
**Submission to the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on
'Strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the
promotion of international cooperation following the request of The General
Assembly in its resolution A/RES/76/164 (para 12)'**

ASSEDEL (L'Association européenne pour la défense des droits et des libertés) is a non-profit organisation, governed by its statutes, based in Strasbourg, France. Its objective is to disseminate, promote and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms in the spirit of the European Convention on Human Rights, both within the Council of Europe system and at the local, national and international levels.

ASSEDEL is honoured to share its practical proposals that may contribute to the strengthening of United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation based on the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality, and objectivity. These practical proposals are the result of four years of field experience at the world capital of human rights in Geneva. After a thorough review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action Adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993, proposals and ideas will be duly referred to this Declaration as well as to the resolution A/RES/76/164 itself. In this submission, the proposals are presented under 3 major subheadings, **Universal Periodic Review recommendations, the role of the media in raising public awareness of issues of public interest, and human rights bodies within the UN system in carrying out their mandates.**

1. Universal Periodic Review Recommendations

Paragraph 11 of resolution A/RES/76/164 envisions strengthening UN action in the field of human rights while underlining the context of the Universal Periodic Review. In the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of 25 June 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights stated that cooperation between national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights should be strengthened, through the exchange of information and experience, as well as cooperation with regional organizations and the United Nations (paragraph 85) underlined. These demands necessitated a new system, and the Universal Periodic Review was concluded on 15 March 2006 within the Human Rights Council.

As a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States, Universal Periodic Review is particularly important for concerned civil society organizations to raise awareness of the ongoing human rights violations in the countries under review. Knowing that the political and financial relations between states do not always allow them to express themselves freely against a state with which the recommending state has close relations. However, in the current procedure applied by the Human Rights Council, the NGOs have only indirect influences because they do not have the right to recommend directly to states under review. They can only be part of the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions after

preparing and submitting their reports to the OHCHR. Although they have the opportunity to take the floor during the adoption of the ‘outcome reports’ for the State under Review at the sessions of the Human Rights Council, it is only after the recommendations are completed. **ASSEDEL is of the opinion that under the supervision of the OHCHR a broader procedure which allows civil society organizations to recommend should also be possible.** The crucial point here can be the supervision of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as it is hardly possible for NGOs to organize these recommendations on their own. It is likely that big NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to dominate the process and that other relevant civil society organizations might be less likely to participate which strengthens our belief that supervision should be provided by the OHCHR. ASSEDEL is at the disposal of the UN mechanisms for further discussions on the implementation of the new above-mentioned process.

2. The role of the media in raising public awareness of issues of public interest

In resolution A/RES/76/164 paragraph 9, the role of the media in raising public awareness of issues of public interest is highlighted. Moreover, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on 25 June 1993, in paragraph 38, The World Conference on Human Rights underlines the contribution to increasing public awareness of human rights issues. Paragraph 39 states that ‘Underlining the importance of objective, responsible and impartial information about human rights and humanitarian issues, the World Conference on Human Rights encourages the increased involvement of the media, for whom freedom and protection should be guaranteed within the framework of national law.’

In this context, the prior efforts in Geneva are highly appreciated such as attracting public figures, Zinédine Zidane and Brad Pitt to draw the attention of the general public to human rights. However, it is hard to believe that the role of the media strengthens over time in Geneva. A notable number of journalists, especially those working on the UN agenda in Geneva, are losing their jobs. Consequently, the UN human rights mechanisms have great difficulty in shaping public opinion and raising awareness of their agenda.

ASSEDEL believes that the UN should market itself in professional terms. For a few suggestions, organizing attractive events, such as soccer games or public concerts, can be considered as another possibility to attract public attention. For younger generations, effective and public use of social media accounts can also be considered to raise awareness. Even though all institutions have their social media accounts and use them, they are far from attracting the attention of the public on a larger scale. ASSEDEL is at the disposal of the UN mechanisms for further discussions on the role of the media in raising public awareness of issues of public interest.

3. Human rights bodies within the UN system in carrying out their mandates

In resolution A/RES/76/164 paragraph 7, all human rights bodies within the United Nations system are requested to take duly into account the contents of the present resolution in carrying out their mandates. In addition, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on 25 June 1993, in paragraph 7, The World Conference on Human Rights recommends the assignment of human rights officers. On the other hand, in paragraph 9, The World Conference on Human Rights requests the Secretary-General and the General Assembly to take immediate steps to increase substantially the resources for the human rights programme from within the existing

and future regular budgets of the United Nations, and to take urgent steps to seek increased extrabudgetary resources. Thus, in this subheading, we would like to underline two correlated issues, namely the missions of human rights officers and the budgetary restrictions of the human rights program.

During our field experiences in Geneva, one of the challenges we experienced was the changes of officers at OHCHR. Almost every year or in a couple of months, the assistants to the special rapporteurs were replaced. When an officer starts working at the UN, s/he stays until a better opportunity comes along, or the office contracts remain in short terms. It is less likely that a human rights officer will learn all the requirements of his or her mandate in a few months. Each recruitment represents an investment for the person, however, if s/he leaves after a few months, either the investment will be nil, or the chiefs will consider it unnecessary to invest. In other words, short-term recruitment becomes a vicious circle for the functioning of the UN human rights mechanisms, not only for human rights officers but for the system as a whole. **In summary, the UN should recruit for longer periods to be able to invest in the individual and benefit from his or her specific knowledge in a perfect way.** However, this issue may have a budgetary dimension which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

On February 28, 2020, 129 NGOs signed a letter to the UN Secretary-General concerning the lack of adequate funding for the UN Human Rights System. Even in 2019, the financial constraint of the OHCHR resulted in the potential cancellation of the third session of six different treaty bodies. NGOs urged all UN member states to actively participate in these important debates and to make sure that adequate resources are allocated to the human rights system through the UN's regular budget. On the other hand, if we have an overview of the voluntary contributions to the OHCHR in 2022, as of 30 November, the total amount would be USD 211,232,944. It falls far below when it is compared to institutions such as WHO. In the programmed budget 2022-2023 of the WHO, the budget would be financed from voluntary contributions, for a total of USD 5164.8 million. Although no conclusion should be drawn from this comparison, it may give us an idea of possible solutions to the financial problems of the UN human rights program. Given that a significant portion of WHO's voluntary contributions is funded on a project basis, project-based work could be considered for OHCHR as well.

In summary, the OHCHR should consider potential resources for its Office. Removing financial restrictions in the Office would also have a direct effect on the long-term recruitment of more human rights officers and consequently healthier functioning of the institutions. ■

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