UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

GANHRI Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

CONCEPT NOTE

Early warning, conflict prevention and re-establishment of peaceful societies: The role of National Human Rights Institutions

GANHRI ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Wednesday, 8 March 2017
(10:00- 13:00h / 15:00-18:00h)

Room XVII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Around the world, people suffer from internal or international armed conflicts, where they experience the most egregious, widespread and systematic human rights violations and insecurity.

Violent conflicts do not arise overnight, but develop over time, from tensions and increasing acts of violence into full-fledged armed conflicts. Patterns of certain human rights violations provide an early indication of a potential or emerging crisis, which may deteriorate into tensions, violence and armed conflict. Early and targeted interventions to promote and protect human rights can significantly help defuse the situation so as to prevent a violent conflict and to contribute to re-establishing a peaceful society.

An important early indication of a potential or emerging crisis is election-related and political violence. In addition, there are factors that play an important part of creating and upholding a climate of violence within a society. The conference will focus on a number of these factors and provide an opportunity to discuss how NHRIs can monitor and help address them – before and during violent conflicts. It will, therefore, also look at ways to strengthen the voices for human rights in a country, and at how to deal with the threats that NHRIs face in carrying out their mandate under such circumstances.

Whilst states are the primary duty bearers, NHRIs as independent institutions of the state with a broad mandate and powers to promote and protect human rights can play an important role in helping to prevent human rights violations and protect human rights in situations of tensions, violence or conflict.

NHRIs can do so by applying their unique functions in line with the United Nations Paris Principles and with international human rights norms and standards, including by:

- investigating into violence and abuse, and handling complaints;
- monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation to national, regional and international levels;
- serving as early warning mechanisms to prevent violence and conflict, or a further deteriorating of a situation;
- serving as mechanism to protect rights holders, including groups particularly at risk, such as women, minorities, internally displaced persons, migrants, indigenous

peoples and human rights defenders;
- advising the state, and holding its authorities to account;
- reporting to and advising parliament and government on the substance and implementation of human rights norms and standards and their contribution to a peaceful society; and
- providing a platform for dialogue between state and non-state actors at the domestic level.

This is a daunting responsibility and NHRIs, whilst applying their mandates in such contexts, may themselves be subject to threats or attacks, which can put at risk their staff, and the entire institution's independence and integrity.

This Annual Conference will be an opportunity for NHRIs and participants from all regions:

1. To discuss NHRIs' experiences of, and approaches to, and challenges in operating in situations of tension, violence and conflict and to assess what is required for NHRIs to play their vital role;

2. To develop practical strategies for NHRIs to employ in the protection and promotion of human rights during situations of crisis, violence and conflict; and

3. To strengthen cooperation and mutually reinforce relationships on the promotion and protection of human rights during conflict and violence, both among NHRIs as well as between NHRIs and their partners, especially OHCHR, UNDP and civil society.

Morning Session:	**Early indications of a potential or emerging crisis**
Part 1:	**Election-related and political violence**
Part 2:	**Factors contributing to a climate of violence**
Afternoon Session:	**Protecting and strengthening human rights actors**
Part 1:	**Early warning mechanisms and human rights defenders**
Part 2:	**Protecting and preserving the independence of NHRIs**

Morning session: Early indications of a potential or emerging crisis

Part 1: Election-related and political violence

- violence against political actors and intimidation of voters (killings, arbitrary detention, disappearances) by state and non-state actors in general and before elections
- violent oppression of or restrictions to the freedom of assembly and association, and other public freedoms by state and non-state actors

Suggested lead questions:

i) What are the experiences, lessons and good practices of NHRIs across all regions in monitoring and addressing elections and election-related violence?
ii) What are the experiences, lessons and good practices of NHRIs in monitoring and addressing political violence?
iii) What role can NHRIs play during assemblies and demonstrations?

Cross-cutting issue: How can NHRIs work with the UN and civil society in these areas?

Part 2: Factors contributing to a climate of violence

- Hate speech
- Sexual and gender-based violence
- State of emergency

Suggested lead questions:

i) How can NHRIs monitor, and advise on addressing and preventing hate speech?
ii) What are NHRI experiences, lessons and good practices in investigating into, monitoring and reporting on sexual and gender-based violence?
iii) How can NHRIs monitor the human rights situation during a state of emergency and work towards lifting the state of emergency?

Cross-cutting issue: How can NHRIs work with the UN and civil society in these areas?

Afternoon Session

Part 3: Early warning mechanisms and human rights defenders

- Protection of human rights defenders and individuals/groups at risk
- Early warning mechanisms

Suggested lead questions:

i) What role can NHRIs play in protecting human rights defenders, as well as individuals and groups at risk during situations of tensions, violence, and conflict? What are the experiences, lessons and good practices?
ii) How can NHRIs serve as, or help establish, effective early warning mechanisms to

prevent human rights violations or situations from deteriorating?

Cross-cutting issue: How can NHRIs work with the UN and civil society in these areas?

Part 4: Protecting and preserving the independence of NHRIs

- Risks for NHRIs
- Protection of NHRIs
- The role of other actors including: civil society; parliaments; the United Nations and regional organizations; GANHRI and regional NHRI networks

Suggested lead questions:

i) What are the risks NHRIs are typically facing when operating in situations of crisis, violence or conflict? What are the experiences, lessons and good practices of NHRIs in working to preserve their own independence and integrity in such contexts?
ii) What measures have NHRIs developed to protect their members and staff working in situations of crisis, violence and conflict?
iii) What is the actual or potential role can other actors or mechanisms play in protecting and preserving the independence and integrity of NHRIs? In particular, what is the role of civil society? Of parliaments? Of the UN and of GANHRI and regional NHRI networks?

Format:

Each session of 60 minutes, one speaker from an NHRI on each suggested lead question plus one speaker for NGOs and OHCHR / UNDP for each session. Each speaker has 5 minutes (with intro, this brings us to 30 minutes, leaving 25 minutes for general debate and 5 minutes for conclusion by Chair).

Outcome: Statement

As final outcome of the Annual Conference, a concluding statement will adopted by NHRIs at the end of the Conference. The Statement will serve as a reference point and guide for NHRIs' individual and collective actions.