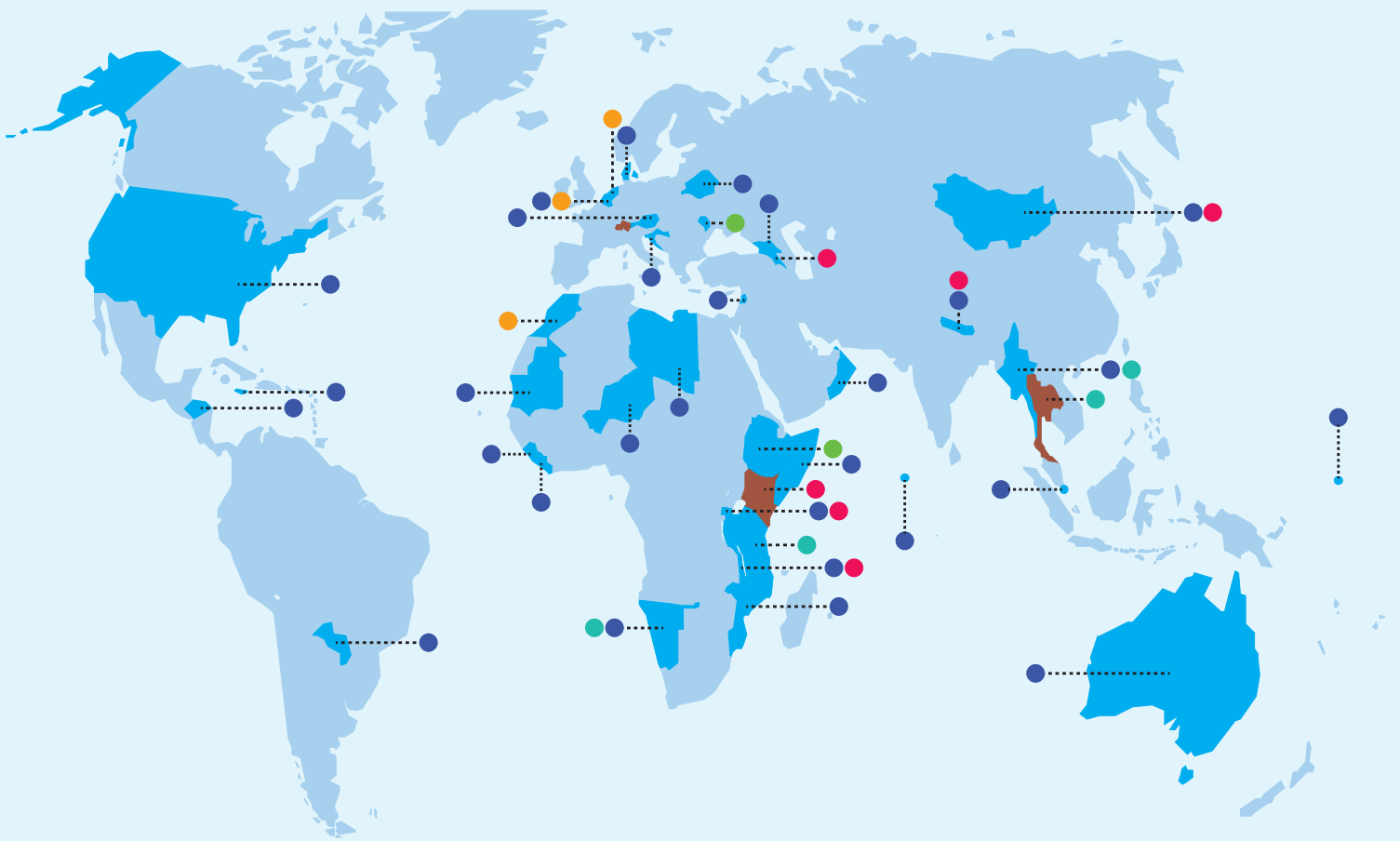


ANNUAL REPORT

2015



UPR
INFO



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Contact

UPR Info is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland. It aims to raise awareness of the Universal Periodic Review process and to provide capacity-building tools to all stakeholders, such as UN Member States, civil society, media, and academics.

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Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Abbreviations | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| 1. A year at the UPR | 7 |
| 2. 2015: Facts and Figures | 10 |
| 3. Programmes | 12 |
| 3.1 Pre-sessions | 12 |
| 3.2 Supporting CSO participation at the UPR | 13 |
| 3.3 Follow-up Programme | 15 |
| 3.4 Enhancing States' capacities | 16 |
| 3.5 Strengthening the UPR | 18 |
| 4. Regional Offices | 20 |
| 5. Organisation | 24 |
| 6. Secretariat | 25 |
| 7. Finance | 26 |
| 8. Looking forward: Third UPR cycle and beyond | 28 |





Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|---|
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| NHRI | National human rights institution |
| OHCHR | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| RS | Recommending State |
| SuR | State under Review |
| UN | United Nations |
| UPR | Universal Periodic Review |



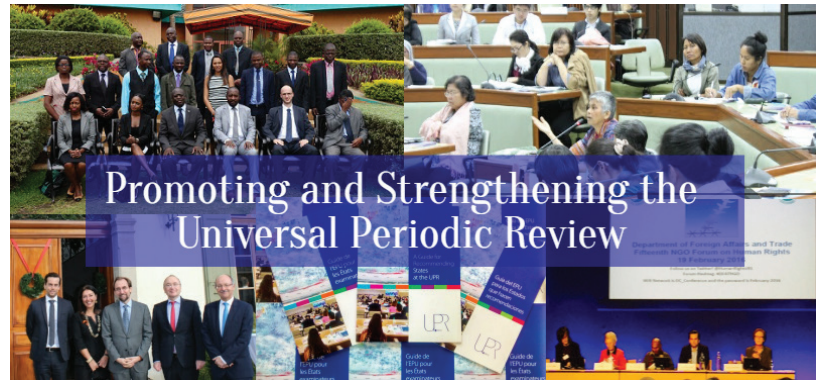


Introduction

- ✓ 2015 achievement: *UPR Info* has extended the international support it offers to CSOs, NHRIs, and States by opening regional offices in Thailand and Kenya.
- ✓ 2015 achievement: *UPR Info* provided States with concise and practical guide-lines on how to effectively engage with the UPR through its publication *A Guide for Recommending States* (available in English, French and Spanish)

Evolution, expansion and engagement were three defining features of *UPR Info* in 2015. Both in Geneva and through our newly-opened regional offices, *UPR Info* supported civil society and State engagement in the process. CSOs were brought together, often for the first time, during several of the trainings provided by *UPR Info*. The collaborative and collective spirit of connecting national groups strengthened their overall impact in the UPR, while ensuring national ownership of national issues. From the States' perspective, *UPR Info* boosted their technical knowledge of the mechanism by hosting an international seminar and launching a guide specifically for Recommending States.

Venturing beyond its Geneva foundations, two new offices were opened in Thailand and Kenya, in order to increase regional support and facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement with the UPR on the ground. Since their establishment, *UPR Info* Asia and *UPR Info* Africa have been instrumental in bringing together civil society organisations to help strengthen their collective voices. In this context, *UPR Info* Asia held the first in-country Pre-sessions in advance of the UPR of Myanmar, in both Yangon, Myanmar, and Bangkok, Thailand. These events offered a unique opportunity for local and national civil society to raise its concerns,



provide first-hand information and data from the ground, as well as evidence-based solutions through offering Recommending States precise and concrete UPR recommendations. The aims of the *UPR Info* Pre-Sessions held at the country level were to brief the local media and engage in dialogue with diplomats on pressing human rights issues. The same format will follow in 2016, with in-country and regional Pre-sessions for Thailand, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda, led by our Asia and Africa offices respectively. *UPR Info* Asia also held in Thailand its very first national consultation between the government and civil society.

The Geneva-based Pre-sessions had a strong year of engagement and participation from local and national CSOs and delegates of the Permanent Missions. In total, *UPR Info* organised three rounds of Pre-sessions on 29 States. These international human rights conferences offered a unique advocacy platform for 93 local and national CSOs, 11 national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and 35 international CSOs to present key insights into the human rights situation on the ground. The speakers were also able to use the occasion of the Pre-sessions to conduct extensive bilateral lobbying activities, engaging with the diplomatic representations to further champion their issues. In conjunction with the Pre-sessions,



six countries also formed part of the *UPR Info* Follow-up Programme: Armenia, Kenya, Malawi, Mongolia, Nepal, and Rwanda. This Programme focuses on the implementation of recommendations after the UPR, bringing together civil society and State actors for multistakeholder cooperation.

In addition to the in-country and Geneva Pre-sessions, 2015 also saw the three *UPR Info* offices provide several capacity building and training workshops to different stakeholders including national human rights institutions, grass-roots CSOs, media, and government officials from numerous countries and forums all over the world. Our Follow-up Programme supported UPR implementation strategies in Armenia, Kenya, Mongolia, Malawi, Nepal, and Rwanda. Outside of the Follow-up Programme, *UPR Info* also gave UPR trainings to a variety of State and civil society actors in Belgium, Ethiopia, the Netherlands, Moldova, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, and Tanzania.

Complementing its engagement with civil society, *UPR Info* also worked closely with States to maximise their role and impact in the UPR process. During several *UPR Info* in-country and Geneva-based trainings throughout the year, diplomats, line ministries and other government actors were provided with UPR support, including on how to implement and monitor recommendations. *UPR Info* also

published in September 2015 *A Guide for Recommending States*, which provides Permanent Missions and Ministries of Foreign Affairs with useful tools and resources on how to participate in the UPR. The publication further illustrates best practices in terms of drafting specific and action-oriented recommendations, and how States can follow up on the implementation of recommendations from one UPR cycle to another. The Guide was followed in October by *UPR Info*'s second seminar for Recommending States, attended by over 50 Permanent Missions in Geneva. The attendance and engagement of States throughout the course of the UPR activities reflects their willingness to comply with their international human rights obligations.

Finally, 2015 saw *UPR Info* welcome a new President to the organisation. The election of Mr Miloon Kothari, former UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, demonstrates our commitment to offer tailor-made support to CSOs on the ground. 2015 offered many opportunities for Mr Kothari's involvement in *UPR Info*'s activities, and marks the beginning of fruitful cooperation.

The impact of *UPR Info* has definitely moved beyond Geneva's corridors. We look forward to engaging with many new actors and countries in the year to come.

Roland Chauville
Executive Director

Miloon Kothari
President



1. A year at the UPR

- ✓ 2015 achievement: We advocated in 2015 for the protection of civil society actors engaging in the UPR from acts of intimidation and reprisals

2015 brought with it a variety of opportunities and obstacles to the UPR. As a consequence of budget cuts to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a new procedure was introduced during the 21st UPR session for the distribution of the draft UPR Working Group reports. The draft reports are now released in two phases. A first version of the draft report, released 48 hours after the review, includes only the recommendations. A second version is released one week later and contains the recommendations as well as the summary of the statements made during the review.

At the 28th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in March 2015, thought-provoking discussions took place during the General Debate of the UPR mechanism (Item 6). Several States and CSOs took the floor to underline the current challenges of the UPR such as the need to strengthen the UN Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance provided by the OHCHR and the necessity to encourage States to submit mid-term reports. In addition, fifty States, led by Morocco and the United Kingdom, raised concern about the increasingly high number of UPR recommendations arguing that it has become difficult for the SuR to successfully manage the implementation process. The co-sponsoring States called for an upper limit of two recommendations per Recommending State (RS). *UPR Info*, on behalf of 47 CSOs, suggested that limiting the number of recommendations would lead to important issues being left aside. Both sides nonetheless agreed that there is an urgent



Luncheon on the effectiveness of the UPR, November 2015

need to improve the quality of UPR recommendations. In this context, Paraguay emphasised the need to reiterate recommendations made in previous reviews when they have not been fully implemented. Paraguay's statement stressed that more efforts should be made, also by the RS, to improve follow-up on the recommendations as the credibility of the UPR will depend largely on the advancement made at the national level.

During the Council's June session, HRC President, Mr. Joachim Rucker, expressed serious concern over reprisals against civil society human rights groups. His comments implicitly referred to a situation regarding the Maldives' second-cycle UPR. On 16 June 2015, the Supreme Court of the Maldives passed judgment on a written submission by the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) – the State's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) – which it found to be "unlawful".

The grave issue of reprisals was raised again at the 30th Session of the Human Rights Council in September 2015. During its oral statement, *UPR Info* brought the Council's attention to the ongoing, concerning reality of reprisals that CSOs and individuals are now facing as a result



of their involvement with the UPR. *UPR Info* reiterated the need for “all States to uphold their promises and facilitate and support CSO engagement in the UPR process”, sentiments echoed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, in his annual report.

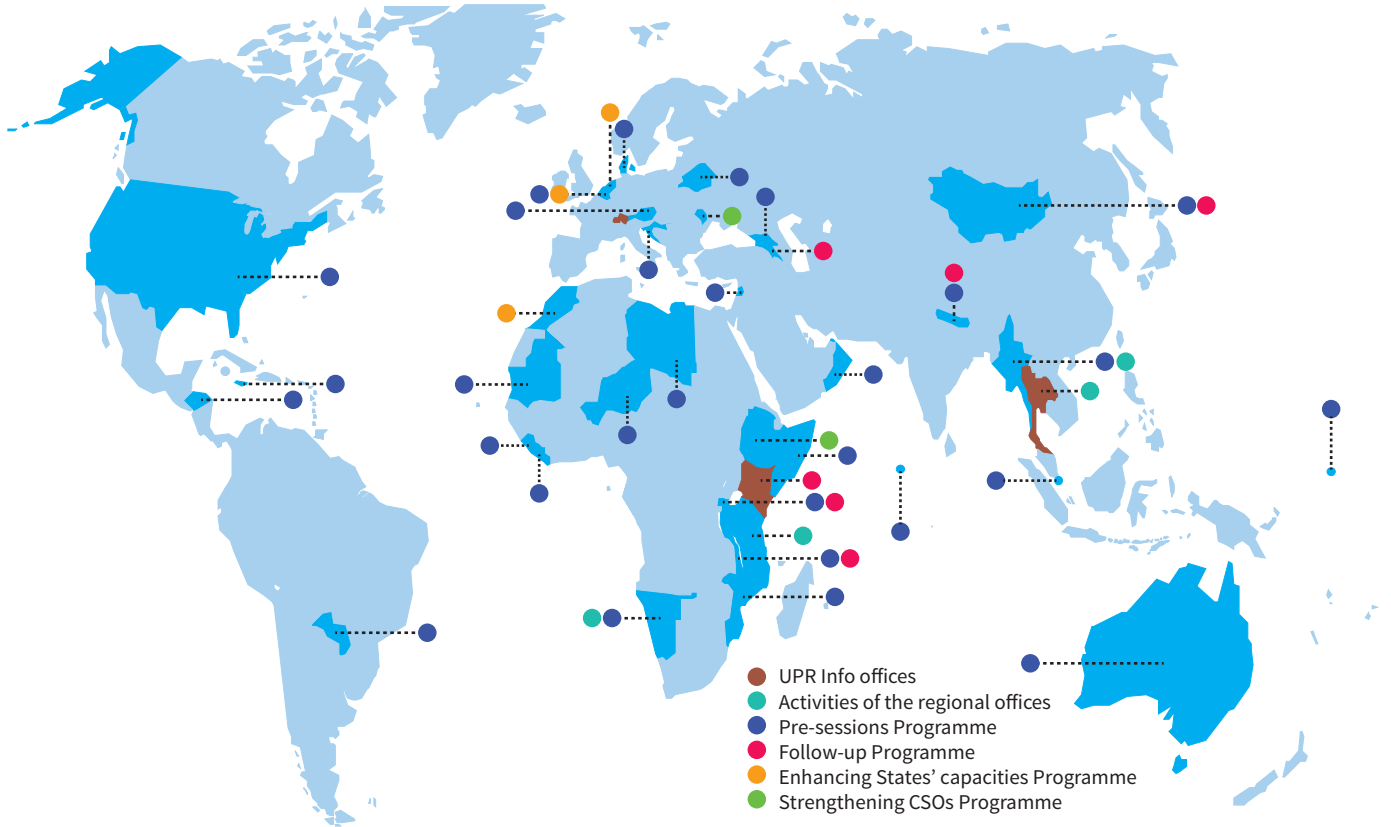
Also during the 30th Session, the OHCHR held a side event on the UPR Trust Fund for the implementation of recommendations. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.E. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, opened the event by highlighting how “States face a daunting task” when implementing UPR recommendations, and outputs from other Human Rights mechanisms. The call for increased and new donations was reiterated to ensure the effective implementation of UPR recommendations thus improving the protection and promotion of human rights for citizens of the ground. A resolution was subsequently adopted in the HRC for Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building, which focuses on the establishment and strengthening of national follow-up systems and on an increase of voluntary contributions to trust funds supporting UN human rights mechanisms, such as the UPR.

In November 2015, as the year was coming to a close, interest turned towards the programme for 2016 – the final year of the UPR’s second cycle – as well as the longer vision for the third cycle (2017–2021). In this light, the High Commissioner, H.E. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the German Ambassador and President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Mr. Joachim Rucker, over

50 ambassadors, and civil society representatives met to discuss the effectiveness of the UPR process. The meeting was organised by the Permanent Mission of Germany, the OHCHR and *UPR Info*. Based on a background paper prepared by *UPR Info*, the discussion aimed to assess the effectiveness of the mechanism by looking at the impact it has had so far and how to improve it in the future. In particular, ambassadors and civil society were asked to share their views on how the UPR could increase its focus on implementation in the third cycle. Overall, the meeting provided a starting point for discussions, which will be further developed over the coming year.

Throughout 2015, we closely followed the trends in framing the specificity of recommendations with the help of our database. Sessions 21 and 22 scored the highest for the second cycle in terms of most number of recommendations requiring specific action (37% and 40% respectively). This, and the increase in the number of recommendations that referred to the first cycle, builds on previous sessions and indicates an emerging pattern of recommendations. This pattern demonstrates that states are becoming increasingly aware of circumstances where SuR fail to implement recommendations and are altering the nature of their recommendations to ensure positive action on the part of the SuR. This is a promising development for the UPR process as it moves to the end of its second cycle.

Where we worked in 2015



UPR Info offices: Switzerland (Headquarters), Kenya (Africa region), Thailand (Asia region)

Activities of the regional offices: Myanmar, Namibia, Tanzania, and Thailand

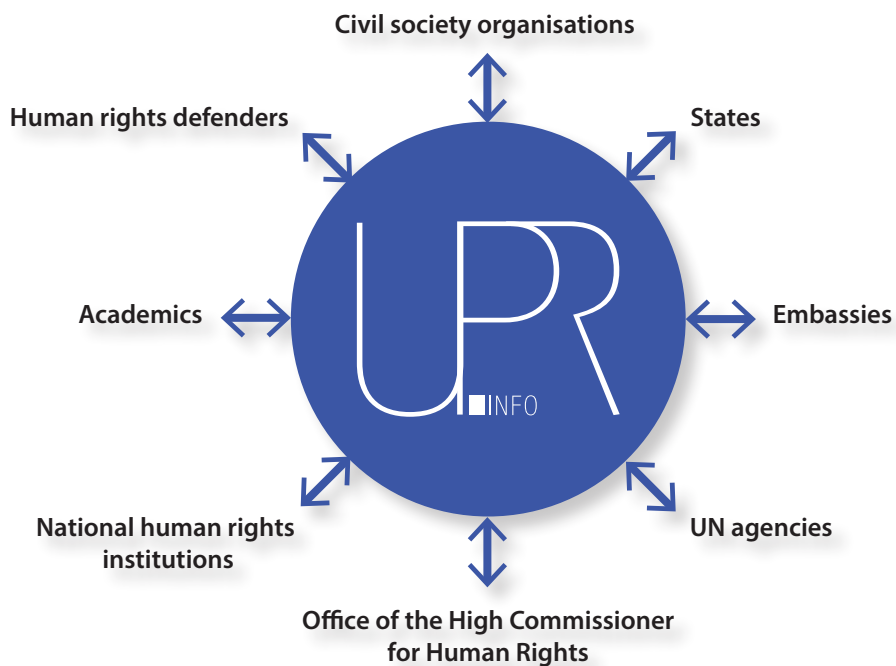
Pre-Sessions Programme: Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Honduras, Jamaica, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Maldives, Malawi, Mauritania, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Paraguay, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, and the United States of America

Follow-Up Programme: Armenia, Mongolia, Nepal, Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda

Enhancing States' Capacities Programme: Belgium, Morocco, and the Netherlands

Strengthening CSOs Programme: Ethiopia and Moldova

Who we work with





2. 2015: Facts & Figures



We opened two Regional Offices in Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya

30

We participated in over 30 training workshops and conferences



We strengthened and supported coalition-building in Armenia, Kenya, Malawi, Mongolia, Nepal, and Rwanda

We trained the Governments of Armenia, Belgium, Kenya, Malawi, Mongolia, Namibia, the Netherlands, and Morocco on the UPR

50

We briefed over 50 Permanent Missions on their role as Recommending States



3

We launched three publications on the UPR

We held Pre-sessions on 29 countries, bringing together:

93 National CSOs



11 national human rights institutions



35 international CSOs



We brought 20 new Permanent Missions to meet with CSOs through our Pre-sessions



ANNUAL REPORT 2015



We supported UPR implementation strategies in Armenia, Kenya, Mongolia, Malawi, Nepal, and Rwanda



We brought government and national CSOs together to discuss implementation in

Armenia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mongolia, and Malawi

1st We held the first national consultation in Thailand on the UPR, bringing together 150 defenders and 40 government officials

100s We supported in total hundreds of CSOs in Moldova, Myanmar, Namibia, Tanzania and Thailand in their UPR advocacy activities



420,000

We continued to develop our website totalling 420,000 visitors

8,286

We made another 8,286 recommendations available on our database



In the last 12 months, our database has been consulted approximately 85,000 times

+50% Our staff incremented in 50% with two Regional Office Representatives





3. Programmes

UPR Info's mission is to promote and strengthen the UPR by raising awareness, providing capacity-building tools, and bridging the different actors of the UPR process in order to ensure the universal advancement of human rights. To promote the universality of the UPR process and to support the holistic engagement of all stakeholders, we run five distinct but inter-related programmes:

- Pre-sessions
- Supporting CSO participation;
- Follow-up;
- Enhancing States' capacities; and
- Strengthening the UPR process.

3.1 Pre-sessions

- ✓ 2015 achievement: 20 new Permanent Missions, having never attended previously, participated in the Pre-sessions.
- ✓ 2015 achievement: 93 national CSOs spoke on the human rights situation in 29 States across all five continents.



The Pre-sessions have become an institution in Geneva, upon which States and civil society are firmly relying upon.

H.E. Mr Juan Esteban Aguirre Martínez
Vice-president of the Human Rights Council

The *UPR Info* Pre-sessions are the largest CSO platform for human rights advocacy in the world. Organised three times a year in Geneva, the international conferences have become an integral part of the UPR process. They provide a unique opportunity for CSOs to brief State delegations on the human rights situation in the SuR. In this manner, *UPR Info's* Pre-sessions strengthen the voice of civil society actors and their role in the UPR process, giving them a chance to make a real difference in an otherwise state-led mechanism.

In 2015, *UPR Info* organised Pre-sessions on 29 States to be reviewed during the 22nd,



Pre-session of Nepal, October 2015

23rd and 24th UPR Working Group sessions, namely: Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Honduras, Jamaica, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Maldives, Malawi, Mauritania, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Paraguay, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, and the United States of America. The Pre-sessions enabled 139 local and international human rights advocates, including 11 national human rights institutions (NHRIs), to share key human rights updates and progress reports on the implementation of first-cycle



My presence at the Pre-Session connected me to the Ministry of Justice. Back home, he invited me and my team to a meeting to discuss the way forward without intentions to manipulate our thoughts. Eventually, the Ministry has invited the Coalition to a process developing the Human Rights National Action Plan, which has just been concluded.

Centre for Youth and Children Affairs, Malawi, 2015

UPR recommendations with the Permanent Missions in Geneva. Feedback from the participants was very positive, indicating that CSOs are able to fully utilise the advocacy potential the Pre-sessions offer. Numerous issues raised by the CSO panellists during the Pre-sessions have been included in the final recommendations made by States. These include:

- ▶ Strengthening the rights and recognition for the indigenous Batwa people in Rwanda;
- ▶ Stricter laws to combat sexual violence and rape in Nepal;
- ▶ Lifting restrictions on pregnant teenage girls to access mainstream education in Sierra Leone; and



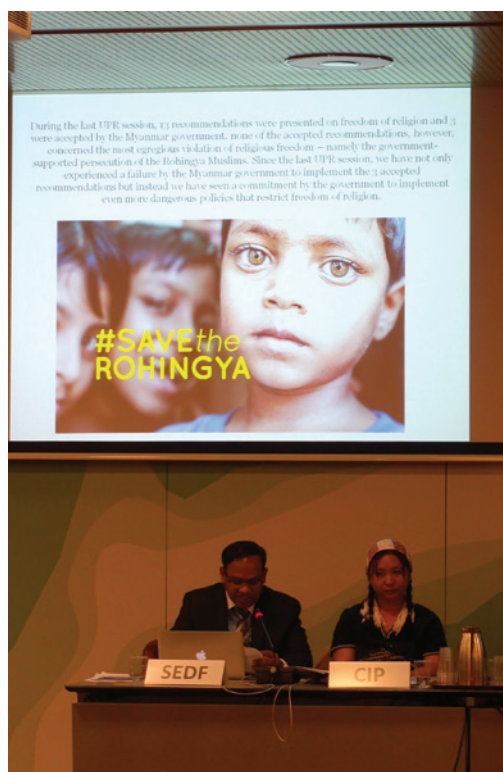
The Pre-session provided a focal point for engagement with States and also an ability to reinforce messages that had been raised in bilateral meetings, as well as the opportunity to inform other States who we had not been able to meet due to time constraints or availability.

Australia National Human Rights Commission, 2015

- ▶ Ending gender discrimination in law and in practice preventing Omani women from transmitting their nationality to their children.

3.2 Supporting civil society participation in the UPR

- ✓ 2015 achievement: Our live coverage of the UPR 24 Session reached 3,770 persons through Facebook.
- ✓ 2015 achievement: We updated 796 CSOs on the outcome of the UPR recommendations and provided further information on how to follow-up on the UPR Recommendations.



Human rights defenders at the Pre-session of Myanmar, October 2015





UPR Info providing training to Rwandese human rights defenders, October 2015

UPR Info aims to bring the UPR to the national level. Therefore, engaging with grassroots CSOs to inform them as to what is happening in Geneva is core to our work. We strengthened our coverage of the UPR sessions through social media by using specific hashtags, infographics, and tagging national CSOs in posts. Our new approach has enabled groups outside Geneva to keep up-to-date, and to use this information in their advocacy activities.

Direct, in-person training for all stakeholders of the UPR allows UPR Info to share know-how and relevant information about the latest developments of the UPR. In short, it ensures effective engagement of CSOs in the UPR process. Over the last 12 months, UPR Info has participated in over 30 training workshops, conferences and presentations on the UPR process including:

- ▶ Co-hosting a conference in Ethiopia on the follow-up to the 2nd cycle UPR recommendations, with the participation of the Government, academics and civil society (January);
- ▶ Contributing to a National Human Rights Institution training run by the Network of African Human Rights Institutions in Geneva (March);



Thank you UPR Info for a great job - your training was very impressive, comprehensive and detailed.

Civil Rights Defenders, Moldova

- ▶ Participating in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's centenary international conference in the Hague (April); and
- ▶ Delivering training to human rights defenders in Namibia (June) and Moldova (November).

The constant engagement of CSOs throughout the entire cycle is crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of the UPR. During 2015, UPR Info worked to ensure that CSOs are equipped with the tools needed to remain involved throughout the crucial period of implementation of the recommendations.

Ideally, national consultations should be organised by the State under Review approximately one year prior to the UPR. During 2015, UPR Info sent reminders to CSOs about the ways in which they can engage with the national consultations. In addition, the Regional

Office in Bangkok organised the National Consultation for Thailand. CSOs were also invited to engage in advocacy at the national and international levels and to participate in our Pre-sessions, in order to better shed light on issues of domestic concern. Additionally, *UPR Info* provided CSOs with the final outcomes of the UPR, and further information on how to follow-up on UPR recommendations, with the aim of raising awareness at the national level. Finally, CSOs were contacted and encouraged to engage in the follow-up process of the second cycle recommendations and to complete mid-term reports on the UPR, offering support to those who wanted to engage in this procedure.

3.3 Follow-up Programme

- ✓ 2015 achievement: In partnership with *UPR Info*, Outcome Charters that commit national CSOs to a joint UPR strategy to ensure successful implementation of recommendations were adopted in Malawi, Mongolia, Nepal, and Rwanda.
- ✓ 2015 achievement: We brought together governments and civil society to discuss implementation of UPR recommendations in Armenia, Kenya, Malawi, and Mongolia.

In order to realise the goal of the UPR, the “improvement of the human rights situation on the ground”, effective implementation of UPR recommendations is vital. With this objective in mind, *UPR Info* designed in



UPR Info trained local and national human rights defenders in Chisinau, Moldova, November 2015

2011 a Follow-up Programme to work with civil society and other stakeholders to help them monitor implementation. For four years (2011–2014), *UPR Info* published 165 country assessments on the implementation of UPR recommendations at mid-term, that is, in between two UPRs. The findings of the first stage of the Follow-up Programme resulted in *UPR Info*’s seminal publication “Beyond Promises”.

The Follow-up Programme evolved in 2015 to include new activities and deeper engagement with actors, bolstered to a large extent by the opening of Regional Offices. The new



You have sowed a seed and it will grow, believe me.

Mr. Pacharo Kayira
Ministry of Justice, Malawi



Workshop for civil society in Kenya, February 2015





We are full of inspiration to work more effectively to push the government for full implementation of the recommendations including those unimplemented recommendations from the first UPR cycle equipped with knowledge, skills, strategies and plans.

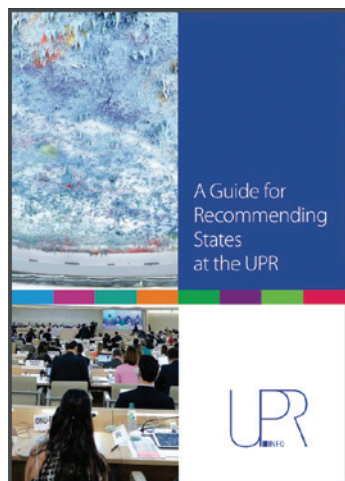
Urantsooj Gombosuren
Mongolian NGO Forum

chapter of the Programme now consists of a two-step process that builds capacity and facilitates dialogue around the implementation of recommendations:

- ▶ “Step 1” involves an in-country capacity-building workshop for CSOs; and
- ▶ “Step 2” is a facilitated dialogue between the government and CSOs to discuss the implementation of recommendations. Upon request of the government, a training is provided by *UPR Info* and other partners to the line ministries.

Since January 2015, numerous activities have been carried out by *UPR Info* and its partners on the ground in six countries across three continents. “Step 1” of the project was implemented in Armenia, Kenya, Mongolia, Malawi, Nepal and Rwanda. Overall, an average of 40 CSOs participated in every “Step 1” workshop. “Step 2” was carried out in Kenya in July 2015, in Mongolia in October 2015, and in Armenia and Malawi in November 2015.

In 2016, *UPR Info* is looking forward to joining civil society and government partners in Rwanda and Nepal for Step 2 of the Programme, where Step 1 was implemented in 2015. It also plans to expand its geographical reach to support civil society actors and government representatives in an additional six countries: Niger, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Tanzania, Uganda, and Togo.



3.4 Enhancing States' capacities

- ✓ 2015 achievement: We published “A Guide for Recommending States at the UPR” to support States’ engagement in the UPR.
- ✓ 2015 achievement: We provided in-country UPR training to governments and ministry representatives in numerous States.
- ✓ 2015 achievement: *UPR Info* organised its second “Seminar on the role of Recommending States”, attended by over 50 Permanent Missions.

UPR Info works closely with government Stakeholders to support their knowledge and engagement with the UPR. The partnership with States extends from assisting Recommending States on how best to formulate measurable and impactful recommendations, to supporting States under Review in holding national consultations before the UPR and creating implementation plans after the adoption of their UPR report.

Three publications were launched in 2015 to support State participation. *A Guide for Recommending States*¹ promotes effective engagement at all stages of the Universal Periodic Review from the perspective of the State making the recommendations. The Guide offers practical tips for participation, best practices for drafting recommendations, and emphasises the importance of linking first and second cycle recommendations. It is currently available in English, French and Spanish.



States' Feedback on *A Guide for Recommending States*

We thank you for this very useful publication, which offers a better understanding of the practice of the UPR, as well as its goals and added value.

Permanent Mission of Senegal

¹ *UPR Info, A Guide for Recommending States* (2015). Available online: <http://goo.gl/S0tSgX>

The second publication for recommending States, *Starting all over again: An analysis between 1st and 2nd cycle UPR recommendations*,² demonstrates the necessity of integrating past and present UPR cycles to keep the focus on implementation of recommendations. For the SuR, *UPR Info* created *Identifying best practices: An analysis of national reports*.³ This study identifies best practices that States should take on board while drafting their national reports. The publication was the culmination of in-depth analysis of 84 national reports submitted by States reviewed during the first six sessions of the second UPR cycle (sessions 13 to 18 May 2012 to January 2014).

In April 2015, *UPR Info* provided a presentation to dozens of diplomats of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in The Hague. With the objective of exploring room for possible improvements in the recommendations made by the Dutch Government, *UPR Info* provided the Dutch MFA with numerous tools and shared data on the UPR. During the event, participants discussed the numerous facets of UPR recommendations, including precision, implementation, and monitoring the real impact on the ground.

The Government of Namibia invited *UPR Info* to its capital Windhoek in June 2015 to give a training session on the UPR. The workshop provided a broad overview of the UPR process, including advocacy strategies, CSOs submissions, national report, and general engagement with the mechanism at all stages. The training lasted a full day and was attended by representatives from various Ministries such as Justice, Health and Defense. Also in attendance was the Ombudsman and national civil society representatives from Namibia. As part of the event, the draft national report of Namibia was presented by a representative

2 *UPR Info, Starting all over again: An analysis between 1st and 2nd cycle UPR recommendations* (2015).

Available online: <http://goo.gl/BDSosp>

3 *UPR Info, Identifying best practices: An analysis of national reports*. Available online: <http://goo.gl/mDwhaR>



Seminar for Recommending States, October 2015

of the Ministry of Justice, where the Ombudsman and CSOs inputs were taken into consideration and included in the new draft of the report.

In October 2015, *UPR Info* organised its second “Seminar on the role of Recommending States”, attended by 60 diplomats from 51 Permanent Missions. The aim of the seminar, with contributions from the OHCHR UPR Branch, was to stress the different roles recommend-

ing States can take throughout the entire process of the UPR and to promote the use of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) recommendations.

In November, *UPR Info* gave a presentation on the UPR to over 80 diplomats from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The presentation aimed at discussing the impact of the UPR, the role of Belgium in the mechanism and provided insights on how to ensure that recommendations made by the delegation are precise and action-oriented. *UPR Info* shared data on the UPR process such as the list of most active States and most raised issues. The precision of recommendations, and how to use the SMART method in that regard, were also discussed in detail.



States’ Feedback on A Guide for Recommending States

I cannot overemphasise the importance of this document to my office. I am really grateful for this information material. It will be used by us to more actively engage in dialogues.

Permanent Mission of Liberia



ANNUAL REPORT 2015



IMAGE COURTESY OF JAMIL DAKWAR

UPR Info closed the year by accepting the invitation by Morocco to provide an in-country training at the State's first ever UPR event. The three-day workshop was attended by the inter-ministerial delegation for human rights, and aimed to provide members of the Government with a training on the UPR, including discussions on National Consultations and best practices related to drafting the National Report.

3.5 Strengthening the Universal Periodic Review

- ✓ 2015 achievement: We were recognised by the HRC President for our work in “disseminating information on the UPR to national actors and creating innovative tools to facilitate implementation”.

UPR Info strives to ensure that the UPR remains an effective mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights. Thus, our work involves monitoring, analysing and reporting on the entire UPR process.

Monitoring the UPR

The intrinsic design of the UPR mechanism – a five-year cycle, broad modalities and multiple stakeholders – demands constant monitoring, both in Geneva and at the national level, in order to ensure its correct functioning. Through our presence in Geneva, Nairobi and Bangkok, as well as our strong relationship

with State and non-governmental stakeholders alike, we remained at the forefront of monitoring the UPR.

In 2015, *UPR Info* reacted to the reprisals by certain UN Member States against civil society representatives engaging with the UN. *UPR Info* presented an oral statement to the Council to reiterate the need for “all states to uphold their promises and facilitate and support CSO engagement in the UPR process”. Likewise, *UPR Info* delivered an oral statement on behalf of 46 CSOs to react to calls from some actors to limit the number of recommendations per recommending State, and to advocate for quality, measurable and specific recommendations. Further oral statements made by *UPR Info* covered topics ranging from promoting best practices of national reports to the importance of CSO participation in the UPR of Mongolia and Malawi.

In November, *UPR Info* participated in a dialogue on the effectiveness of the UPR, organised by the Permanent Mission of Germany, the OHCHR and *UPR Info*. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.E. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the German ambassador and President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Mr. Rüdiger W. Rüdiger, over fifty ambassadors, and civil society joined the event. Participants exchanged views and suggestions with regard to UPR



I would like here to make a specific mention of the NGO *UPR Info*, which is the only organisation specialised on the Universal Periodic Review. Through their activities, they promote more visibility and effectiveness of this exercise and a better understanding of the positions of States and civil society organisations working in the field of human rights.

Ignacio Ybañez, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain

implementation and follow-up. The SMART criteria for recommendations were also mentioned, with some participants expressing the need to consolidate recommendations. Throughout 2015, *UPR Info* continued to pay special attention to other issues such as the trends on Mid-term reporting and the follow-up modalities, ahead of the third cycle.

Website

The *UPR Info* website aims to complement information and documents available on OHCHR’s website. In addition, our website hosts other documents relevant to the UPR, such as CSO’s Mid-term assessment reports, which are not made available on the OHCHR’s website. Since upgrading our website in 2014, *UPR Info* has been able to manage the site more effectively. The website has become more user-friendly, receiving 420,000 visits by 31 December.

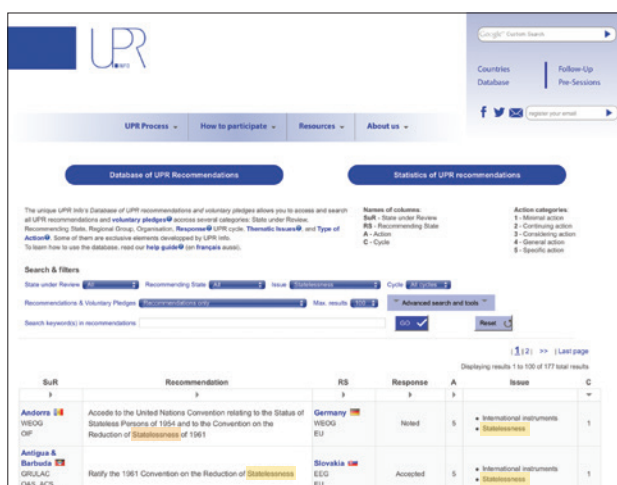
Our News section constitutes an excellent channel to inform all UPR stakeholders about events, in Geneva and elsewhere, related to the UPR mechanism. Our news articles provide updates on useful developments such as available UPR documentation and deadlines for the Stakeholders’ submissions.

Maintaining the database and statistics

In 2010, *UPR Info* created a user friendly and unique database that allows all stakeholders access to all of the UPR recommendations. *UPR Info* Database is recognised by civil society actors and States alike as one of the most useful features of the website, due to the:

- ▶ volume of data;
- ▶ eight specific search categories ;
- ▶ statistical analysis tools; and
- ▶ classification of recommendations.

In the last 12 months alone, the database has been consulted approximately 85,000 times and civil society actors constantly express that the database facilitates their UPR engagement. Moreover, both our database and statistics tools are equipped respectively with a comprehensive *help guide* available in English and French. In 2015, we added two new entries to the “Issue” category: *Privacy* and *Statelessness*.





4. Regional Offices

In 2015, *UPR Info* expanded its geographical and technical capacity by opening two offices internationally. The Asia Regional Office was established in Bangkok, Thailand in May 2015, followed by the opening of the Africa Regional Office in Nairobi, Kenya in June 2015. The offices serve to support multistakeholder engagement at the local, domestic and regional levels, where *UPR Info* engages with civil society, national human rights institutions, government, and UN bodies. The regional offices have begun to organise in-country Pre-sessions in advance of the Geneva-based Pre-sessions, to offer further opportunity to CSOs to brief embassies on the recommendations they would like included in the UPR. These national human rights conferences reinforce the message that the civil society participants will make in Geneva. This gives further weight to their issues that can be shared from the diplomats in attendance with both their capitals and counterparts in their Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the UN.

Africa

The *UPR Info* Africa Regional Office was established in June 2015. It aims to raise awareness and provide capacity-building tools to all domestic actors to engage with the UPR at the national, regional and international level. During the year under review, the Africa Regional Office pursued a two-fold strategy. Firstly, *UPR Info* in Africa sought to promote the UPR in varied ways: holding national consultations one year prior to the UPR to involve more actors and create UPR coalitions; organising domestic Pre-sessions where CSOs and NHRIs could take the floor in front of embassies and UN Agencies; and encouraging both Governments and CSOs to publish a report at

mid-term. Secondly, based on a regional perspective, *UPR Info* sought deeper involvement in regional mechanisms and activities. For this purpose, *UPR Info* worked to strengthen the NHRIs by promoting the creation of a UPR focal point within the NHRI. It also sought to strengthen Governments by organising discussions of National Action Plans and by providing training on the UPR to ministries. In addition, *UPR Info* worked to establish a closer network of human rights activists in the region, clustered in long-term, sustainable relationships, and to expand the donors.

Many activities carried out by the Africa Regional Office fell within the *UPR Info* Follow-up Programme, within the wider strategic framework of the organisation that includes the Headquarters in Geneva and the Asia Regional Office in Bangkok. Following the UPR Agenda set up by the OHCHR, the Africa Regional Office focused its activities on countries to be reviewed in 2016 and countries under the ongoing project (2015: Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda; 2016: Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda). The activities carried out by *UPR Info* Africa can be divided in three categories:

1) Workshops with CSOs

UPR Info Africa organised a series of **workshops with CSOs** immediately after the UPR sessions in Geneva, which pursue four objectives:

- ▶ to improve the CSOs' knowledge of the UPR process;
- ▶ to raise awareness of UPR recommendations made to the country;
- ▶ to empower civil society representatives; and
- ▶ to define the activities for the next months.



ANNUAL
REPORT
2015



Workshop for civil society in Malawi, June 2016

Among other activities, participants discussed and drafted a tentative implementation plan, to be shared with the Government and CSOs and a tentative action strategy plan for CSOs. In 2015, *UPR Info Africa* successfully organised three “CSO strategy workshop on implementation of UPR recommendations” in Kenya (on 10–12 March), Malawi (18–20 June) and Rwanda (7–9 December).

2) Dialogue-day between CSOs and Government

In order to ensure that all national stakeholders are equipped with the tools to make the most of the implementation phase, *UPR Info Africa*, together with its partners, organised a series of **one-day dialogue between CSOs and the Government** (see the “Follow-up Programme” above).

3) Multi-stakeholder UPR training

Different training sessions were organised throughout 2015 with the aim of gathering together all UPR stakeholders in order to openly discuss the UPR mechanism. The sessions increased the awareness of the participants regarding the UPR process and encouraged their engagement therein in more effective ways, by further developing their capacities with the UPR mechanism. The workshops provided advice on the preparation and drafting of the written submissions to the UPR *i.e.* national report, the stakeholders’

reports and the mid-term report. In addition, lobbying strategies were discussed amongst participants to help provide them with an overview of the entry points and procedures in UPR advocacy. In addition, the training sessions contributed to enhancing the capacities of local stakeholders, by strengthening coordination and exchange of information among civil society and other stakeholders in the UPR process. The following sessions were organised by *UPR Info Africa* in 2015:

- ▶ Windhoek, Namibia: Training for Government and CSOs, 9 June 2015;
- ▶ Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: *UPR Info* training within the “Tanzanian CSOs’ validation workshop”, on 17 September 2015; and
- ▶ Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: on 7 October 2015, *UPR Info* made a presentation within a conference titled “Effective Monitoring of the UPR Recommendations through multi stakeholder Engagement and Awareness Raising on the UPR process in Ethiopia”.

In 2016, *UPR Info* will engage with the States undergoing their second review in 2016, and in particular will seek to secure the implementation of projects in the following six countries: Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda. The Africa Regional Office will also continue to engage with the countries we have worked with in 2015.

Asia

The *UPR Info* regional office in Bangkok has implemented numerous activities since it opened its doors in May 2015. On the home front, several projects have already taken place in relation to Thailand's UPR, which is a 2016 *UPR Info* target country for the Pre-sessions and Follow-up programmes. Firstly, to ensure all human rights issues could be addressed in Thailand's second UPR (11 May 2016), a training session for Thai CSOs took place in Bangkok on 5 August 2015. This was intentionally conducted in advance of the CSO submission deadline fixed for 21 September 2015. Our Regional Office succeeded in bringing over 100 Thai activists to discuss how they could cooperate in the framework of the UPR, and encouraged the development of joint submissions to ensure the evidence included in the CSO reports are credible and corroborative.

In the past, international and regional CSOs have worked in a limited way with grass-



Workshop for civil society, Thailand, 2015



National dialogue between the Government and civil society, Thailand, December 2015



Pre-session on Myanmar held in Yangon, September 2015



Pre-session on Myanmar held in Bangkok, Thailand, September 2015

roots activists; using our network, and with the support of certain embassies in Bangkok, we sought to reshape the situation. Thus, in December 2015, Thailand's first ever national consultation was held in Bangkok, in view of the second-cycle UPR of Thailand, to provide input for Thailand's national report. The event was organised in cooperation with the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Thai Ministry of Justice. The event brought together more than 160 participants, including all manner of national stakeholders: Thai CSOs, Government representatives and the National Human Rights Commission.

The Regional Representative of *UPR Info* Asia, Ms Emilie Pradichit, has also undertaken several activities with regard to Myanmar, which underwent its second review in 6 November 2015. As a first step in June 2015, Ms Pradichit extensively trained more than 30 grass-roots and national CSOs in Myanmar. In September 2015, she then organised diplomatic dialogues among CSOs and local embassies in view of the UPR of Myanmar, which was hosted by the European Union Delegation in Yangon initially, and then repeated in Bangkok.



Pre-session of Myanmar held in Geneva, October 2015

This project replicated the Pre-sessions *UPR Info* organises in Geneva, and was the first of its kind in-country. It aimed at increasing the impact of Myanmar CSOs on the language and issues raised in the recommendations at the UPR. Finally, Ms Pradichit was also present in Geneva in December 2015 for the *UPR Info* pre-session of Myanmar, in order to support the human rights defenders she had been closely working with. These training sessions and meetings in Myanmar, Thailand and Geneva combined to provide a unique opportunity to train at the international level former political prisoners. For the first time in their lives, they were able to conduct international advocacy, and could return home safely to Myanmar after conclusion of their lobbying activities in Geneva.

Finally, the Asia Regional Office was actively involved in the implementation of “Step 2” of the *UPR Info* Follow-up Programme in Mongolia in October 2015, as well as “Step 1” in Nepal in December 2015.

Activities carried out by *UPR Info* Asia:

1) Myanmar

- ▶ 18 June 2015: UPR Advocacy-Lobbying Meeting by the Burma-Myanmar UPR Forum;
- ▶ 2–4 September 2015: *UPR Info* Pre-Session Yangon – “Voices from the ground: Burmese CSOs engaging in Myanmar’s second UPR” (Media Briefing and Diplomatic Dialogue); and
- ▶ 8–10 September 2015: *UPR Info* Pre-Session Bangkok – “Voices from the ground: Burmese CSOs engaging in Myanmar’s second UPR” (Lecture and Diplomatic Dialogue).

2) Thailand:

- ▶ 5 August 2015: Thailand CSO Capacity Building Training on the UPR process; and
- ▶ 21–22 December 2015: National Consultation to Inform Thailand’s UPR State Report



5. Organisation

- ✓ 2015 achievement: Mr Miloon Kothari, former UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, was elected President of *UPR Info*

In May 2015, *UPR Info* learnt with great sadness of the passing of Ms. Martine Anstett, Deputy Director at the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) in charge of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Martine was a passionate and dedicated activist with a brilliant career in human rights and had recently joined *UPR Info's* Advisory Board. She will be deeply missed.

Executive Board

Miloon Kothari (India) – President
Saida Manieva (Kyrgyzstan) – Treasurer
Kamelia Kemileva (Switzerland) – Secretary

Advisory Board

Harriet E. Berg (Norway) – Minister Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations in Geneva
Rita Itzsák (Hungary) – Special Rapporteur on minority issues
Marc Limon (United Kingdom) – Universal Rights Group

Phil Lynch (Australia) – International Service for Human Rights

Professor Edward R. McMahon (United States) – University of Vermont



UPR Info was honoured to welcome new additions to both the Executive and Advisory Boards in 2015. Mr Miloon Kothari became the organisation's new President in April 2015. Mr. Kothari is a former UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing (2000 to 2008). He is a leading voice at national, regional and international forums on human rights, especially in economic, social and cultural rights.



Ms Harriet E. Berg joined *UPR Info's* Advisory Board in July 2015. Ms. Berg is presently Minister Counsellor at the Norwegian mission to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva, where she heads the human rights team.



6. Secretariat

✓ Our achievements in 2015: We hired Regional Representatives for Africa and Asia



Roland Chauville
Executive Director



Jean-Claude Vignoli
Director of Programmes



Francesca Piccin
Programme Manager



Aoife Hegarty
Programme Manager



Kira Youdina
Programme Manager



Emilie Pradichit
Asia Regional Representative



Gilbert Onyango
Africa Regional Representative

In 2015, *UPR Info* increased its staff by opening two regional offices. Emilie Pradichit and Gilbert Onyango joined the team to become *UPR Info*'s Regional Representatives in Bangkok, Thailand (Asia Region) and Nairobi, Kenya (Africa Region) respectively. Aoife Hegarty also joined *UPR Info*'s Geneva-based Secretariat, assuming responsibility for the Pre-sessions Programme.

In 2015, four students and young graduates participated in *UPR Info*'s internship programme. For the duration of four to six months, our interns assisted *UPR Info*'s Secretariat in monitoring the UPR sessions, managing communications, writing and editing, maintaining the database and website, and carrying out in-depth research. Our work would not have been possible without the help of the following:

- ▶ Alba Bescos Pou (Spain)
- ▶ Anna-Therese McGivern (United Kingdom)
- ▶ Nicolas Schmidt (Germany)
- ▶ Rebecca Tomkins (Ireland)

UPR Info, in partnership with a dozen NGOs in Geneva, launched a new initiative to ensure that interns are provided with stipends during their internships. A Charter for international organisations is available on its website:

<http://wepayourinterns.org/charter/>



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2015**



7. Finance

- ✓ Our achievements in 2015: We decreased the percentage of salaries in our budget by 17 points (from 72% to 55%)

The total budget for 2015 was 756,080 CHF, an increase of 52.3% compared to 2014.

UPRInfo's activities in 2015 were supported by a wide range of actors. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to each of them for making our work possible and thereby ensuring that the UPR is an effective tool to advance human rights.

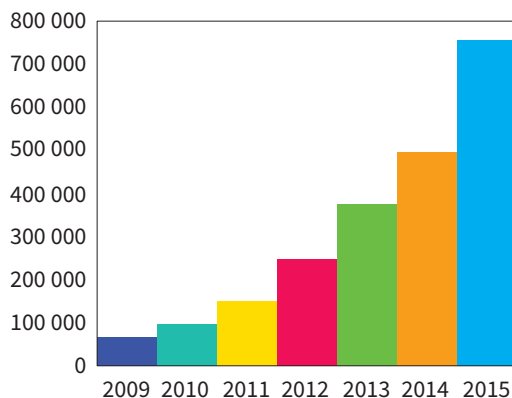
- ▶ Support CSO participation in the UPR: The Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Irish Aid, and the Pro Victimis Foundation;

- ▶ Pre-sessions: The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, the Canton of Geneva, the City of Geneva, the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, (OIF) and Irish Aid;

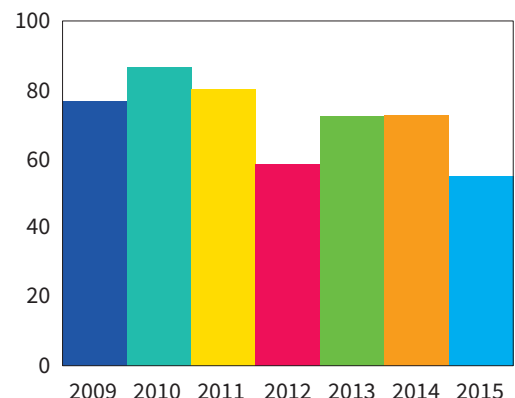
- ▶ Follow-up Programme: The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands; and

- ▶ Enhancing States' capacities: The Permanent Mission of the Netherlands, the Government of Australia, and the UN Development Programme.

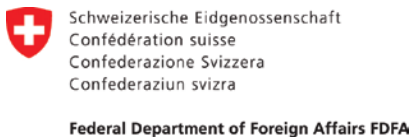
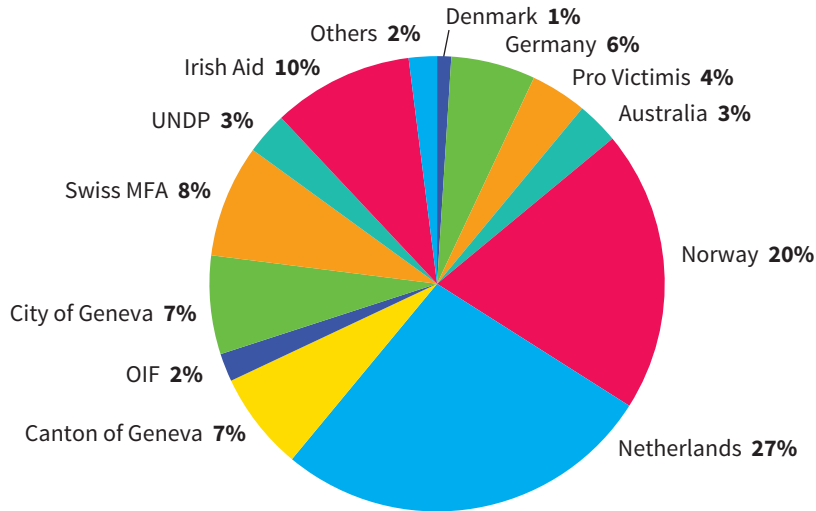
Budget evolution since 2009 (in Swiss francs)



Salaries as a percentage of overall budget since 2009



UPR Info donors 2015





8. Looking Forward

Third UPR cycle and beyond



Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

2016 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Human Rights Council, triggering broad discussion on the merits and challenges of its mechanisms, including the UPR. In parallel, the UPR will be marking a milestone in its own right, as 2016 draws its second cycle to a close.

The time will be ripe for all stakeholders to critically assess the highs and lows of the process since it began its second round of reviews in 2012. Before the third cycle begins in 2017, there is need for inclusive discussions in order to ensure continued enthusiasm and full participation of all stakeholders. In particular, *UPR Info* would like the third cycle to clarify and strengthen three main issues:

- ▶ Fruitful dialogue and international commitments on national follow-up mechanisms to monitor implementation of recommendations (tabled for the discussion at the 26th Session of the UPR Working Group, November 2016);

- ▶ Increased financial and structural support for the participation of national CSOs in the UPR process, bearing in mind that the two UPR Voluntary Funds are accessible to States only; and
- ▶ Strong protection for CSOs and condemnation of any acts of intimidation or reprisals for engaging with the UPR.

Finally, 2016 will also see the finalisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including operationalising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *UPR Info* will be following the developments closely, as we believe the SDGs present a huge opportunity to catalyse the advancement of human rights. In this regard, the UPR may well have an important role to play.



Promoting and strengthening the Universal Periodic Review

2016 ©