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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High  
Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Universal periodic review

## **Operations of the Voluntary Fund for participation in the universal periodic review**

**Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for  
Human Rights**

GE.19-07106(E)



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## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 16/22 and decision 17/119, in which the Council requested the secretariat to provide an annual written update on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for participation in the universal periodic review and on the resources available to it. As indicated in the previous update report (A/HRC/38/26), in an effort to consolidate information related to the universal periodic review, and on the basis of Council decision 17/119, the secretariat aligned the timing of submission of the reports on the activities supported through the two universal periodic review trust funds, namely, the Voluntary Fund for participation in the universal periodic review and the Voluntary Fund for financial and technical assistance for the implementation of the universal periodic review. Consequently, as from 2015, both annual reports are submitted to the Council at its June session. The present report provides an overview of contributions and expenditures, together with a description of activities funded since the previous report until 31 December 2018.

2. Participation of Member States in the review process has been universal ever since the launch of the mechanism, demonstrating strong commitment to and acceptance of the mechanism as a critical tool of the Human Rights Council and States Members of the United Nations. Their commitment has been reiterated not only during reviews and interactive dialogues held by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review but also at the adoption of the outcomes of the universal periodic review and general debate under agenda item 6 of the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council. It has also been reiterated increasingly by senior representatives of Member States during the high-level segment at the Human Rights Council plenary sessions.

3. The support provided through the Voluntary Fund for participation in the universal periodic review remains instrumental, allowing delegations to participate in the presentation of national reports and contribute to an interactive dialogue that is universal, independent, impartial and non-politicized, with recommendations that are constructive, specific, action-oriented and implementable, taking into account national capacities. Fund-supported participation also contributes to raising delegations' awareness of the need for close coordination of implementation efforts at the national level, through national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. This need primarily stems from the fact that substantive issues raised in the universal periodic reviews often mirror the recommendations of other human rights mechanisms and complement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as highlighted during the annual high-level panel discussion and at the first intersessional meeting of the Human Rights Council for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held on 16 January 2019, pursuant to Council resolution 37/24.

## II. Financial situation of the Fund

4. Table 1 shows the detailed financial situation of the Fund as at 31 December 2018 (statement of income and expenditure).

Table 1

**Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January–31 December 2018**

(United States dollars)

<i>Income</i>	
Voluntary contributions received in 2018	29 239.77
Gain/loss on exchange	830.68
Interest and miscellaneous income	25 070.21
<b>Total income</b>	<b>53 479.30</b>
<i>Expenditure</i>	
Staff costs	21 866.28

<i>Income</i>	
Other personnel costs (consultants' fees and travel)	—
Staff travel	14 345.05
Travel of representatives/participants to meetings and seminars	228 584.06
Contractual services	2 627.70
General operating and other direct costs	17 757.80
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	1 493.96
Grants out (<\$50,000) and fellowships	22 086.69
Programme support (indirect) costs	40 139.09
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>348 901.23</b>
Adjustments to prior year expenditure (liquidation of commitments)	—
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditure for the period	295 421.93
Opening balance on 1 January 2018	1 203 240.60
Other adjustments (prior period)	—
Unpaid pledges	—
<b>Total fund balance as at 31 December 2018</b>	<b>907 818.67</b>

5. Since the establishment of the Fund, 18 countries have made financial contributions. In 2018, Belgium contributed \$29,239.77.

6. Since the Fund has not enjoyed a predictable pattern of income, substantial resources are systematically kept as a reserve for future activities; the secretariat of the Fund has approved all requests, in line with the Fund's terms of reference, to enable participation in the universal periodic review.

### III. Activities

#### A. Travel to meetings

7. Under the terms of reference of the Fund, financial support is made available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to cover travel to Geneva by one official government representative in order to participate:

(a) In sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review during which the representative's country is considered;

(b) In plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council during which the outcome of the review of the representative's country is adopted.

8. The Fund also provides for the travel of official representatives (one per delegation) of developing countries, in particular least developed countries, that are members of the Human Rights Council and do not have a permanent mission in Geneva, to act as rapporteurs (namely, as members of the troika).

9. In 2018, 22 of the 29 States that were considered eligible for the travel assistance of the Fund benefited from financial assistance to participate in the sessions of the Working Group at which they were reviewed or in the Human Rights Council plenary sessions: Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cuba, Djibouti, Jordan, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritius, Montenegro, Nigeria, Serbia, Tonga, Tuvalu and Uzbekistan. In total, 24 delegates were funded.

10. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 6/30 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, the secretariat has been encouraging States to consider the possibility of taking into account aspects related to gender balance in the composition of their delegation and in the sharing of responsibilities among its members. Of the 24 delegates assisted under the Fund in 2018, 10 were women and 14 were men.

11. Since March 2014, a more proactive approach through targeted correspondence has been implemented to encourage States to avail themselves of the support provided through the Fund. A few weeks prior to the session, the secretariat addresses correspondence to States that could benefit from the assistance of the Fund, indicating the first steps that need to be taken to request the assistance and setting out the main entitlements. Such a targeted approach has allowed States, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries without representation in Geneva and not very familiar with the human rights framework and machinery, to become more familiar with the Fund and to request support. In addition, the secretariat is ensuring, as much as possible, complementarity between the support provided through the Fund and that provided through the fund for small island developing States and least developed countries.

12. In addition to covering travel costs, the Fund also provides for the payment of a daily subsistence allowance at the rate applicable to Geneva at the time of travel. Under the standing official provisions for such travel, a Government formally requesting such assistance would be advised of the official entitlements for travel and daily subsistence allowance in connection with the required itinerary, which would then be reimbursed upon completion of the trip and upon provision of the necessary supporting documentation. That arrangement, however, proved onerous for many requesting Governments, which were unable to submit the claims documenting the travels and were therefore not reimbursed. In an effort to address that issue, between the seventeenth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (21 October–1 November 2013) and November 2015, the secretariat arranged to provide economy class tickets prior to travel and paid the daily subsistence allowance upon arrival in Geneva, thereby alleviating most of the difficulties associated with retroactive reimbursement of expenses.

13. In November 2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), together with most of the United Nations Secretariat, started using Umoja, which has changed the way in which the Secretariat manages its administration, executes its work processes, conducts its business and manages its resources. The new system also implies some changes to the way travel arrangements are processed. Once a Government requests the assistance of the Fund, it is advised of the official entitlements for travel and daily subsistence allowance. OHCHR is required to make the necessary arrangements for the issuance and payment of the ticket in advance. The daily subsistence allowance is provided in two instalments, with 75 per cent of the total amount paid in advance, either by bank transfer or upon arrival in Geneva, and the remaining amount and terminal expenses disbursed after the completion of the mission on the basis of required documentation.

14. The direct ticketing does, however, require more advance planning since Governments are required to designate their delegate with sufficient lead time to enable the secretariat to make the travel arrangements and issue the ticket in accordance with the United Nations official travel policies. However, and unlike the practice until November 2015, in cases where such direct ticketing is not possible, the previous arrangement for retroactive reimbursement of travel expenses can no longer be provided. Undoubtedly, the fact that retroactive travel reimbursement is no longer an option under Umoja has had a substantial impact on the support provided to States.

15. Table 2 below shows the breakdown of financial assistance and annual expenditures, complete with the amount authorized, status of reimbursement and total commitments to date with regard to the financial assistance provided for the travel of government delegates to Geneva.

Table 2

**Expenditures for travel of government representatives to attend sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review and plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of countries funded</i>	<i>Amount paid (United States dollars)</i>
2008	6	16 885.00
2009	17	23 568.00
2010	23	39 942.00
2011	21	11 698.00
2012	3	11 295.00
2013	6	35 176.00
2014	15	53 939.00
2015	23	95 512.00
2016	26	82 300.25
2017	15	55 912.27
2018	22	228 584.06
<b>Total</b>		<b>654 811.58</b>

## **B. Training**

16. The terms of reference of the Fund allow the financing of briefings prior to the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review to assist countries in the preparatory process. These briefings usually consist of plenary segments and breakout group discussions during which the policies, procedures and modalities of the universal periodic review are examined, information is exchanged and good practices and lessons learned are discussed concerning the organization of national consultations, the setting up of interministerial coordination mechanisms (so-called national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up), the drafting of national reports and participation in the interactive dialogues held by the Working Group and the Human Rights Council in plenary session.

17. In its resolution 35/29, the Human Rights Council acknowledged the crucial role that parliaments play in, inter alia, translating international commitments into national policies and laws, including by supporting the implementation of recommendations generated by the international human rights mechanisms, especially the recommendations supported by the State concerned in the framework of the universal periodic review. It is noteworthy that, within the context of the universal periodic review, the majority of recommendations require or involve parliamentary action.

18. From the perspective of the OHCHR Management Plan 2018–2021, the enhanced focus on parliaments as a key enabling participant in any national human rights protection system will allow OHCHR to deliver results across all pillars. A strengthened parliamentary role in the promotion of human rights, through oversight, and the legislative and budgetary functions of parliaments, will strengthen the implementation of recommendations from human rights mechanisms; better link human rights to national development efforts and budgets; help to detect, address and potentially prevent human rights violations; enhance equality and counter discrimination, in particular through legislative efforts; strengthen accountability through oversight; and enhance participation, as parliaments are an elective body with direct access for civil society and national human rights institutions.

19. In 2018, the Fund was used to actively promote the role of parliaments and parliamentary human rights committees in the universal periodic review process. On 21 and 22 June 2018, the Fund supported a high-level meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, hosted by OHCHR in Geneva. Over 40 delegates, representing national parliaments within the Assembly, the European Parliament, observer non-governmental

organizations and international experts, participated to define a road map for cooperation and partnership between OHCHR and the Assembly.

20. On 28 June 2018, the Fund supported a joint workshop held by OHCHR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at the IPU headquarters in Geneva. The event, entitled “Parliaments as guardians of human rights: the case for strong parliamentary human rights committees and the development of international principles to support their work”, included Members of Parliament and civil society organizations from diverse geographical locations. The findings of the study on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review, including the draft principles on parliaments and human rights (A/HRC/38/25) were presented. The workshop enabled participants to engage in discussions on the rationale for having a set of international principles to guide the work of parliamentary human rights committees. Diverse regional perspectives and experiences were shared relating to the role of parliamentary human rights committees in the international human rights system, particularly the universal periodic review and treaty body system; parliamentary oversight of government policy; and the critical relationship between parliaments and national human rights institutions. Participating parliamentarians agreed to disseminate and discuss the draft principles in their respective jurisdictions and use them as a guide to strengthening the mandate of parliamentary human rights committees.

21. On 28 June 2018, within the framework of the thirty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council, a side event was organized by the OHCHR Universal Periodic Review Branch, IPU and the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Ecuador, Italy, Maldives, Morocco, the Philippines, Romania and Spain. The panel was composed of Members of Parliament from Burkina Faso, Chile, Togo, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Uzbekistan, as well as academics and representatives of civil society organizations and OHCHR. The event allowed for the sharing of good practices in relation to parliamentary engagement with human rights and participants advocated for awareness-raising about efforts to establish or strengthen national parliamentary human rights committees, drawing on the good practices of various parliamentary systems and reflecting on the draft principles on parliaments and human rights. A representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean stated that the Assembly had already committed in its annual meeting to endorse and advocate for the draft principles.

22. Other events supported through the Fund in 2018 included two subregional workshops on the universal periodic review for the sharing of good practices in terms of preparation and reviews and in the implementation of and follow-up to recommendations. In these workshops, OHCHR pledged to continue to support parliaments in their engagement in the universal periodic review process, in close cooperation with IPU, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and the United Nations Development Fund.

23. The first subregional workshop was targeted at English-speaking States in Africa and was held in Entebbe, Uganda, on 23 and 24 April 2018. It was organized with the support of the Government of Uganda and in close cooperation with the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Uganda Human Rights Commission (the national human rights institution). The workshop was an opportunity not only for representatives of Member States but also for regional organizations, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and United Nations country teams to become more familiar with policies and action concerning the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms.

24. Topics for discussion during the workshop included: policies and practices in relation to the universal periodic review; the establishment of interministerial structures and processes as national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up; and creating synergy between the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and recommendations of human rights mechanisms. Good practices and challenges in relation to the universal periodic review were shared between representatives of different regions. Panel discussions were held on strengthening cooperation between national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, regional human rights mechanisms and the United Nations country

teams in the universal periodic review process. Concrete examples of national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up were most useful to participants, as was a reflection on the role of regional organizations such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

25. Overall, the discussions in the workshop highlighted the need for strong national reporting and follow-up mechanisms, including the use of the universal human rights index;<sup>1</sup> clustering of recommendations from human rights mechanisms according to the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, feeding into national human rights action plans or sectoral road maps; and national databases to track implementation and facilitate reporting and follow-up. The role of national human rights institutions and civil society in the universal periodic review process was appreciated and encouraged.

26. The second subregional workshop was specifically aimed at French-speaking countries, jointly organized by OHCHR and the International Organization of la Francophonie and held in Dakar, Senegal on 25 and 26 July 2018. More than 150 participants attended from over 30 countries in 4 continents (Africa, America, Asia and Europe), including high-level representatives of African French-speaking countries, United Nations regional human rights mechanisms, IPU, the association of francophone parliamentarians, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. Canada expressed great appreciation for the holding of the workshop on behalf of the International Organization of la Francophonie during the general debate under item 6 at the thirty-ninth session of the Human Rights Council.

27. The second workshop was designed to facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learned in relation to the implementation of and follow-up to the recommendations of international and regional human rights mechanisms. It also had a focus on concrete proposals to reinforce and consolidate the universal periodic review mechanism and improve the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review. For example, participants shared their experiences and good practices with regard to the implementation and assessment of recommendations from the universal periodic review, and with respect to the role of parliamentarians, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. The need for synergy between efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and recommendations from human rights mechanisms was stressed, as was the need to harmonize approaches to human rights and development.

28. Recommendations from the second workshop included: setting up or strengthening national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up for the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review; using databases, such as national tracking databases, to coordinate efforts and ensure consistency in the follow-up process; encouraging greater participation of parliaments, together with other stakeholders, in all phases of the universal periodic review process; and making better use of the general debate under item 6 in the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council in order to share good practices to facilitate implementation beyond the submission of midterm reports, a process that requires the collection of data for the subsequent preparation of a more comprehensive national report.

29. Since May 2017, OHCHR has been organizing informal briefings during the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review for members of delegations participating in the review, especially those who have travelled from their capitals. The briefings, which are held in the first and second week of the sessions, have provided visiting delegations with an overview of follow-up processes and measures for the implementation of recommendations made by human rights mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review, in light of existing good practices. The briefings have been received positively by Member States and will continue to be systematically offered to delegations during sessions of the Working Group in the third universal periodic review cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://uhri.ohchr.org/>.

## IV. Conclusions

30. The Secretary-General, in his report on strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation and the importance of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity (A/72/351), stated that the increased focus on the follow-up and implementation of the recommendations from human rights mechanisms provided the United Nations system with an opportunity to engage with Member States. He also stated that international cooperation, including through human rights mechanisms and their recommendations, provided an important basis for States to achieve greater results in both the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights protection at the country level. He pointed out that technical assistance in the field of human rights should be based on such recommendations and be provided in closer cooperation and partnership with Member States, regional human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and the wider United Nations system.

31. Recommendations from human rights mechanisms, in particular recommendations from the universal periodic review that are accepted by States, are one of the best entry points for engagement with the United Nations system at the national level. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and linking it to the recommendations from the universal periodic review, allows the United Nations to support States in achieving concrete results both in terms of the promotion of human rights and their development targets.

32. The importance of implementation was also highlighted during the high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming, held on 26 February 2018, during the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council, pursuant to Council resolution 16/21, which had as its theme the challenges and opportunities resulting from the universal periodic review. The issues for discussion included the importance of recommendations from the universal periodic review, which can serve as a key entry point for cooperation with and action by Governments, the United Nations system and the international community at large, including donors; contributing to international cooperation through the sharing of best practices; the critical role of coordination mechanisms in reporting and follow-up; strengthening coordination at the United Nations level through the mainstreaming of human rights into United Nations country team and individual programmes, and the planning and programming of agencies; and strengthening South-South and North-South cooperation and international donor coordination.

33. Common themes in statements and interventions made at the high-level panel discussion included the importance of the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review, and the potential for a better and more focused use of human rights recommendations in action across the United Nations system, in support of the prevention of human rights violations and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

34. During the first of its two intersessional meetings for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held on 16 January 2019, the Human Rights Council examined numerous aspects of the relationship between the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights. One of the main conclusions was that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals should be integrated increasingly into the universal periodic review process. Member States and other stakeholders must make better use of the universal periodic review outcomes and reports of the treaty bodies and special procedures to guide their planning, reporting and follow-up procedures for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including in the preparation and consideration of voluntary national reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Participants concluded that States and other stakeholders should continue to share experiences and good practices in relation to integrating and aligning the promotion of human rights and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and international levels.



35. From the third universal periodic review cycle onwards, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has provided advice to foreign ministers of countries through a letter sent after the adoption of the relevant outcome document by the Human Rights Council, flagging areas that need particular attention over the 4.5 years until the next universal periodic review, and offering support from OHCHR or the United Nations system under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

36. During the reporting period, the Voluntary Fund for participation in the universal periodic review continued to facilitate the participation of developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review at which they were considered. Assistance was also provided to requesting States to enable them to participate in the adoption of their outcome document by the Human Rights Council during its plenary sessions. In that regard, the secretariat followed up with delegations through a more proactive approach, which included sending targeted correspondence, to ensure that all States entitled to assistance under the Fund could avail themselves of the opportunity.

37. Since the launching of the universal periodic review process and in recognition of the inherent challenge of ensuring that participation is indeed universal, the needs and constraints of least developed countries have been considered. Ensuring the informed, regular and full participation of States with limited resources and no representation in Geneva, in addition to the participation of all other States, requires regular outreach activities.

38. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to help States not only to participate in the universal periodic review but also to understand the review as a full process, in particular at the national level, focusing on the implementation of recommendations made during the previous cycles. The activities supported by the Fund, including the joint workshop with IPU to promote the role of parliaments and parliamentary human rights committees in the universal periodic review process, the two regional workshops held in Uganda and Senegal, and the briefings organized by OHCHR during the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review for members of delegations, contribute to that understanding. These workshops and briefings allow Member States to share their best practices regarding their national implementation and follow-up processes. The secretariat also encouraged States to nominate a senior representative from the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up as a member of the delegation benefiting from the travel assistance under the Fund.

39. The Voluntary Fund for participation in the universal periodic review is instrumental in ensuring the presence of many delegation members. It allows those members to participate in and contribute to the presentation of national reports describing the implementation of previous recommendations at the national level, which further feeds into an interactive dialogue that is universal, independent, impartial and non-politicized, the quality of which contributes anew to recommendations that are constructive, specific, action-oriented and implementable, taking into account national capacities. OHCHR will continue this strategic use of the Fund, which contributes to the increasing understanding of the review as a full process, in particular at the national level, focusing on the implementation of recommendations.