



Promoting human rights through
the Universal Periodic Review
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UPR Info Policy Paper – Strengthening the Universal Periodic Review: Reflections Ahead of the Fifth Cycle (March 2026)

Executive Summary

As the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) approaches the period between its fourth and fifth cycles in 2027, an important opportunity emerges to reflect on how the mechanism can continue to evolve while preserving its core principles of universality, cooperation, and equal treatment among States, and further strengthen its impact on the human rights situation on the ground.

In November 2025, UPR Info convened a Policy Dialogue bringing together States, UN actors, and civil society to reflect on the future of the mechanism. The discussions highlighted both the continued relevance of the UPR and the need to strengthen certain aspects of its functioning, particularly regarding participation, implementation, efficiency, and cross-pillar cooperation.

This paper complements a separate report summarising the discussions held during that Policy Dialogue. It sets out UPR Info's reflections on practical avenues to strengthen the effectiveness and credibility of the mechanism and enhance the implementation of UPR recommendations.

Here are our key considerations:

Elevating the Adoption of UPR Outcomes under Item 6 as a Moment of Accountability and Commitment

- 1) The adoption of the UPR outcome should be used as a forward-looking moment focused on implementation rather than reiteration of past positions.
- 2) States under Review should use the UPR adoption to communicate the strategic direction for implementing accepted recommendations, including priorities, coordination mechanisms, timelines, and planned engagement with national stakeholders.
- 3) Recommending States should use the adoption stage to engage in constructive follow-up, including through targeted questions and offers of technical or financial cooperation to support implementation.

Non-Cooperation: Rights, Obligations, and the Integrity of the Mechanism

- 4) Participation in the UPR should entail both rights and obligations and should not be exercised selectively. Where a State has not voluntarily concluded its Review process as a State under Review, it should not have the possibility to participate in other UPR-related proceedings until that process is duly completed.
- 5) The UPR is grounded in an interactive dialogue placing the State under Review at the centre of the process and cannot be conducted in its absence.

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6) Non-cooperation by a State must not restrict the ability of civil society and United Nations agencies and experts to submit information and ensure continued transparency regarding the human rights situation concerned.

Written Recommendations: A Promising Option Under Certain Conditions

(7) The introduction of written recommendations could improve efficiency and transparency if implemented through a transparent digital platform allowing States to view existing recommendations, support similar proposals, and indicate potential technical or financial assistance for their implementation.

(8) Safeguards should ensure that recommending States remain present and actively engaged in the interactive dialogue, with written recommendations only validated if the State intervenes during the Review.

(9) Clear guidance should ensure that interventions during the dialogue remain interactive and focused on implementation, follow-up questions, and opportunities for cooperation.

Development and Humanitarian Actors: Strengthening UPR Implementation through a Cross-Pillar Approach

(10) Development and humanitarian actors should more systematically and intentionally use accepted UPR recommendations as a framework for programming, policy dialogue, and the allocation of development cooperation resources.

(11) Aligning development cooperation strategies with UPR recommendations can strengthen coherence across the UN's human rights, development, and peace and security pillars.

(12) In a context of financial constraints affecting the UN system and civil society, greater integration of UPR recommendations into development and humanitarian programming can help maximise the impact of limited resources while advancing concrete human rights outcomes.

(13) Efforts should be made to raise awareness among development and humanitarian actors of the operational value of UPR recommendations. UPR Info stands ready to support such efforts.

Elevating the Adoption of UPR Outcomes under Item 6 as a Moment of Accountability and Commitment

The adoption of the UPR outcome at the Human Rights Council represents a pivotal moment in the review cycle. It is the stage at which the State under Review formally communicates its position on the recommendations received and publicly commits – before its peers and national stakeholders – to their implementation.

For several years, **UPR Info has advocated for a more strategic use of this moment.** Despite its importance, the adoption stage often remains underutilised. States under Review frequently reiterate past positions made during the Working Group or the reasons for accepting or noting recommendations duplicating information that is already included in the addendum, while recommending States tend to limit their interventions to welcoming the outcome or restating positions already expressed during the Working Group dialogue. As a result, the adoption risks becoming a procedural formality rather than a meaningful moment of accountability.

While the adoptions under item 6 formally conclude the Review of each State, they also mark the transition toward the next phase of the UPR cycle: the implementation of recommendations. They should be understood as the starting point of implementation, **a forward-looking moment centered on implementation.**

For the State under Review, this stage provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate political ownership of the implementation phase. For the past two years, UPR Info has encouraged States to approach this stage as an opportunity to look ahead and set the tone for the years of implementation that follow. By using their speaking time strategically, delegations can help shift the focus from recommendations to action. **Rather than revisiting the past interactive dialogue or duplicating information included in the addendum, the State under Review could use the adoption to outline the strategic direction and key priorities for implementing accepted recommendations.** This may include identifying priority areas, presenting initial plans, strategies, coordination mechanisms across government institutions and with other stakeholders – including state actors and civil society – indicating timelines, or announcing planned consultations with national stakeholders for the development of a human rights action plan. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for the State under Review to identify areas where international cooperation or technical assistance could facilitate progress.

Such an approach would signal that implementation is being pursued in a structured, strategic and intentional manner. It would also strengthen transparency and accountability towards peers, as well as towards national actors involved in the implementation process – including parliaments, members of the judiciary, national human rights institutions (NHRI), civil society organisations (CSO), UN agencies, and recommending States. In addition, such an approach can facilitate cooperation among States but also national actors, helping translate recommendations into concrete progress on the ground.

At the same time, recommending States could make more substantive use of this stage. Rather than reiterating previously expressed positions or congratulating the State under Review, they could engage in constructive follow-up by asking targeted questions on implementation and clarifying the intent and expected impact of their recommendations. They could also encourage concrete next steps, share relevant experiences or good practices to support implementation, and – where relevant – offer technical or financial assistance to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations they have proposed.

United Nations development and humanitarian actors could make greater use of this adoption moment and, as with the recommending States, come up with concrete support measures for implementing the strategy developed by the State under Review. This process should begin at the national level, in the period between the UPR review and the Item 6 adoption, through in-country discussions to align national development plans with UN agencies' programmes of work and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Similarly, NHRIs with A status and CSOs with ECOSOC accreditation can take part in this stage of the process by delivering statements, thereby strengthening the accountability of the State under Review with regard to its initial plans for implementing the recommendations.

Beyond enhancing transparency and accountability, civil society actors bring unique expertise, grounded knowledge, and direct access to rights-holders, including those in vulnerable situations and hard-to-reach areas. This proximity enables them to provide context-specific insights that are essential to informing inclusive, evidence-based policies, that respect human rights and promote gender equality. Through their continuous engagement at the national level, CSOs play a critical role in raising awareness on human rights issues and advancing human rights education.

Their contribution is therefore not only instrumental to monitoring and advocacy, but also to supporting informed decision-making processes and fostering ownership of implementation efforts. As such, where appropriate, these actors can present themselves during their interventions as potential partners in supporting the implementation of human rights plans, in line with a whole-of-society approach.

A more strategic use of the adoption stage would reinforce the cooperative nature of the UPR and strengthen mutual accountability among stakeholders. **The adoption should mark the beginning of implementation, not the end of the review.**

Key considerations:

1) The adoption of the UPR outcome should be used as a forward-looking moment focused on implementation rather than reiteration of past positions.

2) States under Review should use the adoption to communicate the strategic direction for implementing accepted recommendations, including priorities, coordination mechanisms, timelines, and planned engagement with national stakeholders.

3) Recommending States should use the adoption stage to engage in constructive follow-up, including through targeted questions and offers of technical or financial cooperation to support implementation.

Non-Cooperation: Rights, Obligations, and the Integrity of the Mechanism

Recent instances of non-cooperation with the UPR have exposed gaps in the framework governing such situations. For a mechanism grounded in universality, equal treatment, and peer accountability, ambiguity regarding the consequences of non-cooperation presents a structural risk to its credibility and predictability.

Paragraph 38 of Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 states that *“after exhausting all efforts to encourage a State to cooperate with the universal periodic review mechanism, the Council will address, as appropriate, cases of persistent non-cooperation with the mechanism.”* This remains the only provision explicitly referring to situations of non-cooperation. Its broad formulation leaves significant room for interpretation regarding the practical implications of disengagement from the mechanism.

While the UPR is a voluntary mechanism, we believe that **participation inherently entails both rights and obligations**. UPR Info considers that engagement with the mechanism should not be exercised selectively – with States participating in certain segments of the process while disregarding others without consequence. Such an “à la carte” approach would undermine the principle of equal treatment among States and weaken the integrity of the mechanism.

In practical terms, **where a State voluntarily fails to complete its Review as a State under Review, it should not participate in other UPR-related proceedings – including interventions under item 6 of the Human Rights Council agenda or participation in interactive dialogues – until its own Review process has been duly concluded**. Participation in the mechanism should remain coherent and reciprocal.

This discretion currently allowed by the framework may create asymmetries between States and could open the door to selective engagement. Although such a scenario has not yet materialized, its possibility alone risks undermining the credibility and predictability of the mechanism.

Recent instances of non-cooperation have also reignited discussions on whether a Review should proceed in the voluntary absence of the State under Review. UPR Info does not support such an approach. Resolution 5/1 clearly places the State under Review at the centre of the process, and the UPR is fundamentally built upon an interactive dialogue among States.

Conducting a Review without the principal interlocutor would fundamentally alter the nature of the process and risk transforming it into a unilateral exercise, contrary to its founding principles.

At the same time, non-cooperation by the State under Review must not obstruct the engagement of other stakeholders. Civil society organizations and United Nations agencies and experts must retain the ability to prepare and submit reports on the human rights situation in the country concerned. Ensuring continued documentation, transparency, and information-sharing is essential to prevent non-cooperation from limiting scrutiny or obscuring developments on the ground.

Ultimately, the credibility of the UPR depends on clarity, consistency, and fairness in how participation in the mechanism is understood. Addressing situations of non-cooperation is not about sanctioning States, but about safeguarding the universality, integrity, and cooperative nature of the mechanism. **Participation in the UPR cannot be selective.**

Key considerations:

4) Participation in the UPR should entail both rights and obligations and should not be exercised selectively. Where a State has not voluntarily concluded its Review process as a State under Review, it should not have the possibility to participate in other UPR-related proceedings until that process is duly completed.

5) The UPR is grounded in an interactive dialogue placing the State under Review at the centre of the process and cannot be conducted in its absence.

6) Non-cooperation by a State must not restrict the ability of civil society and United Nations agencies and experts to submit information and ensure continued transparency regarding the human rights situation in the State that was scheduled for Review.

Written Recommendations: A Promising Option Under Certain Conditions

The inter-cycle period offers an opportunity to reflect on possible adjustments to certain modalities of the UPR while fully preserving the principle of equal treatment among States. One proposal that has consistently emerged – which was again raised during the recent policy dialogue – is the possibility for States to submit recommendations in writing.

UPR Info considers that the introduction of **written recommendations could represent a constructive innovation for the mechanism, provided that appropriate safeguards are in place to preserve the interactive nature of the Review.** While such a system presents clear opportunities, it also carries potential risks that should be carefully addressed.

In the current context of financial constraints affecting the United Nations system, a system allowing recommendations to be submitted in writing could contribute to improving efficiency. Collecting recommendations in advance **could reduce the administrative workload currently borne by the UPR Branch and the Troika**, particularly with regard to the verification and consolidation of recommendations. This would allow them to focus more on translation and processing, potentially supported in the future by automated translation tools.

Beyond administrative efficiency, the format through which written recommendations are submitted would be critical. A transparent digital platform could bring several important benefits.

First, such a platform could **improve the preparation of the State under Review** enabling it to access recommendations in advance, by allowing it to identify emerging thematic priorities and better structure its responses during the interactive dialogue. This could ultimately strengthen the quality and focus of the exchange in the room.

Second, the platform could facilitate the **identification and clustering of similar recommendations**. Recommending States would be able to see which recommendations have already been submitted by other States in the system and indicate their support for existing proposals where relevant. This could help to cluster similar recommendations with an identical objective while preserving their diversity expressed.

Third, such a system could significantly strengthen **cooperation for implementation**. A major innovation such a platform could include **would be the possibility for recommending States to indicate whether they are in a position to offer technical or financial assistance in support of the recommendations they propose**. This could be facilitated through a simple feature within the platform, such as a checkbox allowing States to indicate their willingness to provide technical or financial support when submitting or validating a recommendation. This would encourage greater ownership by recommending States and help address the frequently expressed need for technical and financial support to implement UPR recommendations.

Taken together, these elements could enhance transparency, improve the quality of dialogue during the Review, and facilitate the identification of partners for implementation.

At the same time, **the introduction of written recommendations should not undermine the core feature of the UPR: its interactive dialogue among States**. Three key challenges therefore require careful consideration.

The first concerns the risk that recommending States might rely solely on written submissions and reduce their participation in the dialogue itself. Preserving the presence and engagement of States in the room, maintaining the 3.5-hour Review, is essential to maintain the interactive nature of the Review. **One possible safeguard would be to require recommending States to intervene during the dialogue in order for their written recommendations to be formally considered**.

The second challenge relates to the substance of interventions. If recommendations are submitted in advance, there is a risk that statements during the dialogue could become limited to general expressions of support or congratulations. **Clear guidance could therefore help ensure that interventions are more interactive, including follow-up questions, clarification of recommendations, offers of cooperation, or sharing of good practices** that could the implementation of specific recommendations.

A third challenge relates to ensuring fairness among recommending States. If recommendations are submitted through a written system, it may be necessary to define a maximum number of recommendations per State in order to ensure equal opportunities for all delegations to contribute to the process. **One possible approach could be to determine this number based on the average number of recommendations made by States taking the floor during previous UPR reviews, or a word limit that can reasonably be delivered within the average speaking time allocated in previous cycles.**

If carefully designed, a system allowing written recommendations could enhance efficiency, transparency, and cooperation within the UPR – while preserving the core principle that the Review remains an interactive dialogue among States.

Key considerations

(7) The introduction of written recommendations could improve efficiency and transparency if implemented through a transparent digital platform allowing States to view existing recommendations, support similar proposals, and indicate potential technical or financial assistance for their implementation.

(8) Safeguards should ensure that recommending States remain present and actively engaged in the interactive dialogue, with written recommendations only validated if the State intervenes during the Review.

(9) Clear guidance should ensure that interventions during the dialogue remain interactive and focused on implementation, follow-up questions, and opportunities for cooperation.

Development and Humanitarian Actors: Strengthening UPR Implementation through a Cross-Pillar Approach

One of the often-underutilised strengths of the UPR lies in its potential to reinforce coherence across the three pillars of the United Nations system: human rights, development, and peace and security. While the interconnections between human rights and sustainable development are widely recognised, the strategic use of the UPR as an operational tool within development and

humanitarian cooperation remains limited. Yet the respect for human rights is not only a development objective; it is also one of the most effective ways to prevent conflict and to guarantee just and sustainable peace. The UPR therefore offers a unique platform through which States can translate human rights commitments into concrete development and peacebuilding actions.

Despite this potential, development and humanitarian actors rarely anchor their programming in UPR recommendations their governments made. This represents a missed opportunity. Accepted UPR recommendations provide a State-owned, internationally endorsed framework that can guide policy dialogue, strategic programming, and the allocation of development and humanitarian resources and technical assistance.

Aligning development cooperation strategies and actions with selected UPR recommendations would allow States and international partners to use the mechanism as a structured entry point for advancing concrete human rights outcomes. For recommending States in particular, this alignment offers a legitimate and strategic framework to pursue foreign policy priorities when align with the priorities of the State under Review and with its consent while supporting the implementation of internationally agreed human rights commitments.

Such an approach would strengthen policy coherence across the UN pillars, improve coordination between diplomatic engagement and development programming, and **ensure that development financing contributes in a more structured and intentional way to the realisation of human rights commitments.**

Strengthening this approach will also require greater awareness among development and humanitarian actors of how the UPR can support their programming objectives. **UPR Info stands ready to support efforts to increase awareness among these actors – including development agencies, cooperation ministries, and implementing partners – on how UPR recommendations can be used as practical entry points for programming, policy dialogue, and partnerships for implementation.**

This reflection is particularly important in the current financial context. Among the three pillars of the United Nations – peace and security, development, and human rights – the human rights pillar is chronically underfunded. The current liquidity crisis affecting both the United Nations system and civil society organisations further exacerbates this imbalance.

In this context, greater coherence between development cooperation, humanitarian action, and human rights commitments becomes even more essential. **Aligning development and humanitarian programming with UPR recommendations represents a practical and cost-effective way to strengthen implementation while maximising the impact of existing resources.**



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If strategically used, the UPR can therefore serve not only as a review mechanism, but also as a bridge between human rights commitments and the broader development and peace agendas.

Key considerations:

(10) Development and humanitarian actors should more systematically and intentionally use accepted UPR recommendations as a framework for programming, policy dialogue, and the allocation of development cooperation resources in alignment with the State under Review national priorities and with its consent.

(11) Aligning development cooperation strategies with UPR recommendations can strengthen coherence across the UN's human rights, development, and peace and security pillars.

(12) In a context of financial constraints affecting the UN system and civil society, greater integration of UPR recommendations into development and humanitarian programming can help maximise the impact of limited resources while advancing concrete human rights outcomes.

(13) Efforts should be made to raise awareness among development and humanitarian actors of the operational value of UPR recommendations. UPR Info stands ready to support such efforts.