

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW:

**A GUIDE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY
FOR THE FOURTH CYCLE**



**UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS**
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

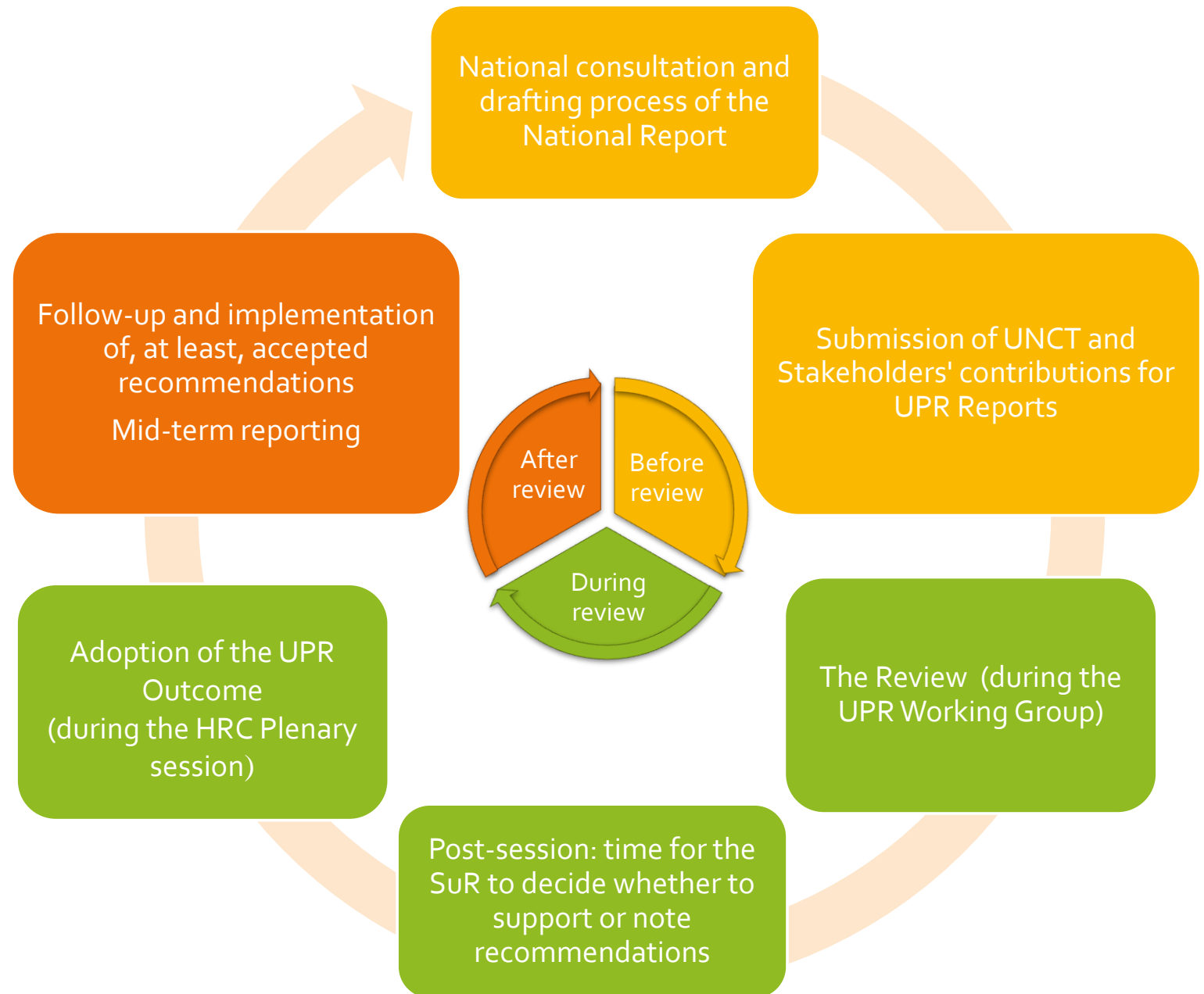
Overview: Universal Periodic Review mechanism

- UPR is a mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC) that started in 2008.
- A **peer-review mechanism**: All UN Member States review other States' human rights record and make recommendations to the State under Review (SuR) that will either 'support' or 'note' the recommendations
- **Periodic** and **cyclical** mechanism: each state is reviewed every app. 4.5 years
- Based on principles of **universality of coverage and equality of treatment**
- Universal thematic coverage: the only United Nations (UN) human rights mechanism that covers **all human rights** issues.
- **Universal geographic coverage**: Every UN Member State takes part in the UPR process and has been reviewed under the UPR.
- **100% participation** in the first three cycles.
- The ultimate objective of the UPR is the **improvement of the human rights situation in every country, with impact on the lives of people.**
- Participation in the UPR is possible for **other stakeholders**- civil society, National Human Rights Institutions, regional mechanisms, UN entities etc.
- Civil society actors are encouraged to engage in all phases of the UPR cycle.
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-main>

Overview: UPR process at a glance

- The UPR reviews are conducted by the **UPR Working Group (UPR WG)**, which consists of the 47 States of the Human Rights Council.
- Any UN Member State can pose questions and/or make recommendations to the States under Review.
- Each State review is assisted by groups of three States, “**troikas**”, who serve as rapporteurs. The selection of the troikas for each State is done through drawing of lots.
- Reviews take place through **an interactive discussion** between the State under Review and other UN Member States.
- The UPR WG **meets three times per year in Geneva (Switzerland)**- January, May and November. WG sessions are also available online on UN Webcast.
- All recommendations received will be included in the **Working Group report, issued** at the end of the WG session.
- States under Review have to take position on all UPR recommendations, by either supporting or noting them.
- UPR outcomes are adopted app. six months after the WG, during item 6 (UPR adoptions) of Human Rights Council’s plenary sessions.
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/basic-facts>

Key Phases of one UPR cycle of 4.5 / 5 years



Documentation as basis of UPR review

National Report

Prepared by the State under Review, ideally following a broad and diverse consultation process with other national stakeholders, such as the Parliament, Judiciary, Local and Regional Governments, NHRI, civil society organizations etc.

UN Compilation

Prepared by OHCHR with official reports from Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures, relevant official UN reports from OHCHR, UNCT, Fact-Finding missions, Commissions of Inquiry.

Summary of Stakeholders report

Prepared by OHCHR using credible and reliable information provided by relevant stakeholders, including civil society, NHRIs and regional human rights organizations.

The quality of the reports prepared by OHCHR depends on the quality of inputs received by other UN human rights mechanisms, UN entities, NHRI, regional organizations and civil society

Public engagement of civil society stakeholders in the UPR

Main public entry points for engaging with the UPR:

- **1. Submission of information for the UPR Stakeholders' report-** Civil society actors can submit written information through an online database platform – which will be summarized by OHCHR in the UPR pre-session summary report.
- Guidelines: [StakeholdersTechnicalGuidelines4thCycle_EN.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)
- Deadlines and info: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ngos-nhris>
- **2. Oral statements at the Human Rights Council- UPR adoptions-** ECOSOC accredited NGOs can participate as observers, and make oral statements, during the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council - when the UPR outcomes of State reviews are considered and adopted.
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ngo-participation>
- NGOs can also observe the UPR WG, online or in-person, depending on modalities for each session.
- **3. Submission of UPR mid-term reports-** Civil society actors can submit mid-term reports that are also published on OHCHR website.
- **4. Organizing UPR-focused side events-** civil society actors can organize the side events in the context of the UPR Working Group or the Human Rights Council sessions.

Tips for UPR Submissions

- It is recommended that the stakeholders review carefully the **UPR Submission guidelines for the 4th cycle** and the Submission database guidelines, and comply with word limits, formats and deadlines.
- Guidelines also available in UN languages. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ngos-nhris>
- One organization can submit **one joint and one individual submission** per review, and can contribute to more joint submissions.
- Stakeholders may consider forming **thematic coalitions** with other CSOs.
- **Length:** Individual submissions- max. 2815 words. Joint max. 5630 words.
- **Language** - Written contributions in one of the **UN official languages**.
- **First-hand, credible and reliable** information should be given priority.
- All submissions should **be tailored to the UPR** and contain information on developments since the last review and follow up on implementation of the recommendations.
- Recommendations should be **S.M.A.R.T.** – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-Oriented and Time-Bound. Stakeholders are encouraged to provide information on emerging human rights issues.
- Main contact: ohchr-uprsubmissions@un.org

Tips for UPR Adoptions at the Human Rights Council, including Oral Statements

- **Only NGOs in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** can be accredited to participate in the Human Rights Council's sessions as Observers.
- As such, NGOs can attend and observe proceedings of the Human Rights Council including UPR adoptions, submit written statements, make oral interventions, incl. during UPR adoptions, and organize "parallel side events", including during sessions of the HRC and of the UPR Working Group.
- As the CSOs have only 1 minute and 30 seconds for their statement, keep your intervention short with a maximum of 3 key messages.
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ngo-participation> - including updated information notes for each session
- **Hybrid modalities** for civil society have been introduced, such as pre-recorded video-statements.
- Hybrid options can be used to promote diverse participation at various events.
- More information for HRC participation: OHCHR Civil Society Team: ohchr-hrcngo@un.org

Mid-term UPR reports by civil society stakeholders

- Civil society stakeholders can submit their own UPR mid-term reports to ohchr-uprsubmissions@un.org
- Mid-term reports can be **submitted online** anytime after the first half of the UPR cycle of each State under Review, but preferably around 2 years after the review.
- There are no specific formats, word limits or deadlines for mid-term reports: it is up to the stakeholder to decide.
- **Mid-term reports** can be presented as a follow-up to the implementation of recommendations, to raise emerging issues and put focus on the implementation of specific rights and issues. They can be general or focus on specific issue.
- Mid-term reports are a voluntary “good practice” encouraged by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and they are posted publicly online on the specific mid-term UPR OHCHR website: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ng-os-mid-term-reports>
- Other stakeholders (States, NHRIs, UN system entities) may also submit mid-term reports.

Civil society engagement

Before the Review

- Encourage the Government to host “**a broad and inclusive consultation process**” as a first step in the preparation of the national report, focusing on the implementation of recommendations from the previous review. Encourage internal consultation with various branches of the Government and participation of relevant stakeholder including NHRIs, civil society stakeholders and UNCTs;
- Maintain an **open dialogue** with the Government Ministry or the NMIRF preparing the report and encourage consideration and reflection in the report of the inputs received from all stakeholders through the consultation process;
- Make a **submission to the UPR process** in compliance with the guidelines for stakeholders’ submissions. Encourage other civil society actors to make submissions and, where necessary, provide these with training and capacity building, and encourage the UNCT to be a partner;
- Consider **forming a thematic/other coalition** with NGOs for submissions and coordinate with organizations working on similar thematic;
- Liaise with, participate in, and provide input to any activities undertaken **by UNCT and UN Agencies** in relation to the preparation of their submissions for the UPR process;
- Consider how civil society can cooperate with the UN system and its entities, also taking into account the tips for UN entities in the **UPR Practical Guidance**:
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf
- Consider holding **public awareness campaigns**;
- Consider meeting with Embassies in the country or with the Permanent Missions in Geneva, and share proposed recommendations and submissions. <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/blue-book>

Before the Review

Further tips

- **Advocate for follow up to UPR recommendations from the previous cycle and their integration into national development plans and SDGs efforts;**
- **Support** the Government and stakeholders in identifying linkages between UPR recommendations and SDGs, incl. the synergies between human rights and development;
- **Advocate for the UN system in-country to support implementation**, as a minimum, of accepted recommendations of the previous UPR cycle, and their inclusion in the CCA and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), consider holding side-events;
- **Advocate for the preparation of a mid-term report by the Government; by the UN system in-country; and all other national stakeholders**, taking stock of what has been done in terms of follow up to recommendations of the previous UPR cycle and of remaining challenges;
- **Noted recommendations** require greater attention especially as they may identify risk areas and may play a role in prevention efforts;
- Encourage **Parliament Human Rights Committee and or MPs of relevant Committees** to be fully aware of commitments made by the executive in the previous cycle – especially those requiring parliamentary action - and advocate for an input by Parliament into the national report being prepared for the review;
- Encourage the **NHRI to share its assessment of implementation** of recommendations of the previous UPR cycle with the Parliament, and through public hearings with the participation and input of civil society organizations.

Civil society engagement

During the Review in the UPR WG and at Adoption in the HRC (item 6)

- **During the review** – Consider organizing a **live webcast of the review** and extend an invitation to government representatives, members of Parliament, civil society, and the media; and consider hosting a similar event for members of the public;
- Consider hosting or participating in the thematic or country-specific side events focused on the UPR review;
- **Between review and adoption** – consider translation into local and plain languages and public awareness campaigns on the recommendations received. Advocate with the Government (executive, parliament and judiciary) especially **on those recommendations for which a clear position has not yet been taken**;
- **At the adoption of the outcome** – ECOSOC accredited NGOs are encouraged to **make a statement in the HRC and widely distribute the UPR outcome at national and local levels**;
- **During the general debate** in the HRC (under Item 6) – accredited stakeholders should be encouraged to make a statement **outlining possible good practices and challenges** faced by the State in connection with the implementation of recommendations.

Civil society engagement

After the Review

- **Disseminate widely and use the High Commissioner's Letter and its annexed Matrix to advocate with relevant Government Ministries and other national stakeholders and the UN system in-country.** High Commissioner's Letter and Matrix are available on OHCHR website;
- **Use the Matrix of thematically clustered UPR recommendations to ensure that recommendations that have been accepted by the State** are acted upon by the Government with the support of the UN system and the donor community;
- **Advocate with Government officials, as well as regional and national stakeholders, Local and Regional governments, including Parliament, and especially its Human Rights Committee,** for follow up action on the human rights areas identified by the HC letter to the Foreign Minister and its Annex, as a minimum, on the accepted UPR recommendations;
- **Advocate for and support the implementation of UPR recommendations,** the development of an integrated National Human Rights Action Plan with baselines and gender equality indicators, or of an NMIRF or the setting up of a national recommendations tracking data-base (NRTD), if required through the UN system or the UPR TF.
- Provide relevant information to the **media on the UPR mechanism** and its recommendations, issue press releases or hold press conferences.

Civil society engagement

After the Review - further tips

- Encourage the Government and all other stakeholders to submit a regular update or a mid-term report on the status of implementation of UPR recommendations, especially with respect to those that have been accepted;
- Encourage **South-South and North-South cooperation** or the **financial support** by the recommending state, if a donor country, and if the State that accepted the recommendation is already recipient of its Official Development Aid (ODA);
- **Use your networks** for the development of a **financing compact between all stakeholders** for the implementation and follow-up action – encouraging the participation of national partners, especially Parliament, NHRI and NGOs, - and suggest a mechanism to monitor implementation of any agreed **national human rights plan** - including through regular country level reviews with the support the UN, donors, and participation of the NHRI and NGOs;
- **Advocate for the effective use of UPR 4th cycle tools** (HC Letter to FM, Matrix and Infographic) in connection with broader debates on policies and/or human rights related actions at country level.

Useful tools for implementation and follow-up

To facilitate engagement with States that have undergone the UPR, since the beginning of the 3rd cycle, OHCHR makes available for each country - on its website (documentation by country):

- 1) **A Letter by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Minister of Foreign Affairs;**
- 2) **A Matrix of thematically clustered accepted and noted recommendations** per State reviewed, which detail what the State in front of the international community and at the highest level has agreed to act upon following the review immediately or at a later stage, **the matrix also serves as an annex to the Letter;**
- 3) **An UPR Country Infographic** showing trends between the past two cycles in terms of received and accepted recommendations and linking recommendations to specific SDGs;

These documents can be used for advocacy with respect to policies and actions in the field of human rights.

UPR Reprisals

- The important role of civil society and the need to maintain a safe and **enabling environment in which NHRIs, NGOs, HRDs can operate freely and safely**, have been highlighted by several resolutions of the Human Rights Council, which remains attentive to any threat or intimidation towards human rights defenders or reprisal for any form of cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives, and its mechanisms;
- The UN system and OHCHR relies to a large extent on cooperation with and **information provided by governments and civil society partners**. When those engaging or willing to engage with the UN are subject to intimidation and reprisals for their efforts, we all lose, and the credibility and effectiveness of the Organization is undermined;
- The **Secretary-General** has recognized reprisals as a **priority and a core responsibility for the UN**, and has called on all entities to be **vigilant and engaged** in the issue;
- The UN system is expected to uphold a **zero-tolerance approach with respect to any act of intimidation or reprisals** against NHRIs, NGOs, HRDs and other civil society actors that cooperate or have cooperated with the UN, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights;
- Reprisals in the UN system recorded by the SG: [End Reprisals: Database of reprisal cases recorded by the UN Secretary-General - HURIDOCS](#)
- Any reprisal for cooperation in the UPR process should be reported to the UPR Secretariat (ohchr-uprreprisals@un.org) and OHCHR reprisals Team: ohchr-reprisals@un.org)

UPR impact, good stories and good practices

- **UPR process has a direct impact on the lives of people.** UPR recommendations often result in new or improved laws or other meaningful changes.
- **Recent examples:** abolition of the death penalty, adoption of human rights defenders' laws, ratification of international human rights treaties, laws for the protection of women, children, minorities, and vulnerable groups etc.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2022/07/sierra-leone-un-human-rights-recommendations-help-lead-end-death-penalty#:~:text=On%2023%20July%202021%2C%20Sierra,third%20UPR%2C%E2%80%9D%20Brewah%20said.>
- **UPR good stories can serve as an inspiration for replication in other countries.**
- UPR Good Practices and UN Sustainable Development Goals, in cooperation with UNDP and DCO: http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/UPR_good_practices_2022.pdf
- Emerging UPR Good Practices incl. civil society actors, OHCHR and UPR Info: http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Emerging_UPR_GoodPractices.pdf
- UPR Trust Fund implementation projects: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/trust-fund-implementation>
- UPR-Info publication on UPR impact: <https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/2022-07/Beyond%20Reporting-EN-Web.pdf>

Useful OHCHR resources

- Universal Periodic Review: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx>
- UPR Civil Society Engagement: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/NgosNhris.aspx>
- HRC NGO participation: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ngo-participation>
- UPR tools- HC letter to the FM – Matrix and Country Infographic: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Documentation.aspx>
- UPR Submission Guidelines: http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/StakeholdersTechnicalGuidelines4thCycle_EN.pdf
- UPR Practical Guidance for UN entities: http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf
- Emerging UPR Good Practices: http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Emerging_UPR_GoodPractices.pdf
- OHCHR Reprisals: http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Reprisals/CSOsGuide_EN.pdf
- Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI): <http://uhri.ohchr.org/>
- E-mail contact for UPR Submissions: ohchr-uprsubmissions@un.org
- E-mail contact for HRC NGO team: ohchr-hrcngo@un.org

Other resources- UN entities and stakeholders

- UPR guidance for NGOs on freedom of speech and protection of journalists by UNESCO and Amnesty International and Factsheet on drafting UPR recommendations
- <https://www.unesco.org/en/communication-information/safety-journalists/universal-periodical-review>
- UNDP- UPR and SDGs Good stories, in cooperation with DCO: <https://www.undp.org/publications/un-good-practices-how-universal-periodic-review-process-supports-sustainable-development>
- UN system- Development Coordination Office: <https://un-dco.org>
- SG Call to Action on Human Rights: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/2020_sg_call_to_action_for_hr_the_highest_aspiration.pdf
- UPR Info: <https://www.upr-info.org/>
- UPR Info database of UPR recommendations: <https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/>
- UPR Info pre-sessions for civil society: <https://www.upr-info.org/en/presessions>
- UPR Info reports and publications: <https://www.upr-info.org/en/resources/upr-info-publications>

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