

PLAN OF ACTION SUBMITTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS*

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We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.
(A/59/2005, paragraph 17)

The present plan of action, which was called for by the Secretary-General in his report entitled “In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all” (A/59/2005), presents a strategic vision for the future direction of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It builds on his assertion, shared by many, that much more needs to be done by the international community to address today’s threats to human rights and that OHCHR must be considerably better resourced to play its central role in meeting this challenge.

The plan is anchored in the mandate given to the High Commissioner to promote and protect the effective enjoyment by all of all human rights and it seeks, in particular, to remedy longstanding shortcomings in the mandated task to “... play an active role in removing the current obstacles and in meeting the challenges to the full realization of all human rights and in preventing the continuation of human rights violations throughout the world ...” (see General Assembly Resolution 48/141, paragraph 4.f).

The historic legacy of the United Nations human rights programme is

*This is a summary of the plan of action drawn up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, included as an annex to the UN Secretary-General Report “In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all” submitted to the 59th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UN A/59/2005/Add.3, May 26 2005). The complete version is available at <www.ohchr.org>.

found especially in the wide-ranging body of human rights norms and standards produced in the past 60 years. But putting new resources and capacities to work in response to the human rights problems posed today by poverty, discrimination, conflict, impunity, democratic deficits and institutional weaknesses will necessitate a heightened focus on implementation.

Thus, the present plan envisages attention to a range of “implementation gaps” on the ground, including those related to knowledge, capacity, commitment and security. Helping to close those gaps and thereby protecting people and helping to empower them to realize their rights must be seen as the essential mission of the United Nations human rights office.

To these ends, the plan sets forth action points in five areas:

- a. Greater country engagement through an expansion of geographic desks, increased deployment of human rights staff to countries and regions, the establishment of standing capacities for rapid deployment, investigations, field support, human rights capacity-building, advice and assistance, and work on transitional justice and the rule of law.
- b. An enhanced human rights leadership role for the High Commissioner, including through greater interaction with relevant United Nations bodies and actors and regular system-wide human rights consultations, a reinforced New York presence, an annual thematic human rights report, a global campaign for human rights and more involvement in efforts to advance poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals.
- c. Closer partnerships with civil society and United Nations agencies through the establishment of a civil society support function, support for human rights defenders, stepped up commitment to Action 2 activities for rights-based approaches and national protection systems and human rights guidance to the resident coordinator system.*
- d. More synergy in the relationship between OHCHR and the various United Nations human rights bodies, an intergovernmental meeting to consider options for a unified standing human rights treaty body, including consideration of the possible relocation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to Geneva and a review of the special procedures.
- e. Strengthened management and planning for OHCHR through the establishment of a policy and planning unit, significantly increased staffing levels, staff diversity initiatives, updated staff training, a staff field rotation policy and new administrative procedures.

* Action 2 is a global programme designed to strengthen the capacity of UN country teams to support the efforts of Member States, at their request, in strengthening their national human rights promotion and protection systems. [EN]

While the present plan of action focuses on the work of OHCHR, it is written against a backdrop of discussion on the future of the Commission on Human Rights, in the context of the Secretary-General's call for the Commission to be replaced by an upgraded Human Rights Council. OHCHR strongly supports the proposal that country scrutiny be exercised through an effective, fair and transparent system of peer review that should be built on the principle of universal scrutiny. OHCHR stands ready to contribute to discussions as to how best this might be achieved.

The present plan carries with it considerable consequences – strategic, operational and material. Consolidated action points are provided in section V for ease of reference.

The implementation of aspects of the plan can begin in the coming months through more effective prioritization of existing resources and improved planning and policy development so that all components of OHCHR can better work towards bridging implementation gaps, at the country-level, in a coordinated and sustained manner.

However, to be implemented in full the plan requires that OHCHR receive considerably more resources, otherwise it will remain merely aspirational. At present, the human rights program receives only 1.8 per cent of the United Nations budget. The bulk of OHCHR resources, including for key activities requested by United Nations bodies, are therefore in the form of extrabudgetary contributions. The total annual budget of OHCHR is US\$86.4 million. We estimate that in order to address the shortcomings identified in the Secretary-General's report and make a serious effort to step up the work of the Office along the lines suggested in the present plan of action, OHCHR will need to double its overall resources over the next five to six years.