



Promoting human rights through
the Universal Periodic Review
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Report on the UPR Policy Dialogue

Executive Summary and Context

The first Policy Dialogue dedicated to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was held on 19 November 2025 in Geneva, at the Permanent Mission of Thailand. The dialogue was convened to foster reflective and strategic discussions on how best to prepare for the next phase of the mechanism and to strengthen its impact on the promotion and protection of human rights on the ground. As the UPR approaches the end of its fourth cycle, the Policy Dialogue provided a timely space for structured exchange among States, the United Nations (UN), civil society organisations (CSOs) and other international organisations. The discussions focused on (1) exploring procedural adjustments to the UPR for the next cycle, (2) ways to improve the implementation of UPR recommendations, and (3) the sharing of good practices and the promotion of cooperation among stakeholders, with a view to informing future inter-cycle reflections.

Participants reaffirmed the UPR as a central and widely supported mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC). As the UPR moves towards its 18th anniversary, the mechanism was consistently described as a cornerstone of the UN human rights system, valued for its universality, equal treatment of States, and peer-review nature. Participants highlighted the UPR's contribution to transparency, self-assessment, and constructive peer engagement, enabling States to identify gaps, receive recommendations, and strengthen accountability through dialogue. These core features were repeatedly underlined as essential to the credibility, legitimacy, and effectiveness of the mechanism.

Discussions also recalled the tangible advances made through the UPR since its establishment. Participants noted that the mechanism has contributed to strengthening national legal and institutional frameworks and to creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation both between States and between governments and civil society. The UPR has supported the establishment and reinforcement of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) and National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF). Moreover, it has contributed to legislative and policy reforms in areas such as gender-based violence, the abolition of the death penalty, and the prevention of child marriage, and encouraged the ratification of international human rights treaties, including the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol. At the same time, participants acknowledged that, despite these advances, the UPR has not yet reached its full potential, particularly in terms of translating normative and policy progress into concrete, measurable improvements in the enjoyment of human rights on the ground.

The current context was recognised as a defining factor for these reflections. Over recent years, a range of discussions have taken place concerning the UPR, including reflections and proposals developed in the context of the UN's financial constraints and broader efforts towards rationalisation and efficiency within the HRC. These discussions have generated a number of ideas related to the functioning and modalities of the mechanism, many of which could not be fully explored or advanced during an ongoing cycle. The Policy Dialogue provided an opportunity

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to revisit some of these proposals, to reflect on their implications in light of experience gained during the fourth cycle, and to identify those that could warrant more in-depth consideration in preparation for the next cycle. In this regard, participants underlined the importance of the forthcoming inter-cycle period as a critical moment to take stock of lessons learned, assess potential adjustments and their long-term implications, and identify ways to strengthen implementation and impact, while preserving the UPR's core principles.

Against this background, the Policy Dialogue enabled to identify and structure a set of key challenges, good practices that can reinforce the mechanism and areas for further reflection to inform preparations for the fifth cycle. These included: non-cooperation with the UPR; possible procedural and modalities adjustments; the use of adoption sessions; measures to strengthen effectiveness beyond Geneva; inclusivity, civil society participation, whole of society approach; and the sharing of good practices, including through national implementation mechanisms.

Non-Cooperation and Universality

Non-cooperation by Member States was identified as a significant challenge with potential implications for the universality and credibility of the UPR. Participants noted that the strength of the mechanism lies in its universal application, and that selective participation risks undermining equal treatment and peer accountability.

Concerns were raised that continued non-cooperation by States under review could weaken incentives to engage constructively with the mechanism. Some participants argued that, in cases of persistent refusal to cooperate, options should be examined to ensure that the review process should take place in the absence of the State under review, while others stressed that any response must remain consistent with existing rules and preserve the cooperative nature of the UPR.

There was broad agreement that safeguarding universality is essential to maintaining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the mechanism, and that further reflection on how to address non-cooperation is required.

This situation of non-cooperation confronts the mechanism with a reality that had not been fully anticipated at the time of its creation, particularly regarding the availability of clear tools and procedures to address such circumstances. The upcoming inter-cycle period provides a timely opportunity to reflect on and strengthen the mechanism so that it is better equipped to respond to similar situations in the future.

Procedural and Modalities Adjustments

Participants discussed proposals aimed at improving efficiency and strengthening the interactive nature of the UPR. One proposal reiterated during the dialogue was the submission of recommendations in writing prior to the review, rather than their oral presentation during the interactive dialogue. Supporters of this approach highlighted its potential to enhance substantive exchanges, reduce repetition, and ease the administrative burden on the Secretariat and the troika.

Discussions emphasized that any procedural adjustments should preserve meaningful interaction between the State under review and recommending States. Proposals included linking written recommendations to active participation in the dialogue to avoid disengagement.

Accessibility considerations were also central to this discussion. Participants underlined the importance of maintaining UPR adoptions during regular sessions of the Human Rights Council and ensuring the continued availability of webcasting. These elements were considered essential for effective participation by civil society, particularly actors with limited resources or from underrepresented regions.

It was further suggested that any proposal should be assessed for their potential impact on civil society participation, to ensure that adjustments do not restrict access or engagement.

Use of Adoption Sessions and Implementation Planning

The use of adoption sessions under item 6 of the Human Rights Council agenda was discussed as a key moment in the UPR cycle. Participants emphasized that these sessions should be oriented towards implementation rather than viewed solely as a procedural conclusion of the review.

It was suggested that adoption sessions could be used to present implementation plans or roadmaps outlining how accepted recommendations will be addressed (including priority areas, coordination mechanisms, timelines, or planned consultations) and clarifying the rationale for recommendations that were noted. Such an approach was seen as a way to strengthen transparency, accountability, and follow-up.

Participants also highlighted the potential for adoption sessions to facilitate dialogue on implementation support, including offers of technical or financial assistance by recommending States.

Strengthening Effectiveness and Follow-Up

Enhancing the effectiveness of the UPR beyond Geneva was identified as a priority. Participants noted persistent challenges related to the volume and the quality of recommendations (measurable and actionable), coordination across government institutions, and limited monitoring and data systems. In this context, there was a clear call to strengthen follow-up systems, ensuring that recommendations are systematically tracked, responsibilities clearly allocated, and progress regularly assessed.

NMIRFs were widely recognized as effective tools to address these challenges. These were described as mechanisms that help consolidate fragmented follow-up, assign responsibilities, ensure continuity across political cycles, and strengthen coherence between international commitments and national policies. Their role in coordinating consultations, preparing reports, and facilitating dialogue with civil society and international partners was emphasized. Participants also highlighted the need to enhance the use of digital technology to generate data and evidence-based analysis, enabling more transparent monitoring, improved data collection, and more informed policymaking in support of implementation.

The importance of engaging additional State actors, including parliaments and the judiciary, was highlighted. Judicial engagement was seen as critical for interpreting recommendations in light of international human rights law and translating political commitments into legal and institutional practice.

Participants also stressed the need for improved cooperation between human rights mechanisms and development actors, noting the alignment between UPR recommendations and the Sustainable Development Goals. Better integration with development planning was viewed as a way to support implementation and mobilize resources.

Inclusivity and Civil Society Participation

Inclusivity was identified as a defining feature of the UPR and a key condition for its effectiveness. Participants emphasized that the UPR functions not only as a review mechanism, but also as a catalyst for national-level dialogue and coordination. Preparation for the review and follow-up processes requires the involvement of a wide range of actors, including government institutions, CSOs, NHRIs, parliaments, the judiciary, UN entities, and other relevant stakeholders.

CSOs were recognized as essential contributors throughout the UPR cycle, including in reporting, advocacy, follow-up, and monitoring. Their role in providing independent analysis, raising sensitive issues, supporting the translation of recommendations into concrete actions, and holding authorities accountable was highlighted. Participants underlined the importance of ensuring that the UPR remains accessible to independent civil society actors and that the process is safe for human rights defenders, including through effective responses to acts of

intimidation or reprisal. Some participants also underscored that, since the beginning of the fourth cycle, an increase in reprisals against civil society actors has been observed, thereby limiting their participation in the UPR.

The engagement of parliaments was identified as critical for legislative follow-up, budgetary oversight, and the sustainability of implementation. Parliamentary involvement was seen as contributing to institutional continuity, facilitating the adoption of necessary legal reforms, and strengthening democratic accountability for the implementation of accepted recommendations.

The role of the judiciary was also emphasized, particularly in interpreting and applying international human rights standards at the national level. Judicial engagement was viewed as essential for translating UPR recommendations from political commitments into legal and jurisprudential practice, and for clarifying the normative content of rights and obligations arising from accepted recommendations.

Participants further stressed the importance of structured cooperation among all stakeholders at the national level. Inclusive and participatory approaches were considered to improve the quality, legitimacy, and sustainability of implementation outcomes, while reinforcing trust and ownership across institutions. The need to maintain strong linkages with independent expert mechanisms, including treaty bodies and special procedures, was also underscored, as their inputs provide an important evidence base for the UPR process.

Financial and Technical Assistance, Technology, and Good Practices

Discussions highlighted the importance of financial and technical assistance to support both participation and implementation. The role of the two UPR Voluntary Funds was emphasized, alongside concerns about funding shortfalls that limit access for least developed countries and small island developing States. Participants called for enhanced and sustained support to these funds.

The dialogue also noted the potential of peer-to-peer exchanges, regional cooperation, and partnerships with civil society, academia, and other actors to support implementation and capacity-building.

New technologies were identified as useful tools to strengthen follow-up and data management. Digital platforms and national tracking databases were cited as enabling more systematic monitoring of recommendations across human rights mechanisms.

Finally, participants expressed interest in further exchanges of good practices, including on national architectures for implementation, the clustering and prioritization of recommendations, and the use of measurable indicators to assess progress.