**Expert meeting on enhancing capacity-building for local governments to incorporate human rights into all their work**

**Opening remarks by Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Opening session 10:00 – 10:20, room XIX, Palais des Nations**

**28 August 2023**

Your Excellencies,

Dear participants,

By 2050, a forecasted 70 percent of the world’s population will call cities their home.[[1]](#footnote-2) Over the past decades, national governments all over the world have decentralized and devolved increasing powers to local governments. Urbanization means a greater role for cities to enhance human rights protection in the context of significant global challenges.

Extreme poverty is increasing for the first time in a generation. At the current trajectory, nearly 600 million people will continue to live in extreme poverty in 2030.[[2]](#footnote-3) Inequalities have reached unprecedented levels. In 2021, the poorest half of the global population owned only 2 per cent of the total wealth, whereas the richest 10 per cent owned 76 per cent of all wealth.[[3]](#footnote-4)

We face hunger levels not seen since 2005.[[4]](#footnote-5) Climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss accelerate at an alarming pace. Globally, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals has stalled or regressed on more than 30 per cent of all targets.[[5]](#footnote-6)

These challenges require holistic local solutions. This was acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General who in his report Our Common Agenda called for multilateralism that is more networked, more effective and inclusive of a diverse range of voices beyond States, such as cities and local and regional governments, among others.

To tackle these formidable challenges we face, stronger cooperation between local governments and among all levels of governments is more critical than ever before. Several cities and local and regional governments around the globe are leading by example in creating solutions to global issues. At the UN 2023 Water Conference of this year in March, it was encouraging to hear the many promising practices developed with communities, to achieve SDG 6, realize the rights to water and sanitation and make cities more inclusive, sustainable, and liveable.

By engaging with innovative practices, challenges, and successes that cities encounter in their efforts to promote and protect human rights at the grassroots level, the international human rights system can enrich its understanding of local needs and realities -it can identify, and promote best practices that can be replicated in other contexts, therefore improving dialogue and coordination between different tiers of government. This exchange of ideas and experiences between local and global actors has the potential to foster more effective policies and a deeper respect for human rights across all levels of governance.

The international human rights system would also greatly benefit from such experiences - likewise, local governments can benefit from the guidance and recommendations issued by international human rights mechanisms.

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Local governments also have a role to play in guaranteeing their human rights. The international human rights obligations of the State extend to all levels of government – national, regional, and local.

Public servants in the local administration – from urban planners and social workers, statisticians, finance officers or city council members – are already defending and realizing human rights in their daily work. It is imperative that we empower local government officials with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources, that will enable them to be effective stewards of human rights within their own communities.

Embedding human rights in public management requires building the capacity of locally elected officials and government staff. The use and application of human rights as well as education and training stand as pivotal tools in fostering a human rights culture. Our Office has supported these efforts through initiatives including capacity-building for local authorities, such as through the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which has already trained civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel.

The programme’s activities were in fact implemented across the globe:

* In Madagascar, we organized capacity building workshops for local authorities in [seven] cities aimed at integrating gender and human rights into local development plans.
* In Mexico, [in 2022], our Office, in collaboration with the Mexican Institute of Water Technologies, supported the development of indicators on the rights to water and sanitation, and conducted training workshops with local authorities on the use of these indicators.
* In Uruguay, [in 2022 and 2023], we facilitated collaboration between the United Nations country team and local governments in seven provinces, focusing on implementing the SDGs at the local level in line with recommendations from international human rights mechanisms. The activities that will be presented in more detail by the representative of the Government of Canelones included analysing provincial policies through a human rights lens, and in fact identifying best practices, training 150 local government staff and publishing guidance booklets for provincial governments on how to apply a human rights-based approach in local planning.

Dear participants,

More than halfway into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, we need human rights to be at the core of all policies, budgets, and decisions, including economic and fiscal policies made by local government officials.

These policies and decisions must pass the test of public scrutiny. Cities and municipal authorities should promote a transparent, participatory, and accountable governance that meaningfully involves all residents, including particularly those most marginalized and discriminated against, in decision-making processes.

Our Office is committed to continued support to the Human Rights Cities movement and local governments to deliver on their obligations to ensure that every person can live in dignity and be free from fear and want.

As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, I encourage you all – States, cities, local and regional governments, and others – to pledge concrete actions that can bring about transformative change for the greater enjoyment of human rights by everyone, everywhere.

1. [wcr\_2022.pdf (unhabitat.org)](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. D\_FINAL\_WIL\_RIM\_RAPPORT\_2303.pdf (wid.world), p. 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [A/78/80 (undocs.org)](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F78%2F80&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. A/78/80 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)