
The theme of this annual panel discussion is a timely one with the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review having started in the spring of last year. It is a remarkable achievement that 193 UN member states have now had their human rights record examined twice – and in the case of 42 States, three times.

The European Union remains strongly committed to the Universal Periodic Review: This is a truly cooperative mechanism with the potential to making long-term advancements in all 193 UN Member States. The equal treatment of all States is central to the UPR's success, rendering this process indispensable in the international human rights promotion and protection system. A key feature of the success of the Universal Periodic Review lies – in our view – in the very principle of universality: “universal” not only because the UPR applies to all UN member states; but also “universal” because it tackles a vast array of topics comprehensively and offers States the opportunity to address all human rights issues.

Over the last two cycles of the UPR, more than 57,000 recommendations have been issued by States according to statistics by UPR Info, and the average acceptance rate is 73% – these are impressive numbers.

However, for the UPR to have a real impact on the ground – and bring about truly positive human rights changes – effective implementation of the accepted recommendations from previous UPR cycles is crucial. In this regard, it is important to have recommendations that are sufficiently action-oriented, specific and measurable. It is also important that we put a stronger focus on implementation of previously accepted recommendations. We welcome the submission by many States of voluntary mid-term reports as appropriate as well as voluntary practices and tools such as implementation time lines which can provide a good opportunity for States to address specific measures taken to implement previous recommendations.

During the last two cycles of the UPR, the five issues most often raised - international instruments; women's rights; rights of the child; torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or...
punishment; and justice – all fall within the core priorities of the European Union and our external action policy.

The European Union's Member States are therefore actively engaging throughout the whole UPR process, and are among the top recommending States. Delegations of the European Union in third countries engage closely with local civil society actors ahead of the UPR sessions, as do the EU Member States and the EU Delegation here in Geneva. Last but not least, UPR recommendations form an integral part of the European Union's Human Rights Dialogues with third countries. We acknowledge the importance of providing technical assistance and capacity-building in view of the implementation of UPR recommendations and would like to warmly thank the OHCHR for their valuable support in this regard.

Let me conclude by reiterating our strong commitment to the UPR process and thanking you for the interesting discussion today.

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