

UPR Info Strategic Plan 2013-2016





Promoting and strengthening
the Universal Periodic Review
<http://www.upr-info.org>

Organisation

Vision: UPR Info's vision is to make the UPR process an effective mechanism to improve human rights on the ground.

Mission: *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.

Values

Universality: *UPR Info* wholeheartedly affirms the universality of human rights, and deems essential the universal coverage and equal treatment of all issues, countries, and stakeholders.

Transparency: At *UPR Info*, we are committed to employing and promoting the highest standards of transparency, both internally and externally. We commit to the transparency of our organisational working methods, strive to promote the transparency of States during the Review and Implementation phases of the UPR, and work diligently to make the modalities and developments of the UPR mechanism transparent to all stakeholders.

Impartiality: We hold as central the tenet of impartiality, which underpins our unique capacity to act as a neutral facilitator to support the cooperative development of the UPR mechanism through objective, reliable information and interactive dialogue.

Inclusiveness: Through our work both online and offline, we strive to continuously increase the quantity, diversity, accessibility, and active participation of all stakeholders in the UPR process. The UPR is everyone's concern and responsibility.

Ownership: *UPR Info* is convinced that transformative human rights progress is reliant upon ownership, with empowered national and international stakeholders with strong capacities aligning their goals and efforts to achieve tangible change on the ground.



Context

1. Background

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was established in 2006 by the United Nations through General Assembly Resolution 60/251. The UPR promotes the universality, interdependence, indivisibility and interrelatedness of all human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948. It exemplifies international cooperation, as it provides a space for various stakeholders to bring their distinct voices, perspectives, and resources together to contribute to the global commitment to advance human rights. The UPR aspires to be intergovernmental, efficient, action-oriented, participatory, and complementary to the work of other human rights bodies.

The main objective of the UPR is to improve the human rights situation on the ground. In addition, it was designed to promote the fulfilment of State's human rights obligations and an assessment of the positive challenges and developments faced by the State, to enhance State capacity, to provide a forum for sharing best practices, to support coordination in the area of human rights promotion and protection, and to urge cooperation of States with the Human rights Council, OHCHR, and other human rights bodies. To this end, the UPR creates a Review of every UN Member-State's human rights situation every four and half years in a Working Group Session of the Human Rights Council. The Working Group Session allows a space for each State to provide a self-assessment of their human rights situation, and for recommendations to come forward from other States through an interactive dialogue. It is envisioned that multi-stakeholder collaboration will occur after the Working Group Session for the implementation of UPR recommendations.

UPR Info was created in 2008 following the creation of the UPR mechanism. The founders recognised the potential for the UPR to become an effective mechanism in



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which States, NGOs, civil society actors, human rights institutions, and UN bodies could collaborate towards the universal advancement of human rights. Acknowledging that this great endeavour would require broad-based accessibility, increased stakeholder capacities, close monitoring, and extensive coordination, *UPR Info* was founded with the sole purpose of taking rigorous action to promote and strengthen the Universal Periodic Review. As a result of its deep involvement in the UPR since its inception, *UPR Info* has developed a unique expertise on the UPR process itself and has an extensive record of each State's Working Group Session. Through six years of intensive engagement with the mechanism, *UPR Info* has established itself as a bridge amongst the stakeholders, as and as the premier source for UPR-related information. With this unique capacity, *UPR Info* is well positioned to continue to strengthen and expand its programme to reflect the most current challenges faced by the UPR, and work diligently to support the realisation of its potential.

The Universal Periodic Review is now in its test phase. In March 2012, the first cycle of the UPR came to an end, setting the unprecedented record of the United Nations to examine the human rights situation of all countries in the world. The first cycle was marked by 100% participation of all UN Member States, and resulted in considerable change on the ground as a result of the implementation of recommendations. From these commendable achievements, significant momentum persists into the present day. However, the spotlight is now on States to demonstrate whether or not the implementation of recommendations will be substantive. This decisive factor will determine the capacity of the mechanism to become a successful vector for launching deep-reaching and deep-rooted human rights protection and promotion on the ground. At this turning point, there are two paths the UPR can take. It can either become a peer exercise where recommendations are received and superficially acknowledged, or it can be imbued with increasing accountability, amplifying its potential to effect deep and substantive change in human rights across the globe.

2. Challenges

Three major gaps have been identified as challenging the success of the UPR: an accessibility gap, a modality gap, and a follow-up gap. Since the promise of the UPR relies upon its conception as an integrated process rather than a single event, *UPR Info* has identified obstacles that can undermine the potential of the UPR at all stages of the process.

2.1. Accessibility Gap

As a relatively new mechanism, the UPR faces challenges of universal accessibility. The obstacles to UPR engagement relating to accessibility can be broken into three parts: an awareness gap, an information gap, and a capacity gap.

First, there is not yet universal awareness about the potentiality of the UPR to launch substantial improvement in human rights amongst civil society actors, particularly national civil society organisations (CSOs). Without being aware of the diverse points of possible engagement with the mechanism and the benefits that can be achieved through participation, CSOs are not likely to invest resources to contribute to the UPR process. This presents a major obstacle since CSOs can significantly strengthen the process by guaranteeing that the review reflects the real situation on the ground and that the implementation of recommendations is substantive.

Secondly, stakeholders who are already aware of the UPR confront the challenge of lacking information about the continual developments of the UPR process in a way that would prepare them for meaningful engagement. Being active in the UPR requires an understanding of the modalities (which are subject to revision), a grasp of the deadlines for various points of participation, an awareness of the status of recommendations, and cognizance of best practices in participation. For a single stakeholder, it is tremendously time consuming and financially burdensome to gather all of the data that would be required for effective engagement. This makes



participation particularly challenging for actors that are not used to working at the Human Rights Council Level, namely national or local organisations. The work of *UPR Info* of providing a centralised place for UPR related information and analyses has been fundamental to closing the accessibility gap in this area, and it is imperative that it continues so that stakeholders can efficiently channel their resources towards launching context-specific advocacy plans for UPR participation.

Thirdly, UPR stakeholders face a gap in capacity that hinders meaningful UPR participation. Although having all of the information about the UPR is a tremendous first step, stakeholders also need to develop skills, competencies, and abilities to embark upon substantive UPR engagement. This will help ensure that their participation can be guaranteed on a sustainable and long-term basis.

2.2. Modality Gap

The modalities of the UPR mechanism are contained in HRC Resolution 5/1, the landmark resolution that lays down the founding principles and rules by which the UPR operates. The resolution was adopted by consensus amongst States, and although it provides a sound basis for the structural integrity for UPR development, it creates two interrelated problems. First, the modalities allow a high degree of leniency with regard to the requirements of State engagement. This means that although certain measures for participation are highly encouraged, such as consulting civil society to write their national report and reporting on the progress since the last Review, it is ultimately the purview of States to decide the extent to which they follow these suggestions. Therefore, the UPR relies heavily on cooperation and good will from States. It is from this vast flexibility that the second problem arises: the ability of States to modify the modalities. To a certain degree, States can adopt the modalities that suit their interests, and circumvent the ones that would call attention to deficits in engagement. For instance, during the first UPR cycle several States had great freedom to choose how to respond to recommendations. This obscured a clear identification of the accepted and rejected

recommendations, as well as the rationale for those decisions. However, this information is required to monitor the implementation of the accepted recommendations at the second cycle. If this obstacle is not overcome, the UPR process will become increasingly opaque, and it will become increasingly difficult for the UPR to advance human rights progress.

2.3. Follow-up Gap

Follow-up measures are critical to ensuring that the progress made by States is tracked, and that subsequent Reviews build upon the achievements and shortcomings of the State's previous cycle. At the present time, there is not a formalised United Nations mechanism to monitor the implementation of UPR recommendations, and it is therefore the purview of the various stakeholders to contribute to this important facet of the UPR.

Measures to strengthen follow-up must occur both upstream and downstream: through the formulation of precise recommendations and through close monitoring of the status of implementation. Since UN Resolution 5/1 clearly states that the UPR has to be action-oriented, recommendations made at the UPR should be more precise. Precise recommendations will increase stakeholder capacities to monitor the implementation status of each recommendation. Stronger and more specific assessments of the level of recommendations will allow stakeholders to identify areas where States need more assistance in implementing recommendations received, or continued advocacy to encourage States to uphold their commitments. The current situation, where only 35 percent of recommendations are precise, has to be ameliorated. After the Review, recommending States must carefully follow the status of their own recommendations, and national CSOs can participate in monitoring the implementation status of the recommendations in their State. Additionally, the State under Review should be transparent and expressive with regard to its progress in implementation at mid-term (3 years after the Review). These measures, both before and after the Review, are central to supporting the implementation of recommendations.



3. Goals & Impact

In order to work towards closing the gaps that hinder substantive human rights progress through the UPR, *UPR Info* has set four overarching goals around which to orient its strategic objectives and activities. *UPR Info* has determined that it is essential that stakeholders are aware of the mechanism and how to engage with it (Goal 1), equipped with the tools and capacities to fully participate (Goal 2), and actively engaged in following up the implementation of recommendations (Goal 3). In addition, it is imperative that the UPR mechanism operates efficaciously and in congruence with its founding principles (Goal 4).

UPR Info believes that by **increasing awareness of the UPR mechanism**, discourse will proliferate about human rights and the range of actors participating in the UPR process will be expanded, contributing to recommendations that affect civil society concerns and needs on the ground, as well as an influx of actors mobilised to strengthen implementation efforts. This goal is meant to reduce the accessibility and follow-up gaps. The UPR has to be known before stakeholders see reasons to participate.

UPR Info believes that by **increasing stakeholder capacity**, barriers to participation will be removed, increasing the feasibility of engagement. This goal is meant to reduce the accessibility and follow-up gaps. Stakeholders have to fully understand the UPR principles and rules before participating, and have tools and competencies for successful participation.

UPR Info believes that by **strengthening the follow-up to recommendations**, States will become increasingly accountable to both their national constituents and to the international community for their human rights records. By making recommendations of more specific and of higher quality, it will be easier for States to implement them and for the international community to monitor their implementation.



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By working to close the follow-up gap, the overall implementation of recommendations will be supported.

UPR Info believes that by **engaging in monitoring and advocacy to strengthen the mechanism itself**, it will assure that the UPR is reflective of the reality on the ground and resilient enough to accommodate the increased participation and changing national and international contexts. This goal is meant to reduce the modality and follow-up gaps. A strong UPR mechanism will ensure the preservation of an effective vector for the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe.

4. Strategic Programme Objectives

In order to actualise *UPR Info's* overall aim of *promoting and strengthening the UPR mechanism*, in light of the challenges and opportunities in the present context, the following objectives and activities will be pursued in alignment with the organisational goals:

4.1. Goal 1: Increased awareness of the UPR mechanism

Objective 1: Ensure stakeholders have information about how to engage in the UPR and possess the information necessary for meaningful participation

- 1.1 Maintain an up-to-date website including all documentation related to the review of each State
- 1.2 Produce and publish newsletters highlighting important UPR and organisational developments
- 1.3 Exchange information with permanent missions and CSOs, both upon request, and at regular intervals in preparation for various points of UPR engagement
- 1.4 Deliver informational presentations and participate in meetings, conferences and seminars regarding the UPR mechanism

Objective 2: Increase visibility of the UPR in social media

- 1.1 Regularly update social media pages to inform subscribers of key developments at the UPR process
- 1.2 Provide coverage of UPR Working Group Sessions via Facebook and Twitter

Objective 3: Ensure access of the general public to the UPR

- 1.1 Upload UPR documentation onto the website in different languages (English, French, Spanish)



- 1.2 Collect, analyse, and synthesise all UPR related documentation to produce simplified explanations and guidance documents to facilitate stakeholder participation
- 1.3 Produce and disseminate video explanations and tutorials of the UPR process

4.2. Goal 2: Increased stakeholder capacity to participate in the UPR mechanism

Objective 1: Strengthen skills, competencies and abilities of stakeholders

- 1.1 Develop, administer and participate in civil society trainings focusing on strategies for efficacious UPR engagement
- 1.2 Provide direct technical assistance to stakeholders who request support

Objective 2: Provide tools and resources for efficacious engagement

- 1.1 Develop capacity-building tools based upon rigorous needs assessments and stakeholder consultations
- 1.2 Maintain an up-to-date database of all UPR recommendations

4.3. Goal 3: Strengthened follow-up on the implementation of recommendations

Objective 1: Increase the quality of UPR recommendations

- 1.1 Facilitate meetings prior to UPR sessions, allowing CSOs to brief permanent missions in Geneva, and to share their country-specific human rights concerns
- 1.2 Categorise all UPR recommendations according to action level

Objective 2: Promote follow-up reporting on the status of implementation

- 1.1 Solicit input from stakeholders on the implementation status of recommendations
- 1.2 Give visibility on our website to reporting by all stakeholders



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4.4. Goal 4: Efficacious UPR mechanism, with modalities and stakeholder practices congruent with its founding principles

Objective 1: Monitor the UPR modalities

- 1.1 Follow discussion at the UPR by attending all Working Group Sessions and HRC Item 6 General Debates, and review human rights documents and statements issued regarding modality changes
- 1.2 Analyse congruence of modalities with UPR aims

Objective 2: Raise awareness when modalities diverge from UPR aims, and highlight best practices in engagement

- 1.1 Deliver statements to the Human Rights Council during Item 6 General Debate reflecting findings and concerns of stakeholders
- 1.2 Publish news analyses when practices emerge that are antagonistic to efficacious UPR functioning
- 1.3 Regularly meet with different actors to discuss modalities and the challenges and obstacles to engagement in light of the modalities

5. Implementation of the Strategic Objectives

5.1. Target Groups

UPR Info's unique positioning as an impartial NGO with expertise on the UPR mechanism allows us to act as a neutral facilitator for all actors of the UPR process. *UPR Info* orients its work at two levels: universally, and locally with particular attention to national CSOs. Considering the universal aspirations of the UPR, and the organisation's highly regarded value of inclusiveness, *UPR Info* strives to reach stakeholders in every country through its programming. At the same time, *UPR Info* has identified that national CSOs have a critical role to play in the UPR and are in great requirement of strengthened UPR engagement capacity. Active CSO participation is fundamental to guaranteeing that the review reflects the real situation on the ground, and that the implementation of recommendations is substantive and sustainable in domestic contexts. *UPR Info* believes that it is necessary to empower local actors to become leaders equipped with the resources necessary to push forward towards the creation and sustainability of their own free and just societies. Therefore, our objectives and activities are designed to equip national and local groups with the resources needed to take full ownership of their own processes of human rights advancement.

5.2. Human Resources

UPR Info will ensure adequate human resources to support the fulfilment of its mission. The strategic objectives shall be actualised through the work of the organisational staff, dedicated interns, the Executive Committee, and the Advisory Board.

The staff, headed by the Executive Director, is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the organisation, programme and project management, fundraising, and

other operational activities. The Executive Director is responsible for soliciting multi-stakeholder input, conducting needs assessments, and developing donor partnerships. The Programmes Director is responsible for conducting programme analyses with the aim of developing additional capacity-building tools, drafting publications to increase awareness about ways to maximise stakeholder engagement, and managing public outreach and relations. In addition, staff shall provide technical support to both States and NGOs, develop and deliver civil society trainings, advocate for modality adherence and reform through participation in UN meetings and UPR presentations, and collaborate regularly with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other stakeholders to ensure strengthened linkages.

The Executive Committee is the deciding board in charge of reaching the organisation's goals, and is instrumental to the strategic and operational development of the organisation. The Advisory Board provides the staff with advice, expertise and strategies on the activities of the organisation in order to better fulfil its mission. The Advisory Board is composed of members from a diverse range of governmental and non-governmental organisations, providing the *UPR Info* team with an extraordinary wealth of knowledge and experience for consideration when pursuing its goals. The Executive Committee and Advisory Board provide inputs to the development of the organisation throughout the year, regularly corresponding with the directors through in-person meetings, email, and telephone interactions. Moreover, once annually, all organisational members participate in the annual General Assembly during which time an intensive review of the strategic plan is conducted, and strategies are refined to ensure continued growth and stakeholder impact.

5.3. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

At *UPR Info*, we highly rely upon the input of a diverse range of stakeholders when devising our planning, monitoring and evaluation strategies. In light of its importance,



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we have an integrated participatory methods process by which we include stakeholders in all aspects of our programming. We devise our methods with a results-based management approach, endeavouring to achieve improved performance and demonstrable results.

In setting organisational goals, developing strategies, and allocating resources to achieve those goals, *UPR Info* relies upon rigorous and participatory stakeholder needs and capacities assessments, context and problem analyses, and internal and external programme evaluations. In order to ensure that the implementation of activities occurs at the time most conducive to maximum impact, *UPR Info* coordinates with stakeholders to determine the ideal timing of its activities. Additionally, *UPR Info* solicits inputs from target groups during the planning of its activities to guarantee maximal attention to the needs of the stakeholders, and assesses the gaps in outreach when devising tools through web and UPR participation data.

Monitoring is vital to ensuring that our projects stay on track. With this goal, we view monitoring as an ongoing process by which we obtain regular feedback on the progress made towards implementing our organisational goals. To this end, *UPR Info* depends upon a robust results framework with extensive quantitative and qualitative indicators to track and monitor its progress, which are mainstreamed and integrated into the management process. In addition to monitoring the results achieved through the programming, *UPR Info* finds it essential to monitor the broader UPR environment to ensure that the strategic objectives best reflect the changing context. Programme evaluation is vital to our capacity to learn from previous engagements, and to contribute to the improvement of decision-making to ensure the activities of the organisation are achieving results for the target groups. *UPR Info* deems it necessary to integrate various levels of analysis, and therefore internally evaluates progress against indicators pertaining to all aspects of its programming, and conducts a thorough review and integration of stakeholder feedback upon completion of each organisational activity.



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5.4. Ownership

UPR Info believes that truly transformative and sustainable societal processes rely upon stakeholder ownership. Through our activities, we aspire to ensure that the stakeholders we work with become active agents in the realisation of the goals we mutually pursue. Even as we share the goals of human rights protection and promotion, we recognise that we are not suited to determine the human rights needs of each country. Rather, we work to create an environment through which stakeholders can devise and implement their own agenda for UPR engagement and human rights advancement. Whether by opening up an advocacy space for civil society voices prior to the Working Group Session, creating training agendas directly reflective of the needs of each individual stakeholder, or equipping States and NGOs with the tools needed to devise strategies for UPR engagement, *UPR Info* affirms the necessity of helping stakeholders become equipped with the knowledge and capacities to develop and actualise their own context-specific human rights goals.

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