*Check against delivery*

**Human Rights Council**

**37th session, item 10**



**Oral statement by**

**Mr. Morten Kjaerum**

**On behalf of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights (VFTC)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Geneva, 22 March 2018**

**President,**

**Director,**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished representatives of Member and Observer States and of Civil Society**

**Introduction**

**I thank the Director of the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division, Ms. Georgette Gagnon, for her comments today and all her support.**

On behalf of Members of the Board of Trustees[[2]](#footnote-2) of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights (VFTC), **I also thank the High Commissioner and his Office for their continuing excellent assistance from the Secretariats of the two trust funds.**

In accordance with resolutions 18/18 and 33/28. I present the Board’s report for 2017 on behalf the current Chairperson of the Board, Ms. Mariclaire Acosta who could not attend the Council session this year.

The VFTC is the second largest trust fund administered by OHCHR providing financial support for technical cooperation in implementation of international human rights standards at national level. The members of the VFTC Board also constitute the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review.

**In its dual capacity the Board provides policy advice and guidance on technical cooperation in support to State efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights including the implementation of UPR recommendations.**

The VFTC Board’s report covers its forty-fourth and fifty-fith sessions held in Geneva and in the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa in Lebanon, with a short visit to the OHCHR presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, in March and October 2017 respectively.

**Board session in Geneva**

During the Geneva session the Board was able to discuss the importance of the continued process to strengthen the thematic capacities of the regional OHCHR presences also in the context of the new management plan. A briefing was provided on the ongoing work and results following the enhanced capacities on the ground for reporting and follow-up to the work of the human rights mechanisms. The Board had the opportunity to contribute to the preparations for the new OHCHR’s four-year cycle programme.

The Board continued its discussion with partners and relevant parts of the Office and **there are clear expectations that OHCHR also in the future will provide sound advice on the engagement with the UPR process. The importance of enhancing the linkages between these outcomes, recommendations and reviews and the efforts on the ground to combat inequality and discrimination were particularly stressed.**

**Excellencies,**

**The Board found that the presence of the Regional Office in Beirut clearly adds value in multiple fronts. The support provided on the development of the statutory framework for the establishment of a national human rights institution,** commenting on legislation and supporting the strengthening of complaints and investigative mechanisms**, has been found as critically important by all the actors with whom the Board met including Parliamentarians.**

**The Board emphasizes the work done in the region building new partnerships to support State efforts advancing women’s rights. The Board was particularly pleased with the ongoing training programmes on community mobilization for women human rights defenders from across the region; and the capacity-building activities for judges and lawyers, on judicial gender stereotyping and women’s access to justice.** The overall impression gained by the Board is that the work on gender mainstreaming has moved its focus from quantity of activities to quality of the support provided. This is thanks to the placement of gender expertise in the regions.

Given the generosity of Lebanon, the situation and challenges following the most recent reception of a large number of refugees, in particular from the Syrian Arab Republic was also a key focus of discussions.

In response to the crisis in Syria, OHCHR has established a team, which functions as a virtual country office, operating from Gaziantep, Amman, Geneva and Beirut. **The Board observed how the work of the team continues to be a key source for OHCHR data collection, early warning and advocacy and also for capacity-building activities with partners. The output that the team provides is an important example of the quality work that OHCHR delivers and how it is facilitating and guiding the processes of many other key actors.** For the Board, this type of technical cooperation could be developed in other regions as well.

Through the Session, the Board was informed by various partners on the ground that the **OHCHR regional office is seen as the expert point of reference.** The Board hopes that strengthening the OHCHR regional presence will result in an increase in its thematic capacity. This is particularly important at this juncture, when peace and security, violent extremism and the need to strengthen the rule of law play such a critical role in the stability and prosperity in the region.

**Excellencies;**

**In the occupied Palestinian territory, the support received and the value of the work of the Office was emphasized by all: the authorities, civil society and members of the United Nations and the international community with whom the Board met. The Board visited both the West Bank and Gaza.** This visit demonstrated once again that, when OHCHR is given the opportunity to use the full mandate in a strategic manner to support human rights efforts in a country, the results are tangible and sustainable despite critical complexities**. The Board noted that capacity-building activities have increased significantly since the accession in 2014 by the State of Palestine to seven of the core international human rights treaties.**

**The discussions highlighted how the Office’s monitoring work informs the programmes of partners. It contributes positively to the tangible results achieved in the development of the national protection framework, engagement with the human rights mechanisms and legal and policy reforms promoting human rights. The close monitoring of the situation of human rights defenders and of persons in detention has enabled the Office to get an accurate idea of the challenges that need to be addressed and of the relevant institutions to work with on the design and implementation of appropriate programmes.**

**Further,** the Office plays an important convening role and provides a trusted space for dialogue. It creates channels of participation, in particular for human rights defenders and victims. That was highlighted in particular by human rights defenders in Gaza.

The leading role of the Office through the United Nations humanitarian protection cluster, is unique. **The Board felt that such examples could contribute to the methodologies of mainstreaming human rights into humanitarian work in difficult situations to be applied in other regions.**

**The cooperation, trust and credibility that the Office has managed to build over more than 20 years of presence, through numerous crisis situations and difficult times, is the result of a consistent and innovative programme in full conformity with international standards and the mandate of the High Commissioner**.

The operational challenges that the Office faces are striking in particular in movement to and from Gaza, and by the challenges that lie ahead. To sustain and build on the progress made so far requires not only support from headquarters but also from the entire United Nations system.

**Excellencies,**

**The Board continued this year elaborating on the principles for effective technical cooperation in its annual report.** The Board is very pleased for the recognition by the Council of its contributions. **This year the Board stresses that to be effective, technical cooperation in the field of human rights from the Office should build on its** priorities through its programmatic cycle, with the aim of optimizing the effective use of the resources available. **The OHCHR multi-year strategic programming process, to which the Board has contributed, is the most comprehensive process for identifying human rights strategies and priorities for human rights technical cooperation.**

**VFTC founded activities in 2017**

**In 2017 the Fund continued to provide resources for technical cooperation to build strong national human rights frameworks in 28 regions, countries and territories through 14 human rights mainstreaming projects**; **10 human rights components of peace missions** and **four country/stand-alone offices**.

The **total expenditure of the Fund at 31 December 2017 was $12,362,447,** almost a million USD less that in 2016. **By 31 December 2017, the Fund had received a total of $11,002,141.** The deficit was covered through the Fund’s reserves which are getting very limited if the good intentions for more substantive increase of voluntary contributions to OHCHR do not materialize.

**Excellencies;**

**Through the debates in the Council the Board has observed an increased willingness from States to publicly acknowledge the important technical support received from the Office even in complex situations. Nonetheless, many states still remain shy at requesting and recognizing the assistance that the Office can provide. When the Office is close to the realities on the ground, greater opportunities to build solid partnerships develop. For example, the Board encourages countries and UN in the Middle East and North Africa Region to seek the possibility of technical support from Human Rights Advisers. It is one of the regions not benefiting from this type of programme.**

**However, it is difficult to ensure sustainability of efforts if financial support is always fragile and under short-term agreements. In this moment when the Office is finalizing a solid and up-to-date programme for the next four years, financial support for the Office’s capacity to develop robust, long-term strategic partnerships to support effective implementation on the ground is more critical than ever. The international community should make history and boost the support to OHCHR to the same levels as the other key pillars of the UN.**

**The Board looks forward to the panel discussion in June focusing on human rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through technical cooperation.**

**Thank you**

1. In relation to the presentation of the Annual Report of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, A/HRC/37/79 of 31 January 2018 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Board’s members appointed by the Secretary General from the five geographic regions are Ms. Mariclaire Acosta (Mexico and current chair), Ms. Esi Sutherland-Addy (Ghana), Ms. Lin Lim (Malaysia) Ms. Valeriya Lutkovska (Ukraine) and Mr. Morten Kjaerum who was appointed in July 2017 to fill the seat vacated by Mr. Christopher Sidoti from Australia. The Board’s chairpersonship rotates annually among its members. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)