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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 Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review

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

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I. Introduction

A. Submission of the report

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council decision 17/119, in which the Council requested the Secretariat to provide an annual written update on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review and on the resources available to it. The report was prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund. The report provides an overview of contributions and expenditure as at 31 December 2019 (see table 1), together with a description of action taken since the submission of the previous report (A/HRC/41/29) to operationalize the Voluntary Fund. It also provides a description of the results achieved through the various activities financed by the Voluntary Fund during 2019.

B. Background

2. In its resolution 6/17, the Human Rights Council requested the Secretary-General to establish a voluntary fund for financial and technical assistance in order to provide, in conjunction with multilateral funding mechanisms, a source of financial and technical assistance to help countries implement recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review in consultation with, and with the consent of, the country concerned. In its resolution 16/21, the Council requested that the Voluntary Fund be strengthened and operationalized in order to provide a source of financial and technical assistance to help countries, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, to implement the recommendations emanating from their respective reviews. The Council also requested that a board of trustees be established in accordance with the rules of the United Nations.

3. The Voluntary Fund was established in 2009. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides financial and technical assistance to States that have requested or consented to receiving such support, in the spirit of the founding resolution of the universal periodic review, in which it is stated that the objectives of the review include the improvement of the human rights situation on the ground (Human Rights Council resolution 5/1, annex, para. 4 (a)), the fulfilment of the State's human rights obligations and commitments (*ibid.*, para. 4 (b)) and the enhancement of the State's capacity and of technical assistance, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the State concerned (*ibid.*, para. 4 (c)).

II. Operationalization of the Voluntary Fund

A. Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund

4. The members of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights also serve as the Board of Trustees for the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the implementation of the universal periodic review, and they are tasked with overseeing the management of the latter Voluntary Fund. In 2019, the composition of the Board was as follows: Santiago Corcuera-Cabezut (Mexico); Morten Kjaerum (Denmark); Lin Lim (Malaysia); Valeriya Lutkovska (Ukraine); and Esi Sutherland-Addy (Ghana). Mr. Corcuera-Cabezut was nominated in August 2019 to replace the seat vacated by Carmen Rosa Villa (Peru). At a session held from 4 to 8 November 2019, the Board of Trustees elected Esi Sutherland-Addy as Chair; her mandate will run until 30 November 2021.

5. In close consultation with the various sections of OHCHR, the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance focuses its attention on broadly guiding the operationalization of the Voluntary Fund by providing policy advice.

6. As members of the two Voluntary Funds, the Board of Trustees also continued to offer policy guidance in order to enhance the effectiveness of technical assistance and financial support for States in implementing recommendations of the universal periodic review and other international mechanisms. The Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance held its eleventh session in Geneva from 19 to 21 March 2019, focused mostly on continuing its policy guidance on the operationalization of the Voluntary Fund, including a wide-ranging discussion on the adoption of draft guidelines on the use of the Voluntary Fund in light of developments at the national and international levels. The Board of Trustees also increased its focus on the creation or strengthening of national capacities for coordination and implementation and the creation of efficiencies in reporting and implementation, and in light of the Sustainable Development Goals or the strategic choice of implementation of specific thematic recommendations, among other areas.

7. In November 2019, the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance visited the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa in Pretoria and Mozambique, where it held its twelfth session. The visit provided an opportunity for the Board to observe in situ the development and implementation of programmes by another OHCHR regional presence. The main purpose of the session was to increase the understanding of the type of technical cooperation that OHCHR provides in a regional context and to give relevant guidance to the Regional Office to continue strengthening the technical cooperation components of its programmes on the ground. The Board also used the opportunity to visit the OHCHR project in Mozambique and its main partners. In Mozambique, the Board observed the integration and complementarities of the various funding tools of OHCHR. It was noted that the support provided to the Ministry of Justice through the Voluntary Fund, supervised by the expertise of the Regional Office, represented a good example of the support given by the Voluntary Fund.

B. Strategic use of the Voluntary Fund

8. Since its establishment, the universal periodic review mechanism has completed two cycles, in which every State Member of the United Nations has undergone reviews. The third universal periodic review cycle began in May 2017, and Member States have shown growing interest in the review process; as a result, the average number of recommendations of the reviews in the third cycle has increased considerably. From the second cycle onwards, a particular focus of the reviews has been the implementation of the accepted recommendations, as stipulated by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 16/21.

9. Taken together with the recommendations of treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders, recommendations from universal periodic reviews highlight a cross section of the critical human rights gaps at the country level. They point to the areas that need strengthening in order to bolster national human rights institutions and national capacities, foster resilience and create an environment conducive to addressing the root causes of human rights violations and, as such, have a preventive effect.

10. OHCHR has been supporting States in implementing universal periodic review recommendations in a holistic manner, jointly with the recommendations of other United Nations human rights mechanisms, in particular through the use of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance, at the request and with the consent of the State involved.

11. OHCHR has been making every effort to make its follow-up support more proactive, systematic and results-oriented. It has been holding at least two informal briefings during the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, especially for members of delegations who have travelled from their countries to participate in the review. The briefings provide visiting delegations with an overview of follow-up processes and measures for the implementation of recommendations of human rights mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review, and inform delegates about the possibilities offered by the Voluntary Fund.

12. In order to advocate for further national level implementation, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been sending letters to the foreign ministers of countries that have undergone third cycle reviews. The letters flag priority areas of concern that are in need of particular attention during the four-and-half years until the next review,

and offer support in relation to the areas identified. OHCHR has also been producing matrices of clustered recommendations per State reviewed, starting with those recommendations that have been accepted by the State under review. In the matrices, each recommendation is linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals and relevant targets and indicators. In addition, OHCHR has prepared infographic pages, reflecting trends between the second and third cycles in terms of accepted recommendations and the link between recommendations and the Sustainable Development Goals. These infographic pages are a tool for implementation, not only for the States after their reviews, but also for the programming activities of the United Nations country teams and, in general, for the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

13. Proposals by field presences for Voluntary Fund resources should be prepared in consultation with, and with the consent of, the country concerned. Not only is this the minimum requirement, this principle also enhances the necessary national ownership. National ownership reflects the spirit of the review (in which the primary responsibility to implement the universal periodic review recommendations rests with the State) and the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and is an essential factor for the success of any cooperation. Accordingly, Governments should be the initiators or co-initiators of requests for Voluntary Fund resources, with OHCHR being a source of expertise and technical support.

14. In order to increase objectivity in considering suggested projects, OHCHR has based its funding decisions on five criteria, which are also based on the terms of reference of the Voluntary Fund. The same criteria have been included in the internal guidelines on the use of the Voluntary Fund adopted by the Board of Trustees after its March 2019 session. The list is not restrictive, however, and proposals for other types of projects focusing on implementation of universal periodic review recommendations, based on consultations with, and the consent of, the country concerned have also been encouraged. All the projects have been implemented in conjunction with the States concerned, which can count on the technical assistance provided by OHCHR field presences or provided directly by OHCHR Headquarters to the States upon their request.

Promotion and implementation of key universal periodic review recommendations

15. The Secretary-General, in his report A/72/351, notes that during the last few years a new momentum has emerged for constructive and cooperative engagement in the field of human rights. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the launch of the United Nations reform process and the start of the third universal periodic review cycle have served as a catalyst for national implementation efforts that integrate human rights into the 2030 Agenda and the targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals. This encourages nationally owned processes, which will result in a more constructive engagement with Member States.

16. Recommendations resulting from a universal periodic review have grown in number from a few dozen for the first countries undergoing reviews to some two hundred recommendations per country on average in the third cycle. This increase poses serious challenges for States in terms of implementation, taking into account the accumulation of universal periodic review recommendations over time and in light of other implementation requirements, such as those relating to recommendations from treaty bodies, special procedures and regional human rights mechanisms.

17. Support from the Voluntary Fund for efforts to implement recommendations from the universal periodic review will therefore need to be focused on key recommendations, so that such support can make a significant and lasting contribution to national change. In order to determine whether the Voluntary Fund's resources should be spent on a proposal for the implementation of specific universal periodic review recommendations, the following questions are particularly relevant:

(a) Have the treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders flagged the thematic issue in question?

(b) Do the recommendations correspond to the areas flagged by the High Commissioner in the letter sent following the review?

(c) Will implementation of the proposal contribute to strengthening the national human rights protection system and changes in laws and in practice?

(d) Will implementation of the proposal contribute to the better alignment of human rights and development efforts with the Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators?

Establishment or strengthening of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up

18. States have increasingly adopted comprehensive, more efficient and sustainable approaches to reporting, engagement and follow-up to recommendations through the establishment of a new type of governmental structure known as a national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up. This is a permanent national governmental mechanism or structure mandated to coordinate and prepare reports to, and engage with, international and regional human rights mechanisms and to coordinate and track national follow-up to and implementation of recommendations. Such national mechanisms work in coordination with ministries and specialized State bodies, such as the national statistics office, parliament and the judiciary, and in consultation with the national human rights institution(s) and civil society organizations. During 2019, the Voluntary Fund has been supporting multiples initiatives proposed by Member States in this area.

19. In 2019, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 42/30 on promoting international cooperation to support national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up and requested OHCHR to organize regional consultations to exchange experiences and good practices relating to the establishment and development of such mechanisms and their impact on the effective implementation of human rights obligations and commitments. The funding of projects for the establishment or strengthening of a national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up by the Voluntary Fund serves to create sustainable capacity for reporting on and implementation of universal periodic review recommendations, in line with resolution 42/30.

20. During a regional consultation held in Panama in October 2019 for Spanish-speaking countries supported by the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR worked together with States to strengthen the dialogue and coordination between national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up and the government structures in charge of implementing the 2030 Agenda and monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Creation of a recommendations implementation plan

21. Many States develop recommendations implementation plans, sometimes supported by database software hosted at a ministry that administers the software. Such plans, and any databases to support them, ideally cluster all recommendations from the international human rights mechanisms thematically, prioritize them, assign implementation responsibilities and establish a period for implementation, as well as resources and indicators. During the general debate on the universal periodic review at the forty-second session of the Human Rights Council in September 2019, States shared good practices and concrete steps for the implementation of recommendations from the reviews. Many States that took the floor reported on the development of national action plans for the implementation of the recommendations. They also provided information on the submission of voluntary midterm reports, reflecting progress achieved at the implementation stage, and expressed their readiness to share their positive experiences, encouraging other States to follow that practice.

22. The national recommendations tracking database developed by OHCHR and available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish and, shortly, in Russian, will greatly assist the work of the national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, and in the elaboration of recommendations implementation plans. Clustered recommendations can easily be cross-referenced to the Sustainable Development Goals to build synergies and linkages between the different follow-up and reporting activities related to the Goals and human rights. They can also serve as useful tools for United Nations country teams, where applicable, to inform their common country assessment and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and interactions with government counterparts.

During 2019, the Voluntary Fund has been supporting several initiatives proposed by Member States regarding recommendations implementation plans connected with the Sustainable Development Goals and online databases.

Strengthening the capacity of United Nations country teams

23. In addition to direct support for implementation of the recommendations stemming from universal periodic reviews by OHCHR field presences, another modality is the integration of support in United Nations country team programming on follow-up, in response to a government request for such assistance. Through the leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinators, accepted universal periodic review recommendations could be increasingly reflected in common country assessments or United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, as well as in the planning and programming documents of individual United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Such a practice would assist States in achieving concrete progress in implementing recommendations from the universal periodic review, as well as in delivering on human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. Practical guidance from the Secretary-General on how to maximize the results of the universal periodic review process to achieve impact at the country level will be made available soon. The guidance will be an important additional tool to help United Nations entities in their technical cooperation and assistance to Member States and it could increase the use of the Voluntary Fund in this area.

Strengthening parliamentary capacities for implementation

25. In its resolution 35/29, the Human Rights Council acknowledged the crucial role that parliaments play in translating international commitments into national policies and laws. This includes supporting the implementation of recommendations generated by the international human rights mechanisms, especially those from the universal periodic review that are accepted by the State. It may be noted that within the context of the universal periodic review a majority of recommendations require or involve parliamentary action.

26. In resolution 35/29, the Council also requested OHCHR to prepare a study on how to promote and enhance synergies between parliaments and the work of the Council and its universal periodic review. The resulting report (A/HRC/38/25) was based on responses to a questionnaire sent to parliaments, Member States and national human rights institutions. In the report, OHCHR stressed the importance of parliamentary human rights committees and their critical role in all phases of the universal periodic review, especially in follow-up to recommendations. Annexed to the report is a set of draft principles on parliaments and human rights, which aim to guide parliaments in setting up parliamentary human rights committees and to ensure their effective functioning.

27. Strengthening the involvement and engagement of parliaments on human rights issues, through their oversight, legislative and budgetary functions, will increase implementation of the recommendations of human rights mechanisms. OHCHR is actively promoting the role of parliaments and parliamentary human rights committees in the universal periodic review process, including through regional workshops or consultations to share good practices in the implementation of and follow-up to the universal periodic review recommendations. The regional consultation on the universal periodic review organized by OHCHR in Panama in October 2019 included a special session dedicated to the role of parliamentarians in the follow-up and implementation of the universal periodic review recommendations. Examples of parliamentary observatories monitoring the legislative agenda and the interconnection with human rights recommendations and the Sustainable Development Goals were presented as a good practice.

III. Results achieved through the implementation of activities supported by the Voluntary Fund during 2019

28. The activities financed through the Voluntary Fund in 2019 can be divided into three categories: activities of OHCHR field presences; direct support to Governments; and a regional workshop on universal periodic review preparation and implementation of recommendations. Support to OHCHR field presences was provided for activities in

Afghanistan, Argentina, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Peru, Samoa and Uruguay. Based on a request from the Government of Mongolia (where OHCHR does not have a field presence), a comprehensive one-and-a-half-year project was developed and implemented throughout 2019.

29. Using Voluntary Fund support, the OHCHR Country Office in Cambodia enhanced the capacity of local authorities to implement the complex and lengthy communal land titling process. In total, OHCHR Cambodia helped 2,000 indigenous persons to progress towards the legal recognition of their land by mitigating the risk of eviction and land grabbing. Indigenous communities were consulted and kept informed by OHCHR before and during each step of the communal land registration process. The OHCHR Country Office emphasized the importance of gender parity on the committees selected by indigenous communities for the consultations; as a result, 40 to 55 per cent of the representatives on the committees were female.

30. The OHCHR Country Office in Cambodia also provided the local authorities with information on how to manage the process: in addition to providing technical support during the registration processes, the Country Office published a manual on the three-step communal land titling process to assist local authorities and indigenous communities. The manual was widely disseminated and used extensively in training local authorities in charge of communal land titling at the provincial level. In 2019, 61 participants from the Ministry of Rural Development, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, along with several of their provincial departments, gained knowledge on intellectual property rights and communal land titling during a three-day training organized by OHCHR in partnership with those ministries.

31. The OHCHR Country Office also worked with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples to advocate for the simplification of the lengthy and complex communal land titling process. It has continued its advocacy for the simplification of the process with the World Bank, which announced that it would support communal land titling registration in 2020.

32. In Mongolia, OHCHR provided technical cooperation with support from the Voluntary Fund to assist the country in implementing some of the key thematic recommendations from its second cycle review, including the establishment of a national preventive mechanism to combat torture; the adoption of a national action plan on business and human rights; the adoption of a law on the protection of human rights defenders; the setting up of a national recommendations tracking database; and the relaunch of the Free and Equal Campaign. The presence of a Human Rights Adviser in the country has been critical in supporting implementation of a number of these activities.

33. With a view to establishing a national preventive mechanism, OHCHR, in close collaboration with the Government of Mongolia, held a consultative meeting to identify a national preventive mechanism in line with the requirements of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, during which a member of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment provided expert advice. As a result, the parliament adopted the Revised Law on the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, which designates the National Human Rights Commission as the national preventive mechanism, with an independent mandate and functions from that of the Commission.

34. In addition, OHCHR organized a national multi-stakeholder consultation on the adoption of the national action plan on business and human rights, during which the Chair of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises provided specific expert advice. Given the need to further raise awareness on this issue, the Government of Mongolia will continue to work towards the adoption of a national action plan with the active participation of all stakeholders, including the business community, workers' organizations and civil society.

35. In relation to a bill on human rights defenders, OHCHR, in collaboration with the Government and the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, organized a consultative meeting on the legal protection of human rights defenders, during which the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders provided expert advice with

a view to ensuring that the draft law was in line with relevant international human rights standards. Previously, OHCHR had also provided extensive comments on the bill. The consultation encouraged the Cabinet to submit the bill to parliament for its adoption.

36. Furthermore, the Voluntary Fund was used by OHCHR to assist Mongolia in launching the national recommendations tracking database, an important tool for the Government to implement the recommendations of international human rights mechanisms. Finally, the Voluntary Fund is also being used for the realization in the country of more activities connected with the Equal and Free Campaign, which is aimed at ensuring the protection of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

37. The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific used the Voluntary Fund to recruit a national United Nations Volunteer to support the ongoing work of the Regional Office related to the universal periodic review, including the assessment of the universal periodic review recommendations. In 2019, the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review reviewed the human rights record of New Zealand and Vanuatu (at its thirty-second session), and Fiji (at its thirty-fourth session). The Volunteer continued providing technical support to the United Nations country team in Fiji for its universal periodic review submissions. The Volunteer was engaged in the development, coordination and delivery of awareness-raising and training activities for national stakeholders, including on the role of international human rights mechanisms, the establishment of a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up and the development of action plans and indicators for the implementation of recommendations.

38. More than 40 high-level provincial officials who are part of the Federal Human Rights Council of Argentina were trained on United Nations human rights mechanisms and how to integrate universal periodic review recommendations into local public policies. In this regard, the Human Rights Adviser, with funding support from the Voluntary Fund, strengthened the capacities of the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up with the aim of strengthening the capacity of State institutions to monitor and report on the implementation of human rights recommendations and to link them with the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. The training also enhanced the capacities of provincial officials to recognize the fundamental principles of social and economic rights, based on the mandate of the Federal Human Rights Council and the provincial Sustainable Development Goal focal points through the application of the OHCHR methodology for human rights indicators. Moreover, training was provided to the Office of the Ombudsperson of the Nation on human rights indicators to follow up universal periodic review recommendations; as a result, the Ombudsperson's Office is developing a list of indicators for monitoring implementation of review recommendations regarding the rights to housing, health and education. In addition, the Voluntary Fund continued to provide support to the national human rights secretariat and the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies, which is in charge of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Technical assistance was also provided in order to build the online Recommendations Monitoring System (SIMORE Plus), which links human rights recommendations with the Sustainable Development Goals.

39. The OHCHR Country Office in Guatemala assisted the Presidential Commission for Coordinating Executive Policy in the field of human rights to establish the Recommendations Monitoring System for Guatemala (SIMOREG). The System contains over 2,000 recommendations from eight treaty bodies and the universal periodic review. The OHCHR Country Office also provided support to the Presidential Commission to develop workshops on international protection mechanisms and on the use of the Recommendations Monitoring System, as well as to share the recommendations from the most recent universal periodic review. In all, 525 representatives of 52 State institutions and 50 social organizations at the regional and local level participated in the workshops. The OHCHR Country Office in Guatemala also provided technical assistance to the inter-institutional forum on human rights, including in meetings for inter-institutional coordination, web revision of the Recommendations Monitoring System and verification of booklets or ranking on the Universal Human Rights Index.

40. As a part of its efforts to tackle police violence, OHCHR has undertaken a project supported by the Voluntary Fund in Jamaica to educate police recruits on human rights approaches, standards and requirements pertinent to their law enforcement roles. OHCHR, with support from the Human Rights Adviser, organized three training sessions in June and

July 2019 in cooperation with the National Police College of Jamaica, among other things, to build the capacity, knowledge and skills of police recruits to understand, identify and respond to acts of discrimination and to build their legal literacy and procedural awareness of the child protection system. Additionally, the trainings sought to shift attitudes and biases among police recruits towards marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, persons living with HIV/AIDS and persons with disabilities.

41. The Human Rights Adviser in Jamaica also organized a workshop for the Jamaican judiciary to present the online training platform on international human rights. The workshop was organized in collaboration with the Judicial Education Institute of Jamaica and the Court Management Services and was attended by the judges at all levels, including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The workshop presented the main elements of the training course and provided guidance on how trainers and judges can use the online platform as a consultation tool. During the training, the online course was handed over officially to the Judicial Education Institute and one administrator was assigned to manage the site and to provide access to all members of the judiciary.

42. As part of a Voluntary Fund project in Peru, the OHCHR Regional Office for South America received technical support to develop an intersectoral protocol that identifies the key phases for the preparation of reports and the implementation of recommendations, with a special emphasis on the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review. The protocol was widely disseminated among different stakeholders, such as the ombudsman's office and civil society organizations, and it will allow for a better implementation of the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms' recommendations. The Voluntary Fund also allowed the review of implementation of the National Human Rights Plan for 2018–2021, including in light of the recommendations of the third cycle of the universal periodic review and the 2030 Agenda.

43. In Uruguay, the Voluntary Fund was used to create a course on the integration of human rights recommendations into action plans of State institutions. More than 90 State officers, mainly members of the institutions that compose the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, were trained on how to effectively integrate the recommendations into planning processes within their institutions. The course was facilitated by the Human Rights Adviser and co-organized by the United Nations Country Team, OHCHR, the Institute of Public Policies on Human Rights of MERCOSUR, the National Secretariat for Human Rights and the Uruguayan International Cooperation Agency.

44. The Voluntary Fund was also used in Uruguay to strengthen capacities of national justice operators. Around 200 judicial operators (judges, prosecutors and public defenders) were trained on international human rights standards and soft law and were equipped with better tools to implement international human rights recommendations. Finally, the Voluntary Fund supported the launching and implementation of a project focused on the structural transformations needed for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. The project, led by the Resident Coordinator's Office and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and aimed at strengthening the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in high-income countries, was part of a joint process among United Nations agencies, academia, government, the private sector and civil society.

45. Financing from the Voluntary Fund allowed the Regional Office for Central America to continue to support the Government of Costa Rica in building capacity of members of the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Monitoring and Implementation of International Human Rights Obligations to finalize the installation of a national database developed by Paraguay. The Regional Office will continue to support the Government in implementing the recommendations of the international human rights mechanisms through the action plan developed by the Inter-Institutional Commission.

46. With the support of the Voluntary Fund, activities in Mauritania were aimed at the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of recommendations from the 2015 universal periodic review, developed by the Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society in 2018. In March 2019, the OHCHR Office in Mauritania organized a training session on formulating and adopting human rights and Sustainable Development Goals indicators. Members of the interministerial technical committee on drafting State reports and other focal points on

human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals participated in the training. In May 2019, a follow-up session allowed participants to effectively monitor progress in the implementation of the national action plan. In October 2019, on the occasion of the midterm review, a workshop to assess progress in achieving implementation of recommendations from the review was held. More than 60 stakeholders participated in the workshop and took part in the activities aimed at supporting the Government in the implementation of the recommendations.

47. The inclusion of civil society allowed for a better knowledge of the state of implementation of the national action plan in Mauritania, as well as the realization of human rights indicators for the 2020 national report. All these activities resulted in a better understanding of remaining gaps in the implementation of human rights recommendations, and allowed the interministerial committee to identify its priority actions prior to the universal periodic review of Mauritania in 2020.

48. The Voluntary Fund enabled the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa to deploy a national United Nations Volunteer to work part-time in the Ministry of Justice of Mozambique. The Volunteer assisted the Ministry with capacity-building of its staff and those of the interministerial committee on human rights-related issues. The Volunteer also assisted in the development of a repository of relevant international instruments ratified by Mozambique, showing the reporting status for each instrument, and in the use of a matrix of universal periodic review recommendations linked to relevant Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the Volunteer facilitated the work of the joint United Nations human rights team and its engagement with the human rights mechanisms. The Voluntary Fund was also used to translate into Portuguese recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms, allowing a wide dissemination of these instruments at the national level.

49. In Nigeria, with the assistance of the Voluntary Fund, the Human Rights Adviser helped to implement repeated recommendations emanating from the three cycles of the universal periodic review regarding the criminal justice and penitentiary system. In 2019, the Correctional Service Act entered into force. This law overhauled the penitentiary system, providing for non-custodial sentences and the commutation of death sentences to life imprisonment for convicts on death row for 10 years or more, and it strengthened the focus on ensuring that penalties were in accordance with best global practices.

50. Using the Voluntary Fund, OHCHR supported a national workshop on the Correctional Service Act, which brought together relevant stakeholders in the administration of criminal justice from the federal and state levels, including representatives of the Federal Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior and law enforcement agencies, as well as judges, magistrates, attorneys general, Nigerian Correctional Service officials, rule of law experts and international partners. The aim of the workshop was to develop a strategic action plan for the effective implementation of the Act, including the establishment of the National and State Committees on Non-Custodial Measures, and to highlight the importance of additional trainings for Correctional Service personnel, among others.

51. In North Macedonia, the Voluntary Fund has been used to support the activities of the expert working group of the intersectoral human rights body, which is the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up for human rights recommendations. Following the country's third universal periodic review, the expert working group updated the list of recommendations and drafted a new Recommendations Implementation Plan in 2019. With OHCHR assistance, the expert working group also developed a proposal for a dedicated web page and the introduction of a system of regular annual consultations with civil society, as well as consultations for specific reporting and follow-up tasks. During a workshop held in December 2019, the Recommendations Implementation Plan was shared for the first time with civil society organizations for a consultative process, prior to finalizing the Plan. Discussions with civil society were focused on tracking progress in the implementation of recommendations and on ways to increase transparency and inclusiveness of the work of the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up.

52. In October 2019, at the official request of the Government of Belgium, the Universal Periodic Review Branch of OHCHR in coordination with the OHCHR Regional Office in Brussels organized two-day national consultations on the theme of discrimination and racism. The consultations brought together representatives from all relevant stakeholders,

including religious, cultural and social groups, national human rights institutions, international and national experts, members of the Government, including from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the ministry in charge of gender issues and equality, academia, trade unions and United Nations agencies. The final report of the consultations recommended the implementation of international, regional and national recommendations to address racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at all levels. The report also recommended that civil society and other relevant stakeholders should work in close consultation during the preparation of a future national action plan against racism.

53. In Afghanistan, the Voluntary Fund was used to further enhance the capacity of senior government officials (members of the universal periodic review technical working group), the Afghan delegation attending the meeting of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, civil society organizations and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to implement the recommendations received from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms and to promote the country's engagement with those mechanisms.

54. With the full involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Human Rights Service and the Universal Periodic Review Branch of OHCHR conducted a number of workshops, in particular for the interministerial committee and its focal points responsible for the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review. The workshops focused, among other things, on the role of the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up and the utility of establishing a national recommendations tracking database, a human rights action plan and a recommendations implementation plan linked with Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the assistance that the United Nations system in Afghanistan could provide in that regard. A workshop for civil society addressed the importance of engaging the public in various stages of the review and the participation of civil society and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in the universal periodic review process. Opportunities for dialogue with the State and the engagement of relevant organizations in the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review were reinforced.

55. Supported by the Voluntary Fund, a regional consultation on the universal periodic review, looking at good practices, follow-up mechanisms and synergies with the 2030 Agenda, was organized by OHCHR in Panama in October 2019, with the consent of the host country and in partnership with the Development Coordination Office, the UNDP regional office and the office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The activity gathered 70 representatives from 17 Spanish-speaking countries, including senior government officials from national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up and Sustainable Development Goal-related structures, representatives from national human rights institutions, parliaments and civil society, and officials from the United Nations system. A member of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund, Mr. Corcuera-Cabezut, participated in the regional consultation.

56. The main objectives of the regional consultation were to facilitate the use of good practices and the articulation of lessons learned at the various stages of the universal periodic review process, especially regarding the implementation of recommendations, and to identify challenges as well as opportunities to align initiatives to achieve human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level. It included a segment on the use of recommendations from the universal periodic review and other human rights mechanisms in the preparation of voluntary national reports on the Sustainable Development Goals. The consultation also covered the role of parliaments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in the implementation of human rights recommendations and the Sustainable Development Goals; strategies to mainstream human rights in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level; and the activities of United Nations country teams to assist States in integrating recommendations from the universal periodic review to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

57. At the end of the event, the Regional Director of the Development Coordination Office delivered a joint concluding statement on behalf of UNDP, the Development Coordination Office and OHCHR, highlighting an important number of best practices that

will serve as a good reference for similar regional workshops for the Asia and the Pacific and Eastern European Regions, to be held in 2020.

IV. Financial situation of the Voluntary Fund

Table 1
Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January–31 December 2019
(in United States dollars)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Amount</i>
I. Income	
Voluntary contributions received in 2019	412 361.56
Gain and loss exchange	2 264.52
Singapore (pledged in 2018, paid in 2019)	5 000.00
Gain/loss on exchange	296.67
Miscellaneous and Investment income	63 160.66
Total income	487 786.74
II. Expenditure	
Staff costs	298 606.22
Other personnel costs (consultants' fees and travel)	15 132.46
Travel of staff and consultants	51 145.61
Travel of representatives or participants to meetings and seminars	80 953.38
Contractual services	26 495.62
General operating and other direct costs	45 750.96
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	-
Grants out (<\$50,000) and fellowships	-
Programme support (indirect) costs	67 028.02
Total expenditure	585 112.27
III. Adjustments to prior year's expenditure (liquidation of commitments)	
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditures for the period	(97 325.53)
Opening balance 1 January 2019	2 350 318.33
Other adjustments (prior period)	(5 000)
Unpaid pledges	-
Total Voluntary Fund balance as at 31 December 2019	2 247 992.80

Table 2
Contributions to the Voluntary Fund for financial and technical assistance, from the establishment of the Voluntary Fund to 31 December 2019
(in United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Biennium 2008–2009	
Colombia	40 000
Russian Federation	450 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	45 326
Biennium 2010–2011	
Germany	148 148
Morocco	500 000

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Russian Federation	200 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	133 707
Biennium 2012–2013	
Australia	387 580
Germany	475 664
Kazakhstan	9 975
Norway	849 114
Biennium 2014–2015	
Germany	242 844
Kazakhstan	53 890
Netherlands	30 000
Norway	601 733
Oman	10 000
Biennium 2016–2017	
France	22 753
Germany	221 631
Kazakhstan	10 000
Norway	475 367
Paraguay	3 000
Republic of Korea	50 000
Saudi Arabia	150 000
Spain	111 485
United Arab Emirates	100 000
2018	
France	23 229
Germany	124 224
Norway	357 270
Pakistan	3 000
Republic of Korea	50 000
Russian Federation	200 000
Saudi Arabia	70 000
Singapore	5 000
Spain	56 818
2019	
Republic of Korea	50 000.00
Saudi Arabia	75 000.00
Spain	27 352.30
Pakistan	3 000.00
Total contributions	6 625 784.00

58. From the establishment of the Voluntary Fund in 2009 to the end of 2019, 17 States have made financial contributions: Australia, Colombia, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (see table 2).

59. The strengthening of the financial basis of the Voluntary Fund is a positive trend, and one that shows the increasing importance that States attach to the implementation of

recommendations arising from the universal periodic review and the reception of dedicated support for that task. Continued donations to the Voluntary Fund and a widening of the donor base are both crucial to further solidify the long-term sustainability of universal periodic review-related technical cooperation, both during the third but also well into future review cycles, especially taking into account the increase in projects foreseen for 2020.

V. Final considerations

60. The Secretary-General, in his report on strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights (A/72/351), stated that the increased focus on the follow-up to and implementation of recommendations made by human rights mechanisms provided the United Nations system with an opportunity to further engage with Member States. International cooperation, including through human rights mechanisms and their recommendations, gave 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. Technical assistance in the field of human rights should be based on such recommendations and be delivered 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.

61. The recommendations of human rights mechanisms, in particular universal periodic review recommendations that are accepted by the State, are one of the best entry points for United Nations system-wide engagement at the national level. The operationalization of the 2030 Agenda, linking it to universal periodic review recommendations, allows the United Nations to assist States in achieving concrete results both in terms of human rights progress and development targets.

62. The conclusions above were also highlighted by participants at the high-level panel on human rights mainstreaming, held on 26 February 2018 during the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council, and by the Deputy Secretary-General, in her dialogue with the Human Rights Council on 7 March 2019. The Deputy Secretary-General underlined that countries could show progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by utilizing human rights reporting processes, such as the universal periodic review, and that those review processes could in turn complement the voluntary national reviews conducted at the high-level political forum for sustainable development. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her report to the Human Rights Council on the implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights (A/HRC/41/25), noted that the United Nations system at the country level was well placed to support implementation efforts by Member States through the use of the accepted recommendations from universal periodic reviews.

63. In his most recent human rights report, “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights 2020”, presented at the opening of the forty-third session of the Human Rights Council in March 2020, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of the universal periodic review recommendations to advance the 2030 Agenda. The Secretary-General encouraged the full use of the human rights mechanisms, including the universal periodic review, to contribute to the implementation of the Goals. He also asked for better use of the universal periodic review outcomes in national development planning and in follow-up and reporting, including on the Sustainable Development Goals and in the preparation of the voluntary national reviews. Additionally, in his report, the Secretary-General requested the United Nations to make fuller use of its human rights tools and entry points, including the universal periodic review, as a basis for meeting the challenges, opportunities and needs of the twenty-first century and for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

64. As previously mentioned, the letters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the foreign ministers of countries after they undergo a third cycle review flag areas that need particular attention over the four-and-a-half years until the State’s next review, and offer support from OHCHR or the United Nations system under the leadership of the respective United Nations Resident Coordinator. These letters, jointly with the matrices of clustered recommendations linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals with relevant targets and indicators, as well as the production of infographic pages,

are innovative tools that aim to support the follow-up efforts made by Member States and to stimulate further national level implementation.

65. In particular, OHCHR encourages Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams to ensure that clustered recommendations of the human rights mechanisms are integrated into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks signed at the country level and are integrated into efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, the new United Nations Development Assistance Framework Guidelines acknowledge that the recommendations of human rights mechanisms are essential for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Accepted recommendations from the universal periodic review are an important entry point, and this is increasingly being recognized by OHCHR and the rest of the United Nations system.

66. In 2020 the Secretary-General is expected to issue practical guidance for all United Nations officials at Headquarters, as well as for United Nations missions and United Nations country teams, on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review to achieve the greatest impact at the country level. The guidance will outline how the universal periodic review can serve as an entry point for engagement with Member States. The text should guide action on human rights by United Nations entities in line with their mandates and in support of specific Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators. The release of the practical guidance could also mean a further increase in the catalytic role played by the Voluntary Fund in the implementation of recommendations from the universal periodic review, owing to growing requests by Member States and the increasing United Nations engagement in the countries in this area.

67. In 2020, it is envisaged that the Voluntary Fund will be supporting at least 25 projects in countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia and in the Middle East and North Africa. This represents an increase of 84 per cent in terms of proposals received from Member States in comparison with 2019, following one of the main recommendations made by the Board of Trustees to OHCHR, to increase the use of the Voluntary Fund. OHCHR will continuously rethink and revitalize its strategic vision for follow-up support with the advice of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund, in order to target more effective support to States in their efforts to implement, as a minimum, accepted universal periodic review recommendations. Underlying principles for the allocation of Voluntary Fund resources will include support for building national implementation capacities that are efficient and sustainable, in line with the vision outlined by the Secretary-General in his most recent reports.

68. OHCHR reiterates the importance of the active participation of other stakeholders in the follow-up processes and will endeavour to explore ways through which stakeholders may also benefit from the Voluntary Fund, either directly or indirectly, by becoming involved in the technical cooperation and assistance programmes of the States concerned that are assisted by the Voluntary Fund.
