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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**



I. Introduction

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 present report was prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund. The report contains an overview of contributions and expenditure as at 31 December 2020 (see table 1), together with a description of the operations of the Voluntary Fund since the submission of the previous report¹ and of the results achieved through the various activities financed by the Voluntary Fund in 2020.

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 to 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 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 for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review 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 receive such support, in the spirit of Human Rights Council resolution 5/1, the founding resolution of the universal periodic review mechanism, in which the Council indicated that the objectives of the review included the improvement of the human rights situation on the ground, the fulfilment of the State's human rights obligations and commitments and the enhancement of the State's capacity and of technical assistance, in consultation with, and with the consent of, the State concerned. In the same resolution, the Council also stipulated that the universal periodic review should fully integrate a gender perspective.

II. Operations 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 are tasked with overseeing the management of the Funds. In 2020, the composition of the Board was as follows: Azita Berar Awad (Islamic Republic of Iran); Santiago Corcuera-Cabezut (Mexico); Morten Kjaerum (Denmark); Valerya Lutkovska (Ukraine); and Esi Sutherland-Addy (Ghana) (Chair). Ms. Berar Awad was nominated in March 2020 to fill the seat vacated by Lin Lim (Malaysia). The position of Chair is held on a rotational basis, covering at least two sessions of the Board. The Chair delivers an annual oral update to the Human Rights Council.

5. In close consultation with OHCHR, the Board of Trustees provides policy guidance on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review in order to enhance the effectiveness of technical assistance and financial support provided for States in implementing

¹ A/HRC/44/19.

recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and other international mechanisms.

6. In 2020, the sessions of the Board of Trustees were affected by travel restrictions imposed in order to contain the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In that regard, the secretariat of the Board applied innovative approaches to carrying out its work by organizing online sessions, enabling it to hold both internal discussions and discussions with key partners in all regions of the world.

7. The Board of Trustees held its thirteenth session virtually on 20 May 2020. At the session, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant senior OHCHR staff focused their interventions on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for OHCHR projects with States and the related adjustments that were being made. The Board was provided with a briefing about coordination efforts across the United Nations system, under the Secretary-General's leadership, to facilitate the provision of coherent and coordinated messages and support. The timely launch by the Secretary-General of "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights", which he presented to the Human Rights Council on 24 February 2020, set an ambitious agenda for mobilizing the United Nations and the international community to ensure that respect for human rights becomes a reality for every person in every country, with the realization of gender equality and equal rights for women being one of the key areas of focus.

8. The fourteenth session of the Board of Trustees was held virtually on 17 and 18 November 2020, through a videoconference hosted in Lund, Sweden. At the session, the members of the Board, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, experts and partners reviewed the activities and projects planned and implemented across all regions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Deputy High Commissioner referred to the recently issued practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review mechanism at the country level² and to the universal periodic review as an important tool for engagement at the country level. Particular attention was paid to the work of human rights advisers providing technical advice to States in the field and in the implementation of projects supported by the Voluntary Fund.

9. The most recent report of the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights³ contains information on good examples of engagement in the universal periodic review and follow-up to recommendations, through technical cooperation and as requested by States. The Board continued to offer policy guidance in order to maximize the effectiveness of the technical assistance and financial support available to States in implementing the recommendations arising from the universal periodic review. The practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review mechanism at the country level, recently developed on the basis of the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, contains advice on how United Nations entities at the country level can engage in supporting progress by States on human rights, starting with the implementation of the accepted universal periodic review recommendations, and in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 on the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

B. Strategic use of the Voluntary Fund

10. Since its establishment, the universal periodic review mechanism has completed two review 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 emanating from 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.

² See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf.

³ A/HRC/46/70.

11. Taken together with the recommendations of the treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders, recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review highlight a cross section of the critical human rights gaps at the country level, which include discrimination, violence against women and other violations of women rights. 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; as such, they have a preventive effect. In addition, those recommendations are intrinsically connected with the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. OHCHR has been supporting States in implementing recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review 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 in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review, at the request and with the consent of the State concerned.

13. OHCHR has been making every effort to make its follow-up support more proactive, systematic and results-oriented. At every session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, OHCHR has held at least two informal briefings for members of delegations participating in the review of their countries. The briefings are aimed at providing delegations with an overview of follow-up processes and measures for the implementation of the recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review, and informing delegates about the options offered by the Voluntary Fund. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OHCHR conducted the informal briefings in-person, in a hybrid format and/or virtually, at the two sessions of the Working Group.

14. In order to advocate for further implementation at the national level, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has advised States that have undergone their third cycle reviews of areas that deserve particular attention during the four and a half years until the next review, offering OHCHR and United Nations system support in relation to the implementation of recommendations and the integration efforts with the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. OHCHR has also been producing matrices of thematically clustered recommendations, by State reviewed, starting with those recommendations that have been accepted by the State under review. In the matrices, recommendations are linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, OHCHR has prepared infographics reflecting trends between the second and third cycles, in terms of accepted recommendations, as tools for implementation not only for States after their reviews, but also for the programming of the activities of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

15. Voluntary fund resources are provided at the request and with the consent of the Government concerned, with OHCHR serving as a source of expertise and technical support. Proposals by OHCHR field presences are likewise 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 recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review rests with the State, and the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and it is an essential factor for the success and sustainability of any development cooperation endeavour.

16. In order to increase objectivity in considering suggested projects for Voluntary Fund support, OHCHR has based its funding decisions on five criteria drawn from the terms of reference of the Voluntary Fund. In addition, in December 2020, OHCHR reminded field presences involved in negotiating proposals that aim to be funded by the Voluntary Fund about integrating a gender perspective, in line with Human Rights Council resolution 6/30, and bearing in mind the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on women. All the projects have been implemented in conjunction with the States concerned, which, upon their request, can count on the technical assistance provided by OHCHR field presences or provided directly by OHCHR at headquarters.

1. Promotion and implementation of key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review

17. 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,⁴ the Secretary-General noted that, in recent years, a new momentum had 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 had served as catalysts for national efforts that integrated human rights into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals.

18. The recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review have grown in number, from a few dozen for the first countries undergoing reviews to some 200 recommendations per country on average in the third cycle. Notwithstanding a significant overlap and repetition, this increase poses challenges for States in terms of implementation, taking into account the accumulation of universal periodic review recommendations over time and in the light of other obligations, such as those relating to recommendations from treaty bodies, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and regional human rights mechanisms.

19. Support from the Voluntary Fund to implement recommendations from the universal periodic review therefore must be focused on key recommendations, so that such support can make a significant and lasting contribution to change at the national level. The following questions are particularly relevant in determining whether the Voluntary Fund's resources should be spent on a proposal for the implementation of specific universal periodic review recommendations:

(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 to changes in law and in practice?

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

In 2020, the Voluntary Fund supported initiatives proposed by States for the promotion and implementation of key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review.

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

20. States have increasingly adopted comprehensive, more efficient and sustainable approaches to reporting on, engagement with 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. Such national mechanisms work in coordination with ministries and specialized State bodies, such as the national statistical office, the parliament and the judiciary, and in consultation with national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. In 2020, the Voluntary Fund supported initiatives proposed by States for the establishment or strengthening of such mechanisms.

21. In its resolution 42/30, on promoting international cooperation to support national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, the Human Rights Council 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

⁴ A/72/351.

implementation, reporting and follow-up by the Voluntary Fund will serve to create sustainable capacity for reporting on and the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, in line with resolution 42/30, when the regional consultations resume, as soon as the global public health context allows.

3. Creation of a plan for the implementation of recommendations

22. Many States develop implementation plans, and occasionally, such plans are supported by database software that is 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 responsibilities for implementation and establish a period for implementation, as well as the necessary resources and indicators of achievement. During the general debates on the universal periodic review in the Human Rights Council, States often share good practices and concrete steps for the implementation of recommendations emanating from the reviews.

23. The national recommendations tracking database developed by OHCHR, which is currently available in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish, will greatly assist in the work of the national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up and in the elaboration of implementation plans. Clustered recommendations can easily be cross-referenced with the Sustainable Development Goals to build synergies and linkages between the various follow-up and reporting activities related to the Goals and human rights. They can also serve as useful tools for United Nations country teams, to inform their common country assessments, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and interactions with their government counterparts. In 2020, the Voluntary Fund supported initiatives proposed by States regarding implementation plans connected with the Sustainable Development Goals and online databases.

4. Strengthening the capacity of United Nations country teams

24. In addition to the implementation of the recommendations stemming from universal periodic reviews, another modality of support is the integration of such recommendations into United Nations country team programming, in response to a government request for such assistance. Through the leadership of resident coordinators, accepted recommendations could be increasingly reflected in common country assessments or in 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, as well as in realizing human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

25. The practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review mechanism at the country level, developed by OHCHR in close cooperation with United Nations entities, was finalized in mid-August 2020 and is available in all official languages of the Organization. The practical guidance note is aimed at providing advice on how United Nations entities at the country level can engage in the universal periodic review process to support progress by States on human rights, and it includes a specific reference to the Voluntary Fund. The practical guidance note will represent an important additional tool to assist United Nations entities in integrating human rights-related recommendations into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and in increasing their technical cooperation and assistance provided to States and thereby also increase the use of the Voluntary Fund in this area.

5. Strengthening parliamentary capacities for implementation

26. In its resolution 35/29, the Human Rights Council acknowledged the crucial role that parliaments played in translating international commitments into national policies and laws. 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 on the study⁵ included a set of draft principles on parliaments and human rights, which were aimed at guiding parliaments in setting up parliamentary human rights committees and ensuring their effective functioning.

27. Strengthening the role of parliaments in ensuring compliance with human rights obligations, through their oversight, legislative and budgetary functions, will increase implementation of the recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms. OHCHR actively promotes 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 recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. OHCHR continued to organize online events in 2020 to raise awareness and strengthen the capacity and engagement of members of parliament at all stages of the universal periodic review process, in close cooperation and coordination with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Organization of La Francophonie and the Commonwealth. OHCHR recently developed a guidance note on the specific role of parliamentarians before, during and after the universal periodic review process,⁶ in close cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, complementing the practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review mechanism at the country level for other stakeholders. Current and future projects supported by the Voluntary Fund and involving parliaments could also benefit from the new tool.

III. Results achieved through the implementation of activities supported by the Voluntary Fund in 2020

28. In 2020, the Voluntary Fund approved financial and technical assistance for activities in the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mongolia, Nigeria, Peru, the Republic of Moldova, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uruguay and Yemen. As in previous years, the fund's strategic focus in 2020 was assisting States in the implementation of key recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, the establishment and/or strengthening of the national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up and the creation of implementation plans and databases relating to recommendations, as well as supporting United Nations country teams and parliamentarians in the implementation of recommendations.

29. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the implementation of a number of those projects in the field. OHCHR conveyed to the States involved in those projects its flexibility with regard to considering any necessary adjustments requested by the countries, in accordance with their new national priorities in the evolving global context of the pandemic. That approach was discussed and agreed with the members of the Board of Trustees, the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner, in the online meetings held in May and November, which were organized jointly with the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights. Notwithstanding the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of strategic activities, which are described below, were implemented with the support of the Voluntary Fund by OHCHR field presences and concerned States.

30. Using Voluntary Fund support, the OHCHR country office in Cambodia closely coordinated with the Government of Cambodia to launch a national recommendations tracking database. In particular, the OHCHR country office, with the support of OHCHR at headquarters and the regional office, virtually provided a briefing to the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, the governmental institution in charge of human rights efforts in the country, on the use of the database. The office gave an in-depth overview of the database and how it could assist Cambodia in tracking the implementation of human rights-related

⁵ A/HRC/38/25.

⁶ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/TIPs_Members_Parliament.pdf.

recommendations and in the preparation of the State's implementation reports. Following interest expressed by the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, an official request was made by the Government of Cambodia for further training on the database.

31. The OHCHR country office in Cambodia organized consultations for the preparation of its discussion paper on simplifying communal land titling, consulting with relevant ministries, civil society organizations working to support indigenous peoples, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank. The final draft, which is awaiting endorsement by the authorities, incorporated the principles set out in the 2030 Agenda, including the universal principles of human rights, leaving no one behind and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, and is due to be released in early 2021.

32. In Nigeria, the Human Rights Adviser, with the support of the Voluntary Fund, continued to assist the national authorities in the reform of the criminal justice system, especially the penitentiary system. Those activities followed previous assistance related to the adoption of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act of 2015 and the Correctional Service Act of 2019, which constituted the linchpin of the Government's efforts aimed at criminal justice system reform, through legal and institutional measures targeting the establishment of a legal framework and institutional mechanisms.

33. With support from the Voluntary Fund, Nigeria benefited from a virtual round table convened by the Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory High Courts, gathering the heads of the courts of all 36 states and representatives of the Federal Ministry of Justice to review the draft Federal Capital Territory Courts practice direction on sentencing. It also supported a two-day technical session for personnel of the Federal Ministry of Justice and judges for the validation of the draft direction and a three-day virtual national summit on correctional service reform. Those activities were undertaken in lieu of previously planned in-person national workshops, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the government directive that all meetings should be conducted virtually.

34. Through OHCHR support, the Federal Capital Territory developed and adopted the Federal Capital Territory Courts (Sentencing) Practice Direction, consolidating existing sentencing guidelines and integrating non-custodial sentences, as provided under the Correctional Services Act of 2019. Following its adoption, the Practice Direction was discussed at a national summit, which was also supported by OHCHR, to help to raise awareness of efforts to reform the criminal justice system pursuant to recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and to create momentum for implementation at the federal, state and regional levels.

35. In Peru, with the support of the Voluntary Fund, the Government was able to start an unprecedented process to engage six regional governments on the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review and to determine the bases for the approval of regional agendas for their implementation. It included the strengthening of the capacities of the mechanism of appointed focal points of the six regions and the submission of three draft regional human rights plans, for the regions of Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Loreto, all based on universal periodic review recommendations. Due to the Voluntary Fund contribution, it is anticipated that the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights will approve those drafts through regional management tools, namely, regional resolutions, and the follow-up mechanism, based on the national recommendations tracking database, the Universal Human Rights Index and a system developed by the Ministry.

36. Despite the national state of emergency due to COVID-19, which kept Peru in one of the most dramatic social, economic and health crises in decades, and despite the current political context in Peru, the country launched a regional universal periodic review process, with a focus on the regions of Ayacucho, Cajamarca, Cuzco, Huancavelica, Loreto and Madre de Dios. A number of online activities were conducted, including: workshops organized by the Government and OHCHR for public servants from the six regions, public defenders and national human rights institution officials; technical sessions for personnel from the six regions to help them to identify the most relevant recommendations for each region; and one workshop with the universal periodic review civil society platform and the national human rights institution. As part of an innovative process, the engagement with the regions allowed the Government of Peru to implement, for the first time at the regional level,

the intersectoral protocol for the preparation of the reports of Peru before the systems of international protection of human rights. The approval of the protocol in 2020 was also the result of Voluntary Fund support provided in previous years, and OHCHR had provided direct technical assistance in its drafting and advocacy for its approval.

37. With the assistance of the Voluntary Fund, in 2020, the OHCHR field presence in the Republic of Moldova implemented a series of activities aimed at contributing to an integrated and coherent manner of implementation of human rights-related recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, the treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The activities responded to the needs of, and were implemented in strong partnership with, the State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova and its Human Rights Coordination and Social Dialogue Department, which also has the function of the Permanent Human Rights Secretariat of the National Human Rights Council, the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up.

38. The main results achieved were that the knowledge and skills of the human rights focal points for monitoring, reporting and follow-up were strengthened. A series of online workshops conducted with the full involvement of the Permanent Human Rights Secretariat was fundamental in that regard. In addition, the Permanent Human Rights Secretariat, with OHCHR support, developed guidelines on the implementation of international recommendations by the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up. The guidelines are a methodological support tool for the human rights focal points, including the newly appointed focal points, and help in understanding the existing international and national mechanisms related to the monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of recommendations.

39. The national recommendations tracking database was deployed to the Government of the Republic of Moldova as a tool to assist the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up in better planning, tracking, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of human rights-related recommendations. A better understanding of the main challenges, as well as the identification of the priorities for advancing the implementation of the national human rights action plan and human rights-related recommendations, was ensured. The Permanent Human Rights Secretariat conducted an inclusive consultative meeting on the level of implementation of the national human rights action plan, with the support and guidance of OHCHR in the Republic of Moldova.

40. A road map of the interlinked actions stemming from the national human rights action plan, the targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals and the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review, the treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council was developed to support the Permanent Human Rights Secretariat of the Republic of Moldova in various activities. Improved monitoring and reporting on the progress of implementation of the actions envisaged in the action plan was ensured through the framework methodology on the means and sources of information for data collection for the verification of the extent to which the results-based indicators of the action plan were achieved, which was developed with the support of the Voluntary Fund.

41. The OHCHR team in Serbia, with the support of the Voluntary Fund, provided advisory and technical assistance for the preparation of three mid-term reports for the country for the third cycle of the universal periodic review, including the participation of all relevant representatives of the ministries, the judiciary and the parliament through the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up. OHCHR also supported the preparation of the mid-term report of civil society organizations, with information and data provided by 14 civil society organizations and networks through the platform of organizations for cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms, utilizing human rights indicators for measuring progress achieved. Likewise, the United Nations country team in Serbia produced its mid-term report, which encompassed input from all United Nations agencies and funds operating in Serbia.

42. Additional support was provided to the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, with the aim of strengthening the capacity of State institutions to monitor and report on the implementation of human rights-related recommendations and to

link them with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. As a result, the national implementation plan was created and is awaiting adoption; it includes the continued implementation of the 175 recommendations, including recommendations on the realization of gender equality and women rights, adopted in the context of the third cycle of the universal periodic review of Serbia. In the last quarter of 2020, the OHCHR team in Serbia established strong cooperation with the newly founded Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, which will be charged with monitoring and reporting on the implementation of recommendations.

43. In Uruguay, despite the fact that some of the planned activities for 2020 were postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an important goal was achieved. The Voluntary Fund was used to support the transition of the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up during the first year of the new government administration in the country. In March 2020, a new government took office and new authorities were designated to coordinate the national mechanism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

44. The Voluntary Fund supported the handover of the Monitoring System on International Recommendations Unit and the appointment process of new focal points representing public institutions to the mechanism for the 2020–2025 period. In 2020, the new coordinators and the focal points of the Monitoring System on International Recommendations were trained on topics such as the universal protection system, the recommendations made to Uruguay and the functioning of the Monitoring System. In October, as part of the capacity-building training for the focal points, a training session on the universal protection mechanism was implemented. The newly integrated Monitoring System is already working to assist the State with the submission of the next mid-term report in 2021.

IV. Financial situation of the Voluntary Fund

Table 1

Statement of income and expenditure for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020

(United States dollars)

<i>I. Income</i>	
Voluntary contributions received in 2020	346 597.13
Gain and loss exchange	
Pledges received in 2019	466.12
Pledge from Singapore	–
Miscellaneous and investment income	20 763.34
Total income	367 826.59
<i>II. Expenditure</i>	
Staff costs	317 975.13
Other personnel costs (consultant fees and travel)	67 056.23
Travel of staff and consultants	786.64
Travel of representatives and participants to meetings and seminars	(5 647.59)
Contractual services	64 517.17
General operating and other direct costs	21 881.24
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	–
Grants out (<\$50,000) and fellowships	(13 218.62)
Programme support (indirect) costs	58 973.51
Total expenditure	512 323.71

Adjustments to prior year expenditure (liquidation of commitments)	–
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditures for the period	(144 497.12)
Opening balance as at 1 January 2020	2 352 992.80
Outstanding contributions receivable (prior period 2017–2019)	(105 000.00)
Outstanding contributions receivable in 2020	–
Total fund balance as at 31 December 2020	2 208 495

Table 2

Contributions to the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review, from the establishment of the Fund to 31 December 2020

(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
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

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
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
Saudi Arabia	75 000
Spain	27 352
Pakistan	3 000
2020	
France	128 807
India	100 000
Kazakhstan	10 000
Pakistan	5 000
Republic of Korea	50 000
Singapore	5 000
Total	6 924 591

45. From the establishment of the Voluntary Fund in 2009 to the end of 2020, 18 States have made financial contributions: Australia, Colombia, France, Germany, India, 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).

46. 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 fund and a widening of the donor base are both crucial to further solidifying the long-term sustainability of universal periodic review-related technical cooperation, both for the third cycle, but also for future review cycles, especially taking into account the increase in the number of projects envisaged for 2021.

V. Final considerations

47. 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,⁷ the Secretary-General noted that the increased focus on the follow-up to and the implementation of recommendations made by human rights mechanisms provided the United Nations system with an opportunity to further engage with Member States. 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, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations, regional human rights mechanisms and the wider United Nations system.

48. The recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms, in particular universal periodic review recommendations that are accepted by the State concerned, are one of the best entry points for United Nations system-wide engagement at the national level. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and linking it to recommendations emanating from the

⁷ A/72/351.

universal periodic review, allows the United Nations to assist States in achieving concrete results, both in terms of human rights progress and development targets, paying particular attention to the goal of achieving gender equality.

49. In her report on the implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights,⁸ the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recalled that the high-level panel on human rights mainstreaming had noted that the United Nations system at the country level was well placed to support the implementation efforts by Member States through the use of the accepted recommendations emanating from universal periodic reviews.

50. In his call to action for human rights, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of the universal periodic review recommendations for advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He encouraged the full use of the human rights mechanisms, including the universal periodic review, to contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. He also asked for better use of the outcomes of the universal periodic review processes in national development planning and in follow-up and reporting, including on the implementation of the Goals and in the preparation of the related voluntary national reviews. He also identified the realization of gender equality and equal rights for women as one of the critical areas for United Nations engagement.

51. The advice provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to States as they undergo their third cycle review, with an offer of support from OHCHR or the United Nations system, under the leadership of the respective resident coordinators, jointly with the matrices of thematically clustered recommendations linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the production of infographic pages, are innovative tools that are aimed at facilitating follow-up efforts made by States, in close cooperation with national stakeholders, international partners, and the United Nations system in-country.

52. In addition, OHCHR has produced the guidance note on engagement at the country level for national human rights institutions and civil society in the context of the universal periodic review⁹ in close cooperation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and the non-governmental organization UPR Info, and the guidance note on the specific role of parliamentarians before, during and after the universal periodic review process, developed in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In 2021, a study on good practices emerging from the universal periodic review process, prepared by an international consultant, will be made available on the main webpage for the universal periodic review. The study is an additional tool for identifying and promoting good practices for the implementation of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review at the national level and effective forms of cooperation for advancing human rights between Governments, parliaments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations.

53. In particular, OHCHR encourages resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to ensure that clustered recommendations, including on the realization of gender equality and women rights, 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. In the new guidance on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, it is acknowledged that the recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms are essential for the realization of the Goals. Accepted recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review are an important entry point, a fact which is increasingly being recognized by OHCHR and the rest of the United Nations system.

54. The recently issued practical guidance note on maximizing the use of the universal periodic review mechanism at the country level, developed by OHCHR, is aimed at providing practical advice on how United Nations entities at the country level can engage in the universal periodic review process to support progress by States on human rights, starting with accepted universal periodic review recommendations. The practical guidance note, which includes a reference to the Voluntary Fund and is available in the six official languages of

⁸ A/HRC/41/25.

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Tips_21Sept2020.pdf.

the United Nations, will become an important tool to help United Nations entities in their technical assistance provided to States, and it is expected to increase the use of the Voluntary Fund, owing to growing requests by States and the increasing United Nations engagement in countries in that area.

55. In 2021, it is envisaged that the Voluntary Fund will be supporting at least 27 projects in countries in the regions of Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, in line with the increasing trend of proposals received from States observed in the past two years, and following one of the main recommendations made by the Board of Trustees to OHCHR, namely, to increase the use of the Voluntary Fund. At the end of 2020, in line with Human Rights Council resolution 6/30, heads of OHCHR field presences were invited to pay special attention to the integration of a gender perspective when discussing proposals to be supported by the Voluntary Fund with States, bearing in mind the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women. OHCHR will continually rethink and revitalize its strategic vision for follow-up support, with the advice of the Board of Trustees, in order to target more effectively support provided to States for their efforts to implement, at a minimum, the accepted recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review.

56. OHCHR reiterates the importance of the active participation of other national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in the follow-up processes and will endeavour to explore ways through which such 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 and thereby broadening partnerships and the strategic use of the Voluntary Fund.

57. In addition to North-South and South-South forms of cooperation, it is crucial to recommend that States consider the systematic use of their official development assistance in support of the implementation of recommendations accepted by the State; this applies especially to countries of priority for their development assistance programmes.
