

November 18, 2013

To: All Member States of the United Nations

Re: Providing adequate funding for OHCHR to fulfill its vital mandate; Ensuring continued support for OHCHR's crucial work on civil society cooperation.

Excellency,

We are writing to you with regard to the negotiations on the proposed programme budget for the 2014-2015 biennium, in which the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) faces substantial cuts. We urge your Government to provide the financial and human resources necessary for OHCHR to continue to effectively carry out its vital mandate of promoting and protecting human rights for all.

Escalating demands are overwhelming an inadequately funded and understaffed OHCHR

The proposed programme budget for the 2014-2015 biennium appears to result in a net decrease of 4.8% in the core budget of OHCHR. This decrease, which is mainly made up of proposed staff post cuts, comes at a time when the Office is experiencing overwhelming financial challenges. The contributions to OHCHR from the United Nations (UN) regular budget are not keeping step with the ever-increasing demands for OHCHR support from the field and inter-governmental processes. The numerous new and expanded mandates established by the Human Rights Council, the activities associated with the Universal Periodic Review and its follow up, and the establishment of new international human rights treaties as well as the increasing accession of States to the human rights treaties, have substantially increased OHCHR's workload.

In 2005, leaders attending the World Summit committed to doubling OHCHR's funding over five years. However, those additional resources have gone in large part to supporting this new human rights machinery rather than a heightened focus on 'on-the-ground' implementation as originally envisioned. Just last month, in her presentation to the Third Committee, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, expressed regret that OHCHR had to turn down 27 requests for technical assistance this year to enhance States' capacities to protect human rights because of lack of resources.

While our organizations greatly welcome the progress made by the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies, we regret that Member States are not providing the commensurate funding to accompany the additional workload. Unfortunately this imposes an undue burden on OHCHR, and overextends the human rights programme. And though OHCHR can turn to voluntary contributions to try fill the gap, activities mandated by intergovernmental bodies are supposed to be supported through the regular UN budget.

In addition, OHCHR, like other divisions of the Secretariat, was asked to make most of its budget cuts in staff costs, while taking into account upcoming retirements or otherwise vacant posts. It

seems particularly incongruous that these proposed cuts in staff come at a time when Member States are also considering (and approving) additional mandates for the Office to implement.

Provide sufficient resources to support civil society engagement with the UN human rights system

A particularly alarming development is the proposed removal of UN regular budget funding for a high-level post tasked with strengthening engagement between civil society and the UN human rights programme.

Though the internal structure, management and functioning of OHCHR is a matter for OHCHR, and it is not appropriate for our organisations (nor for the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council) to seek to dictate on these issues, we are concerned that a decision by Member States to allocate fewer resources to civil society engagement by OHCHR sends the wrong signal to human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations working around the globe to promote and protect human rights. As a matter of principle, we consider that the resources dedicated to supporting NGO engagement with the UN human rights system should be progressively increased and only decreased in exceptional circumstances, which do not exist presently.

Civil society makes an important contribution to the UN by sharing valuable ideas and information, advocating effectively for positive change, enhancing the accountability and legitimacy of the global governance process, and increasing ownership of outcomes. Cooperation with civil society is a strategic priority for OHCHR, and the High Commissioner has stressed that OHCHR's collaboration with civil society "bolsters our shared objectives, helps to address our mutual concerns, and supports my Office's mission and initiatives both at headquarters and in the field."

Ironically, the proposed reduction in regular budgetary resources to civil society engagement follows the consensus adoption by the Human Rights Council in September of Resolution 24/21 promoting and protecting space for civil society—in which Member States highlighted their commitment to a free and vibrant civil society. By supporting the retention of this post with funds from the UN regular budget, your Government can send the message that it is sincere about the crucial role of civil society in promoting and protecting human rights.

Support a strong human rights mandate

Lastly, we are very concerned that the call for across-the-board cuts to the 2014-2015 budget do not adequately consider that OHCHR already has a disproportionately small allocation, despite being the lead agency of one of three main pillars of the UN, alongside security and development. In that regard, Ms Pillay has described the 3% of the total UN budget allocated to OHCHR as "scandalous" and has stated that "the establishment of new activities without additional resources can no longer be seen as a sustainable practice."

The budget process provides an important opportunity for your Government to demonstrate its dedication to a strong and independent human rights mandate at the UN, by not only ensuring that

OHCHR receives the necessary funding and staffing, but also by expressing commitment to increasing the relative proportion of the UN regular budget for human rights activities from the present 3% share.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Evans
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On behalf of

Action Canada for Population and Development (ACPD)
African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
Akahatá Equipo de Trabajo en Sexualidades y Generos
Alkarama
Amnesty International
Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC)
Bahá'í International Community
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)
Child Rights Connect
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Coalition of African Lesbians
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
CREA
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
Federation for Women and Family Planning
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International)
International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)
International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
Peace Brigades International (PBI)
Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI)
UPR Info
West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN)
World Federalist Movement–Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)