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VERBAL NOTE

The Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and referring to the Office's request, hereby submits its answers to the questionnaire of Enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights.

QUESTION 1:

In your opinion, what are the specific priority areas in which international cooperation in the field of human rights should be further enhanced?

Elimination of discrimination and greater openness and inclusion should be cross-cutting themes in all human rights policies and international cooperation. The growing inequality of opportunity and the disparities in enjoyment to certain human rights are of great concern. Discrimination and marginalization of certain groups should be addressed more efficiently in development cooperation by way of interventions and measures designed to empower and "level-up" access to services and benefits on equal terms by those left behind or excluded. Gender equality is a particular concern both at policy and programming level. Special attention should thus be given to the promotion of women's and girl's human rights and their opportunities for participation.

Participation and capacity-building of rights-holders and duty-bearers alike are an important element when striving to further human rights enjoyment. In this sense, the linkages between the work of human rights mechanisms (recommendations made during the UPR and by special procedures and treaty bodies) and international development cooperation efforts could be strengthened.

Also, promoting the legal validity and implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, and thus strengthening their status, is important. Good and accountable governance should be strengthened both at national and international level in order to increase openness and inclusiveness, and in the international organizations, openness should be increased by supporting the opportunities for participation of civil society.

QUESTION 2:

How can international cooperation in the field of human rights be further enhanced in specific areas such as human rights education, international migration, interaction among human rights institutions and the right to development?

One important way of furthering specific areas of human rights is the promotion of universal ratification of all central human rights treaties and their full implementation at the country level. Multilateral system, particularly the UN, is an important forum for dialogue and policy development, but also a channel for international development cooperation. Human rights should be mainstreamed into all UN work.

The emerging international development agenda (Post 2015) presents an important opportunity for coordinated efforts to further human rights. The new development goals should adhere to standards and principles of human rights and international efforts to

support their implementation should strive to build the capacity of duty bearers and rights holders in order for these selected set of rights to be enjoyed in practice.

Support to and cooperation with civil society actors is of outermost importance. The role of national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in the collection of information and data as regards bottlenecks related to human rights enjoyment and the progress/regression in implementing national action plans and policies related to international commitments should be acknowledged.

An active civil society, as well as education of civil society actors on international and national human rights standards and systems is crucial for the promotion of human rights issues widely. Often civil society actors have broad and strong international cooperation networks which could be made use of also at governmental level. Also, educational institutions could be more involved in promoting general awareness on human rights issues among citizens. Best practices concerning human rights education could also be shared through the use of international cooperation.

International cooperation could also be enhanced by promoting partnership policies to achieve results and to use resources more effectively in order to address the rights of groups subject to discrimination. Coordination of development cooperation projects, including support to human rights defenders is important in order to avoid overlapping and incoherency. Overall, exchange of information and cooperation among actors working with human rights issues are important in order to deepen information, which is crucial in order to work more effectively.

International cooperation has a crucial role in the field of protecting, promoting and realizing the human rights of migrants and the topic should be discussed in international forums (as was done during the UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Cooperation in October 2013). All human rights of migrants – regardless of their status – should be protected by countries of origin, transit and destination, and all discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia against migrants should be prevented.

QUESTION 3:

Could you give suggestions on how to improve the ways and means of international cooperation in the field human rights such as technical assistance, South-South cooperation, mainstreaming human rights etc.?

Civil society actors should be more involved in the work of international organizations and cooperation and exchange of ideas between governments and ministries should be promoted. Also, open and constructive dialogue between governments and human rights treaty bodies should be encouraged.

International cooperation should be based on human rights strategies and action plans that make it possible to mainstream human rights into all work and cooperation with third parties.

In crisis management, it is important to incorporate clear human rights objectives into the mandates and reporting of crisis management missions and operations, and ensure that people in leading roles in the crisis management tasks are trained on human rights issues.

Human rights should be mainstreamed in trade policies as well, for example by strengthening the protection of fundamental rights at work and human rights in the preparation, implementation and dispute resolution phases of international investment agreements. Corporate responsibility should be promoted and intergovernmental norms on business and human rights developed. The work of international development funding institutions in promoting social and economic human rights is more and more important. It is important that human rights are mainstreamed into their work.

QUESTION 4:

How have your authorities benefitted from international cooperation in the context of the universal periodic review? How could international cooperation in the context of this human rights mechanism be further strengthened, particularly with regard to the implementation of the recommendations that enjoy the support of the State concerned?

UPR can be linked to programming of development cooperation initiatives and hence, can support the partner country's efforts to implement human rights recommendations identified during the UPR process.

The different UN agencies, programs and funds could in a more systematic way use the recommendations and the corresponding political commitments by states when writing the country strategy papers and drafting annual plans (use them as basis for planning in addition to the capacity gap analysis made by the institution in concern). Ideally the implementation of these recommendations would be part of political dialogue and donor consultations, to ensure that resources and support are being directed for these priority concerns.

QUESTION 5:

With respect to human rights treaties that your State is a party to, what difficulties have you faced in fulfilling your reporting obligations? How have you benefitted from international cooperation in that regard and also in implementing the concluding observations of the treaty bodies?

As regards the periodic reporting on the implementation of international human rights treaties, the Government of Finland does not consider facing any particular difficulties. At present the Government has submitted all requested periodic reports to the UN treaty bodies and also provided replies to the Committees' lists of issues as well as to their follow-up questions on the implementation of the concluding observations.

Finland has a standing national reporting and coordination authority. The Legal Service of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has served as a national competent authority and focal point for many decades. More precisely, the Unit for Human Rights Courts and Conventions of the Legal Service is entrusted with the task of preparing the Government's periodic reports on the implementation of international human rights treaties, coordinating the reporting process within the State administration as well as following up to the concluding observations adopted by the treaty monitoring bodies, and representing the Government before the international judicial and investigative bodies, i.e. drafting and submitting the Government's observations to individual communications to the relevant treaty monitoring bodies.

A Network of Contact Persons for Fundamental and Human Rights, appointed in June 2012, with representatives from all ministries, enhances, inter alia, the follow-up to the concluding observations within the respective ministries.

National reporting practices and follow-up measures to the concluding observations vary widely. The Government is interested in sharing views on existing good practices related to the periodic reporting. International cooperation provides an opportunity of shared learning in this regard.

Finland has already had an opportunity to engage in an informal exchange of views on the reporting obligations as well as on the implementation of the concluding observations. For example, the Government has shared its good practices in the sphere of cooperating with civil society and other stakeholders on human rights. The two-stage participation by representatives of civil society in the Government's periodic reporting process has for a long time ago become an established practice. The Government has also shared its views on the simplified reporting procedure which provided a positive experience by

facilitating and speeding up the reporting process as well as on the national follow-up mechanism to the concluding observations.

The Government is of the view that international cooperation and dialogue between States and other stakeholders, including the treaty monitoring bodies, national human rights institutions and organizations representing civil society, provide fruitful occasions for a reflection on national implementation and follow-up measures as well as further elements for developing the interpretation of the treaties.

QUESTION 6:

Please identify best practices that have emerged from international cooperation in human rights.

Within EU, the position of EU Special Representative for Human Rights has strengthened the role that human rights play in the EU's foreign and security policy. Also, the EU's first Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, provides an opportunity to mainstream human rights more effectively into all areas of the EU's external relations, including crisis management. EU cooperation at the country level on human rights issues is also of great importance, for example through supporting local human rights defenders.

Regional organizations are important in that they complement the work of the UN. Regional human rights norms must aim to set a higher level of protection for human rights than the UN.

The Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are valuable channels for promoting human rights. The particular strengths of the Council of Europe are its comprehensive, legally binding system of norms and its pan-European membership base. The World Bank Group and regional development financing institutions are important for the promotion of inclusive growth, and work aimed at promoting human rights has gained increasing weight especially in the World Bank. This development has taken place largely thanks to the efforts of Nordic and Baltic countries.

Human rights based approach to development is another important best practice that should be promoted. Finland adheres to a human rights based approach and is currently actively engaged in the discussions within the European Union on how best to implement this approach.

The Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurance of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 13 November 2013

