*Check against delivery*

**Human Rights Council**

**32nd session, item 10**



**Oral statement by**

**Ms. Lin Lim**

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

**Geneva, 30 June 2015**

**President,**

**Deputy High Commissioner,**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished representatives of Member and Observer States,**

**Distinguished representatives of Civil Society.**

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 would like to thank the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Kate Gilmore, for the excellent support and collaboration received from the Office in carrying out the Board’s mandate through this reporting year.

Allow me to present this report, following resolution 18/18, in my capacity as Chair of the VFTC Board. The VFTC, the second largest trust fund administered by OHCHR, provides financial support for technical cooperation aimed at enhancing implementation of international human rights standards at national level. The members of the Board are also the constituent members of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. In this dual capacity, the Board provides policy advice and guidance on technical cooperation relevant to OHCHR’S six thematic strategies and seeks to promote the complementary and hence, more effective, use of both funds.

The Board commended the OHCHR’s strategic use of the UPR Trust Fund to build and strengthen national follow-up mechanisms and processes. These included the inter-institutional bodies for reporting and follow-up, especially on the implementation of key thematic priority recommendations; design of national human rights action plans; creation of a monitoring and tracking database; and documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned – all of which have resulted, not only in larger and more sustained impact but also increased interest by the States in accessing technical support through the use of the Trust Fund on UPR implementation.

The Board’s report today on the VFTC covers its forty-second session held in Geneva and Kyiv, Ukraine in February this year and provides an update on the use of the VFTC during the period under review, supplementing the information in the annual report to the Human Rights Council.

In Geneva, the Board was briefed on the financial and administrative situation of OHCHR. The Board noted the efforts by the Office to address the financial challenges by terminating or reducing field presences and programmes traditionally covered by VFTC resources. But it remains deeply concerned that these reductions negatively impact on the capacity of the Office to respond to urgent human rights needs on the ground as requested by States. The requests for technical cooperation keep growing but the voluntary contributions have not kept pace, so that the funding gap has been widening.

The Board was especially disturbed to learn about the problems encountered as a result of the implementation of the new UMOJA system, in particular to access accurate and timely information on expenditures, provide financial reports and make timely grant payments to partners. These difficulties and delays which we understand have been common throughout the Secretariat are negatively affecting the credibility and operational capacities of OHCHR especially on the ground. The Board strongly urges the UN Secretariat to ensure adequate human resources support to OHCHR to urgently solve the OMOJA teething challenges.

Another key issue is that of migration and technical cooperation. The Board understood the decision of the Office taken in 2013 to integrate migration across all the thematic strategies, rather than maintaining it as a distinct and separate thematic strategy; but emphasized that it is necessary to ensure that such mainstreaming does not result in loss of visibility and effective results. The mass movement and displacement of people is most likely going to continue. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that experiences in the field continue to inform the strategic direction on this complex issue and that technical cooperation activities reflect the realities and possibilities for real impact, taking into account the key value added of the Office’s expertise and mandate in this area. The Board, therefore, welcomed the re-focused priority of the Office in this important area.

Another important area is that of economic, social and cultural rights. The Board had confirmed through all its field visits that demands for specific technical cooperation in this area, such as on land rights and housing rights, continue to grow. Therefore, it wishes to highlight this as an area requiring effective medium and long-term strategies to provide support and follow-up training to strengthen the capacity of the Office to respond to the increasing demands and expectations.

Excellencies,

The second part of the Board’s session was in Kyiv, where the visit to the Human Rights Mission in Ukraine was its first to this type of OHCHR field presence. The Board had an excellent opportunity to observe in situ how the Office was able to respond swiftly to the crisis that unfolded in early 2014 and to deploy a mission in a very complex situation. OHCHR had the advantage of already having a presence there, with expertise and experience, through the deployment of a human rights adviser to the United Nations Country Team since 2011 supported by the VFTC. The start-up financing from the Secretary-General’s contingency fund and the engagement of OHCHR senior management were also critical elements in the rapid response.

The Board learned how OHCHR had managed from the outset to become a key partner in the country. All stakeholders confirmed that the support and visits, constant engagement and advocacy by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights had played an invaluable role. The Board also learned that the Mission had developed a remarkable capacity to strike an effective and appropriate balance by monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation, challenges and violations on both sides of the contact line with a totally impartial and transparent approach and a strategic use of “protection by presence”. The results of the intensive monitoring work combined with the unique technical capacity of the staff have been heavily relied upon by all partners to design their own response efforts. This is the essence of the type of technical cooperation that OHCHR can and is best placed to offer.

The Ukraine Mission was a very good example of what the Board tries to emphasize: that understanding the human rights situation through monitoring and technical cooperation and advisory services need to be treated as part and parcel of a continuum, in which evidence-based information on the situation and challenges on the ground is carefully analysed and used to identify the best course of action and the range of tools and support available before implementation takes place. This natural progression of work was recognized and appreciated by all the partners that the Board met, not only in Ukraine but also other countries visited such as Cambodia, Mexico and Tunisia.

A particularly significant finding was the clear expectation that the Mission would continue to play a key role in providing technical support beyond its current mandate. All stakeholders emphasized that while there has been much progress, Ukraine still requires major technical support to make the operationalization of reforms fully compliant with international human rights standards. A major limiting factor has been the very short-term nature of the Mission’s mandate; the most recent extension being for six months up to September 2016. The Board very much hopes that the Government and OHCHR can agree on a longer-term plan that would enable more strategic planning and longer-term programmes to meet ongoing expectations for technical assistance and to support more sustained and realistic fundraising possibilities.

Excellencies,

Following its practice of previous years to propose a set of principles for effective technical cooperation in the field of human rights, this year the Board wishes to elaborate on its view that effective technical cooperation should reflect national development objectives. On the one hand, for technical cooperation in the field of human rights to have effective and sustainable results, it has to be closely aligned to national socio-economic development objectives, and, on the other hand, sustainable socio-economic development hinges on a human rights-based approach.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) makes it even more critical and also feasible for OHCHR technical cooperation programmes to support national development objectives. The Agenda and the SDGs are grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties, and OHCHR clearly has a central role to play. Aligning technical cooperation on human rights with national development objectives should entail support for States to ensure that policies and institutions to promote development base themselves on the obligations that emanate from international human rights standards. Human rights instruments provide a coherent framework for practical action to carry out national development objectives.

For economic and social development processes to be sustainable and effective, they have to be participatory, transparent and non-discriminatory. Corruption, discrimination, inequality, especially gender inequality, and abusive power relations are often at the heart of development challenges and obstacles. The Board, through its experiences on the ground, is convinced that technical cooperation programmes aimed at respecting and strengthening the rule of law, in accordance with international standards, are essential to create conducive environments for sustained and sustainable development. Capacity building programmes to strengthen national institutions, such as the judiciary and national human rights institutions fully compliant with the Paris Principles, are essential. Equally critical are programmes to enable civil society to work freely and to participate actively and effectively in these processes.

Since its establishment, the Fund had supported numerous programmes aimed at integrating human rights into national development efforts, notably through OHCHR country presences and in particular Human Rights Advisers in the United Nations Country Teams. These Advisers play a crucial role in mainstreaming human rights standards into the UN Development Assistance Frameworks and assisting the country teams to operationalize such standards. Although the Advisers continue to be highly valued by State partners and the UN family the financial resources for their work and the sustainability of their presence have become particularly challenging. The Board calls for support, particularly from the UNDG Human Rights Working Group, to help ensure adequate funding for these key positions on the ground.

Excellencies,

In 2015, the Fund continued to provide resources for technical cooperation to build strong national human rights frameworks in 30 regions, States and territories. This included support for 15 Human Rights Advisers, 9 human rights components of peace missions, and 6 country/ stand-alone offices. However, the funding gap has been growing. Requests for technical cooperation and expenditures continued to exceed the voluntary contributions made in 2015.

The total expenditure of the VFTC in 2015 amounted to $17.4 million, substantially less than in the previous year. The reductions were due to the termination of or substantial reduction in a number of programmes previously covered by the Fund, including those in Ecuador, Republic of Moldova, Togo and Kosovo.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Fund received a total of $13.1 million in voluntary contributions, of which $8.2 million were earmarked and $4.8 million were allocated to the Fund from unearmarked contributions to OHCHR. The resulting deficit at the end of 2015 was covered from existing reserves. The estimated cost plan for the VFTC in 2016 is USD 17.2 million. Only USD 2.5 million has been received in contribution thus far.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude by saying that the Board considers that technical cooperation in the field of human rights has substantially advanced in recent years. What is needed now is an enhanced capacity, both at headquarters and in the field, for OHCHR to provide the type of technical cooperation that it is best placed to offer, given its mandate and expertise. This is particularly critical in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. What is also clearly needed is improved resource mobilization to reduce the funding gap and ensure adequate resources to meet the growing human rights needs on the ground.

Finally, let me express the Board’s great appreciation to the Secretariats of the two trust funds and the offices and field presences of OHCHR for the quality of assistance and support we have received. We are greatly encouraged by the deep commitment and high level of competence of so many of those we work with and so many of those we meet during the course of our work.

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/32/451 of 20 April 2016 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 Mr. Christopher Sidoti (Australia), Ms. Mariclaire Acosta Urquidi (Mexico), Ms. Esi Sutherland-Addy (Ghana), Ms. Lin Lim (Malaysia and current Chair); and Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris from Latvia who was appointed in February 2016 to fill the seat vacated by Mr. Valeriu Nicolae from Romania. The Board’s chairpersonship rotates annually among its members and Mr. Sidoti will take over at the end of June 2016, following the decision of the Board during its last session in Ukraine. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Reference to Kosovo should be understood to be in full compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)