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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Summary of the expert meeting on enhancing capacity-building for local governments to incorporate human rights into all their work

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

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 51/12, reflects the discussions held at the expert meeting on enhancing capacity-building for local governments to incorporate human rights into all their work, which was held on 28 August 2023. The report also draws on 28 written submissions received from Member States, local governments, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and other stakeholders in response to the call for inputs.

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I. Introduction

1. The expert meeting on enhancing capacity-building for local governments to incorporate human rights into all their work was held in Geneva, on 28 August 2023, pursuant to the request of the Human Rights Council in its resolution 51/12. The meeting focused on discussing good practices and challenges in strengthening the capacities of local governments to implement human rights at the local level and to engage more effectively with United Nations human rights mechanisms. The meeting consisted of an opening session, two thematic sessions and a brief closing session.

II. Summary of proceedings

A. Opening session

1. The moderator of the opening session, the Chief of the Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Section, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Wan-Hea Lee, opened the discussion by outlining the objectives of the expert meeting and introducing the three speakers.

2. The President of the Human Rights Council, Václav Bálek, welcomed the participation of local actors, recognizing the paramount role of local governments in advancing human rights. He noted that in many cases human rights challenges are better understood at the local level, where authorities can have a more direct, positive impact on people's lives, and acknowledged the role of local governments in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals. He also acknowledged that local governments may face obstacles such as limited awareness and inadequate institutional structures and called for increased efforts to enhance their capacity to promote human rights. He commended the active participation of local governments in the universal periodic review process and their collaboration with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. He concluded by expressing hope that capacity-building efforts would foster a stronger human rights culture and encouraged the sharing of approaches and practices piloted by local governments worldwide.

3. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Seong Deok Yun, stressed the importance of incorporating human rights into all aspects of local government work and of achieving a whole-of-government approach to ensuring political coherence across all government levels. He also highlighted the need for local governments to engage with international human rights mechanisms. Mr. Yun acknowledged the challenges faced by local governments, both in terms of capacity-building and addressing structural barriers, and he emphasized the importance of collaboration among various actors at the regional, national and international levels to strengthen local government capacity. He expressed hope that the discussions during the expert meeting would provide concrete solutions to enhance the ability of local governments to fulfil their human rights responsibilities and become more effective players in implementing the international human rights framework.

4. The United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif, underscored the growing role of cities and local governments in advancing human rights protection. With projections indicating that 70 per cent of the global population will reside in urban areas by 2050, she highlighted the heightened responsibility of cities and local governments. Ms. Al-Nashif stressed that the complex global challenges necessitated comprehensive local solutions and inclusive multilateralism, which included not only States but also cities and local and regional governments, and she emphasized the importance of exchanging ideas and experiences between local and global actors to enrich the understanding of local needs and realities, identify best practices and improve dialogue and coordination between different levels of government.

B. Thematic sessions

5. The first session, on the theme "Human rights cities – enhancing capacity-building for local and regional governments", featured five panellists and was moderated by Ms. Lee. Panellists shared experiences from Colombia, Ghana, the Republic of Korea and Uruguay. In addition, the Director of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Morten Kjaerum, presented its work in promoting human rights and capacity-building initiatives at the local level. Speakers shed light on diverse approaches, challenges faced and the outcomes achieved within their respective contexts.

6. The District Chief Executive (Mayor) of the Afadzato South District, Ghana, Etornam James Flolu, stressed the importance of focusing on human rights when implementing policies aimed at improving people's lives. His district had developed a medium-term policy aligned with international human rights commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063. Promising practices included community-driven by-laws that incorporated residents' rights, in particular those of women, children and people with disabilities, as well as a dedicated "right to information desk" for handling residents' complaints. Mr. Flolu acknowledged various challenges in ensuring that traditional values and culture are not used to undermine the universality of human rights and the difficulty of prioritizing human rights education over visible infrastructure development. To overcome those challenges, Mr. Flolu proposed several initiatives to strengthen the capacity of local offices and administrative staff, such as regular training, exchange programmes and collaboration with civil society organizations. He also emphasized the need for the consistent monitoring and review of activities to assess progress and budgetary allocation from the central government to support decentralization processes.

7. The High Counsellor for Peace, Victims' Rights and Reconciliation of the Mayor's Office of Bogotá, Colombia, Ivonne González Rodriguez, presented the efforts made in Bogotá to strengthen capacity-building for public servants and officials in the context of human rights. Those efforts were framed by the peace agreement signed in 2016, which set a road map for territorial administrations to implement aspects of the peace agreement, with a focus on the rights of victims. One significant challenge was the integration of various public policies, including human trafficking, migration and human security, into a cohesive framework consistent with human rights principles. Ms. González Rodriguez underscored the importance of cross-sectoral and interconnected policies for a comprehensive approach. and also highlighted the commitment of the city administration to promoting a gender-based approach and its implementation of a security policy with a gender focus, the first of its kind in Colombia. She also discussed the importance of education for civil servants to strengthen institutional capacity and their ability to define a road map for respect of human rights. She highlighted some of the unique features of Bogotá's human rights framework, such as the Human Rights Commission within the Council of Bogota, which includes representatives from opposition political parties. This inclusivity had strengthened the decision-making process related to the human rights agenda.

8. The Director of the Human Rights Division of the government of Canelones, Uruguay, Carlos Garolla, emphasized the importance of a human rights-based approach to development. Given their proximity to local communities, local governments have a significant role in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring that no one is left behind in sustainable development efforts. Mr. Garolla discussed the collaboration between the Division and OHCHR on the "Building Bridges II" project, which was aimed at facilitating the implementation of international human rights recommendations and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the departmental level. One of the project's milestones was the publication of a guide entitled "Planning with a human rights-based approach", aimed at training civil servants and public officials on national human rights commitments and providing conceptual tools and methodologies for integrating human rights into policy planning, budgets and local actions.

9. The Director of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Mr. Kjaerum, underscored the global trend of cities actively promoting human rights and emphasized the significance of concentrating efforts on local communities, where people live. Acknowledging the complexity of realizing human rights at the local level, he stressed

the need to provide support for the efforts of cities to strengthen human rights across all aspects of their operations. Mr. Kjaerum described the work the Institute had accomplished over the past five years, focusing on knowledge production, training and bridge building. He emphasized the importance of understanding local human rights challenges through data analysis and tools such as surveys. Furthermore, Mr. Kjaerum highlighted the pivotal role of academic institutions and national human rights institutions in fostering connections between local governments and various human rights actors, emphasizing the need to strengthen global and local networks for advancing human rights and sustainable development in local communities.

10. The Executive Director of the International Human Rights Training Centre of Gwangju Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea, Gyonggu Shin, outlined the steps taken by the city of Gwangju to progressively institutionalize human rights. In 2007, a Human Rights and Peace Ordinance was established, later revising it along with enacting a Human Rights Charter in 2012. Other key features included the human rights-based plan, revised every five years, the Human Rights Citizen Council and the Human Rights Office. Importantly, Gwangju's Human Rights Charter requires human rights education for all local government employees. This is provided by civil society activists, fostering closer ties between local government officials and civil society. Mr. Shin stressed the importance of civil society and global networks in sustaining the momentum of the initiatives. Towards that end, Gwangju has initiated the annual World Human Rights Cities Forum, which provides a platform for local governments across the world to exchange experiences and broaden their networks.

11. In interventions from the floor, speakers reiterated the important role of local authorities in ensuring the exercise and protection of human rights, and in particular, economic, social and cultural rights. Speakers discussed some of the challenges faced by local authorities in fulfilling this role, with a particular emphasis on lack of technical expertise and resource constraints and the limited awareness of human rights obligations. These challenges hampered the ability of local authorities to integrate human rights into their work and to engage with the United Nations human rights system.

12. Recommendations to address these challenges include States investing in building the capacity of local governments, focusing not only on physical infrastructure but also on human capacity. The representative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) highlighted the need for a balanced distribution of responsibilities and resources, acknowledging that smaller or less-resourced governments may require more and tailored support and also sought the opinion of the panel on how to increase the direct engagement of local and regional governments in the universal periodic review process.

13. A number of speakers underscored the importance of data collection and disaggregation at the local and regional level for a nuanced understanding of challenges, especially for inclusion in voluntary local reviews. The role of national human rights institutions was also emphasized as crucial in bridge building and fostering partnerships for enhancing human rights at the local level. In addition, the representative from Global Cities Hub called for the creation of a new status for local and regional governments to participate in the United Nations system.

14. Several speakers shared promising practices for enhancing the capacities of authorities to implement human rights at the local level. In South Africa, the integrated local government capacity-building strategy aims to address challenges in capacity-building, emphasizing the need for strategic frameworks to guide integration, harmonization and coordination among stakeholders. Chile shared two recent developments, including an initiative to create municipal human rights offices, responsible for fostering awareness, education and promotion of human rights at the local level. Seven municipalities in Chile have already established such units. Moreover, the National Institute of Human Rights of Chile has developed a training programme for civil servants, contributing to the incorporation of human rights in daily municipal work. Moreover, the international online academy and conference series, "Human Rights Go Local – What Works", run by the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, gathers and disseminates practical insights from local governments worldwide on the protection and promotion of human rights at the local level. The next series will focus on human rights action plans as tools to promote accountability of local governments.

15. The second session, on the theme “Strengthening the capacity of local and regional governments”, was moderated by Executive Director of the non-governmental organization Universal Periodic Review Info (UPR Info), Mona M’Bikay. Five panellists shared practical experiences and promising practices and identified opportunities for local and regional governments to increase their engagement with the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

16. A legal expert from the Interministerial Committee for Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, Maja Bova, shared promising practices from the Committee’s engagement with local and regional authorities. Ms. Bova discussed the recent country mission by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of the Council of Europe and described how the Interministerial Committee engaged with regional and local authorities in preparing its follow-up report. In addition, the Interministerial Committee worked with local authorities in the preparation of the mid-term report for the third universal periodic review of Italy, which highlighted linkages between recommendations in the universal periodic review and the Sustainable Development Goals and included an annex specifically devoted to good practices from the local and regional levels. Ms. Bova stressed the importance of promoting human rights at all levels of government and mentioned the training efforts of the Interministerial Committee, in collaboration with the National Association of Italian Municipalities, to enhance knowledge of international human rights law and the recommendations of United Nations human rights mechanisms.

17. The Deputy Commissioner, Policy and External Affairs, of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, JoAnn Kamuf Ward, emphasized the importance of allocating adequate resources to local governments to ensure that they have the necessary capacity to promote and protect human rights, as well as the need for dedicated staff at OHCHR to foster relationships with subnational actors and their networks. Her recommendations for enhancing local government engagement with United Nations human rights bodies centred on three key areas. First, she proposed integrating state and local governments into the review processes of the treaty bodies, the universal periodic review and the special procedures. This could entail inviting state and local governments to provide written comments or including the perspectives of local governments in national reports. In the context of treaty bodies, the “List of issues” presents an opportunity for subnational governments to contribute. Additionally, Ms. Ward recommended implementing an electronic survey or platform for gathering information from subnational governments. She also advocated the setting-up of dedicated consultations with subnational actors before reviews, akin to prereview consultations for civil society organizations. Secondly, Ms. Ward recommended that state and local governments participate directly in country reviews, working alongside national governments and national human rights institutions. Ms. Ward’s third suggestion was to mandate that national governments share the recommendations of United Nations human rights bodies with state and local entities in an accessible format. In her closing remarks, Ms. Kamuf Ward stressed the importance of the role of academic institutions and civil society actors in informing local governments about developments at the international level.

18. Miloon Kothari, former Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, underscored the significance of incorporating specific strategies for data collection in human rights education targeted at local authorities. He emphasized the need for enhanced communication and collaboration among city human rights commissions, ombudspersons, national human rights institutions and local governments. Mr. Kothari explored different levels of engagement for local and regional governments in the universal periodic review process, proposing their contribution to stakeholder reports, national reports and the submission of voluntary local universal periodic review reports. In addition, he stressed the critical role of local authorities in the implementation phase of the universal periodic review, particularly in tracking and fulfilling recommendations, such as those related to essential services, including water, sanitation, housing and education. Mr. Kothari also discussed the importance of local authorities providing information to Special Rapporteurs for their thematic reports and during country visits. Finally, Mr. Kothari emphasized the use of international standards to guide local authorities. Operational standards, such as guidelines on evictions and displacement and principles of tenure, provide direct guidance to local

authorities on safeguarding human rights. In his closing remarks, Mr. Kothari added that local governments should not simply be viewed as recipients of the recommendations and standards from the human rights system, emphasizing that the contributions of local governments are vital for developing human rights standards as well as strategies for their implementation.

19. The Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Esther Eghobamien-Mshelia, emphasized that local governments play a crucial role in fulfilling the obligations of the State under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, particularly in areas related to violence against women and girls, human trafficking, discrimination, social opportunities and the empowerment of rural women. Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia discussed the challenges in engaging local governments in human rights initiatives, including limited knowledge of global policy frameworks, reporting obligations and gender mainstreaming practices. She also pointed out the absence of redress mechanisms for harmful practices and inadequate institutional resources and capacities in local government departments. She shared some good practices documented by the Committee, such as engaging with Samoa on addressing gender-based violence and advocating for the inclusion of women in village councils. The engagement of the Committee with Mauritania and Spain were also mentioned, addressing concerns related to land ownership, climate action and discriminatory practices. She underscored the significance of draft general recommendation No. 40 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems and, in that context, she encouraged local-level participation in consultation processes. Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia proposed several actions to enhance local engagement in human rights, including: gender-responsive engagement with local governments, using existing mechanisms and partnerships; promoting the Committee's "Cities for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" for local implementation and accountability; and embracing inclusion, innovation and technology for more impactful local engagement. She urged stronger collaboration with OHCHR and gender stakeholders, along with a greater focus on the untapped human capacity and resources within rural communities to advance gender equality and human rights.

20. A member of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, Melissa Upreti, highlighted the significant barriers to the meaningful participation of women and girls in local government, such as entrenched patriarchal attitudes, stereotyping and restricted access to resources and networks. She stressed the necessity of a balanced mix of special measures, incorporating both temporary and permanent strategies, to address participation gaps, advocating for a transition from quotas to a comprehensive, system-wide approach. Ms. Upreti underscored the importance of attitudinal changes and accountability structures to combat less visible barriers such as harassment and violence. Ms. Upreti discussed some of the good practices of local governments encountered by the Working Group, including inclusive consultation processes with historically underrepresented groups; increased funding, specifically for women's organizations, and covering areas such as sexuality education and women's reproductive health; and the adoption of ordinances incorporating human rights standards into local governance frameworks, as seen in the Human Rights Cities Network and "Cities for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" around the world. In the face of global challenges, including rollbacks of women's rights, authoritarianism and disinformation campaigns, Ms. Upreti emphasized the crucial role of local governments as defenders of human rights.

C. Interactive dialogue

21. During the interactive dialogue, the speaker from the government of Canelones, Uruguay, shared examples of its engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms. Since 2022, Canelones has participated in the national mechanism for the implementation, reporting and follow-up, mandated to coordinate and prepare reports to and engage with international and regional human rights mechanisms. The government of Canelones has also contributed information for the review of Uruguay by the Committee on the Elimination of

Racial Discrimination and was involved in drafting the report for the country's fourth universal periodic review.

22. The speaker from Public Services International underscored the importance of State engagement in dialogue and collaboration with local governments to bolster the representation of subnational authorities in national delegations participating in various human rights mechanisms.

23. The speaker from the Swedish Institute for Human Rights noted that a group of practitioners in Sweden working at the local level utilizes recommendations from United Nations human rights mechanisms as tools for prioritizing human rights activities. Local actors are keenly interested in the country's human rights reviews, wanting to understand the impact of their work and to influence the next set of recommendations. Those practitioners recognize that human rights mechanisms may address concerns within their mandates and have observed that the mechanisms are turning to local authorities for the implementation of their recommendations. Local actors have sought guidance on engagement throughout such processes, from pre- to post-session, and have expressed a need for support in understanding and interpreting recommendations.

24. The speaker from UN-Habitat stressed the need for clear recommendations and standards on human rights at the local level and sought the panel's opinion on the potential for increased efforts by both Member States and the United Nations to make human rights standards more specific for local governments. In addition, the speaker asked whether, in the universal periodic review process, recommendations monitoring and reporting could better acknowledge the role of local and regional governments.

25. Another challenge, as highlighted by the speaker from the government of Catalonia, was the inability of representatives of local governments to attend sessions of the Human Rights Council, which hindered their human rights advocacy efforts and restricted access to crucial information. The representative of the Catalan government called for inclusive participation of regional and local governments in the United Nations system.

26. The speaker from Global Human Rights Group underscored the interconnectedness of the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights, observing that numerous local governments have affirmed their dedication to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, creating an avenue for the prioritization of human rights at the local level. She illustrated this connection by discussing the impact of the Sustainable Cities programme, designed to bridge the efforts of the United Nations Global Compact and its network of city signatories. She shared how the Global Compact had influenced the government of her hometown in New Zealand to adopt a sustainable living strategy, which framed human rights issues such as housing, water and sanitation and education through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals. The speaker emphasized that including an explicit human rights-based approach in international frameworks and addressing gaps in the human rights content of the frameworks at the international level was crucial.

27. The speaker from the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission highlighted the challenges faced by local human rights institutions, including her own, where commissioners served voluntarily, without specific human rights training or awareness of human rights mechanisms. She proposed that OHCHR could compile information for local human rights institutions and proactively update them about treaty body reviews and country visits, with priority given to States lacking a national human rights institution, such as the United States of America. Local human rights institutions, according to the speaker, would greatly benefit from context-specific educational videos. Those resources would provide information on international rights standards, their relevance to local contexts and guidance on how to integrate the standards into their substantive work.

D. Closing session

28. At the closing session, concluding remarks were delivered by the Secretary-General of United Cities and Local Governments, Emilia Sáiz, who underscored the imperative of placing human rights at the core of policy and decision-making across all institutions,

especially at the local and regional levels. Ms. Sáiz emphasized the important opportunity presented by the expert meeting to enhance the capacity of local institutions, engaging them not only in education but also in providing services grounded in human rights. She highlighted the specific challenges faced by women, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities. Ms. Sáiz stressed the critical link between the climate agenda and human rights and called for concrete decision-making that prioritizes equality. Ms. Sáiz concluded by emphasizing the necessity of integrating the human rights agenda into future local service provision in order to prevent a decline in access to, and the quality of, public services.

29. In her closing remarks, the Director of the OHCHR Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Peggy Hicks, highlighted the crucial role played by local organizations, the academic community and civil society in the development of human rights cities. She emphasized their significance in ensuring accountability and the sustained impact of those initiatives. Ms. Hicks underscored that by actively engaging with international human rights mechanisms, local governments can obtain valuable guidance, advice and good practices to harmonize their laws with international human rights standards. She also stressed the importance of cities and local governments bringing their local-level expertise and experiences to international human rights forums. While acknowledging the challenges in strengthening the capacities of local authorities, Ms. Hicks reiterated the commitment of OHCHR to supporting them through the sharing of good practices and the facilitation of knowledge exchanges among local governments worldwide.

III. Inputs received from States and other stakeholders

30. To inform the present report, OHCHR sought contributions from States and local governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, national human rights institutions, local government networks, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders. OHCHR received 28 submissions.

31. The contributions received highlight the challenges faced by local governments in promoting and protecting human rights and advance recommendations for strengthening the capacities of local governments and enhancing their engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

Challenges

32. The contributions identified numerous challenges in the promotion and protection of human rights at the local level, including a lack of awareness among local government officials regarding human rights norms, standards and mechanisms. Even when officials are aware of such norms, they often lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively translate the standards into practice owing to inadequate training, experience and/or resources.

33. Resource constraints, including financial, human and technical limitations, were frequently highlighted as a major challenge hindering the effective upholding of human rights. For example, competencies may be transferred from higher levels of government to local governments without adequate financial resources. Additionally, there can be a lack of political will to prioritize human rights at the local level, often influenced by issues such as corruption and authoritarianism. The presence of populist and illiberal political voices further compounds the challenge.

34. One submission noted the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for human rights mainstreaming in local policymaking. Moreover, local government staff often lack cross-sectoral responsibilities, focusing exclusively on specific areas such as children’s rights or the rights of persons with disabilities.

35. The non-ratification of key international human rights treaties and conventions, including the absence of human rights mainstreaming and budgeting at national and municipal levels, poses further challenges to the implementation of human rights-based

approaches. Moreover, a lack of coordination among various local government departments and between central and local governments exacerbates those challenges.

Capacity-building

36. A variety of initiatives are in place at the local level to strengthen the capacity of local governments in promoting and safeguarding human rights. Multiple stakeholders, such as government ministries, local government associations and academic institutions, actively participate in those efforts.

37. In India, the central government ministry responsible for local governance provides capacity-building programmes and initiatives tailored to empower local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights.

38. In Sweden, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, in collaboration with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, has developed a platform for human rights policy and operational development. The purpose of the platform is to serve as a starting point and a development tool when municipalities and regions want to strengthen their own work on human rights and to integrate a human rights-based approach into all parts of their organization and operations.

39. The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden has created online tools supporting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including online training on the Convention, tools for assessing its implementation, guidance on conducting a "best interest of the child impact assessment" and legal guidance for interpreting and applying the Convention. Since 2016, the Ombudsman has overseen a governmental project focusing on the implementation of Convention-related methods and materials for selected authorities. The project emphasizes the sharing of best practices among the authorities in order to enhance awareness of children's rights. Regular network meetings are coordinated by the Ombudsman to facilitate discussions on topical issues and the exchange of experiences and knowledge among representatives from various authorities and regional and local governments.

40. In Chile, the Subsecretary of Regional Development and Administration has taken measures to build the capacity of local governments to integrate human rights into their practices. Through the Municipal and Regional Training Academy, the organization has conducted targeted training, including a diploma programme on a human rights-based approach applied to local and regional governments, designed to enhance the understanding and skills of subnational-level officials dealing with vulnerable populations, emphasizing a human rights perspective.

41. The Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, operating through its office in the Asia-Pacific region, has worked with the city of Gwangju, Republic of Korea, United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific and the Asia Democracy Network to conduct a series of capacity-building initiatives across the Asia-Pacific region. These initiatives aim to empower local governments and actors to effectively implement and localize both human rights and Sustainable Development Goals in their respective areas. The approach leverages the familiarity and receptiveness of local governments to the Sustainable Development Goals, using them as an effective entry point for the implementation of human rights.

42. A number of submissions emphasized the importance of city networks such as United Cities and Local Governments, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity. These networks facilitate exchanges on policy issues, fostering long-term partnerships and peer-to-peer learning. However, one submission raised concerns about the potential limitation of sharing city efforts for human rights within specific networks, hindering collaborative actions at the local level. To address this issue, a cross-fertilization of knowledge and approaches among different networks was proposed, aiming to create a network of networks united by a shared commitment to human rights.

Engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms

43. Current procedures and practices for involving local governments in the activities of United Nations human rights mechanisms encompass various avenues. Local governments can participate in consultations with the central government, submit reports and engage in dialogues with United Nations human rights bodies. They can also collaborate with national human rights institutions and civil society organizations to convey their perspectives and challenges.

44. Some local governments have contributed to and participated in the universal periodic review process as part of the work of their national government, although the practice is not widespread. Similarly, some local governments have contributed to and participated in their national reviews before treaty bodies in order to share information on the implementation of human rights at the subnational level. Special procedure mandate holders regularly interact with representatives of local governments during their country visits.

45. Certain contributions highlighted that local governments often have limited awareness and understanding of United Nations human rights mechanisms and how those mechanisms are relevant to their work. There is a clear need to increase the understanding of local governments as to how to interact with the human rights mechanisms, develop technical expertise in reporting and implementing recommendations and create the necessary institutional support.

46. In the blended learning course developed by the Asia-Pacific regional office of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, specific modules are dedicated to giving an overview of existing international and regional human rights mechanisms. A deep dive into how those mechanisms relate to the local governments and how cities/municipalities can contribute to them needs to be further developed and disseminated. In Italy, the Interministerial Committee for Human Rights organized, jointly with the National Association of Italian Municipalities, a specific e-training on the entities of the United Nations system in the field of human rights.

47. While enhancing the capacities of local governments to heighten their understanding of international human rights and United Nations human rights mechanisms is crucial, the creation of more robust entry points for local governments within the United Nations human rights system was advocated in a number of submissions.

48. One of the most effective ways to engage local governments in the universal periodic review process is for national governments to include representatives from local governments in consultation processes, including both the universal periodic review preparations and the implementation of recommendations. In addition, local governments could submit a voluntary mid-term report on the implementation of recommendations received during previous universal periodic review cycles.

49. The Global Cities Hub has initiated a coalition with partners (UPR Info, UN-Habitat, OHCHR, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Geneva Human Rights Platform) to reflect upon ways and means to further enhance the engagement of local governments in the universal periodic review. As a first output, the coalition has produced “Tips for local and regional governments wishing to participate in the universal periodic review” to explain what the universal periodic review is about and at which stages local and regional governments can engage with the universal periodic review process.

50. The Global Cities Hub also suggested the creation of a new status for local governments within the United Nations so that they may be accredited and participate in United Nations processes and meetings in their own capacity. Moreover, a Human Rights Council forum on local governments and human rights could be established, bringing together mayors to facilitate the exchange of good practices on specific thematic topics. Such a forum would provide an opportunity to involve mayors in the work of the Human Rights Council and establish direct channels of communication at the local level.

51. The Swedish Institute for Human Rights recommended that the United Nations treaty bodies include specific sections to local governments in the concluding observations in order to clarify the views and expectations of the Committee regarding the implementation of human rights at the local level. The Global Cities Hub also suggested that the United Nations

treaty bodies could convene a dedicated meeting with local and regional governments before the country reviews.

52. In addition, establishing and including local governments in the national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up on human rights recommendations could play a crucial role in enhancing the participation of local actors in international review processes. It would also create a forum for much-needed exchange between the national and local levels regarding success factors in the implementation of human rights and the more precise division of responsibilities.

53. The Global Cities Hub suggested that the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures could request that all special procedure mandate holders meet at least two representatives of local and regional governments during their country visits.

54. Contributors also shared experiences from the implementation of voluntary local reviews reporting, which offers valuable insights for human rights reporting at the local level. The city of Los Angeles, for example, which has committed to localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, produced its first voluntary local review in 2019. The creation of the voluntary local reviews has provided opportunities for stronger cross-department coordination and a city-wide review of progress on priority issues in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

55. Voluntary local review reporting through participation in the annual high-level political forum on sustainable development is one way that cities engage directly with the United Nations. During the annual high-level political forum, the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments organizes side events and capacity-building programmes on the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, in partnership with relevant United Nations agencies, to ensure the strong presence of local governments in advocacy efforts and knowledge exchanges. Moreover, studying voluntary local reviews across cities can help United Nations treaty bodies and human rights practitioners understand who key stakeholders are, what issues resonate at the local level and how cities are approaching the translation of international agreements that were created by and for national governments.

IV. Conclusions

56. **Local governments face various challenges in promoting and safeguarding human rights, as highlighted at the expert meeting and in written submissions. The obstacles include limited awareness among officials about human rights norms and standards and mechanisms, coupled with constraints in financial resources and technical capacities, as well as coordination challenges between central, regional and local governments.**

57. **Discussions at the expert meeting and written submissions both highlighted the ongoing need for enhanced capacity-building and guidance to support local governments in implementing human rights in their operations. A variety of initiatives are in place at the local level to strengthen the capacity of local governments in promoting and safeguarding human rights. Partnerships formed with civil society, academic institutions, national human rights institutions and national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up on human rights have been integral to those efforts. Additional efforts could be undertaken to expand collaboration, fostering peer-to-peer exchanges and support within and among local governments.**

58. **Although different avenues for dialogue and interaction between local governments and United Nations human rights mechanisms have been identified, there is room for further and more meaningful engagement. Additional areas of growing human rights concern, such as disability, migration, immigration, women's rights, gender social security, housing, taxation and digitization and expanding partnerships with various stakeholders, including universities, research organizations and technology companies, may be pursued in the future.**

59. **Strengthening engagement necessitates capacity-building for local governments and national governments, involving local authorities in reporting and implementing**

recommendations made by the United Nations human rights mechanisms. Local governments should not be considered simply as recipients of recommendations as the contributions of local governments are also vital for developing human rights standards and strategies for their implementation. More robust entry points for local governments into the United Nations human rights system should be established.

V. Recommendations

60. **National governments should:**

(a) **Provide financial and human resources to OHCHR to reinforce its work on local governments and human rights;**

(b) **Provide local governments with the necessary financial resources and technical capacities to fulfil their human rights responsibilities;**

(c) **Establish and include local governments in the national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up on human rights;**

(d) **Ensure local governments are increasingly included in the review processes conducted under the universal periodic review, United Nations treaty bodies and the country visits undertaken by special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council, as well as in the implementation of recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms;**

(e) **Disseminate the recommendations of United Nations human rights bodies with local entities in an accessible format.**

61. **Within their competencies, local governments should:**

(a) **Establish or strengthen offices within the local administration dedicated to the implementation of human rights;**

(b) **Establish or strengthen a local human rights-complaint oversight and redress mechanism, such as an ombudsperson, at the local level;**

(c) **Ensure adequate training in human rights law and principles for elected local and regional government officials, civil servants at the local and regional levels, judges, law enforcement officials and other relevant local actors;**

(d) **Build relationships with civil society organizations, local human rights institutions, academic institutions and community stakeholders to enhance local capacity-building on human rights;**

(e) **Actively participate in national processes relating to the State reviews conducted under the universal periodic review, United Nations treaty bodies and the country visits undertaken by the special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council, as well as in the implementation of recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms;**

(f) **Develop indicators and collect, disaggregate and analyse data on the local human rights situation to adopt evidence-based laws, policies and programmes;**

(g) **Join the global campaign launched by United Cities and Local Governments, "10, 100, 1,000 human rights cities and territories by 2030".**

62. **The Human Rights Council should consider requesting OHCHR:**

(a) **To develop guidance on the effective implementation of human rights at the local level and on the establishment of relevant accountability mechanisms;**

(b) **To provide an annual report on good practices and challenges faced by local governments in implementing human rights effectively at the local level;**

(c) **To compile information regarding the United Nations human rights mechanisms for local governments and other local actors and proactively update them**

about the universal periodic review processes, United Nations treaty body reviews, the country visits of special procedure mandate holders and annual thematic reports;

(d) **To convene regular workshops or expert meetings on specific themes to enhance capacity-building for local governments in embedding a human rights-based approach into their work;**

(e) **To develop guidance on integrating human rights within the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level and reporting processes, such as the voluntary local reviews;**

(f) **To support networks of human rights cities at the regional and global levels, fostering knowledge exchanges and collaboration among different networks promoting human rights at the local level.**

63. **The Human Rights Council should consider establishing a permanent regular discussion, for example a forum on local governments and human rights, to exchange good practices on specific thematic topics and to facilitate direct communication between mayors and the Human Rights Council.**

64. **National governments, local and regional governments, national and local human rights institutions and other relevant stakeholders should coordinate efforts to develop and implement laws, policies and guidelines that integrate human rights into local governance.**