

Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals

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National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are key institutions that are independent from, yet work with, governments in promoting and protecting human rights. NHRIs can play a key role in helping to prevent conflict; they advocate for the rights of minorities and the disadvantaged, and ensure respect for human rights.

On 5 December 2016, over 50 representatives from NHRIs from Europe, Central Asia and the Arab States, as well as development experts, civil society activists, and human rights specialists convened in Istanbul for a one-day consultation. The objective was to raise NHRIs' awareness of the 2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), discuss their possible role and the role of the human rights-based approach in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, and identify the policy guidance and capacity support NHRIs need to fulfill this particular role. The event also provided a forum for cross-regional consultation of NHRIs from Europe, Central Asia and Arab States. [See full report here.](#)

Merida Declaration

The [Merida Declaration on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) was adopted in 2015, in Mexico, at the Twelfth International Conference of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (now GANHRI). The declaration explicitly recognizes that human rights instruments and mechanisms will provide an important framework for the implementation of the SDGs, and that implementation will contribute to the realization of human rights.

The Declaration underlines that NHRIs are uniquely placed to play a bridging role between stakeholders. They promote transparent, participatory and inclusive national processes of implementation and monitoring of human rights. The Declaration encourages the Regional Networks and individual NHRIs, in line with their mandates under the Paris Principles, to collaborate in mutual capacity building and sharing of experiences, and to consider the practical functions they can assume to contribute to a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Declaration also affirms the role of civil society and businesses in realizing the 2030 Agenda, and emphasizes that strengthening NHRIs in all regions is an effective tool to support the implementation of the SDGs.

Why are SDGs important for NHRIs?

Successful implementation of the SDGs will underpin the solution to many challenges that NHRIs and people around the world face, such as forced migration, climate change, inequalities of globalization, and conflict. Both the human rights agenda and the 2030 Agenda are very closely interlinked. The 2030 Agenda provides a strategic and pragmatic opportunity for NHRIs, especially since most are operating in states where the human rights situation is deteriorating. The SDGs, and their emphasis on human rights, could make work on human rights more palatable to those governments that have committed to the 2030 Agenda more wholeheartedly than they have committed to the human rights agenda.

How can NHRIs support the implementation of the SDGs?

NHRIs can play a significant role in the implementation of the SDGs, including in analyzing and monitoring their implementation. NHRIs' approach towards supporting the implementation of SDGs can be labeled as 'constructive accountability'; in other words, NHRIs should cooperate with states to ensure the most inclusive, participatory process for the development of action plans for implementing the SDGs, while at the same time holding states accountable for implementing their commitments. NHRIs should ensure that implementation of the SDGs becomes part of the national debate, and that states develop national indicators that encompass all of the goals.

Recommendations from the Conference

To support the implementation of the SDGs in a human rights compliant way, NHRIs should:

- Integrate the SDGs in their action plans, reports and other documents.
- Advocate with respective governments, especially in Europe, to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is implemented internally, and not looked at only through the prism of international development and foreign policy;
- Identify who is left furthest behind through human rights monitoring, and in this way assist the states in prioritizing the SDGs;
- Engage with regional bodies, which should also have a role in the implementation of the SDGs;
- Cooperate with other stakeholders such as Parliaments and civil society in holding the government accountable to achieving the SDGs;
- Exchange experiences with other NHRIs, governments, parliaments, statistical offices, civil society and international partners to raise awareness of the SDGs, build capacities, and maximize limited resources;

To support the monitoring of SDG implementation, NHRIs should:

- Collect information on the implementation of the SDGs and provide it to the follow-up and review mechanisms.
- Develop methodologies on how to monitor the implementation of the SDGs;
- Develop action plans for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs;
- Use the qualitative data they collect to measure progress made towards achieving the SDGs and how governments are translating the SDGs in their national contexts;

To support the NHRIs in their role vis-à-vis the 2030 Agenda, international partners and NHRI networks should:

- Support the NHRIs in developing tools, methodologies and capacities to monitor SDG implementation;
- Develop and disseminate global and regional guidance material, elaborating how NHRIs can monitor SDG implementation;
- Develop and disseminate knowledge products showcasing what approaches have been successful;
- Facilitate knowledge sharing among different governments as they might be more prone to listen to their peers;
- Translate the GANHRI, UNDP and OHCHR tripartite partnership into a global programme to strengthen the NHRIs, including the NHRIs' role in implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda;
- Provide specific support to NHRIs of countries which are up for voluntary reporting to the Working Group in 2017;
- Support GANHRI in becoming a member of the Global Alliance.