 1,000th urgent action request. December also marked the tenth anniversary of

the Convention’s entry into force, which established the urgent actions procedure.

“Behind each urgent action request, there is a human tragedy. The family of the victim suffers from the absence of their loved one and from the uncertainty as to whether the victim is still alive. As time passes, the chance of finding the person alive reduces and the grief increases,” said the Committee.

Among registered cases, 49 per cent relate to disappearances in Iraq and 42 per cent relate to disappearances in Mexico. Families, relatives and representatives of disappeared persons can submit a request to CED after reporting the disappearance to relevant national authorities. The urgent action procedure provides support to people seeking justice at the international level and to States in the fight against enforced disappearances.

In the context of the pandemic, UN Human Rights undertook actions to prevent enforced disappearances. In Mexico, many state governments ordered the immediate cremation of bodies without guaranteeing the right to identity of the deceased. The Office collaborated with WHO and the ICRC and offered technical assistance to the Ministries of Health and the Interior, resulting in the adoption of national standards that prioritize the decisions of families on the safe and dignified disposal of human remains. “Now, there are guidelines so that no one is cremated without being identified or offering their families the possibility to claim the body,” noted Gabriela Gorjón, Public Information Officer at UN Human Rights in Mexico.

Through the urgent action procedure, 90 persons had been located by the end of 2020, including in Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, Cuba, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Sri Lanka and Togo. For instance, the procedure was successfully used to secure the swift release of three land defenders, from an indigenous community in Chiapas, Mexico, who were disappeared on 8 June.

“The Convention on Enforced Disappearances is clear: no exceptional circumstances can be invoked to justify enforced disappearances,” said Ibrahim Salama, Chief of the Human Rights Treaties Branch of UN Human Rights. “This principle also applies during the pandemic.”



UN Human Rights staff in Mexico accompanying the Missing Persons Search Brigade in Poza Rica, Veracruz, in February 2020. © OHCHR-Mexico

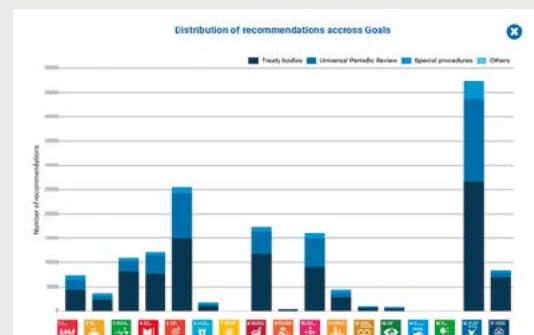
A revamped Universal Human Rights Index

With almost 50,000 unique visitors every year, the [Universal Human Rights Index \(UHRI\)](#) has long been a central gateway to the work of the international human rights mechanisms. In October, UN Human Rights launched a new version of the tool with a revamped interface and extended functionalities. More than 180,000 observations and recommendations issued by the human rights treaty bodies, the special procedures and the UPR, which are aligned with the SDGs, are now available online.

“The UHRI provides easy access to human rights recommendations and leverages synergies with the 2030 Agenda,” said Jonas Grimheden, Programme Manager at the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). “The database offers a new user-friendly design, making it easy to find [and export] data in just a few clicks,” he added, underlining that data-sharing is facilitated by the open source technology that supports the tool.

Hanae Hanzawa, a UN Human Rights staffer in Bangkok, Thailand, recognizes its huge potential. “As a human rights trainer, I use the UHRI often and with its various thematic filters, I can easily find the recommendations I am looking for,” she explained. By harnessing the power of machine learning, automatic text classification algorithms help to categorize content against themes and SDGs, which enables users to efficiently search the database. “[The UHRI] is respected among academics, human rights lawyers and practitioners as being a first-class database to find country-specific observations and recommendations of authority and reliability,” confirmed Anne Charbord, lecturer at the Paris School of International Affairs.

The experience gained and the partnerships built during the course of this innovation project will undoubtedly help to promote the digital shift in other areas of the work of UN Human Rights. It will also ensure the long-term sustainability of the UHRI as new documents and recommendations are issued each year.



UHRI home page (left) and SDGs chart (right). © OHCHR

Development (D)

Advancing sustainable development through human rights



2030 AGENDA



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

4 SDG indicators (for which UN Human Rights is responsible in terms of methodology, data compilation and dissemination)



High-level Political Forum

91 Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes supported (with guidance on integrating human rights data and analyses – 47 VNRs submitted in 2020 and 44 in 2021)



Right to development and SDGs

214 persons completed the UN Human Rights e-course (from 83 countries)

HUMAN RIGHTS INTEGRATION



UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks

1 UN system-wide guidance on Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and Cooperation Frameworks (that applies a human rights lens and integrates human rights content)

65 CCAs/Cooperation Frameworks processes supported (integration of human rights analysis and recommendations)



UN system at the global level

37 UN policies/programmes integrated a human rights approach



In the field, human rights mainstreaming support to

170 RCOs/UN Country Teams
400 other UN partners
1,100 government counterparts



Submissions for Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) from

15 UN Country Teams (joint submissions)
53 UN entities

ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Climate change, environment, toxics and human rights

43 UPR recommendations issued (41 of which were supported by the State under review)

56 special procedures communications (sent and made publicly available)



Preventing business-related human rights abuses

Over **3,700** participants in the 9th Forum on Business and Human Rights (from 140 countries, including 200 speakers in 28 sessions)

A cornerstone in due diligence policies: The voice of human rights defenders

Just weeks after completing a two-week human rights training programme that was organized by UN Human Rights, in Bangkok, Panachai Chanta was employing the skills he had learned and making a concrete impact on the ground. Returning to the northern province of Mae Hong Son, where the local farming community was trying to halt a development project, Panachai led talks with local authorities to stop construction, which was allegedly planned without the consent of the community or any form of public hearing.

“The knowledge that I gained from the Human Rights Defenders School helped me to constructively negotiate with them,” he said. “I told local officials that indigenous peoples have the right to lands and territories that they have traditionally owned and occupied, according to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by Thailand and 142 other Member States. I also cited the relevant Cabinet’s resolution on this issue.” Following these negotiations, all parties agreed to halt the project.

UN Human Rights first launched this training programme in 2014. Since then, the Office has equipped over 100 Thai human rights professionals and activists with skills and knowledge that can strengthen their work.

In order to pursue this objective across the region, UN Human Rights and the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises organized the first UN Pacific Forum on Business

and Human Rights. Held in a hybrid format in Suva, in December, the Forum featured sessions on various issues, including climate change and climate justice, the extractive industries, pollution, modern slavery, corruption, HRDs, entrepreneurship and the SDGs. Central to the discussion was a strong recommendation that companies consistently undertake human rights due diligence and consult with HRDs before initiating business activities.

“Human rights and human rights defenders need to be a priority for both States and businesses,” said Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders during the annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, held in November. To this end, she urged companies that are launching projects to engage with potentially affected communities and HRDs at the earliest possible stage and called on States to collaborate with HRDs during legislative processes.

“[Companies] have to keep the door open, even if objections of the defenders might render a project more costly, less profitable or even unviable. Free, prior and informed consent by the community is a must,” she emphasized.



Panachai Chanta, Coordinator of the Centre on Health Security and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, participating in an HRD training programme organized by UN Human Rights in Thailand. © OHCHR/Todd Pitman

Highlights of pillar results

Development (D)

UN Human Rights supports efforts to advance economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. It helps to address human rights gaps in development and economic policies and

regulations. It takes steps to strengthen the accountability of duty-bearers in the public and private sectors and the participation of rights-holders, including those left furthest behind. The Office

promotes the achievement of rights-based Sustainable Development Goals and the overall integration of human rights into the work of the UN Development System.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS



D1 – BUSINESS and human rights

Judicial and non-judicial mechanisms hold business and other economic actors to account for rights abuses and provide remedies to victims.

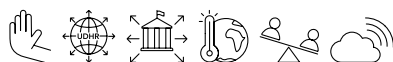


UN Human Rights provided mediation support to **indigenous communities and business actors in Cambodia**. In August, an agreement on communal land was reached between a rubber company and three Bunong indigenous communities in Mondulkiri Province and Socfin. Due to the Office’s intervention, over 500 hectares of land were returned to the indigenous communities, including sacred forests, spirit forests, cemeteries and reserve lands, which were located in the economic land concessions managed by the company. With the development of maps and the marking of the returned areas, the communities will be able to apply to have their land registered under the **communal land titling (CLT)** process, thus securing their land tenure.

UN Human Rights collaborated with the World Economic Forum Partnership for Global LGBTI Equality (PGLE) to disseminate the Standards of Conduct for Business on Tackling Discrimination against LGBTI people and to build tools to advance their implementation. The Office finalized a **guide for LGBTI HRDs on engaging with the private sector** and supported the development of a gap analysis tool to help businesses measure their performance in implementing the Standards of Conduct.

D2 – GUIDING PRINCIPLES on Business and Human Rights

Business actors implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights effectively.



In **Colombia**, the Presidential Council on Human Rights (PCHR) approved the **second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights** in December. UN Human Rights provided technical assistance during the formulation process, including for the organization of dialogue spaces with unions, business associations and academia. A baseline on business and human rights was successfully included in the Action Plan, which UN Human Rights had developed with two universities in Bogotá (Universidad Javeriana and Universidad del Rosario). The Office also provided technical assistance to the Mining and Energy Planning Unit to design a tool for mapping human rights risks in the mining and energy sectors.

In the **Russian Federation**, UN Human Rights raised awareness on the risks of **business-related human rights abuses in the context of COVID-19**, particularly with regard to decent work and social protection. The Office strengthened its partnership with two major representatives of the business sector, namely, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE) and the UN Global Compact National Network. Together, they co-organized a videoconference to mark UN75 and Human Rights Day on the topic “Respect for human rights as a corporate responsibility indicator.” A total of 122 participants discussed challenges requiring better regulation and the effective enforcement of rules.

D3 – LAND and HOUSING laws/policies

State authorities adopt and implement laws, policies and strategies on land and housing that increasingly comply with human rights.



In **Kenya**, UN Human Rights assisted the **Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples** to prepare for her appearance as an expert witness in the **reparation proceedings in the Ogiek rights to land and housing case** that was before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. The testimony of the Special Rapporteur focused on the issue of reparations for the Ogiek community, related international standards and good practices. The Government's Task Force that is mandated to implement the Court's judgment drafted its final report on the implementation of the decision.

UN Human Rights and the **Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia** undertook consistent advocacy with local authorities regarding the planned **evictions of ethnic Vietnamese communities** in Kampong Chhnang province. The Office successfully intervened to stop the demolition of homes belonging to families of ethnic Vietnamese, leading to a postponement of the relocation of almost 1,000 families. UN Human Rights called on the Government to complete the planned resettlement site before relocating the families and to ensure that the people were in agreement with the plan, as required by international human rights standards.

The UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for **South-West Asia and the Arab Region** reviewed the publications ***Land and human rights: Standards and application*** and ***Land and human rights: Annotated compilation of case law***. These publications provided the sector with short, user-friendly guides on applicable international human rights law, international humanitarian law and criminal law standards. Furthermore, in October, UN Human Rights and UN Women published the 2nd edition of ***Realizing women's rights to land and other productive resources***, which links the issue with the achievement of the SDGs and more systematically integrates the latest guidance from the international human rights mechanisms.

D4 – HEALTH POLICIES and human rights

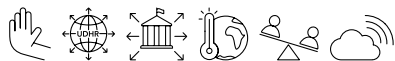
Public health approaches, including sexual and reproductive health policies, comply with international human rights standards and provide non-discriminatory access, especially to children, adolescents, women and migrants.



UN Human Rights expanded the global constituency for **sexual and reproductive health and rights** through awareness-raising on relevant international standards. For instance, the Office partnered with WHO and the Oxford University to launch the **Right to A Better World series** on 18 November, targeting practitioners and students. The series consists of four episodes, namely, comprehensive sexuality education, contraception, maternal mortality and morbidity and violence against women. In each episode, which is approximately 20 minutes long, human rights experts and advocates from around the world share stories on their professional struggles and successes. The Office also updated its **information series on sexual and reproductive health and rights** to reflect the latest standards.

D5 – ENVIRONMENT and CLIMATE policies

Environmental and climate policies and plans increasingly respect, protect and fulfil human rights, guaranteeing those affected with access to information, decision-making, public participation and remedies.



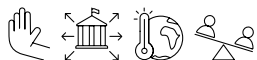
In **Mexico**, UN Human Rights promoted the establishment and functioning of a **Climate Justice Network** with more than 25 CSOs, which met regularly to share information on key issues like air quality, impact studies and the implementation of the **Escazú Agreement**. This work led to the submission of a joint proposal to the Ministry of Environment, with specific recommendations on the rights of indigenous peoples, rural people and people of African descent, the right to a healthy environment, due diligence and the integration of human rights and gender approaches into Mexico’s Nationally Determined Contribution, pursuant to the Paris Agreement.

In the **ASEAN region**, UN Human Rights, UNEP and UNICEF co-organized a virtual expert group meeting on **policy guidance** for promoting and protecting **children’s rights to a healthy environment**, with the participation of a CRC member and the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment. Moreover, the Office partnered with UNEP to produce a regional study on the impacts of COVID-19 on environmental rights.

With technical support from UN Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment issued 40 communications and 25 press releases concerning **environmental protection and human rights**. His report to the General Assembly focused on the need for urgent action to conserve, protect and restore the biosphere on which all species depend. It further illustrated the devastating impacts of COVID-19 and the crucial role of human rights in catalysing action to safeguard nature.

D6 – HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT assessment

Human rights assessments and impact analyses mitigate, prevent or redress the negative effects of economic, trade and development policies and projects.



UN Human Rights worked at the UN inter-agency level to **mainstream human rights into the new UN guidance on transformative economies**. This resulted in recommendations that the UN pay particular attention to the political economy and identify potential winners and losers in economic restructuring, with explicit references to the full respect for human rights, including ESCRs, and the duty to avoid retrogression in times of crisis.

The new safeguards of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and IDB Invest explicitly require human rights due diligence, and the IDB safeguards include a self-standing gender equality safeguard, the first of its kind for any **multilateral development bank (MDB)**. UN Human Rights continued to work in partnership with the MDBs and their Independent Accountability Mechanisms (IAMs) to strengthen banks’ operational **strategies and policies, reprisals and accountability procedures**. The Office’s submissions to the World Bank Group’s Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence 2020-2021 led to the recognition that human rights abuses and violations are among the causes of conflict and opened entry points for operational engagement. UN Human Rights’ advocacy contributed to positive outcomes in operational and reprisals policies and procedures for the IDB, IDB Invest, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the European Investment Bank.

D7 – HUMAN RIGHTS INTEGRATION in implementing the SDGs


States integrate human rights, including the right to development and the outcomes of international human rights mechanisms, as they implement the Sustainable Development Goals and other development and poverty eradication efforts. The UN supports them in these activities and integrates human rights into its own development work.



Through its **Surge Initiative**, UN Human Rights operationalized the Secretary-General's Call for a New Social Contract, building an understanding of opportunities and entry points related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the reform of the UN Development System, including through rights-based and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) analyses, research and advice on how to implement the recommendations issued by the international human rights mechanisms. This work enabled UN Human Rights field presences to enhance their **local engagement related to ESCRs** and the implementation of the SDGs. The Office provided technical advice on addressing inequalities and discrimination and integrating human rights analyses into UN development processes, including in 65 CCAs and/or UNSDCFs. For example, in **Cambodia**, UN Human Rights contributed to prevention efforts through the creation of a UNCT early warning dashboard, featuring an indicators framework that encompasses all rights, SDG indicators and risk factors. In **Kenya**, UN Human Rights provided support to the Human Rights Adviser (HRA) and a network of 24 Social Justice Centres to undertake a human rights assessment of inequality in access to water in 24 informal settlements and communities in Nairobi, Kisumu and the coastal regions. The assessment provided evidence to support the advocacy efforts of CSOs as the COVID-19 crisis began and informed the Government's response regarding the suspension of utility bills, the provision of water to informal settlements and a moratorium on evictions during the pandemic.

 In the context of COVID-19, UN Human Rights provided **extensive advice to UN partners** to ensure the **integration of human rights into response and contingency plans**. For instance, in Zimbabwe, the Office prepared a checklist of international human rights standards to inform UN activities, which is available in accessible formats for persons with disabilities. In the **Bahamas** and **Jamaica**, UN Human Rights supported the design of a matrix that links the recommendations issued by the international human rights mechanisms with the SDGs, facilitating their integration into the response plans of the UN and the respective governments.

The High Commissioner sent letters to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the 51 countries that underwent a **Voluntary National Review** in 2020 and to the 44 countries that will undertake a VNR in 2021. The letters encouraged countries to **integrate human rights considerations** into their VNR reports and were accompanied by a country-specific document providing guidance and hyperlinks to tools such as the UHRI and the NRTD. The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs made reference to these tools in its annual *Knowledge Exchange Booklet on Approaches and Tools for the 2021 VNRs*.

 With a view to ensuring the mutual reinforcement of the SDGs and CRPD, UN Human Rights concluded a four-year project to develop an **SDG-CRPD resource package** to ensure that all actions undertaken to implement the SDGs are inclusive of persons with disabilities. The package, which was jointly developed with organizations of persons with disabilities, with funding from the European Union (EU), includes policy guidelines, human rights indicators related to the Convention, data source guidance, training materials and videos.

D8 – DISAGGREGATED human rights DATA


National institutions, assisted by communities, systematically collect, disaggregate and use data relevant for advancing human rights when they monitor and implement the SDGs.



UN Human Rights provided assistance in relation to the signature and implementation of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) on a **Human Rights Approach to Data** in several countries. In **Uganda**, a MoU was signed, in 2019, to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and the National Planning Authority. UN Human Rights provided technical support to develop a road map aimed at advancing the implementation of the MoU. The road map will serve as an important monitoring and accountability tool between the four institutions. In **Albania, Kosovo**⁵ and **Liberia**, new MoUs were signed in 2020. As a first step in Kosovo, the Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo (OIK) incorporated the SDGs into its five-year strategy. In October, a joint working group, which included representatives of OIK and the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS), met for the first time to discuss the indicators and modalities of cooperation between the two entities, with a focus on the planned 2021 census (see feature story on p. 381 of the online report).

To support the **compilation of data for SDG Indicator 10.3.1/16.b.1 on discrimination**, UN Human Rights collaborated with approximately 200 national statistics offices and developed a pioneering compendium of survey questions to support disaggregation by multiple characteristics (such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender identity, socio-economic status, disabilities) in international and national censuses and surveys. This set of sample questions and technical guidance are being implemented in partnership with UNDP and UNODC under the SDG 16 Household Survey Initiative. For the first time, UN Human Rights reported data on **SDG Indicator 16.1.2 on civilian deaths in armed conflict**, which was disaggregated by sex, age and cause of death.

In **Mexico**, the National Council on Social Policy Evaluation (CONEVAL) increased the **integration of human rights** into its **evaluation models**, referencing human rights norms and exploring how to strengthen statistical data on vulnerable groups. UN Human Rights collaborated with the Human Rights Programme of the National Autonomous University of Mexico to support this process, including by delivering an in-depth training course on human rights indicators and SDG measurement frameworks for 35 staff members of CONEVAL.

 UN Human Rights collaborated with UN Women, UNICEF and national institutions to undertake a **COVID-19 rapid gender assessment in West Africa**, ensuring the integration of HRBA and LNOB analyses. The reports provide evidence regarding the impacts of the pandemic on women and men across the region and aim to inform decision-making. The evidence will also ensure a better understanding of the socio-economic effects of the crisis on societies, at the individual level (violence, discrimination, loss of income, psychological health, time spent on household chores) and at the household level (coping strategies, expenses for children). This reflected solid inter-agency collaboration and provided UN Human Rights with the opportunity to generate the raw data that are needed to undertake quantitative and qualitative human rights assessments. The reports and the related database are now available for [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Mali](#) and [Senegal](#).

⁵ All references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Calling for people-centred policies in Serbia, with a focus on ESCRs

In 2020, UN Human Rights increased its advice on the application of an HRBA to economic policies and practices through its Surge Initiative. Emphasis was placed on building back better in the context of COVID-19 and leveraging the human rights obligations of States to reduce inequalities and ensure inclusive social and economic systems.

Serbia was one of the countries that received the support of the Surge Initiative, a field-driven initiative composed of human rights and development specialists. Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, the objective was to increase the realization of ESCRs through tailored research and advice on development, economic and fiscal policy options at the country level.

UN Human Rights and its national partners, including representatives of Roma communities, CSOs and government stakeholders, led a real-time mapping exercise of needs and risks in substandard Roma settlements. This provided the first compilation of cross-checked information on over 700 settlements with approximately 170,000 inhabitants, which identified health risks and assessed access to electricity, clean water and sewage infrastructure and gathered data on sustainable sources of income.

These activities offered detailed information on the human rights impacts of COVID-19 on select Roma communities and directly informed the UNCT's analysis of vulnerable groups, enabling their inclusion in the UN SERP. It also contributed to the enhanced delivery of



A Roma settlement near the industrial zone in the city of Novi Sad, Serbia. © Vojin Ivkov

support to Roma and other inhabitants, including through the timely allocation of government resources and emergency aid.

ESCRs can determine whether people will live or die or if societies will become more resilient or fall apart. Consequently, all human rights need to be integrated into all policies, programmes and processes. “It is important that we see ESCRs as essential rather than luxuries,” said Todd Howland, Chief of the Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch at UN Human Rights.

As noted by Françoise Jacobs, Resident Coordinator in Serbia, “The rippling effects of the pandemic” prevented many people from enjoying their essential rights, such as access to work, education, safe water and electricity, thereby threatening their “health, well-being and prosperity.”

By gaining a deeper understanding of the situation of vulnerable Roma persons, the Government, the UN and other partners are better able to provide assistance.

While this work is still in its early days, there are promising signs that the approach is working. In addition to the pandemic, the world is facing a panoply of risks, including economic upheaval, potential human rights violations, the dismantling of health care systems and the long-term disenfranchisement of groups that are being left behind. The Office's expertise in ensuring that ESCRs are central to development and humanitarian efforts can help pave the way for respecting, protecting and fulfilling key human rights, reducing inequalities and preserving the dignity of people left behind when a crisis hits.

We are all in the same storm: Making COVID-19 vaccines available to all

On 17 September, during the HRC’s biennial panel on the right to development, Dr. Maria Mercedes Rossi reminded participants, “We are all in the same storm, but travelling on different boats.” The discussion was focused on strengthening international cooperation in the fight against COVID-19.

As a representative of the CSO Association Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Dr. Rossi noted that our capacity to face and overcome emergencies is linked to factors beyond our control and choice, such as our birthplace, our family income, our access to safe dwellings and caring neighbourhoods, the level of pollution around us, the preparedness of public health systems and our access to them and the integrity of our leaders and their interest in common goods.

In December, in the [Guidance Note on human rights and access to COVID-19 vaccines](#), UN Human Rights asserted that COVID-19 vaccines must be treated as global public goods, not as marketplace commodities that are only available to countries and individuals who can afford them. In its General Comment No. 25, CESCR argues that access to vaccines, medicines and health technologies is an essential dimension of the rights to health and development and that everyone is entitled to scientific progress to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.

Dr. Rossi remembers a time when she worked as a doctor in Zambia and antiretroviral treatment was not yet available. “I had an eight-year-old patient, Martin, in the last stage of HIV infection. I [asked him at the hospital]

“What should I bring when I come back tomorrow? Some fruit? A drink?” He replied: “Dr. Maria, bring me the medicine!” Linking Martin’s story to the COVID-19 crisis, she urged countries to unlock international solidarity and the right to development for the benefit of all humanity, underlining that Martin’s story mirrors the situation for millions of people around the world, highlighting the urgent need for universal, just and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

In November, a group of special procedures mandate holders issued a [joint statement](#) to emphasize that COVID-19 requires a concerted and principled response based on the fundamental human rights-based principles of international solidarity, cooperation and assistance. “There is no room for nationalism or profitability in decision-making about access to vaccines,” they said.

Dr. Rossi has been collaborating with UN Human Rights for more than 10 years, contributing to activities related to the right to development, including the UN Human Rights capacity-building module on the right to development and SDGs. She urges the international community to commit to making the vaccine widely available to prevent global threats and address inequalities, noting that the right to development should be legally binding and that international solidarity should be recognized as a right.



Maria Mercedes Rossi has championed the struggle to advance the right to development at the UN and reinforce international solidarity. © Photo courtesy of Maria Mercedes Rossi



In February, UN Human Rights staff conducted a mission to Lomas del Diamante, an irregular human settlement in the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in order to monitor and document the living conditions of residents and their access to economic, social and cultural rights. The 400 families living in the community face uncertainty about land tenure and fear mass evictions that would enable the State to construct a proposed large-scale housing project.
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Peace and Security (PS)

Preventing violations and strengthening protection of human rights, including in situations of conflict and insecurity



CONFLICT PREVENTION, EARLY WARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

 **Emergency deployments**
13 staff members deployed (in 8 countries with deteriorating human rights situations)


 **Emergency Response Teams**
3 teams established (to work on risk analysis, early warning and response coordination in Africa (West and Southern Africa) and the Asia-Pacific region)

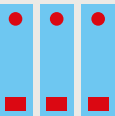
 **Humanitarian development nexus**
1 UN Regional Humanitarian Country Team supported (to integrate human rights into the Syria responses)

 **Independent investigations**
8 commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions supported (on situations in Burundi, the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen)

 **Transitional justice**
 Over **30** processes and mechanisms supported (in more than 20 countries)

PEACE OPERATIONS

 **Role of human rights components**
1 comprehensive study (documenting the support they provide to the implementation of the mandates of UN peace operations)

 **Public reporting**
13 reports by human rights components (of 8 UN peace operations)

 **Human Rights Due Diligence Policy**
10 UN peace operations and 2 regional frameworks supported (AU-UN Partnership on Peace and Security and the G5 Sahel Compliance Framework)

One step forward in Sudan

Sudan is in the aftermath of a revolution. Although significant change has taken place since the 30-year regime of General Omar al-Bashir was ousted in April 2019, many challenges remain. UN Human Rights is strengthening the capacities of journalists, lawyers and government officials to face their country's new realities.

As journalist Hussein Saad walked off a plane from Kampala in July 2015, he reflected on what he had learned at a workshop on transparency and corruption and looked forward to applying this new knowledge in his writing about human rights and peace in Sudan.

He had just cleared customs when he was suddenly stopped and whisked off to Khartoum North's political security headquarters. He was charged and placed under house arrest for three months. "That would not happen today," Mr. Saad said. "Now, the security apparatus does not interfere and I am no longer arrested for my work. Press freedom is much improved."

The ability to write as a journalist without interference or fear is a strong indication of how things have changed since tens of thousands of Sudanese took to the streets at the end of 2018. This pressure was maintained for six months until they toppled the Government. Sudan is undeniably more open and tolerant.

Many are encouraged by the visible changes, others express frustration at the seemingly slow pace of progress.

Salih Mahmoud is the Deputy of the Darfur Bar Association and a recipient of the Sakharov Prize for his outstanding human rights work in Darfur defending victims of ethnic violence. "Too much force is used against demonstrators and detainees are dying in custody," he said. While Mr. Mahmoud notes that impunity still reigns, he is encouraged by the absence of war and believes the presence of UN Human Rights augurs well for the future of Sudan. In September 2019, UN Human Rights signed an historic agreement with the transitional government to establish offices across Sudan.

"So far, things are very positive but the keys to progress are a robust constitution that respects the universality of human rights and fair elections," said Mazen Shaqoura, Head of the UN Human Rights Office start-up team in Sudan. He continued, "Most aspects of law need to be revisited through legal reform and Sudan needs to come into line with international principles and legislation." A transitional justice process is also argued to be essential to secure accountability and reparations for victims of violence.

This requires political will and a robust civil society that is equipped with the tools to advocate for change. UN Human Rights is providing a series of training workshops for civil society groups and activists.

"We are learning about the importance of human rights terminology and how to monitor and document human rights issues," said Hussain Saad, who can continue reporting on inequalities and injustices without fear of arrest.



December 2020: UN Human Rights Sudan Country Office team (left); Hussein Saad (centre); and Salih Mahmoud (right). © OHCHR

Highlights of pillar results

Peace and Security (PS)

Maintaining international peace and security is one of the fundamental purposes of the UN Charter. Situations of conflict and insecurity invariably result in violations of human rights, which are often among the root causes of conflict and insecurity. UN Human Rights has a global mandate to promote and protect human rights and a specific responsibility

to mainstream human rights throughout the work of the UN. When violence and conflict occur, the promotion and protection of human rights is not only essential for the protection of rights-holders, especially civilians, it also holds the key to rebuilding peace under the rule of law and preventing reoccurrence. Human rights are a powerful tool for conflict

prevention. They provide a sound basis for addressing issues of concern, which, if left unaddressed, can lead to conflict. As a result, human rights mechanisms can support early warning and accountability and inform UN peace and security efforts.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

PS1 – PROTECTION of CIVILIANS, CONFLICT and PEACE

Parties to conflict and actors involved in peace operations increasingly comply with international human rights law and international humanitarian law and provide greater protection to civilians.



RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS

Spotlights: Disabilities Women Youth

During 2020, the Office prepared 12 monthly updates and 24 biweekly reports on the **human rights situation in Yemen**. The findings of human rights monitoring activities were shared with key protection actors and contributed to the development of **14 advocacy initiatives**, including statements and press briefings that were issued by the High Commissioner and the special procedures.

UN Human Rights published two quarterly notes on **trends of human rights violations and abuses attributed to Malian Defence and Security Forces, G5 Sahel forces as well as armed groups**, documenting 1,230 human rights violations and abuses. The documented cases and recommendations on actions for addressing them were brought to the attention of relevant authorities. As a result, the Malian military authorities opened investigations in relation to 17 cases. Moreover, the implementation of six protection projects enabled the temporary and **safe relocation of 253 victims** and/or witnesses (35 women, 218 men) and the extension of support to Malian police investigators on interviewing complainants.

Through **methodological guidance** and support to commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and other **mandated investigative bodies**, UN Human Rights contributed to the enhanced cross-fertilization of investigative methods and peer learning of these mechanisms. For example, the Office facilitated start-up workshops for the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen.

PS2 – Counter-TERRORISM and preventing VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism comply with international law.



Through its report on terrorism and human rights (A/HRC/45/27), UN Human Rights provided detailed **guidance** to Member States on the international human rights parameters governing **criminal accountability processes for terrorism-related offences**. The guidance highlights that such processes should be victim-centred and comply with due process and fair trial guarantees as prerequisites to closing the impunity gap and respecting the rights of victims to an effective remedy and reparations.

In June, the **G5 Sahel Joint Force Commander** adopted the **standard operating procedures on the conduct of internal investigations**, representing an important step towards ensuring accountability as it provides for internal investigations when members of the Joint Force are suspected of violations of international human rights law and/or international humanitarian law. The SOPs also require that UN Human Rights be informed when a commission of inquiry is constituted. Furthermore, the Office and the Centre for Civilians in Conflict supported the Joint Force to establish its internal Civilian Casualty and Incidents Tracking and Analysis Cell, which will enable the Joint Force to ascertain the circumstances of and responsibility for casualties and violations.

In **Nigeria, 15 human rights monitors from the National Human Rights Commission** were **deployed**, in conjunction with human rights officers from UN Human Rights, to Benue state, which is one of the states that is most affected by clashes between herders and farmers. The monitors reported 8,131 human rights violations and referred 6,002 cases to relevant authorities. As a result, **3,691 cases were positively resolved** by government agencies.

PS3 – HUMAN RIGHTS protection in PREVENTION/RESPONSE

Strategies to prevent and respond to conflict consistently integrate human rights protection.



In July, the **CEDAW Committee** adopted an emblematic decision on a **case against Bosnia and Herzegovina for conflict-related sexual violence** (CRSV). The victim was raped by a military officer, in 1995, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a village that was under the control of the Bosnian Serb forces. This case is of great importance as it is the first case adopted by CEDAW that addresses sexual violence during conflict and because it requires the State to recognize the plaintiff as a civilian victim of armed conflict and provide her with adequate reparations.

UN Human Rights supported the preparations for the **Security Council Open Debate on “Peace Operations and Human Rights,”** during which the High Commissioner delivered a statement stressing that peace operations are a powerful tool to promote and protect human rights, effectively highlighting human rights as a cross-cutting issue at the Security Council. She also called on States to provide strong political and financial support to these operations.

UN Human Rights reviewed the final draft of the **Ukraine National Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts until 2030**, which it had been advocating for since 2018. The Strategy was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers at the end of the year and submitted to the President's Office for final endorsement.

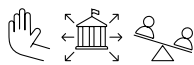
With support from UN Human Rights, the **Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa** undertook its first **electoral observation missions** to Burkina Faso, Ghana and Liberia. This contributed to increased collaboration among members of the Network and a positive outcome related to the protection of human rights in the context of elections for the countries concerned.

UN Human Rights participated in meetings of the **UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Ethiopia** and deployed a surge capacity team, in December, to respond to the conflict in the **Tigray region**.

UN Human Rights supported the integration of a human rights, victim-centred approach into the **UN Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)**. In addition, the Office supported the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) in the mapping of services available to victims of SEA by UN entities and external parties in 13 countries. The public reports that were subsequently issued paved the way for new initiatives. In June, the Office, OVRA and UNICEF jointly conducted a technical consultation to identify ways to improve legal assistance for victims of SEA, leading to the development of a road map to enhance progress in this area. UN Human Rights also contributed to the finalization of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) [Learning Package on Protection from Sexual Misconduct for UN partner organizations](#) and the development of guidance on PSEA for Resident Coordinators. Throughout the year, the Office investigated and publicly reported on allegations of SEA against non-UN international forces operating under a UN Security Council mandate and followed up with Member States and the regional forces concerned.

PS4 – Transitional JUSTICE and ACCOUNTABILITY

Justice mechanisms, including for transitional justice, provide increased accountability for conflict-related violations.



In the **Central African Republic**, significant progress was achieved in the transitional justice process with the **adoption of Law No. 20-009**, which established the **Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission**. UN Human Rights collaborated with UNDP and experts from the International Center for Transitional Justice to help elaborate the draft law by providing technical support to relevant authorities and institutions, including the Steering Committee that was tasked with drafting the law.

In **Kenya**, in order to implement the recommendations of the report entitled **Breaking cycles of violence**, the Office developed the capacity of HRDs and members of the Survivors' Network to address instances of **gender-based violence**. This support led to the **assistance of 555 survivors** (477 women, 78 men) who accessed safe shelters and medical and psychosocial services.

Following the decision of the Government of **Tunisia** to publish the **final report of the Truth and Dignity Commission** in the Official Gazette, the Minister for Human Rights requested support from UN Human Rights to organize an information campaign in July. The campaign included key messages on the value of transitional justice, which were shared on social media platforms. The Office facilitated online discussions with CSOs regarding their role to support the Government in designing an action plan to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

UN Human Rights followed up on emblematic cases within the military justice system to enhance the protection of civilians and improve the **fight against impunity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**. In 2020, more than 20 meetings were organized with judicial authorities to discuss technical aspects of judicial cases. This included designing a proper prosecutorial strategy and developing and implementing judicial **protection measures** for the benefit of **victims and witnesses**. The Office also participated in the drafting of the Peace Accord Agreement between the Government and Forces de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) to ensure its alignment with international law standards, including the right to justice, truth and compensation for victims.

In **Sudan**, UN Human Rights advocated for the swift establishment of the **Transitional Justice Commission** (TJC). It provided the Ministry of Justice with technical advice to lead a participatory process to draft the **TJC Law**, including by facilitating consultations with representatives of CSOs, academia and national and international lawyers. In December, the Ministry adopted a final draft that addresses the concerns raised by civil society and incorporates the Office's recommendations on the independence and composition of the TJC.

PS5 – INFORMATION and EARLY WARNING

Human rights information and analyses are integrated into early warning and analysis systems and influence international and national policymaking, strategies and operations to prevent, mitigate or respond to emerging crises, including humanitarian crises and conflict.



UN Human Rights **Emergency Response Teams** (ERTs) made good progress in strengthening **human rights risk analysis** in support of UNCTs, in line with the Human Rights up Front (HRuF) Initiative and the prevention agenda. In 2020, the ERT in the Regional Office for **South-East Asia** was closely involved with strengthening human rights risk analysis in the CCAs for a number of countries, including Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam. Through its ERT in **Southern Africa**, UN Human Rights provided human rights inputs and risk analysis to various CCAs and VNR processes in the region, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups. The Office provided human rights inputs regarding specific country situations in Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The ERT in the Regional Office for **West Africa** played a key role in gathering and analysing information on potential human rights violations in the context of COVID-19 that informed the Office's regional reports and snapshots. The ERT also created an interactive dashboard to maintain an almost real-time overview of COVID-19-related developments in the region.

In February, during the regional round of the Oxford University moot court competition, which was held in Lebanon, UN Human Rights rolled out components of the **#Faith4Rights toolkit**, with a focus on ethnic and religious minorities and human rights. Participants, including youth and university students, discussed the **Rabat Plan of Action** and the human rights duties of religious leaders. During the discussions, the Office identified youth participants who could further engage with these initiatives.

PS6 – HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE POLICY

United Nations' support to national and regional security forces, law enforcement agencies and non-State actors integrates human rights and complies with the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy.



UN Human Rights continued to provide support and guidance for the implementation of the **Human Rights Due Diligence Policy** (HRDDP). Enhanced advocacy and guidance from the Office resulted in an increased application of the Policy in non-mission settings and a more consistent application in mission settings. UN Human Rights engaged with a greater number of UNCTs, notably in relation to the development of **SOps, risk assessments and mitigation measures**, including in Bangladesh, Belarus, the Gambia, Jamaica, Jordan, Maldives, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. UNCTs in Burkina Faso and Malawi requested technical advice from the Office, which led to an improved application of the HRDDP. In Burkina Faso, for example, UN Human Rights assisted the UNCT with drafting standard operating procedures on the HRDDP and establishing a Task Force. Support was also provided for the creation of a regional HRDDP coordination structure in the Sahel region, which is planned to begin operating in 2021. In Mali, UN Human Rights conducted 68 risk assessments on MINUSMA's support to non-UN security forces and established a mechanism to follow up on the mitigation measures recommended for cases that were reviewed between October 2019 and December 2020.

UN Human Rights established an online **community of practice among HRDDP practitioners in UN peace operations** to promote and share lessons learned and good practices. Six virtual meetings were held to discuss issues such as HRDDP implementation during COVID-19, working with UNCTs in UN peace operations and HRDDP mitigation measures.

Non-discrimination (ND)

Enhancing equality and countering discrimination



LAWS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES



Combating discrimination in all its forms
400 participants in the 13th session of the Forum on Minority Issues (with a focus on hate speech, social media and minorities)



Acting upon complaints:
Women
72 communications (sent by the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls)

People of African descent
11 communications (sent by the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent)

CAPACITY-BUILDING



Fellowship Programmes: Training provided to
27 persons of African descent (21 women and 6 men from 12 countries)
20 indigenous persons (13 women and 7 men from 17 countries)

14 persons from minority groups (5 women and 9 men from 14 countries)

1 transgender person

CALL FOR EQUALITY AND TOLERANCE



Public campaigns: Actions taken by people in response to UN Human Rights social media posts

Racism #FightRacism
900 engagements (with 65,000 views)

Gender equality #ChangeTheStory
7,900 engagements (with 274,000 views)

Albinism #Madetoshine
1,600 engagements (with 64,000 views)

Migrants #Standup4Migrants
18,000 engagements (with 1,500,000 views)



International Decade for People of African Descent
 Over **1,500** persons and organizations engaged (in activities to address the root causes of racial discrimination)

#StandUp4Migrants: Changing the narrative on migration

How we perceive and speak about migrants and migration – the narrative – plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing equality and the human rights of migrants. In 2020, UN Human Rights launched a campaign with a toolbox, urgently calling for the transformation of stories of hate and division into stories of hope and inclusion.

UN Human Rights has taken steps to understand the impacts of harmful narratives and find available solutions by working with a broad range of partners, including migrants and migrant rights defenders as well as representatives from the media, creative arts, business, advertising, academia, civil society, international organizations and Member States. In addition, the Office convened expert meetings, facilitated the exchange of experiences and raised public awareness through animated video stories.

Throughout this process, partners called for UN Human Rights to provide tools and inspiring examples that could benefit others. Building on the publication *Seven Key Elements on Building Human Rights-Based Narratives on Migrants and Migration*, UN Human Rights and its global partners developed an interactive online toolbox that provides ideas, downloadable activities and inspiration for shifting narratives on migration.

“We need stories that show that the values we hold in common are stronger than what divides us,” said the High Commissioner during the launch of the toolbox, on the occasion of International Migrants Day. “Stories that inspire and

connect us, rather than tear us further apart; stories that paint a hopeful picture of the future we share; and stories told by migrants themselves.”

The **toolbox** is a seven-step guide to rethink and change the stories being told about migration. It helps to: 1) define a positive and hope-based **vision**; 2) identify **shared values** to engage target audiences; 3) use the power of **storytelling** to humanize migrants; 4) bring the stories and vision to life in the **local context**; 5) **find common ground** to move forward on intractable issues; 6) find new **allies**; and 7) uphold the “**Do No Harm**” principle.

In December, UN Human Rights launched the **#StandUp4Migrants campaign** to illustrate the toolbox in action. The campaign emphasizes what we have in common as human beings, one story

at a time. Leo Johnson, for example, fled war at the age of 15 and arrived in Canada after spending eight years in refugee camps. “I just didn’t think I could fit within that society, because people assumed that I was a certain way. Over time, I told myself that I had two options. I could either choose to be a victim of my circumstances or I could choose to be a champion of possibilities.” He decided to call both Canada and Liberia home. Leo participated in the UN Human Rights Fellowship for People of African Descent and now leads an organization which helps refugees, migrants and marginalized people in Canada and in Liberia.

In 2021, UN Human Rights will work with local partners to further implement the toolbox and contextualize the campaign.



Visual created for the interactive online toolbox developed by UN Human Rights and partners. © OHCHR

Highlights of pillar results

Non-discrimination (ND)

Enhancing equality and non-discrimination for all is at the core of international human rights law. With a call to Leave No One Behind, the 2030 Agenda has created an ‘equality’ momentum. Taking advantage of this opportunity, UN Human Rights seeks to remove the

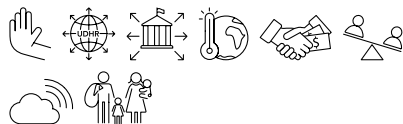
structural barriers that exacerbate and perpetuate discrimination, exclusion and inequalities. The Office supports efforts aimed at strengthening the laws, policies, institutions, practices and attitudes that are conducive to equality and non-discrimination. It strives to increase

public support for diverse and inclusive societies and enhance coherent and rights-based UN responses to exclusion and discrimination. The SDGs provide a common reference for this work, including through linkages with economic, social and cultural rights.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs


ND1 – NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS to combat DISCRIMINATION

Laws, policies and practices more effectively combat discrimination in all forms and responsible authorities actively work to Leave No One Behind, including by addressing the root causes of inequality.




RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS




 In **Georgia**, the **Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which is largely in line with international standards, was approved on 14 July. UN Human Rights provided assistance and guidance during the drafting process, conducted a study on the extent to which existing legislation protected the rights of persons with disabilities and developed recommendations for the Government and the Parliament. In **Timor-Leste**, various ministries made efforts to better integrate disability, such as the **Ministry of Public Works**, which issued a **regulation** stipulating that all public and private buildings must accommodate persons with disabilities. In **Serbia**, UN Human Rights facilitated the consultative process that led to the adoption of the **new National Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities** and its action plan. The Office also supported the work of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations in **Peru**, which drafted **legislation** on the protection of persons with disabilities in **COVID-19 responses**, adopted as Legislative Decree No. 1468.

UN Human Rights continued to **combat racism and discrimination against people of African descent**. On 13 March, the Human Rights Council held a debate on the mid-term review of the International Decade for People of African Descent. In the **European Union**, the Office advocated for the adoption by the European Commission of the 2020-2025 Anti-Racism Action Plan and promoted the International Decade, including through the organization of a series of four webinars on the rights of girls and women of African descent in the EU. On 2 December, the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery was commemorated at the European level for the first time and the High Commissioner for Human Rights delivered a keynote address at the European Parliament. In the **Americas**, under the auspices of the Vice-President of Costa Rica, UN Human Rights and UNFPA organized a dialogue among Afrodescendant leaders, experts and governments on the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on people of African descent. In Peru, UN Human Rights supported the development of a national policy on Afro-Peruvian persons by the Ministry of Culture, including by analysing their access to work.

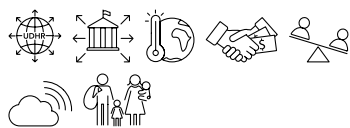
 With support from the Office, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences collected 270 submissions on the increase in **violence against women in the context of COVID-19**. The Special Rapporteur encouraged Member States to maintain services and adopt specific protection measures during the pandemic.


The Office engaged in advocacy during the drafting of the **European Commission’s “Roma Strategic Framework** for Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020-2030.” The new EU Framework makes linkages with the SDGs and incorporates a monitoring framework that is based on human rights indicators.

 UN Human Rights strengthened legal, political and institutional frameworks for the **protection of the rights of youth and children**. In **West Africa**, UN Human Rights advocated for an integrated system for the protection of child victims of abuse and exploitation. Two national steering committees, established in Mali and Senegal, elaborated national action plans for the removal of children from the streets.

ND2 – JUSTICE SYSTEMS investigate DISCRIMINATION

Justice systems and related institutions increasingly monitor and investigate discrimination and provide redress to victims.



 With the support of UN Human Rights, **CEDAW** adopted **General Recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration**. The text incorporated inputs from 120 contributions, regional consultations and three expert group meetings. This guidance will enhance the capacity of justice systems to monitor and investigate human rights violations and provide redress to victims of trafficking.

Following the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 43/1 on systemic **racism in law enforcement against Africans and people of African descent**, UN Human Rights provided support to the mandated work, including through research and analysis, and by laying the foundation for four regional consultations that took place in early 2021.

In **Somalia**, UN Human Rights, the Somali Women and Child Care Association and the Somali Women and Child Cluster, with the support of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, carried out advocacy to urge the Federal Parliament to withdraw the Sexual Intercourse-Related Crimes Bill and instead table the 2018 Sexual Offences Bill. They co-organized a high-level meeting with representatives from the Office of the President, key ministries, the Office of the Attorney General, women and youth groups, religious leaders, traditional elders, academia, media and others. As a result, the adoption of the **Sexual Intercourse-Related Crimes Bill** was **put on hold**.

In **Georgia**, UN Human Rights advocated for better **protection of the rights of religious minorities**. The Office monitored the case of three high school graduates who were scheduled by the Ministry of Education to take the National Graduation Exam on a day that their religion prohibits work. The Office carried out targeted advocacy with State authorities and worked closely with defence lawyers who filed an urgent case in the local court. In a groundbreaking decision, the court compelled the Ministry of Education to administer the test to the students on an alternative date.

ND3 – WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION and PROTECTION

Legal and social frameworks increasingly promote the autonomy and choices of women and girls and protect them from violence, including in the digital space.



UN Human Rights engaged in the **16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign** in various locations. In the **State of Palestine**⁶, the Office partnered with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the UNCT to organize the largest campaign to date. In addition, the Office enhanced its monitoring of gender-related killings by undertaking a mapping of key actors and issues and training women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in both Gaza and the West Bank, which resulted in the creation of a core group of activists in Gaza. A total of 47 representatives from State institutions, NHRIs and CSOs from 13 **Arab countries** also participated in a virtual panel discussion on “The role of national bodies and mechanisms concerned with combating violence against women in the Arab region.” In **East Africa**, the Office organized a virtual policy dialogue under the theme “Ending violence against women and girls: Action to guarantee women’s safety in Africa,” which resulted in commitments from African Union (AU) member states to integrate gender equality and women’s rights into COVID-19 recovery efforts.

In **Liberia**, UN Human Rights provided support to the Human Rights and Protection Department of the Ministry of Justice and CSOs to organize broad public discussions about SGBV, which were followed by three days of anti-rape protests. The Government convened a conference entitled “National call to action: Inclusive involvement to fight rape and sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia” to validate the **National Road Map on Rape and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**. The President declared rape and all forms of SGBV as a national emergency. The Office supported the **review of customary law** to identify discriminatory regulations that fail to take gender into account. It also engaged with the Law Reform Commission and the Legislative Drafting Bureau to integrate an HRBA into revisions of the Rape Law, the Domestic Violence Act and the Inheritance Law.

In **Iraq**, UN Human Rights highlighted challenges faced by children and young adults who lived under ISIL occupation between 2014 and 2017, including in relation to gender norms, poverty, protection and trauma. The Office called for an **enabling environment for girl’s education** in two public reports that focus on the legacy of ISIL territorial control on access to education by adolescents. The reports were issued in February 2020 and January 2021, respectively.

ND4 – ERADICATING HARMFUL NORMS

Judicial institutions, media and other sectors increasingly recognize and challenge harmful gender stereotypes and gender norms with a view to their eradication.



UN Human Rights strengthened the capacity of the judiciary to address and dismantle harmful stereotypes and protect **women’s human rights** to ensure that decisions are based on facts, rather than beliefs about the roles of women and men. In **Uruguay**, the Office has been working to eradicate **judicial gender stereotyping** since 2018. As a result, two guides were published for the judiciary and the Office of the Prosecutor on gender stereotypes and international standards relating to women’s access to justice. In June, UN Human Rights developed the capacities of 80 judges and prosecutors to use the guides and the Supreme Court issued an internal resolution that requests judges to use the guide for the judiciary as a key resource when ruling on cases related to GBV.

Under the **UN Free & Equal campaign**, UN Human Rights sought to **advance the human rights of LGBTI persons** through activities in 13 countries. In **Brazil**, for example, the Office disseminated three videos on LGBTI persons in the workplace and other web articles on social inclusion, reaching more than one million people. On the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (17 May), two thematic campaigns were launched at the global level in all UN languages and in Portuguese on **LGBTIQ+ youth homelessness** and breaking the silence around discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons. The Office developed social media toolkits on

⁶ All references to the State of Palestine should be understood in compliance with General Assembly resolution 67/19.

LGBTIQ+ inclusion in COVID-19 prevention and recovery efforts and organized two high-level UN events with the UN LGBTI Core Group, in New York. At the European level, the Office contributed to meetings of the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network and advocated for the inclusion of international human rights standards in the European Commission's first LGBTI Equality Strategy, which was adopted in November.

On the occasion of **International Women's Day**, UN Human Rights partnered with WikiMedia to address **stereotypes about WHRDs** and **create content on less well-known defenders** who have made important contributions to their societies. A total of 72 competitors made edits in 36 languages and 3,224 articles were created or improved.

ND5 – DIGITAL SPACE

Principles and practices effectively counter discrimination and hate speech in the digital space.



ND6 – MIGRATION

The human rights of all migrants, particularly those in vulnerable situations, are protected.



In **Myanmar**, UN Human Rights partnered with CSOs and the company KoKoTech to create **standards for monitoring** instances of **online discrimination and hate speech against minority communities**, in particular Rohingya people, in the context of COVID-19.

UN Human Rights raised awareness about, monitored and reported on the **human rights protection gaps faced by migrants** and monitored the situation at borders. It also assisted States and other stakeholders with the implementation of human rights-based migration governance measures, including in relation to **COVID-19 and the human rights of migrants**. The Office monitored the situation of **refugees and other migrants from Venezuela in host countries** and provided technical assistance to national actors. In Peru, for instance, the Office and UNIC issued communication materials to prevent the illegal evictions of Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Moreover, UN Human Rights provided support to the Ombudsperson's Office to discuss the situation with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The Office also issued public statements on the detention and deportation of Venezuelan migrants from Trinidad and Tobago, including persons registered as asylum seekers, some of whom were children.

In the EU, UN Human Rights consistently advocated for the creation of an **independent human rights monitoring mechanism at EU borders**. The new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was tabled by the European Commission, in September, contains several provisions that are relevant to human rights and proposes the establishment of such a mechanism. In January, the Office joined the Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and provided advice on human rights-compliant policies.

Through advocacy efforts, UN Human Rights contributed to **ending the detention of migrant children** in Immigration Detention Centres in **Thailand**. In the **Pacific**, UN Human Rights contributed to informing the Regional Policy Dialogue on **climate change-related migration, displacement and planned relocation**, including by outlining policy and identifying legal gaps.

ND7 – PUBLIC MOBILIZATION for INCLUSION

Public support increases for equal, inclusive and diverse societies, without discrimination.



With support from UN Human Rights, the Independent Expert on **albinism** built a campaign around International Albinism Awareness Day on 13 June. This culminated in an online concert and the launch of a social media campaign on the theme #MadetoShine. The Office issued approximately 25 social media posts in English, French and Spanish and an Instagram story that generated 1,600 engagements.

In **Malawi**, UN Human Rights sought to prevent conflict by promoting equality, diversity and inclusiveness. In the south of the country, a number of Christian-managed schools refused to educate girls who were wearing a hijab, which resulted in tension and violence between Muslim and Christian communities. Five schools were closed, leaving 10,000 children out of school. UN Human Rights collaborated with the Public Advisory Committee (PAC), a CSO of religious leaders, to organize a series of workshops with Muslim and Christian leaders on international human rights standards relating to **education, non-discrimination and freedom of religion or belief**. Following a request from the Government, PAC organized a dialogue to negotiate an agreed dress code for schools. Four of the five schools that were closed re-opened.

In the Republic of **Moldova**, the Office conducted an assessment of the human rights situation of Roma people in the region, which served as a basis for initiating a dialogue between Roma CSOs and de facto authorities on access to education, work and social protection. The assessment was used to develop a road map and action plan for **establishing the first institution of Roma community mediators**.


ND8 – UN response to INEQUALITY and DISCRIMINATION

The UN system implements a coherent and human rights-based response to inequality and discrimination, including intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination.



UN Human Rights reactivated the **UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities**, which issued a range of guidance for UNCTs on combating racial discrimination and protecting minorities. In November, the Network convened its first senior-level meeting, involving Assistant Secretaries-General from 10 UN entities. This resulted in the Network's adoption of its first workplan since 2014. Further, UN Human Rights issued a **Guidance Note on interlinkages between COVID-19 and racial discrimination**.

UN Human Rights advocated for the implementation of the UN System-wide Action Plan on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and contributed to the development of a **policy statement on indigenous peoples**, which was endorsed by the **UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)**. UN Human Rights also produced a targeted **Guidance Note on the impacts of COVID-19 on minorities and indigenous peoples**.

 In various locations, UN Human Rights contributed to the efforts of **UNCTs** to increasingly **include disability** in their processes and programmes. For instance, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Office prepared a UNCT-wide Disability Inclusion Action Plan for 2020-2021. UN Human Rights also led inter-agency efforts to draft the **Secretary-General's policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons**, which was issued in May.

Within the context of the UNSDG Task Team on Leaving No One Behind, Human Rights and the Normative Agenda, UN Human Rights coordinated a **review** of the extent to which **human rights** are **integrated into 109 COVID-19 SERPs** prepared by the UNCTs. The review was a true inter-agency effort and a good example of advancing the implementation of the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights. The review pointed to a number of gaps but also some good practices, including the use of human rights indicators as well as the identification of at-risk groups and the drivers of exclusion, inequality and discrimination.

Advancing the rights of LGBTI persons in Bolivia: The civil union of David and Guido

In recent years, important legal advances have been made in Bolivia to recognize the rights of populations with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. Yet, discriminatory legislation and attitudes of homophobia persist. Against this background, the recognition of the free union between David Aruquipa and Guido Montaña in the civic registry (SERECI) marks a new chapter in the fight for equality and non-discrimination of LGBTI persons.

The registry of David and Guido's union, on 10 December, signals the end of a long bureaucratic and legal battle that they initiated as a couple 11 years ago, first as activists for the rights of the LGBTI community and later when dealing with a myriad of public entities, courts and constitutional chambers. "It was a torturous experience, but we decided not to give up," said David.

The road to recognition was paved with many obstacles due to discriminatory provisions in legislation, including the Constitution, which only recognizes unions between a woman and a man. The Constitutional Court ruled that their civil union had to be registered by the SERECI since international human rights treaties ratified by Bolivia have supremacy over the Constitution. Despite this ruling, it took another two years for their union to be registered due to refusals by public authorities.

Nevertheless, David and Guido had considerable support on their side. Two prominent human rights lawyers with significant experience in the promotion

and protection of human rights in Bolivia advised and assisted David and Guido during their struggle. In addition, advocacy undertaken by UN Human Rights with national authorities contributed to the eventual registration of their union. For instance, the Office consistently encouraged authorities to take this landmark step through private and public messages. On 30 July, it submitted a memorandum outlining relevant legal international and regional human rights standards to the SERECI and the Plurinational Constitutional Court. On 6 December, UN Human Rights posted a tweet urging the advancement of LGBTI rights in Bolivia and referring to David and Guido's case as an "historic opportunity." Furthermore, an advisory opinion issued in 2017 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on gender identity and equality and non-discrimination

of same-sex couples, to which the Office submitted an amicus curiae brief, served as a key precedent that enabled David and Guido to begin this process.

On Human Rights Day, the SERECI finally ordered the free union to be registered. The decision was welcomed by UN Human Rights⁷ and many HRDs in the country and abroad. As noted by Alán García Campos, Head of UN Human Rights in Bolivia, "The perseverance of David and Guido and their indefatigable battle for their rights is an inspiration to us all. Their achievement should motivate structural changes in order to fully recognize existing legal unions in Bolivia between same-sex couples and eradicate any kind of discrimination against LGBTI persons."

⁷ See the UN Human Rights tweet at https://twitter.com/Oacnudh_BO/status/1335571718430220288?s=20



David and Guido entered into the first same-sex "free union" in Bolivia.
© Magdalena Tola Paño

Mixing it up for a more diverse Kyrgyzstan

In 2010, deadly inter-ethnic clashes killed hundreds of people in southern Kyrgyzstan. While peace has returned, tensions remain. In response, UN Human Rights has pioneered an internship programme that is helping the national civil service to engage more minorities and increase the diversity of its ranks.

A decade ago, the bustling streets of Osh, in southern Kyrgyzstan, experienced tragic events. Due to an inter-ethnic conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, at least 426 people were killed, 2,500 homes were burned down and thousands were forced to flee. Despite people's desire to move on, social media keep tensions simmering, especially among more extreme youth, and authorities are concerned that violence could unexpectedly erupt.

In 2020, nearly 28 per cent of the country's population was composed of ethnic minorities – Uzbek, Russian, Dungan

Chinese, Kazakh and other smaller groups – but less than 5 per cent of civil servants come from minority groups. Another factor that can influence hiring in the civil service is language. While Russian is an official language and widely spoken, the State language is Kyrgyz, which not everyone speaks fluently.

The UN Human Rights internship programme addresses this underrepresentation by expanding opportunities for ethnic minorities, women and persons with disabilities. Each intern is assigned a mentor, enrolls in training on human rights and public administration and receives a stipend.

“Some qualified specialists cannot find work, but through this project they [can] get a job, including ethnic minorities,” said Anara Temiraliyeva, one of the programme's mentors and Head of the Family and Child Protection Unit in

the Department of Labour and Social Development. Anara would like to see the programme expanded across the country to ensure a more egalitarian and diverse workforce.

Maftuna Mavlyanova, an accountant from Osh, applied for one of the coveted civil service internships. “I was a new bride,” she said, “and there is this stereotype that I needed to tend to the household, so I had many doors slammed in my face. I never dreamed I would be accepted.” Maftuna proved herself and once her internship was complete, she was hired by the civil service.

From Osh, the UN Human Rights internship programme was extended to the country's northern Issyk-Kul region where many minorities live. In 2020, 23 interns completed the programme (14 women, nine men), including nine representatives of ethnic minorities and six persons with disabilities.

In November, the State Personnel Service (SPS), which handles all civil service hiring, proposed establishing a legislative basis to institutionalize the programme. Oleg Tarbinskii, Deputy Head of the SPS, believes the internship programme surpasses its initial goal. “It helps to attract and promote qualified young people into public service, evens out the rural-urban divide by providing equal access to all and measures the commitment of Kyrgyzstan to the democratic and liberal values of the State.”



Maftuna Mavlyanova and other interns at the awards ceremony upon completion of their internship in the south of Kyrgyzstan. © Abdikaimov Nurgazy



UN Human Rights staff from the West Africa Regional Office visit a refugee camp in the Tillabéry region, Niger. © OHCHR

Accountability (A)

Strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations



JUSTICE SYSTEMS, TRIALS AND PRISON CONDITIONS



Trials
708 court cases monitored



Places of detention
2,274 visits undertaken



Detainees
4,312 persons released (upon action from UN Human Rights, including 211 women, 4,008 men and 93 children)



Monitoring missions
11,929 human rights situations documented (41% in-person and 59% remotely)

NON-JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS



Human rights mechanisms
92 opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (55 urgent appeals, 139 allegation letters and 11 other letters initiated or joined)

313 cases clarified by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (698 new cases transmitted to States, including 78 under the urgent action procedure)

88 communications sent by the Working Group on business and human rights (including 79 joint allegation letters, 6 joint urgent appeals and 3 other joint letters)



Paris Principles-compliant national human rights institutions (NHRIs)
61 countries with established/enhanced NHRIs (3 new institutions accredited as NHRIs in Côte d'Ivoire, Estonia and Uzbekistan)

Court ruling in Kenya: A milestone in environmental justice

In a positive development for environmental justice, the Owino Uhuru settlement in Kenya won the equivalent of US\$13 million in compensation for the devastating impacts on the environment and the health of a community caused by lead poisoning from a nearby smelter that recycled batteries.

On 16 July, the Land and Environment Court in Mombasa awarded compensation to the residents and ruled that the community's rights to life, a healthy environment, the highest attainable standard of health and clean and safe water had been contravened and ordered the Government of Kenya and two companies to pay compensation.

The ruling came four years after the Centre for Justice, Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA) filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of the 3,000 residents living in Owino Uhuru. It also came ahead of the tenth anniversary of the landmark Kenyan Constitution and Bill of Rights, which specifically uphold the right to a clean and healthy environment and provide for the legal enforcement of environmental rights.

“We were very excited,” said Phyllis Omido, founder and Head of the CJGEA. “Because we were suing the Government and corporations, we were not sure...if the judge would be bold and fearless enough to pronounce justice.”

A DECADE OF CAMPAIGNING FOR JUSTICE

When her baby son fell seriously ill with lead poisoning, Phyllis Omido, a former employee of the smelter, began a campaign to close the plant. She founded the CJGEA, an environmental grassroots group that advocates for the rights of communities poisoned by toxic chemicals from Kenya's extractive industries. For nearly a decade, Phyllis and other community activists have fought against the presence and effects of lead in the community.

UN Human Rights heard of her fight and offered to help as part of its mandate to support implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and protect civic space. In addition, UN Human Rights worked with Kenyan authorities to ensure the protection of members of the CJGEA and the settlement when they were threatened.

“UN Human Rights is the only international partner that directly funded the litigation,” said Phyllis. “They also assisted us in monitoring and documenting the case. They stood with us when witnesses were harassed, intimidated and afraid, even sending a team into the community. Without UN Human Rights, we would have given up, many times.”

Moreover, Phyllis' work on environmental justice led her to create the Land and Environment Defenders Network, which is also supported by UN Human Rights. Its advocacy has led the Government to close 10 toxic waste smelters over the last five years.

“Environmental human rights issues are on the rise, and as long as that is the case, I have work to do,” Phyllis said. “We still have an unjust society, especially regarding environmental governance and human rights.”



Phyllis Omido has been the driving force behind the quest for justice for the people of the Owino Uhuru community. © OHCHR/A. Fassio

Highlights of pillar results

Accountability (A)

The legal protection of all human rights requires various actors to fully assume their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. This includes States as the primary duty-bearers as well as private actors, armed groups, other non-State actors and individuals who, under certain circumstances, can be held criminally accountable for their actions. To

enhance accountability and promote peaceful, prosperous and inclusive societies, UN Human Rights helps to build human rights-compliant institutional frameworks. It supports the adoption of regulations that domesticate international human rights law and it promotes policies and practices that guard against transgressions (i.e., misuse of criminal law,

arbitrary detention, torture, gender-based violence and censorship). UN Human Rights also supports the establishment of independent, impartial and fair courts and non-judicial mechanisms that address claims and grant remedies, including commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and other investigations.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

AI – ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE and LAW ENFORCEMENT

Laws, policies and practices increasingly address, prevent and reduce human rights violations in the context of law enforcement and justice systems.




RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS

Spotlights: Disabilities Women Youth

Persistent and coordinated advocacy efforts undertaken by the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) resulted in progress made in enhancing **accountability for serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law**. For instance, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine repealed article 375 of the Criminal Code, which infringed on the independence of judges. The Cassation Criminal Court of the Supreme Court modified its practices to help ascertain that plea bargains are voluntary. The Office of the Prosecutor General made a commitment to tackle warrantless arrests in relation to ‘continuous crimes’ and to cease pressing terrorism charges against individuals who are linked with armed groups of the self-proclaimed ‘republics’ in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, a draft law was developed to amend the in absentia prosecution procedure, which is expected to facilitate prosecution of those responsible for serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations. Furthermore, the State judicial administration annulled requirements linked to digital signatures, improving access to online court hearings in the context of COVID-19. In its emblematic judgment on the right to liberty pending trial, the European Court of Human Rights referred to the HRMMU’s findings. It is anticipated that the judgment will change national practices on arrests and pretrial detention.

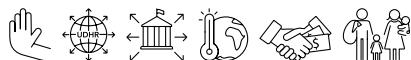
Sustained advocacy efforts undertaken by UN Human Rights in **Libya** contributed to the establishment, in Benghazi and Tripoli, of **specialized courts to address violence against women and children**. Another major development was the appointment, on 11 October, of five women judges (out of a total of six judges) to the newly established courts.

In partnership with the Ministry of Justice, UN Human Rights carried out an assessment of the **free legal aid** system in **Belarus**, identifying gaps and formulating recommendations, which informed the development of a road map to improve legal aid provision. During the year, the HRA, in close coordination with the Resident Coordinator, worked with bar associations, lawyers and two CSOs to provide legal consultation services to 1,543 persons (1,054 women, 489 men), including persons with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence.

 In **El Salvador**, UN Human Rights supported a network of national and international CSOs working on **sexual and reproductive rights** to present a habeas corpus before the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice in favour of 14 women imprisoned for obstetric emergencies. In this context, the Office also provided technical advice to the Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (PDDH, the NHRI), which submitted an amicus curiae brief in relation to these women to support the adoption of precautionary measures in their favour, including in relation to health and hygiene conditions in the context of COVID-19. As a result, the Constitutional Chamber ordered a review of these cases and an improvement of sanitary conditions in the prisons. Following this decision, one of the women was granted early parole and another woman's sentence was commuted.

A2 – ACCESS TO JUSTICE and REMEDIES


Strengthened national mechanisms provide redress to victims and accountability for human rights violations, including for economic and social rights.



UN Human Rights engaged with Member States, UN partners and CSOs to promote accountability for human rights violations. For instance, with support from the Permanent Mission of Libya, the Office and UNSMIL co-organized briefings and consultations on Libya for Member States of the Human Rights Council on the need to ensure accountability for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including war crimes. This contributed to the **establishment**, in June, of a **Fact-Finding Mission on Libya**.

UN Human Rights made significant progress towards ensuring accountability for human rights violations in the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)**, including through the upgrade of the **central information and evidence repository** to the latest e-discovery software. Approximately 3,830 distinct files were added to the repository, such as interviews, reports, petition letters, satellite imagery, maps, court documents, videos and audio recordings. Related open source materials from the media, governments and academia were also uploaded. All relevant staff received online training on the use of the repository.

Throughout 2020, UN Human Rights engaged extensively with EU institutions to promote the application of an HRBA to the **new EU rule of law mechanism**. The Office advocated for making linkages between human rights, democracy and the rule of law, with a focus on defending civil society space. In December, an agreement was reached on rule of law budget conditionality, linking respect for the rule of law and disbursements of EU funds to member states.


 In **Honduras**, UN Human Rights increased its support to the strategic litigation efforts of CSOs in cases related to the **rights of women** and **LGBTI** persons. The restrictive legislation on sexual and reproductive rights represents a major gap in the State's fulfilment of its international obligations. For instance, in a case where a voluntary termination of pregnancy was criminalized, the Office's intervention was key to ensuring the integration of international human rights norms and standards into the sentence, which set a precedent for future jurisprudence in this area.

In **Kenya**, UN Human Rights provided technical and financial support to the Tripartite Task Force (TTF), composed of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority and the National Police Service. The TTF developed **SOPs** regarding the **investigation and prosecution of serious human rights violations committed by police officers**. Investigators and prosecutors worked together to investigate allegations of serious human rights violations, such as killings, shootings, robbery, harassment, sexual assault and inhuman treatment, during the enforcement of COVID-19 curfew regulations. As a result, a number of officers were charged with committing serious human rights violations.


A3 – Investigation of GENDER-related CRIMES

Justice systems investigate and prosecute gender-related crimes more effectively.



 As a co-lead entity of the **United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict** (TOE), UN Human Rights supported national authorities in the investigation and prosecution of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. In the Central African Republic, the TOE collaborated with MINUSCA and UNDP. As a result, the Joint Rapid Response Unit to Prevent Sexual Violence against Women and Children (UMIRR) finalized the judicial investigation into the crimes that occurred in Kaga Bandoro, in August 2019, including CRSV, which involved 264 victims. In January 2021, the judicial file was sent for review to the Office of the Prosecutor of the Kaga Bandoro High Court. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the TOE collaborated with the Joint Human Rights Office of MONUSCO, the UNCT and CSOs and worked with Congolese counterparts to implement a case prioritization strategy for serious international crimes, including sexual violence. The TOE also provided technical assistance in relation to the investigation, prosecution and trial of Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka and his co-conspirators for crimes committed between 2010 and 2017, including the mass rape of 387 civilians. These efforts contributed to the **groundbreaking decision of the Cour Militaire Opérationnelle of North Kivu**, on 23 November, to sentence Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka to life imprisonment after he was convicted of rape, sexual slavery and the recruitment of children. In Guinea, UN Human Rights and the TOE collaborated to support awareness-raising efforts regarding the importance of accountability for the events of 28 September 2009, during which at least 109 women and girls were victims of sexual violence. This resulted in a renewed commitment by senior officials to ensure accountability and elaborate draft guidelines to convene trials for these events.

 In **South Sudan**, UN Human Rights reported and verified 146 incidents of CRSV affecting 218 survivors. The Office and its partners regularly raised cases of CRSV with parties to the conflict. Advocacy undertaken with the Chief of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and the Minister of Defence, in May, regarding concerns over the continued use of sexual violence by the SSPDF in the Yei-Lasu area, was instrumental in the deployment of the District Court Martial to the area. In September, the **District Court Martial** handed down a **landmark ruling** in which 26 suspects were convicted and received sentences ranging from seven to 14 years in prison for the rape of six women and five girls. UN Human Rights monitored the two-month long trial and worked with CSOs to support and accompany the victims and their families before, during and after the trial.

 In **Chad**, UN Human Rights conducted six field monitoring missions in the provinces of Ouaddai; Lake Chad, Moyen-Chari, Mandoul, Logone Occidental and Logone Oriental. The missions monitored specific **violations related to intercommunity conflicts, gender-based violence and child exploitation** and the conditions in prisons and other places of detention. During the missions, UN Human Rights gathered information that formed the basis for its subsequent advocacy with authorities. As a result, five human rights violations were redressed related to the arbitrary arrest of journalists, HRDs, CSO leaders and alleged members of Boko Haram and the ill-treatment of detainees.

A5 – UN ACTION on RULE of LAW

UN efforts with regard to the rule of law, justice, counter-terrorism and accountability put human rights at the core.



Through its participation in the meetings of the Human Rights, Rule of Law and Victims of Terrorism Working Group and the Global Compact Human Rights Working Group, UN Human Rights highlighted the importance of integrating human rights into **counter-terrorism responses and responses to terrorist incidents and crisis situations**. The Office provided comments on the national counter-terrorism strategies of **Iraq** and **Tajikistan**, the Watchlisting Guidance Manual Initiative and the human rights aspects of the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems. The Global Compact Human Rights Working Group finalized the **Basic Human Rights Reference Guide (BHRRG): Proscription of Organizations in the Context of Countering Terrorism**. The BHRRG provides guidance to States on the parameters and human rights implications of identifying organizations as terrorist organizations. In cooperation with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, UN Human Rights delivered training of trainers sessions to law enforcement officers on counter-terrorism and human rights in Cameroon, Iraq, Mali and Nigeria.

UN Human Rights provided technical advice to ensure that human rights are mainstreamed into the **Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syria, Iraq and Third Country National Returnees** (Global Framework). This resulted in the integration of human rights into Global Framework processes (i.e., joint scoping exercises, risk management, technical guidance and advice related to programme design and implementation, monitoring and fund allocations from the Global Framework pooled funds). The support from UN Human Rights also included the provision of human rights and gender expertise to facilitate the implementation of the Global Framework.

In **Myanmar**, UN Human Rights supported the UNCT in enhancing its strategic approach to prevention, which resulted in the development and adoption of a **UNCT Human Rights Strategy** and implementation plan, with a focus on Leaving No One Behind and ensuring the holistic implementation of the UNCT's human rights agenda.

UN Human Rights developed and adapted a **digital image verification tool**, which was initiated in 2019, and deployed it as an internal service within the organization. This enabled staff and accountability mechanisms to test confidential digital artefacts for evidence of tampering and have a higher degree of confidence in the digital evidence used to support casework, human rights analysis and reporting.

Enhancing accountability through the participation of civil society in Uzbekistan

Shukhrat Ganiev, a lawyer by training, became a human rights activist because he wanted to help vulnerable persons in his neighborhood of Bukhara. Many people around him could not understand why he would leave a stable job and tranquil life to assist complete strangers. Shukhrat felt that it was important to bridge the gap between law and law enforcement.

For this reason, he became the Head of the Humanitarian Legal Center, a non-registered CSO in Uzbekistan. “The majority of people perceive your actions as a human rights defender as their last hope. And sometimes it is important for them when you are just beside them during the night searches,” explained Shukhrat.

“During the last few years, a lot has changed for the better for human rights defenders in Uzbekistan.” Until recently, Shukhrat could not have imagined being able to visit places of detention. At the end of 2019, UN Human Rights selected him to participate in a training programme that was co-organized with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Penal

Reform International and the Office of the Ombudsperson. Together with a group of civil society members and staff from the Ombudsperson’s Office, Shukhrat enhanced his capacities to monitor the human rights situation in detention facilities, including penitentiary institutions.

In the summer of 2020, joint advocacy efforts by UN Human Rights and the Resident Coordinator’s Office began to yield results. The Ombudsperson’s Office agreed to include independent civil society experts in its torture prevention monitoring activities.

Three national experts were trained and supported by UN Human Rights, including Shukhrat, and participated in monitoring visits to places of detention and mandatory COVID-19 quarantine facilities. “I could interview prisoners of my own choice, regardless of whether they were convicted on the basis of political or religious charges,” noted Shukhrat.

The work of the monitors was facilitated by the use of sample questionnaires that were developed by UN Human Rights to

support the monitoring activities. The Office also organized debriefing sessions with the Ombudsperson’s Office and civil society experts to discuss their findings, agree on follow-up activities and jointly formulate recommendations, some of which were included in the reports of the Ombudsperson’s Office to the Parliament. The debriefings provided forward-looking recommendations, including on the institutionalization of the participation of civic activists in the work of Uzbekistan’s National Preventive Mechanism.

In addition, Shukhrat and his colleagues provided legal assistance to vulnerable individuals. By the end of 2020, they had won the cases of five young men who had been fully exonerated by the court during the appeals process. Shukhrat then realized how much confidence he had gained during the previous year that “Recent changes are irreversible in my country,” he said. “There is the political will, the strategy and the team. The main thing is not to stop and to move forward.”

Shukhrat Ganiev at a training (left) and during a monitoring visit to the medical unit of a penal colony (right). © Photo courtesy of Shukhrat Ganiev (left) and OHCHR (right)



The future of digital evidence: Fostering accountability for human rights violations

The Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations was launched at a special event to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nuremberg trials. Several years in the making, the Protocol is a new tool that was jointly produced by UN Human Rights and the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, to strengthen the use of video and other digital information as evidence in human rights, war crimes and international criminal cases.

The event, which took place on 1 December, recalled the first use of film as evidence in an international trial and discussed the future of digital evidence and visual imagery in court cases to foster accountability. “Technology can help us see the distant, the obscured and the unimaginable – and serve as concrete proof of violations of human rights and international law,” said Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her opening remarks during the event.

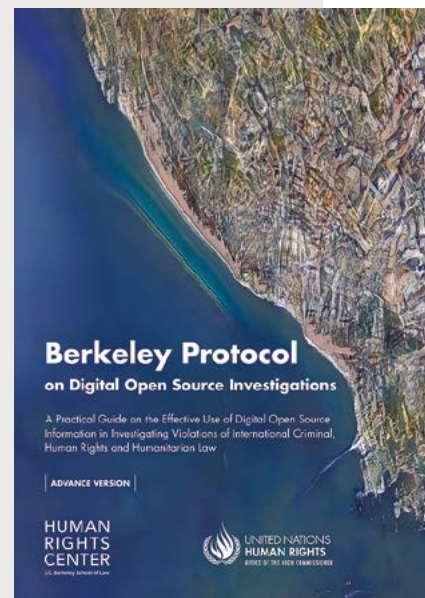
The Berkeley Protocol was developed by a group of experts with diverse professional perspectives, legal and cultural backgrounds and was subjected to a rigorous process of review and validation. It establishes common global standards for using public, digital content, including photographs and film, as evidence and for conducting online research regarding alleged violations of international criminal, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, thereby contributing to a new era in accountability for such violations.

The Protocol provides guidance on methodologies and procedures for gathering, analysing and preserving digital information in a professional, legal and ethical manner. It outlines measures that online investigators can and should take to protect their digital, physical and psychosocial safety and that of others who risk their well-being to document war crimes and human rights violations, including witnesses, victims and first responders, as well as citizens, activists and journalists.

In an era of widespread misinformation and disinformation, the Protocol has gained more importance as it sets out principles and methods behind verification and authentication analyses that practitioners and laypersons can comprehend.

First and foremost, the Protocol requires investigators to be bound by fundamental ethical, professional, methodological and legal principles to ensure that information is collected in line with human rights standards. That information can then be employed for accountability purposes when conditions allow.

In an increasingly digitalized world, UN Human Rights and the Human Rights Center hope that the Berkeley Protocol will help online investigators, whether they are legal professionals, human rights defenders, journalists or others, to develop and implement effective procedures for documenting and verifying violations of international law and to make the best use of digital open source information so that those who are responsible for such violations can be brought to justice.



Cover page of the Berkeley Protocol. © OHCHR



Participation (P)

Enhancing participation and protecting civic space



PUBLIC MOBILIZATION



Global campaigns

9.7 million followers on social media (across all UN Human Rights platforms, 27% more than in 2019)

376,000 mentions of #StandUp4HumanRights

548 video stories (including 138 video messages from the High Commissioner)

120 feature stories (UN Human Rights website and social media)



In the field

700 advocacy campaigns

6,000 press releases/statements

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH MATERIALS



Universal Human Rights Index

48,594 unique visitors to the website (a 32% increase from 2019)



Publications

6.19 million visits to online publications (a 27% increase from 2019)

Over **42,875** printed materials dispatched (to 30 countries)

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS



With CSOs

950 women's rights organizations

450 youth-led organizations

370 organizations of persons with disabilities



Human Rights Day

Almost **600 million** views of GIFs (created with GIPHY)

32.4 million persons reached through a photo challenge ("The World Is In Our Hands," with photographer Justin Wu)

ENGAGEMENT WITH UN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS



HRC and UPR Voluntary Trust Funds

10 delegates of States supported to attend UPR reviews (out of a total of 28 States reviewed)

108 requests processed by the HRC Help Desk for Small States (during regular sessions of the HRC)



Intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the UN

New cases/developments from **45** countries



Social Forum

1,000 participants (from 100 countries, with a focus on "Combating poverty and inequalities")

Empowering young people to participate in the promotion of their rights

The right to participation is one of the most important principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Yet, a “[Global survey on youth and COVID-19](#)” conducted by UN Human Rights, ILO and other partners demonstrated that young people have been hit hard by the pandemic. In particular, respondents from 112 countries, 18-34 years of age, observed the impacts of COVID-19 on their right to participation in public affairs and peaceful protests.

Consequently, many young people channelled their creativity into countering the spread of the virus and raising awareness in their communities. Respondent Nikhat Akhtar, from India, wrote, “I am fighting against the spread of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19.”

As noted by a report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on youth and human rights, “Investing in young people’s rights and empowering youth can lead to more equal societies and positive social change” (A/HRC/39/33). To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools. During the year, UN Human Rights worked to ensure that human rights were more relevant, accessible and useful to young people in the Asia-Pacific region, enabling them to play a vital role in their own development and that of their communities.

In the Pacific, the Office built the capacity of 25 youth representatives to use the international human rights mechanisms and fight for stronger climate action. Sunishma Singh, of the Fiji Youth Council, participated in this initiative: “Knowing

there are human rights mechanisms out there that can be used to hold States and private sector actors accountable for the climate crisis strengthens my resolve to fight for climate action,” he said. Singh and his peers are leading movements to participate in and guide the political debate on climate change.

In Cambodia, UN Human Rights and six youth rights associations organized the Youth Human Rights Champion Competition. Six youth groups, with participants aged 15-23 years, were selected to produce two-minute videos on human rights that are relevant to them, including the right to vote, the right to education of sex workers’ children, the right of vulnerable groups to participate in public affairs, the rights of migrant workers and equality between women and men. The videos can be accessed on the [UN Human Rights-Cambodia Facebook page](#).

In Papua New Guinea, UN Human Rights and the HRA partnered with a CSO to launch an innovative initiative in selected schools entitled “Human Rights Games,” enabling students to learn about and promote their rights.

The voices, creativity and engagement of young people can help shape more inclusive, equal and resilient societies. UN Human Rights is taking steps to make their fundamental right to participate and be heard a reality, including in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.



Launch of the Kedar Human Rights Cup in selected schools of Papua New Guinea. The event commemorates the role of UN Human Rights Adviser Kedar Poudyal. © OHCHR

Highlights of pillar results

Participation (P)

Participation of rights-holders and their representative organizations, reflecting the diversity of society and ensuring those most underrepresented are involved, is key to realizing the promise of human rights for all people. When civil society engages freely and actively in policy development and implementation, policies are more informed, effective, efficient and sustainable. Furthermore, civil society is

generally the closest point of assistance for victims of human rights violations and provide legal, medical, social and financial support. Major obstacles to civil society participation exist at all levels, including within UN forums, and shrinking civic space creates a major gap in the promotion and protection of human rights. While new technologies facilitate the expansion of civil society networks, they also create

new avenues for control of civil society movements and speech, often under the pretext of security. UN Human Rights is uniquely placed to monitor and protect civil society space and the international human rights mechanisms rely heavily on civil society to collect information and support the implementation of their recommendations.

PILLAR RESULTS / SHIFTS / SDGs

P1 – ENABLING NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK for civil society

Stronger laws, policies and practices protect the right to participate and civic space, including online. The environment for civil society is increasingly safe and enabling.





RESULTS / SPOTLIGHTS

Spotlights:  Disabilities  Women  Youth


UN Human Rights served as a bridge between **civil society and social media platforms**. In February, the Office helped bring together NHRIs, journalists, human rights defenders and social media platforms, with a view to identifying key obstacles to online civic space and new avenues through which they can be addressed. These efforts led to more regular engagement between tech companies and human rights organizations. It also established **channels of communication with social media platforms**, enabling UN Human Rights to engage in advocacy regarding content moderation and communicate its concerns about incitement cases.

As a result of advocacy undertaken by UN Human Rights, the Government of **Bolivia** published Decree 4236, on 14 May, which **derogated provisions of Decree 4231 that limited freedom of expression in the context of COVID-19**. The previous Decree allowed authorities to file criminal complaints against those who failed to comply with quarantine orders or disseminated information that allegedly had the potential to put public health at risk or provoke uncertainty among the population. The Office issued public messages, conducted advocacy meetings and sent a technical document to authorities that highlighted the incompatibility of Decree 4231 with the right to freedom of expression, provided in article 19 of ICCPR, due to its violation of the principles of necessity, proportionality and legality.

 In **Mauritania**, a decree was adopted, in July, on the **establishment of an observatory on the rights of women and girls**. UN Human Rights advocated for this result through consistent engagement with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Family Welfare. In addition, UN Human Rights undertook a study and organized a technical workshop on the subject.

 UN Human Rights collaborated with the co-chairs of the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Working Group to organize **consultative dialogues with civil society** actors to gather their views and ensure the **Libya Peace Dialogue Forum (LPDF)** proceedings were **inclusive and rights-**

based. A number of principles were incorporated into the LPDF road map, including the importance of achieving equality between women and men and pursuing comprehensive national reconciliation based on the principles of transitional justice. Firm commitments were undertaken to secure the increased engagement of women in these processes. For instance, a quota was established to ensure that women are selected for a minimum of 30 per cent of ministerial and deputy appointments. The LPDF road map was unanimously accepted by participants and annexed to the outcome document of the Forum.

 In **Kyrgyzstan**, as part of an ongoing programme supported by UN Human Rights to increase the **participation of underrepresented groups in public life**, 23 persons (14 women, nine men, including nine persons from ethnic minorities and six persons with disabilities) completed a three-month internship programme in a number of State and municipal bodies of the Issyk-Kul region. The State Personnel Service proposed that the programme be formally established.

P2 – PROTECTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

The UN system and international, regional and national mechanisms provide increased, timely and effective protection to civil society organizations and individuals, including from reprisals.



UN Human Rights finalized a **guidance document for the UN system on preventing and addressing reprisals**. In June, the Office organized a consultation with UN partners and distributed the guidance for further refinement and use by UN actors in various contexts, such as peace operations, work on counter-terrorism, development and international finance. The Office also mapped the engagement of Member States and civil society with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies to provide guidance and enhance the protection measures of Member States.

In a landmark development that was spearheaded by UN Human Rights, with support from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the UN adopted a **Guidance Note on the promotion and protection of civic space**. The Guidance Note recognizes civic space as a threshold issue for the successful implementation of all three pillars of the United Nations and commits all parts of the system to taking steps to promote and protect civic space. The launch of the Guidance Note, in December, was attended by more than 800 civil society representatives from around the world.

With support from UN Human Rights, the **Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and association** raised awareness about 164 situations, including 24 cases related to **laws or draft laws that could have a negative impact on the right to association** and on trade unions, including in Bulgaria, Guatemala, Honduras, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Tanzania and Ukraine. The Government of Ireland acknowledged the legitimate concerns regarding the 1997 Electoral Act and committed to the establishment, by the end of 2021, of an independent Electoral Commission, which will review the Act in its totality.

Throughout the year, UN Human Rights in **Colombia** coordinated its work with the Office of the Ombudsperson, resulting in the issuance of **50 early warnings concerning attacks against human rights defenders**. Furthermore, the enhanced collaboration between State entities, including the Office of the Procurator General and the Office of the Ombudsperson, resulted in enhanced analysis of early warning responses and the promotion of **coordinated actions by authorities**. UN Human Rights provided technical assistance to ensure the compliance of these processes with international human rights standards.

P3 – PUBLIC SUPPORT for CIVIC SPACE

Business, policymakers and the public at large increasingly value and support civic space.



A particularly relevant issue in 2020 was the crucial **role of civil society in the context of COVID-19**. The High Commissioner and other senior UN Human Rights officials regularly advocated for enhanced access to reliable information and space for the expression of critical views as key elements of an effective response to the pandemic and efforts for building back better.

In May, UN Human Rights developed a **Guidance Note on civic space and COVID-19**, which was translated into four languages and widely disseminated (it was downloaded approximately 5,000 times by visitors from over 80 countries).

P4 – ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

Civil society assistance to victims of human rights violations is strengthened.



In **Azerbaijan**, UN Human Rights supported the provision of **free legal assistance to members of vulnerable groups**, in cooperation with the Ombudsperson and the Bar Association. As a result, 982 individuals (486 women, 496 men), including unemployed persons, persons with disabilities, older persons, pensioners and internally displaced persons (IDPs), received legal assistance during the year. The services primarily focused on social and economic rights, including social security, labour and property rights and the rights to health and education.

 UN Human Rights provided support to the **“WE” Women Human Rights Defenders Network**, which was established with the support of the Office in 2019 and unites 40 WHRDs from 14 countries in the **Middle East and North Africa region**. In 2020, the Network organized a regional online symposium on inequalities between the rights of women and men under nationality legislation. The Network also disseminated recommendations to the media, religious and community leaders and legislative bodies.

P5 – CIVIC SPACE MONITORING

More systematic monitoring of the environment for civic space, including threats to it, takes place.



Advocacy undertaken by UN Human Rights contributed to more effective **actions from EU regional institutions in response to threats to civic space**. The European Democracy Action Plan, the EU Strategy for the Effective Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU Digital Strategy, all of which were adopted in 2020, recognize the need to protect civic space in Europe, both offline and online.

In **Costa Rica**, the Office worked closely with the judiciary to move forward with a **protocol for investigating human rights violations against human rights defenders**. UN Human Rights supported the adoption of a comprehensive protection policy that includes opportunities for participation, early warning, the provision of training to State agents and overall guidelines on crimes committed against HRDs. In **El Salvador**, the Office supported the development of **legislation** that provides a definition of HRDs and establishes relevant **protection mechanisms**, in line with recommendations issued by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. In November, the Legislative Assembly discussed a draft version of the legislation with CSOs.

P6 – PEOPLE HAVE a VOICE

The voices of people affected by decisions, particularly victims and those who face discrimination, are more clearly heard.



In the **Republic of Moldova**, UN Human Rights supported the creation and functioning of an **NGO Task Force on COVID-19 and Human Rights**, which included 56 national and local CSOs, including from the Transnistria region. The work of the Task Force resulted in **contributions to policy and programme design and implementation** and was conducive to a better understanding of the needs of vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

Somalia's 2019 ratification of CRPD opened the avenue for the **increased engagement of persons with disabilities in public processes** that are related to the protection of their rights. In Somaliland, UN Human Rights supported civil society to conduct consultations aimed at revising the Somaliland Disability Policy as a contribution to the drafting of disability legislation that is in compliance with CRPD. The Office supported the Federal Ministry of Women and Human Rights in Mogadishu to conduct consultations on the Persons with Disabilities Bill, which is ready to be tabled before the Cabinet.

The Office contributed to the **protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia** by supporting the use of **human rights-based protocols**, which were developed with indigenous authorities and the Ministry of the Interior, to facilitate the implementation of the peace agreements in the territories of indigenous peoples and communities of people of African descent, such as the Nasa people, the Renacer Negro Community Council, the Greater Community Council of the Comprehensive Farmers' Association of Atrato and the Bari people.

In **Guatemala**, UN Human Rights supported youth-led organizations to promote positive human rights change. It organized a regional meeting with youth leaders from 11 organizations in the eastern part of Guatemala, resulting in the establishment of the Connected Youth Initiative. Similarly, the Office supported the creation of the **Youth Human Rights Defenders Network**, which unites 26 organizations and offers a space for dialogue and technical assistance on the human rights of youth, with a focus on participation and the right to education and work.

P7 – Human rights RESPONSE to VIOLENCE

Public recognition increases that human rights and accountability make important contributions to effective responses to violence, including terrorism and violent extremism.



UN Human Rights released a series of animated videos entitled "Human Rights Explained" as part of a **campaign to raise awareness of and support for human rights among Cambodian youth**. The campaign reached 744,800 Facebook users and the videos were shared with youth organizations, some of which used them in training activities. The Office also worked with six youth organizations on a Young Human Rights Champion Competition to recognize youth support for human rights issues. Participants aged 15-23 years produced six videos on a variety of topics, including the right to vote, the participation of persons with disabilities, the equal right to work for women and men, migrant workers and discrimination against the children of sex workers and former prisoners. The videos were posted on the UN Human Rights - Cambodia Facebook page, resulting in approximately 2.1 million reaches and 101,000 engagements.

Under the MoU between UN Human Rights and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in **Tunisia**, the Office supported the **creation of a Monitoring Unit** within the Ministry to receive, analyse and report on **complaints about alleged human rights violations committed by or against imams and professional worship staff**. While the Unit originally focused on Muslim clerics, additional advocacy by the Office resulted in the extension of its mandate to cover Christian and Jewish clerics. Moreover, a hotline was created to enable clerics who are victims of violations to contact the Unit. In 2020, the Monitoring Unit issued its first quarterly report, which provided quantitative and qualitative data that are disaggregated by gender.

Supporting Syrian civil society actors in their struggle to claim and defend their rights



Jalal Al Hamad, Syrian lawyer and activist. © Photo courtesy of Jalal Al Hamad

“I had to leave because there was an execution order against me,” said Jalal Al Hamad, a Syrian lawyer. Jalal was 25 in 2011 and the war in Syria was in its early stages.

The young man left government-controlled Damascus to reach Deir Ezzor, an area in north-eastern Syria that was an opposition stronghold at the time. When ISIL took control of the zone, he began to fear for his life. Forced to flee again, he arrived in Gaziantep, in neighbouring Turkey.

Nearly 10 years later, Jalal’s country has been ripped apart by a war that shows no sign of ending. Countless women, men and children have been killed or injured and millions have fled. Last year, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted, “During the early years of this murderous conflict, when the casualties were in the tens, then hundreds, then thousands, the world showed considerable concern about what was happening. Now, airstrikes kill and maim significant numbers of civilians several times a week and the response seems to be a collective shrug.”

While the war in Syria fades away from the spotlight, people like Jalal continue to work tirelessly to raise awareness about the ongoing severe human rights violations in the country.

Jalal is now the Director of Justice for Life, an organization established in 2015 with teams inside and outside Syria that monitor events and human rights violations in the Deir Ezzor region. As a result of

interviews with victims and witnesses, the CSO documented hundreds of violations, including killings under torture, extrajudicial killings and disease and malnutrition as a consequence of besiegement.

Jalal’s desire to speak out against such atrocities stemmed from a need to provide a balanced voice. “I wanted to address these violations objectively and neutrally and to be the voice of victims.”

Justice for Life engages with the international human rights mechanisms to report its findings, including the Human Rights Council. The organization recently signed an MoU with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes Under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011. UN Human Rights has interacted extensively with Jalal and his colleagues to monitor the human rights situation in north-east Syria and promote human rights-based approaches to their programming and advocacy efforts.

“We have become a hub for victims,” said Jalal. “Men, women and children are coming to us without fear. This building of trust in the community has been a major success factor, which we hope will help us achieve the ultimate goal: justice.”



At an event to celebrate International Youth Day, Zaira Begg from the Fiji Youth Council presents a mural that was designed and painted by young leaders from across the region, highlighting what climate action and resilience during the pandemic means to Pacific youth. © OHCHR