



Intersessional meeting on the theme “Technical cooperation and capacity-building in the Human Rights Council: taking stock of the past for a better discharge of this mission in the future”

Good afternoon,

On behalf of FIDH, I would like to thank the OHCHR for organizing this meeting. I would also like to acknowledge my fellow panellists.

The importance of effective technical cooperation and capacity-building in the field of human rights has never been as apparent as it is now, in the face of rising authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, and increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

A. I would like to address five points.

1. First is lack of cooperation with UN bodies and mechanisms

Efforts are often undermined by a rising unwillingness by some States, to cooperate with international human rights bodies and mechanisms, including the OHCHR. This lack of cooperation progressively undermines the rule of law and weakens the enjoyment of human rights - one right at a time - ranging from sexual and reproductive health rights; restrictions on civic space; constrained freedoms of expression, media freedom, freedom of association, and freedom of movement; to addressing impunity from historic crimes, war crimes, crimes against humanity and international humanitarian law – all of which are fundamental to functioning democracies.

However, we must also acknowledge that the fruits of democracy have not been fully realised. In the context of unbridled and unregulated global market capitalism; increasing global, regional and national socio-economic inequalities; increasing mistrust in the institutions of democracy; and the reluctance of States to meaningfully engage with international human rights bodies – the discourse of human rights, risks ringing hollow.

So, what civil society response have been?

Civil society organizations and individuals continue to hold governments to account. In some situations, the international community is dependent on civil society organizations and human rights defenders to document and analyse violations of human rights.

In doing so, they have played a vital role in the process of universalizing the concept and application of human rights, monitoring respect for human rights, denouncing violations and even in limiting the capacity for human rights violators to act.

2. The Second issue is reprisals.

Human rights advocacy often comes at a serious personal cost. Many States have increasingly targeted civil society organizations with threats and attacks, including after their engagement with the UN system; with an increase in laws restricting freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly; and with human rights civil society organizations and activists being portrayed as “foreign agents”, as “threats to national security”, as “terrorists”, as “traitors”, and even as “enemies of the state”. These denunciations often lead to arbitrary detention; enforced disappearance of individuals; and the complete shut-down of human rights organisations.

3. Third issue is the perception of civil society

There is an increasing perception of civil society as a hostile opponent, rather than as a necessary partner in development. States need to recognise that ‘merely tolerating’ the exercise of the rights to association and assembly as well as freedom of expression (albeit in constrained manner), while not listening to the message of civil society, undermines the very freedoms and rights they claim to uphold, globally.

Civil society in fact holds crucial resources of expert knowledge and experienced human rights practitioners. As a best practice, we recommend efforts must include civil society at all stages of development, delivery, and implementation, and not only leave CSOs as the beneficiaries of technical cooperation or capacity-building projects. National governments should be expected to constructively engage civil society before bilateral engagement with the OHCHR, to enable contextually-appropriate technical cooperation.

4. The fourth issue is Inclusion and Participation

It is crucial to ensure equal representation as well as effective participation of marginalised groups within these processes. This includes women and girls, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees and the socio-economically marginalised. Their experiences and voices should be mainstreamed when designing and delivering programmes, to ensure that these efforts are inclusive and holistic from conception to implementation – truly people-centred.

5. The fifth point is Strengthening of multilateral efforts

It is vital that as an international community, multilateral efforts are strengthened at domestic, regional, and international levels, to continue to promote technical cooperation and capacity building to assist in mainstreaming human rights. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is a clear example of how global cooperation can enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, peace, and democracy, while simultaneously working to fight impunity.

April 20th, 2023
Ms. Alice Mogwe

B. In conclusion, FIDH, through its 188 members in 116 countries, shall continue its active work in three ways:

- strengthening local and regional actors through enhancing technical cooperation and capacity-building on the ground
- continuing as a liaison to ensure mutual collaboration between these actors and regional and international mechanisms and
- continuing to work in solidarity with like-minded CSOs. Human rights belong to every single person in the world, from birth to death, and apply regardless of from where we are, in what we believe, and how we may choose to live our lives.

Thank you