



Contribution of legal professions to the work of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review

Date: 10 July 2023, 53rd session of the HCR

Time: 14:00-15:00

Location: Palais des Nations (Room XXV), and online

(<https://ungeneva-vc.webex.com/ungeneva-vc/j.php?MTID=m7321efeeae94fe3325ccc5683f51cdece>)

Organiser: the UPR Group of Friends / Argentina, Armenia, Fiji, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa

Co-Organizers: UPR Info, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, International Development Law Organization

Context

State duty to protect requires States to take appropriate steps to prevent, investigate, punish, and redress human rights violations through effective policies, legislation, regulations, and adjudication.

Legal professionals, including defense lawyers, bar associations and judges, can play a critical role in applying international standards at the national level. Through their work, they can ensure implementation of the commitments generated by international human rights mechanisms, including the recommendations supported by UN Member States in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Judges and lawyers contribute to prevent human rights violations and help ensuring accountability for such violations. They achieve this by ensuring the implementation of international human rights commitments within their domestic legal systems, effectively implementing national legislation, promoting relevant reforms, facilitating access to justice, prosecution, and reparation for human rights violations. They are essential actors in upholding the rule of law.

The international community recognizes the UPR as an important international instrument to strengthen the rule of law on the ground. The UPR contributes to promoting the rule of law within UN Member States by fostering the development of legal reforms consistent with international standards. About 8% of UPR recommendations refer to the independence of the judiciary and the protection of defence lawyers. In addition, many of the UPR recommendations address access to justice issues and remedies, requiring, therefore, the necessary involvement of legal professionals. The participation and awareness of legal professionals can further be enhanced to ensure their full engagement and contribution in the UPR process.

Objectives

The side event at the 53rd HRC session aims at understanding the role that bar associations and judges can play and to share good practices of their engagement with human rights mechanisms. Furthermore, the event aims at identifying additional ways to strengthen the contribution of legal professionals to the promotion and protection of human rights through the UPR. The meeting will be an opportunity to hear about inspiring examples of cooperation between legal professionals, civil society and national human rights institutions.



The side event will represent an opportunity for UPR stakeholders to reflect on how the HRC could take further steps to engage with legal professionals and which could be strategic entry points. The side event will also provide an opportunity to understand how legal professionals can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 16.3 "ensure equal access to justice for all", including by strengthening the links between UPR recommendations (SDG 16.3).

The discussion will address the following questions:

- What is the role of legal professionals and why they are important for the successful implementation of the UPR recommendations in member states?
- How legal professionals can better use the UPR as an important methodological and interpretive tool for protecting human rights?
- How can UN members States promote the role of legal professionals in the UPR process?

Format

This one-hour panel discussion is open to representatives from Member States, experts, and interested civil society organizations.

Speakers are invited to prepare 8-minute interventions. A moderated questions and answer period will follow.

Moderator: Ms. Mona M'Bikay, Executive Director, UPR Info

Opening Remarks:

H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas, Chair of the UPR Group of Friends, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Argentina

Panellists

- Professor Jon Yorke, Professor of Human Rights and Director of the Centre for Human Rights at Birmingham City University, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Francesca Restifo, Senior Human Rights Lawyer, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (TBC)
- Karen S. Gomez-Dumpit, Chairperson of the Philippine Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism and Former Commissioner of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines

Closing remarks

- Mark Cassayre, Permanent Observer of the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) to the UNOG