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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND REPORTS OF THE OFFICE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER AND THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
and follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights***

Summary

The present report outlines the efforts undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to implement its mandate. It elaborates on the support given to the continued work of the Human Rights Council and the effective functioning of its mechanisms, both its reform initiatives and its ongoing substantive work. In this context, attention is equally paid to the challenge of the universal periodic review and the support given to that process by OHCHR.

The report elaborates on the strategic themes identified in the Strategic Management Plan and their implementation. It also provides an overview of the continued efforts to strengthen country engagement and activities for the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One focus of the report is the continued commitment to the fight against racism and, in particular, the Durban Review process. Finally, the report highlights the support for human rights instruments and the potential role of the universal periodic review in the promotion of their universal application.

* The present report was submitted after the deadline so as to reflect the most recent information.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council decision 2/102. It should also be read in the context of my report submitted to the sixty-second session of the General Assembly.¹
2. The particular importance of the present report is related to the culmination of the institution-building phase of the Human Rights Council and the beginning of the actual functioning of its new or rationalized mechanisms within the framework of a standing body. The implementation of reform is an important challenge regarding the effectiveness of these human rights mechanisms and we should approach this coming phase with a spirit of constructive engagement and willingness to learn and further develop them together.
3. One of the main calls of Member States during the past months has been the need for greater interaction and consultations between the Council and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Though the demands of the institution-building process often limited the space and time for this interaction, OHCHR intends to continue and enhance a structured dialogue with the Council, such as the round of consultations with regional groups carried out by the Deputy High Commissioner in 2007.
4. The content of the present report constitutes another important tool for dialogue, which is why it addresses not only activities undertaken by OHCHR, but also provides a substantive overview of the human rights challenges we are facing and the strategies the Office is using to address them.

II. SUPPORT FOR THE WORK OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL AND THE EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF ITS MECHANISMS

5. Since my last report, the Council has fulfilled the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly by adopting in resolution 5/1 its land-mark agreement on institution-building on 18 June 2007, one year after its inaugural meeting. Over the past months, the Council, with the unabated support of my Office, has embarked on translating into practice the letter and spirit of its resolution 5/1. While considerable progress has been made, further resolve is required for all mechanisms of the Council to be established effectively and to be able to carry out their mandates in a meaningful manner to ensure the effective protection and promotion of human rights. In the year to come, institution-building will be finalized and implementation will be at the centre of the Council's attention, with specific focus on pragmatic, meaningful and realistic responses to the human rights challenges of our times. My Office continues to be firmly committed to lending substantial support to these endeavours.
6. Significant progress has been made in setting in motion the universal periodic review mechanism. The Council has adopted general guidelines regarding the preparation of the information by the State, on the basis of which my Office has prepared the first compilations of information contained in the reports of treaty bodies, special procedures and other relevant

¹ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 36 (A/62/36).*

United Nations documents. In addition, my Office has been given the task of summarizing the credible and reliable information provided by relevant stakeholders. Such a broad basis of information is critical to the development of an inclusive and objective review process. Further developments were seen with regard to the universal periodic review mechanism, including the selection of the order of review of the 192 countries to be considered by the Working Group during the first four-year cycle.

7. Resolution 5/1 provides the general framework of the review, yet remains silent on several details. My Office has comprehensively contributed to further refining the modalities of the process with a view to developing an effective, meaningful and transparent mechanism on the basis of open and constructive dialogue. Policy issues associated with the establishment of the universal periodic review continue to be addressed both by the Council Bureau and within OHCHR.

8. Progress has also been made in discussing the troika selection system. It is essential that all troikas function in a consistent and coherent manner. This is crucial to ensuring effective interaction with States under consideration by the Working Group.

9. In addition to providing substantive and technical support to member States in establishing the universal periodic review, I welcome the approval by the General Assembly of my request for additional resources to enable my Office to take on this additional responsibility in accordance with Council resolution 5/1.

10. I also encourage United Nations partners to further engage in the process, not only concerning their input during the preparatory phase of the universal periodic review, but also in the implementation and follow-up of the outcome, especially at the national level. The universal periodic review is an opportunity to create greater synergies and coherence in the work of the United Nations at the national, regional and international levels.

11. As I have mentioned on repeated occasions, I consider the universal periodic review one of the main pillars of the institutional architecture of the Council. The review of the first 48 countries within this framework, in the course of 2008, constitutes an opportunity for the Council to demonstrate that it has moved beyond politicization and selectivity by applying universal and equal standards and parameters to the review of the commitments and obligations of all States in the field of human rights. At the same time, I would like to emphasize that the credibility of the Council will be put to the test and the success of the universal periodic review will to a large extent depend on the willingness of States to engage in the process in a meaningful and constructive manner. I therefore encourage all States Members of the United Nations to live up to the commitments embodied in the institution-building package.

12. In my report to the General Assembly at the sixty-second session, I expressed my hope that the Council would devise transitional measures to avoid a protection gap in relation to the new complaint procedure, as the mandate of the Working Group on Communications expired on 18 June 2007. I welcome the decision adopted by the Council at its sixth session, which enabled the holding of the first session of the Working Group on Communications in its former composition, pending the nomination of new members from among the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee. I am pleased to note that this agreement secured a seamless transition from the 1503 procedure to the new complaint procedure. In the light of the many similarities between

the old and the new complaint mechanisms, in terms of their overall architecture, but also in relation to the admissibility of communications, it continues to be critical to operationalize the new and distinct parameters to ensure a more transparent and efficient mechanism as is called for by the Council in its resolution 5/1.

13. Another challenge for the coming year will be to develop the analytical capacities of the Council and of its subsidiary organ, the Advisory Committee. New impetus should be given to the consideration of thematic matters through rejuvenated procedures, such as the holding of panel discussions and general debates. As for the latter, further thought should be given to their format with a view to making them more substantive in nature and less bureaucratic in style.

14. I welcome the establishment by consensus of a new expert mechanism on the human rights of indigenous peoples to provide thematic expertise in this area, in continuation of the work of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the former Sub-Commission. This new mechanism will be composed of six independent experts, of which at least three will be representatives of indigenous peoples. This is an example of how the Council can ensure that the needs of those concerned will be adequately taken into account in the mainstreaming of the rights of specific groups. Another welcome initiative to foster the Council's thematic expertise was its decision to establish a forum on minority issues to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to people belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. The establishment of interlinkages between the forum and the work of the independent expert on minority issues not only encourages the cross-fertilization between various elements of the system of protection and promotion of human rights, but also ensures a consistent and coherent approach.

15. Concerning the establishment of the Advisory Committee, my Office has maintained and prepared a list of the candidatures received, which was closed at the beginning of the year, and from which the 18 members of the new body will be elected. When casting their ballots at the current session, the Council members should bear in mind that the level of expertise, independence and impartiality of the new body will be decisive if this think-tank is to effectively provide research-based advice to the Council on emerging or underdeveloped thematic issues. While it appears that, in terms of composition, the new body may not be fundamentally different from its predecessor, I believe it is critical that, in discharging its mandate, the Committee adopt an approach that is oriented towards implementation rather than theory, and therefore actively engages with State and non-State actors, including non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions, in a meaningful manner.

16. The system of special procedures remains one of the key tools of the Council in the protection and promotion of human rights and my Office continues to provide strong and efficient support to the activities of the various mandate-holders and their Coordination Committee. I have advocated for the substantive participation of the mandate-holders in the review, rationalization and improvement of their mandates and I am pleased to note that this process is well under way. I am confident that the Council at its current session will pursue its efforts to further strengthen the system of special procedures with the objective, to the greatest extent possible, of universality of coverage of human rights issues.

17. As for the process of selection and appointment of new special procedures mandate-holders, my Office has been given the task of preparing, maintaining and periodically updating a public list of eligible candidates nominated by Governments, regional groups, international and non-governmental organizations, other human rights bodies and individuals. I welcome the enhanced transparency and inclusive nature of the nomination process, as well as the opportunity for a variety of interested stakeholders to put forward candidatures of highly qualified individuals with the required competence and experience in the field of human rights. Moreover, my Office is undertaking a preliminary screening of the nominations received with a view to including in the public list those nominees who meet the technical and objective criteria adopted by the Council, thereby contributing to maintaining a system of special procedures that is rooted in independence, impartiality, integrity, objectivity, expertise and experience.

18. My Office is pleased about the expanded opportunities for interactive dialogue between the Council and the special procedures mandate-holders. Consideration might be given to further enhancing such dialogue and to taking measures to ensure that the dialogue with special procedures at the General Assembly remains fruitful.

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN STRATEGIC THEMATIC AREAS

19. Despite the many advances made in recent years in the development of legal standards, in awareness and commitment of the international community and in the increasing recognition that respect for human rights is a precondition for development, peace and security, obstacles to the full realization of human rights remain in the strategic thematic areas identified in the OHCHR Plan of Action. These are impunity, poverty, discrimination, armed conflict and violence, democratic deficits and weak institutions.

20. Impunity for human rights violations is still present in all regions of the world and poses a serious challenge to the pursuit of justice. In post-conflict situations, ongoing impunity makes it difficult to stamp out abusive practices after peace has been restored.

21. In 2006 and 2007, to help end impunity, OHCHR, through its technical cooperation, advisory and advocacy activities, led international efforts to support national protection systems in a variety of ways, such as support for fact-finding or investigation missions and for treaty bodies and special procedures mandate-holders. In November 2006, a decision by the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General on the rule of law entrusted OHCHR with leading United Nations initiatives on transitional justice, both in the field and at the international level. In 2006 and 2007, OHCHR developed nine tools in the field of transitional justice, on issues such as truth commissions, prosecution initiatives, amnesties and vetting. My Office also plans a tenth tool, on the issue of preservation of national archives, and will give strong emphasis to its work on the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms as an essential component in the fight against impunity.

22. As the United Nations focal point for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, OHCHR has promoted recognition of the connection between human rights and poverty. My Office has deepened its expertise and committed its substantive support to human rights mechanisms and other bodies dealing with these issues, including the high-level task force and

open-ended working group on the right to development. OHCHR has also issued major publications on poverty and a human rights-based approach to development, and through advocacy, strengthened partnerships and capacity-building activities has helped to advance knowledge and capacities to deal with these issues.

23. Conscious that the fight against poverty and global inequities requires the concerted effort of many actors, OHCHR worked in 2007 with United Nations human rights mechanisms, such as the independent expert on extreme poverty; the independent expert on the effects of economic reform policies and foreign debt on the full enjoyment of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights; the ad hoc working group on the implementation of existing human rights norms and standards in the context of the fight against extreme poverty; and the Social Forum. My Office has collaborated with its United Nations sister agencies and programmes, as well as with States, to integrate human rights-based approaches into poverty reduction strategies and programmes. The presence of OHCHR on the ground has facilitated the adoption of human rights-based approaches in different programming and planning frameworks.

24. In order to fight discrimination, during the past biennium, OHCHR has provided advisory services in the drafting of anti-discrimination laws; produced guidelines to assist States in the development of national action plans; organized regional workshops; and engaged in inter-agency cooperation on anti-discrimination issues so as to strengthen national protection systems. My Office has also supported national institutions and civil society organizations and assisted in the empowerment of victims of discrimination.

25. In my Plan of Action, I advocated that the protection of human rights should be at the core of policies to address conflict, as when patterns of abuse are tackled effectively, escalation can often be halted. As human rights protection has become a major cross-cutting issue to be incorporated in humanitarian activities, OHCHR has become increasingly involved in the inter-agency response to humanitarian crises and the development of human rights training manuals and operational guidance. In addition, OHCHR has increased its collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and United Nations peace missions, including through supporting their human rights components, and contributed to the development of guidance on human rights for military and police components.

26. In my 2005 Plan of Action, I stated that human rights standards must underpin any meaningful conception of democracy, so that physical integrity is protected and freedoms of participation, elections, assembly, association, opinion, expression and information are guaranteed.

27. OHCHR has therefore carried out democracy-building and support activities under the various components of the United Nations human rights programme. Technical cooperation projects have been mainly geared towards enhancing the capacity of State institutions to promote democratic governance, notably through a strong and independent judiciary; effective parliament oversight mechanisms; independent and powerful national human rights institutions; and a vibrant civil society.

28. In addition, given the importance of constitution-making and constitutional reforms in the context of democratic transitions and peace building, OHCHR has worked with the rest of the United Nations system towards a coordinated approach to constitution-building, and this work will continue in 2008 and 2009. My Office is currently engaged in an exercise to further develop its relationships with key actors in and outside the United Nations system, with a view to strengthening its legal and human rights advisory capacities in this area and developing a publication on this subject.

IV. STRENGTHENING COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT

29. Throughout 2007, engagement at the country level remained at the core of OHCHR action, not only through the consolidation and establishment of field presences, but also through enhanced dialogue with and capacity-building of national counterparts. Dynamic partnerships within the United Nations system and interaction with regional organizations were also a priority of my Office to further strengthen country engagement. In addition, OHCHR continued to improve the capacity of its headquarters to support country engagement. In particular, its rapid response capacity was significantly strengthened, which enabled my Office to initiate and support various emergency or technical missions.

30. At the end of 2007, OHCHR was running and supporting a total of 47 field presences, including regional offices, country offices, human rights components in United Nations peace missions and human rights advisers in United Nations country teams.

31. By the end of 2007, my Office had 11 country offices at the country level,² including a new office in La Paz, which was established early in 2007. As envisaged in the Strategic Management Plan for 2006-2007, the offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (Belgrade) were closed in June 2007 while the office in Kosovo was strengthened in light of remaining human rights concerns and upcoming challenges.

32. I welcome the renewal of memorandums of understanding with OHCHR by the Government of Nepal³ in May 2007, Colombia in September 2007 and the Government of Cambodia in November 2007.⁴ The latter agreement, extending the mandate of OHCHR in Cambodia for 18 months, was reached on the understanding that negotiations aimed at concluding a standard agreement for future operations of the office would resume in 2008.

² Country offices in Angola, Bolivia, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nepal, Togo and Uganda, as well as presences in Kosovo (Serbia) and Palestine.

³ A report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation and activities of her office, including technical cooperation in Nepal, is being submitted to the Human Rights Council at its seventh session.

⁴ A report of the Secretary-General on the role and achievements of OHCHR in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights is being submitted to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/75).

33. By December 2007, OHCHR was also running nine regional human rights presences.⁵ This included a regional office for Central America, based in Panama and established early in 2007.⁶ In November 2007, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Government of Senegal for the establishment of a regional office for West Africa in Dakar.

34. It is expected that, in the course of 2008, three new regional offices will be established and operational - in Central, Asia (Bishkek), South-West Asia and North Africa - and a human rights training and documentation centre for South-West Asia and the Arab region.⁷ The setting up of such offices was foreseen in the Strategic Management Plan for 2006-2007 (except South-West Asia) but, as highlighted in my last report to the Human Rights Council, significant delays have been faced in this process. This was essentially due to the complexity of the required negotiations, including host country agreements and consultations regarding the selection of the seat.

35. I would also like to welcome two important achievements concerning dialogue and cooperation with countries where OHCHR does not have a country office: the conclusion of a framework agreement for cooperation with the Russian Federation; and the completion of several technical cooperation activities in China.

36. Thanks to its Peace Missions Support and Rapid Response Unit, established in 2006, the capacity of OHCHR to react promptly to critical human rights situations significantly increased in 2007, which allowed the taking of action and the provision of conceptual and operational support to a number of unforeseen human rights situations, including implementation of Council resolutions and decisions.

37. My Office was thus able to deploy missions and to mobilize surge capacity in support of OHCHR country or regional offices as well as United Nations country teams or peace operations in seven countries. For instance, early in 2007, in response to the declaration of a state of emergency in Guinea, OHCHR extended support to the United Nations country team and

⁵ Regional offices for Southern Africa (Pretoria); East Africa (Addis Ababa); South-East Asia (Bangkok); the Middle East (Beirut); the Pacific (Suva); Central America (Panama City); liaison office for Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago); regional representative for Central Asia (Bishkek); and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (Yaoundé).

⁶ It should be noted that, at the end of 2007, owing to budgetary constraints, OHCHR transferred from Santiago the mandate of the regional office for Latin America to Panama where, early in 2007, it had established a regional office for Central America. A liaison office has been maintained in Chile.

⁷ The establishment of the Qatar centre was requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/153, mandating the Centre to undertake training and documentation activities according to international standards and to support such efforts within the region by Governments, United Nations agencies and programmes, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations.

provided assistance to a civil society initiative aimed at documenting allegations of human rights violations committed in January 2007 to repress peaceful protests. Other rapid response activities included support for a forensic investigation in Afghanistan, assistance to the United Nations country team in Somalia, and surge capacity to support OHCHR offices to better respond to critical situations, in the context of the violence in the Terai region, in Nepal, in January 2007; and of the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian territories. In October 2007, the rapid response capacity also allowed OHCHR to monitor human rights in the context of parliamentary elections in Togo.

38. As in 2006, the Peace Missions Support and Rapid Response Unit also enabled OHCHR to support the prompt implementation of Council resolutions and decisions. Thus, it provided secretarial support to the high-level fact-finding mission to Beit Hanoun, which was reactivated in 2007,⁸ to the high-level mission/group of experts mandated by the Council to assess the situation of human rights in Darfur,⁹ and assisted the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar following a special session of the Council in October 2007. The Council had requested the Special Rapporteur to assess the human rights situation in Myanmar in relation to the crackdown on the protests of August and September 2007.¹⁰

39. In 2007, my Office advised the following Member States on the establishment and responsibilities of national human rights institutions: Azerbaijan, Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Lesotho, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Uganda and Timor-Leste. In its work on and with national human rights institutions, OHCHR frequently cooperated with regional networks of national institutions and with United Nations partners, including the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

40. Furthermore, my Office provided secretarial support to the meetings of the Accreditation Subcommittee of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, held in April and October 2007. OHCHR also

⁸ The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on Israeli incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory on 15 November 2006 (S-3/1) at a special session. While the secretariat of the high-level fact-finding mission has been activated three times upon the request of the Council - most recently in December 2007 - the necessary travel clearances have not been granted by the Israeli authorities.

⁹ The Council adopted a decision to dispatch a high-level mission to assess the human rights situation in Darfur on 13 December 2006 (S-4/101) as a result of a special session on Darfur. Its mandate was discontinued at the sixth regular session of the Council, in December 2007.

¹⁰ The Council adopted a resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar on 2 October 2007 at a special session (S-5/1), which led to the first country visit by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar since 2003. The Special Rapporteur submitted his report to the Council at its sixth session, in December 2007.

supported and facilitated the involvement of national human rights institutions in the Council, the human rights treaty monitoring bodies and the special procedures. OHCHR has developed a fellowship programme which will start in 2008 and whereby the staff member of a “A” status national institution will be selected to work in the National Institutions Unit of OHCHR for six months, in order to gain knowledge of and experience with the United Nations human rights system.

41. In 2007, I attended meetings in and conducted visits to Afghanistan, Brazil, Burundi, Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Japan, Nepal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and the United States of America.

42. In France, Ireland and the United States, I discussed human rights in the context of counter-terrorism, migration and discrimination. In April, I addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the state of human rights in Europe, focusing on issues such as migration. It should be underlined that my Office is an active member of the Global Migration Group, which promotes a rights-based approach to migration.

43. As in previous missions, in most countries I visited, I insisted on the need for accountability with a view to putting an end to impunity for all forms of human rights violations, past and present. The fight against impunity remains at the heart of the work of OHCHR in Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Nepal, Togo, Uganda, Kosovo and Palestine.

44. Closely interconnected with the issue of impunity, the independence of the judiciary has also been an overarching concern in most missions which I undertook in 2007. Other issues which I focused on during my visits included the situation of human rights defenders and of civil society in general, women’s rights, as well as violations of economic, social and cultural rights.

45. In 2007, OHCHR substantively continued to assist the work of human rights components of 17 peace missions. In particular, OHCHR further stepped up its cooperation with the peace missions of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs and other relevant counterparts to ensure further implementation of the Secretary-General’s decision on human rights in integrated missions, adopted in October 2005. Significant progress was achieved in 2007 regarding the integration of human rights in peace missions, including more public human rights reports.

46. Increased cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the newly established Department of Field Support led to OHCHR participation in all technical assessment missions and other significant mission planning activities conducted in 2007. As a result, well-tailored human rights components will be part of the new joint United Nations/African Union hybrid mission in Darfur as well as of a new mission to be established at the border with Darfur in Chad and the Central African Republic. In addition, the work of the human rights components of the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) and the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) will be redefined to adjust to the changing situation on the ground. Cooperation between OHCHR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations also resulted in the revision of mandates in UNOCI,

the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and UNIOSIL, and contributed to the ongoing process of analysis on the role of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia.

47. In 2007, my Office intensified its involvement with the work of the humanitarian community, particularly through the Geneva-based inter-agency humanitarian settings. In particular, OHCHR now chairs the newly established Reference Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, which is expected to facilitate the integration of a human rights-based approach in humanitarian activities, include a human rights perspective to the advocacy initiatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and increase the level of awareness and information-sharing about human rights initiatives with relevance to humanitarian action. OHCHR actively contributes to mainstreaming human rights in humanitarian programming, mainly through the Global Protection Cluster Working Group which it is co-leading, and the work on the steering committee of the protection capacity programme. OHCHR has also actively been involved in the work of the Global Protection Cluster and began providing support and information to human rights field presences as the roll-out of the cluster approach continued beyond the initial pilot phase.

48. The mainstreaming of human rights in the work of the United Nations system at the country level remains a priority for OHCHR. To that end, efforts continued to further strengthen cooperation with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. In this context, as at December 2007, OHCHR had international human rights advisers in Ecuador, Georgia (covering Armenia and Azerbaijan), Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia. Human rights advisers were deployed in Rwanda, Indonesia, Maldives and Papua New Guinea in the course of 2007 under Action 2 funds. A national adviser was appointed within the United Nations country teams in Skopje and Belgrade.

49. Closer interaction with regional organizations is of great importance, particularly when engaging with countries without an OHCHR presence. The Office extensively interacted with the regional mechanisms of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, aiming at strengthening cooperation in areas of mutual interest and activities. With similar objectives, interaction was enhanced with the Inter-American System, particularly with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. In Africa, OHCHR has continued its engagement with regional organizations, inter alia, by attending the session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the annual summit of Heads of African States. Moreover, in the framework of the 10-year capacity-building programme for the African Union, OHCHR organized a consultative meeting to identify priorities for African Union-United Nations cooperation in the field of human rights, justice and reconciliation for the period 2008-2009. OHCHR also supported activities of the Economic Commission for Africa, such as the first African Civil Society Forum on the Millennium Development Goals and the African Human Rights and Governance Report. In the Asia and Pacific region, OHCHR supported the fourteenth Annual Workshop on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region in Bali, Indonesia, in July, and provided technical support in efforts to establish subregional human rights arrangements in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Pacific. OHCHR also stepped up interaction with the League of Arab States to explore future areas of cooperation.

V. SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

50. A year-long United Nations system-wide human rights advocacy campaign, launched on Human Rights Day 2007, is the focus of OHCHR efforts to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. OHCHR spearheaded a strategy to mark the historic milestone, resulting in the Secretary-General's initiative on the anniversary advocacy campaign by all of the United Nations family leading up to the anniversary date on 10 December 2008.

51. The anniversary year will see the United Nations and its partners advocate specific areas of human rights that are most pertinent to their work under the overarching message "Dignity and justice for all of us". The overarching theme and messages OHCHR has developed for the anniversary reinforce the vision of the Declaration as a universal commitment to dignity and justice. Non-discrimination, equality, fairness and universality are core to the values enshrined in the Declaration, which was drafted and adopted by representatives of all regions and legal traditions.

52. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an enduring and vibrant document. It has inspired more than 80 international human rights treaties and declarations, a great number of regional human rights conventions, domestic human rights bills and constitutional provisions, which together constitute a comprehensive legally binding system for the promotion and protection of human rights.

53. The objectives of the campaign are threefold. The first is to empower people all over the world to promote and realize their rights through raising public human rights awareness, promoting national ownership and wider participation in the anniversary celebration at the international, regional and country levels. The second objective is to establish and promote the vision of the High Commissioner of human rights in the context of the anniversary and beyond as a universal value and a core purpose of the United Nations. The third objective is to highlight United Nations-wide achievements in mainstreaming human rights and to advocate further system-wide coherence on human rights under the current reform focus.

54. The above objectives must be viewed within the bigger picture of ongoing United Nations reform endeavours. Human rights mainstreaming has been central to United Nations reform efforts since 1997, and important progress has been made in many agencies and areas of work across the system. This is particularly important in the light of the current emphasis on system-wide coherence, which would require strengthened linkages between the normative work of the United Nations and its operational activities at the country level.

55. National ownership and local participation are central to the campaign. I have called on all national actors, Governments, civil society and human rights institutions to take every opportunity during the year-long commemoration campaign to reaffirm their commitment to the values and principles of the Declaration. To facilitate the participation of a wide range of local and international partners, the Communications Section of OHCHR has issued a monthly newsletter entitled *Info60*, distributed since September 2007.

56. The Secretary-General launched the campaign at the OHCHR regional office in Bangkok, where he inaugurated a Human Rights Day exhibition. An official event was held in Geneva, which coincided with the first day of the resumed sixth session of the Human Rights Council. The Secretary-General, via video message, myself, representatives of Member States, special procedures, treaty bodies, national human rights institutions and civil society all spoke on the launch and the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Celebrations were also held on 10 December across the world to mark Human Rights Day and launch the year-long campaign. Many partners, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, are planning commemorative activities throughout the anniversary year until December 2008.

VI. DURBAN REVIEW PROCESS

57. On 8 September 2001, Member States adopted by consensus the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. As underlined by victims of racism, including persons of African descent, indigenous peoples, migrants and minorities, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is an historic document because it represents a comprehensive and action-orientated framework to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

58. It is recognized that no country is free from racism and that victims should benefit from effective remedies and redress through concrete legislative, administrative, preventive and judicial measures. My Office, through the Anti-Discrimination Unit, is already providing assistance to Member States and to groups of victims along those lines.

59. My Office has also strongly supported the mechanisms put in place to follow up the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Race, religion and ethnicity are important root causes of ongoing violent conflicts in different parts of the world. In recent months, several countries have been confronted with situations of extreme violence, some linked to the question of participation in democratic structures and multiculturalism, owing to the non-acceptance of the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of all human rights.

60. Last year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 61/149 for the convening of a review conference to look at the progress of implementation of the commitments made in Durban. The responsibility of organizing this conference was given to the Human Rights Council. The Assembly resolution was followed by resolution 3/2 of the Council, which set up a preparatory committee to prepare the issues for discussion at the main review conference.

61. The first organizational session of the Preparatory Committee was held in August. It adopted by consensus 15 decisions on a variety of issues, including the objectives of the Durban Review Conference. That meeting was preceded by 19 meetings of the Bureau, all fully serviced by the Anti-Discrimination Unit.

62. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is a far-reaching document addressing a wide range of relevant issues. Given that the potential of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action has not yet been fully explored, the Durban Review Conference in 2009 is an opportunity for the international community to take stock of what has been done and to review the obstacles that have impeded significant progress in the eradication of racism, racial

discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Durban Review Conference should be a platform to take stock of the best and most effective examples and lessons learned from the fight against racism and to move the anti-discrimination agenda forward.

63. The preparatory process for the Durban Review Conference should, therefore, be comprehensive, taking into account the commitments and the context affecting their implementation at the national, regional and international levels. It should be participatory by involving all stakeholders, including victims, and should be result-oriented, aiming at setting concrete targets to be achieved within a clear time frame. The participatory and inclusive preparation of the Conference on the review of challenges and progress in the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in the Americas region is a good example to be followed. My Office supported this Conference at the request of the Governments of Brazil and Chile and I hope that it can serve as a model for other regions.

VII. SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

64. The human rights treaty body framework was strengthened in 2007 by the operationalization of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/199 and entered into force on 22 June 2006. As at 9 January 2008, 34 States had ratified the Optional Protocol.¹¹

65. The first 10¹² members of the Subcommittee were elected on 18 December 2006, and its first session was convened in February 2007. It met again in June and November 2007, and during the latter session on 20 November 2007, it met jointly with the Committee against Torture.

66. The Subcommittee is mandated to conduct visits to places where persons are deprived of their liberty in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and to interact with national preventive mechanisms. The Subcommittee's initial country visits, to Mauritius and Maldives, were made in October and December 2007; four further visits are planned for 2008.

67. The Optional Protocol creates a two-pillar system, at the international and national levels, directed at preventing torture and other forms of ill-treatment in all places of detention. At the national level, within one year of ratification or accession, States parties must have in place one

¹¹ Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Honduras, Liberia, Lichtenstein, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay.

¹² When 50 States ratify or accede to the Optional Protocol, membership of the Subcommittee on Prevention will increase to 25.

or several national preventive mechanisms. No particular type of national mechanism is specified, therefore human rights commissions, ombudsmen, parliamentary commissions or non-governmental organizations could be designated to carry out this function. States parties must ensure that these national bodies function without any interference from the State authorities.

68. The Optional Protocol provides for the setting up of a special fund, to help finance the implementation of the recommendations made by the Subcommittee after a visit to a State party, as well as education programmes of national preventive measures. The special fund, which may be financed through voluntary contributions made by Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities, was created in 2007.

69. About 350 participants from a number of countries participated in training activities organized by the Treaties and Council Branch. Staff members of the Branch participated in a number of training activities organized by the Capacity-Building and Field Operations Branch, OHCHR field presences or external partners such as the Organisation internationale de la francophonie and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and national human rights institutions. A memorandum of understanding between the Francophonie and OHCHR, which envisages training courses on treaty body and Human Rights Council activities, was concluded in September 2007, and a training course on the modalities of universal periodic review was held in Rabat on 2 and 3 February 2008. A workshop for parliamentarians on the implementation of treaty body recommendations, co-organized by IPU and OHCHR, was held in Ouagadougou from 30 September to 2 October 2007. Follow-up workshops are envisaged for the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Mauritania in 2008.

70. A workshop to encourage engagement with the treaty bodies for representatives of non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions and the media in Guyana, Indonesia and the Philippines was organized in Geneva, in November 2007, and was preceded by national preparatory workshops in the three countries. Follow-up workshops will be organized in all three countries in 2008.

71. A subregional workshop was organized in November 2007 in Ouagadougou, in cooperation with Plan International, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization, on the implementation of recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A similar regional workshop on the implementation of recommendations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was held in Bishkek. These workshops create a momentum among a number of national actors to raise the profile of treaty body procedures and in particular the implementation of the recommendations at the national level.

72. More than 6,000 copies of a DVD training tool on the work of the treaty bodies have now been distributed to Governments, non-governmental organizations, OHCHR field presences, United Nations entities and others, and its revision and further development in Arabic, Chinese and Russian has begun. The DVD, which presents the treaty implementation and reporting procedures in a user-friendly and illustrative manner for use by the different civil society actors working at the national level, is used in OHCHR training activities and by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

73. In August 2007, OHCHR took over the Universal Human Rights Index project, which compiles observations and recommendations of United Nations human rights treaty bodies and rapporteurs, that had been developed by the Government of Switzerland. Presentations of the Index have been held for treaty bodies and staff of the Office, and information sessions on its utilization in the framework of the universal periodic review were also organized in Geneva for French-speaking permanent missions in November and December 2007 by the Treaties and Council Branch jointly with the Organisation internationale de la francophonie. A CD-Rom providing the information contained on the website is being finalized and will be distributed soon to Governments, non-governmental organizations, field presences, United Nations entities and others, together with a promotional booklet published in the six official languages of the United Nations.

74. As is well known, the momentum for reform has accelerated since the Secretary-General's 2002 proposals, by which he urged the adoption of harmonized working methods to create a predictable system for States and other stakeholders, and the introduction of streamlined reporting requirements, possibly via a single report on implementation of all obligations a State had accepted which would be submitted to all treaty bodies. The need to streamline and strengthen the treaty body system, including through the implementation of harmonized guidelines on reporting to all treaty bodies so that they could operate as a unified system was re-emphasized by the Secretary-General in his 2005 report "In Larger Freedom" (A/59/2005). In my Plan of Action, released in May 2005, I described the human rights treaty system as one of the great achievements of the United Nations, but predicted that its inefficiencies would worsen, particularly as progress towards universal ratification and timely reporting continues to be made.

75. In February 2006, I put forward my concept paper, including the proposal for a unified standing treaty body (HRI/MC/2006/2). The concept paper has stimulated debate among States parties, treaty body members, United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations, academics and others, including at the brainstorming meeting held in July 2006 in Liechtenstein (Malbun II). A compilation of views on the proposal formulated since the release of the concept paper is kept updated by OHCHR, while the 2007 special issue of the *Human Rights Law Review* on reform of the United Nations human rights machinery includes four articles which directly address the proposal and the concept paper.

76. All opinions on my proposal acknowledge the challenges facing the treaty body system, and a number cite the concept paper as providing an accurate account of these. Several welcome the concept paper as an important contribution to thinking about ways to strengthen the effectiveness of the treaty monitoring system and deserving of full analysis and consideration. Most suggest that the proposal does not respond to the challenges to the system and raises legal and political problems that cannot be solved in the short or medium term. Many raise concerns that the establishment of a unified standing treaty body could lead to a lack of attention to specific rights or the rights of specific groups. Some express concern at the risk that implementation of the proposal might lead to the loss of the specific identity of individual committees.

77. In response to the proposal, other reform options have been put forward by the treaty bodies, and a working group on harmonization composed of treaty body representatives met twice to discuss these proposals as well as the elements of the concept paper relating to

harmonization of working methods and streamlined reporting guidelines. The proposals of the working group on harmonization were in turn considered at the sixth inter-committee meeting and the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons in June 2007. Participants in the meetings recognized the need to improve and harmonize further the working methods of the human rights treaty bodies and considered it appropriate that the inter-committee meeting be held twice annually.

78. Revised guidelines for a common core document to be submitted to all human rights treaty bodies accompanied by the relevant treaty-specific report were accepted at the fifth inter-committee meeting and the eighteenth meeting of chairpersons; with the agreement of the sixth inter-committee meeting and the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons, a note verbale was sent to all States parties recommending their use. Several States have submitted common core documents and others are preparing such a document. As noted above, Switzerland has developed an electronic tool (the Index) based on the guidelines to assist in streamlined reporting. The tool is being used in workshops on reporting to human rights treaty bodies. In addition, the treaty bodies have begun the task of harmonizing and simplifying their own guidelines so that they are in line with those for the common core document, with one treaty body having finalized its guidelines and others being well advanced in this task. Reporting workshops in which the Treaties and Council Branch participated in 2007 prioritized the guidelines on the common core document to address the need to streamline the treaty body system, and the preparation of treaty-specific reports. Harmonization of the follow-up activities of treaty bodies is also proceeding, including in the context of follow-up to views on individual complaints.

79. A working group consisting of representatives of seven treaty bodies developed a common approach to reservations to human rights treaties and discussed the issue with the International Law Commission at a special seminar in May 2007. In this context, it should be noted that the responsibility for the support for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was transferred to my Office in 2007 and its first Geneva session was held in January 2008.

80. Participants in the sixth inter-committee meeting held discussions with the bureau of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on interaction between national human rights institutions and treaty bodies and recommended that the conclusions of the round table on the role of national human rights institutions in the treaty reporting process, held in Berlin, in November 2006, should form the basis for the discussion on the matter in future harmonization meetings of the treaty bodies.

81. At the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons, discussions were held on the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council. The chairpersons underlined the complementary and mutually reinforcing nature of the treaty body system and the future review and emphasized the importance of a continuing dialogue on that matter. They appreciated that the findings and recommendations of treaty bodies would form part of the basis of the review, highlighted the role of the concluding observations in that regard and further recognized the need for developing effective cooperation between the treaty bodies and the Council. The joint meeting with special procedures mandate-holders in June 2007 provided a further opportunity to exchange views on the above-mentioned issues.

VIII. CONCLUSION

82. As the report outlines, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights supported the Human Rights Council in its institution-building process and the preparations for the universal periodic review are well under way. The Office has also made important advances in implementing its Strategic Management Plan for 2006-2007 and prepared the Plan for 2008-2009 in line with the priorities of the Plan of Action. Continued country engagement, the preparations for the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the renewed commitment to the fight against racism in the form of the Durban Review Conference have been highlighted as part of my Office's efforts to address the human rights challenges before us and to affirm the universality and indivisibility of human rights. The results of the discussion of the present report in the Council are not only welcome, but will help OHCHR to implement these mandates effectively.
