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

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**Human rights cities – Enhancing capacity-building for local and regional governments**

Panel discussion

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**Q:** *What are your views on strengthening the capacities of local governments to implement human rights at the local level? How can partnerships with academic institutions and national human rights institutions assist in this regard?*

Thank you very much for the kind invitation to join this important panel. We have heard significant points raised by the previous speakers regarding their needs and ongoing efforts.

The developments in recent years concerning cities' increased engagement in realizing human rights are among the most promising global movements. People live locally, which is why this is where their rights should primarily be respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Issues might seem easy to solve when viewed from a global or national perspective. However, when the focus shifts to the local level, where most interactions between authorities and people occur in various ways, the complexity becomes evident, and the challenges of realizing the rights of all individuals prove to be intricate.

This is why this meeting holds such importance—to find ways to ensure a solid support base for cities aiming to strengthen the realization of human rights across all aspects of city operations.

My response to your question is based on the work we have carried out at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law over the past years.

I will highlight three elements: knowledge production, training, and bridge-building.

To address key issues in the city, we need to understand the situation. The city requires data about concerns such as poverty, discrimination, school dropouts, and homelessness. The more the city understands the nature of these human rights challenges among its citizens, the better equipped it is to address them.

Two valuable tools are: (1) the analysis of existing administrative data that often contains crucial information from a human rights perspective, and (2) regular surveys that greatly contribute to identifying patterns that should concern policymakers, such as the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence, lack of access to essential services for persons with disabilities, etc.

With the data, academic institutions in partnership with the city can explore ways forward. The RWI has long been engaged with a human rights-based hospital to enhance its capacity and is currently in dialogue with the city of Lund on how to develop a human-rights-based public transport system that ensures nobody is left behind – the bus.

Finally, the RWI's "Handbook for Cities" is another example of knowledge production and sharing. This practical guide offers guidance for local governments and actors to integrate a human rights-based approach into their policies. It provides actionable recommendations and steps enriched by real-world experiences from cities in Indonesia, India, and South Korea.

The next step involves strengthening general human rights knowledge among politicians and officials. The first tier is understanding basic human rights—the "WHAT." What should be respected, protected, and fulfilled according to international and regional human rights instruments. This constitutes traditional legal human rights training.

The subsequent step is addressing the "HOW." How are these goals actually achieved? How are they implemented? In this context, the human rights-based approach takes center stage. Although less developed than traditional human rights training, it's in high demand as it identifies practical steps to translate human rights from legal documents into the everyday lives of local authorities.

This is about implementing international conventions and national laws. Economists are needed to develop human rights-based city budgets; architects and city planners aid in creating inclusive environments for persons with disabilities; engineers contribute to creating just green transitions, and more.

While such training is increasingly available globally, I'd like to highlight The International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at Local and Regional Levels, established under UNESCO's auspices in Graz, Austria.

Working with the human rights-based approach yields tangible results, as seen in for example in Bangladesh, where efforts led to the withdrawal of 216 child laborers from hazardous conditions, allowing regular school attendance. Moreover, the municipality has proactively implemented measures to combat child labor, including a mandatory pledge within the trade license application and procurement process. Encouraging private businesses to adhere to human rights remains a challenge faced by many cities.

Lastly, I'd like to emphasize bridge-building, where academic institutions and national human rights institutions play crucial roles. Leveraging the strengths and resources of each partner organization enables a comprehensive approach to capacity-building for cities. This collaborative approach is exemplified in the long-term partnership between UCLG, the City of Gwangju, OHCHR, UNESCO, and RWI.

At the local level, numerous examples demonstrate how academic institutions and national human rights bodies play a vital role in bridging connections between local governments and a diverse spectrum of actors, including governmental bodies, established NGOs, youth groups, and marginalized groups such as homeless individuals. In Sweden, such a network has thrived for over five years, enhancing the overall effectiveness of efforts aimed at advancing human rights and sustainable development within communities.

Moving forward, we need to strengthen these networks and establish a more robust resource base for cities across all continents, and there is ample potential for growth.

Thank you.