



Lone Lindholt, PhD
Senior Researcher

TPP side event at HRC 45
“COVID-19 and NHRIs
– a study”



A spotlight on human rights during Covid-19

In the Secretary-General's Policy Brief on "Covid-19 and Human Rights: We are All In This Together", the SG highlighted 6 key areas of concern during the pandemic:

1. Emerging human rights challenges in the ***impact of the crisis on lives and livelihoods***
2. Emerging human rights challenges relating to ***inequality, discrimination and exclusion***
3. Emerging human rights challenges regarding ***participation and civic space***
4. Emerging human rights challenges regarding ***peace and security and the rule of law***

NHRIs, Paris Principles & Covid-19

- National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are state-mandated bodies, independent of government, with a broad constitutional or legal mandate to **protect and promote** human rights at the national level.
- The United Nations Paris Principles provide the international benchmarks against which NHRIs can be **accredited** by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).
- Today there are well over **100** NHRIs operating around the world, **79** of which are accredited by the GANHRI in full compliance with the Paris Principles.
- The **UN's Socio-economic Response Framework for COVID-19** has a clear entry point for NHRIs, particularly in monitoring the risks of human rights violations, acting as a bridge between excluded populations and the state, and providing rights-based advice to governments

Aim & Scope of the study

AIM

- To map the effect of the pandemic on the work of NHRIs around the world under COVID-19
- Documenting and analysing the efforts undertaken by NHRIs in their respective societies
- Highlighting how the UN institutions and mechanisms can best support these efforts.

SCOPE

Fundamentally, the study addresses 3 questions:

1. **Effect** - How has COVID-19 affected individual NHRIs ?
2. **Action** - How have individual NHRIs taken steps to address COVID-19 in their countries?
3. **Support and collaboration** - How has UNDP/OHCHR/GANHRI support to NHRIs, and NHRIs' collaboration with other national stakeholders and each other, proven effective?

Data sources

We are drawing on documentation on action taken in this field since February 2020 by around **100 NHRIs** (i.e. almost all those existing) almost equally distributed across Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe. Data is still more coming in daily, as the mapping (including through a survey sent out to all NHRIs) is ongoing as we speak!

Preliminary findings are based on:

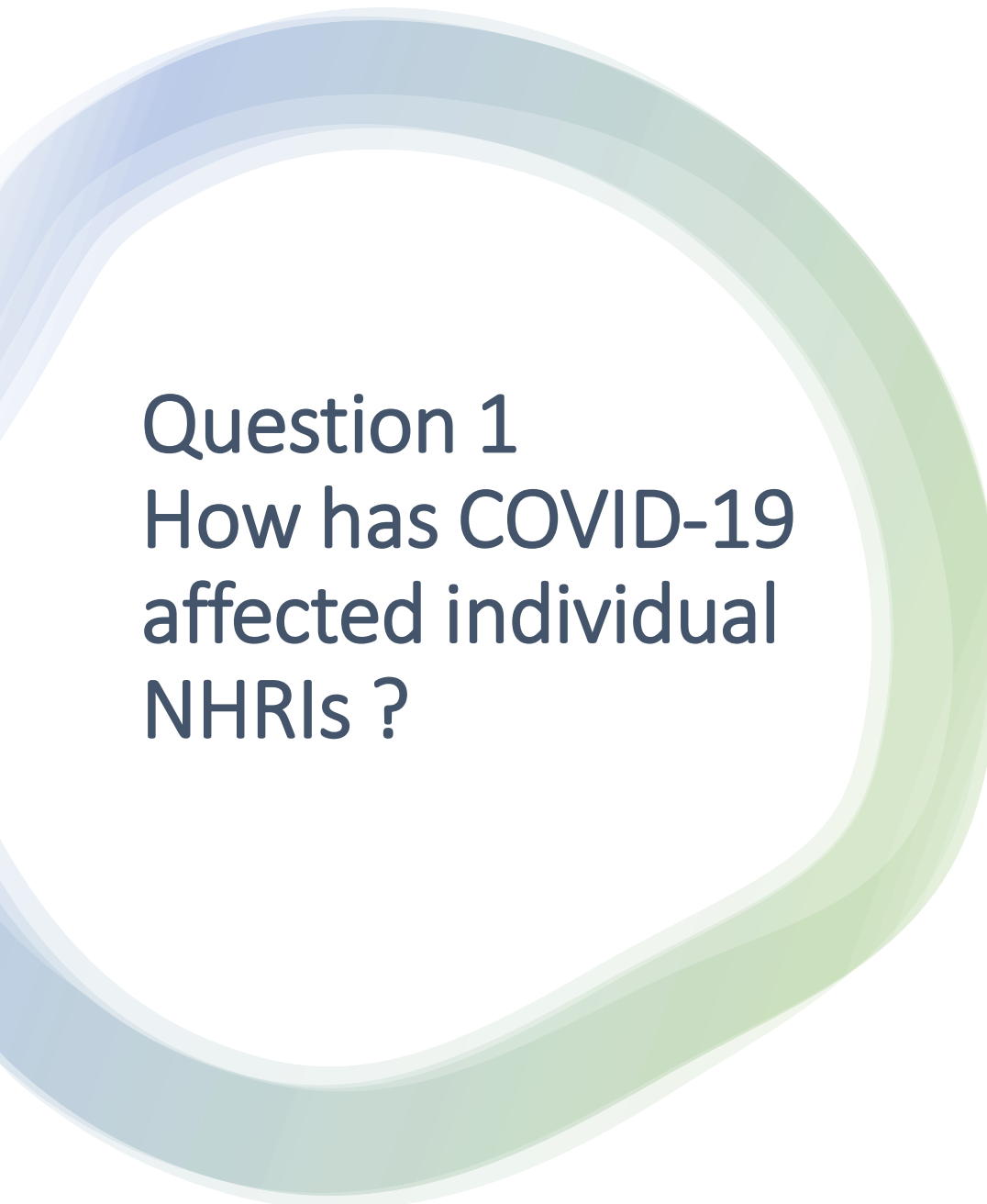
- *2,500 entries covering almost 80 countries from the GANHRI database + GANHRI FUSE (learning community)*
- *Dialogue with the regional networks under GANHRI*
- *Dialogue with UNDP Regional Coordinators and Country offices and OHCHR*

What are our Preliminary Findings?

*As much as the COVID-19 pandemic is truly **global**, so is the pattern of how NHRIs have been **affected** by, **taken action** in response to, and **collaborated** with and **received support** from other actors to address it.*

***Overall**, we see that NHRIs across the world have experienced **similar conditions impacting on their work and, not least, communities**; have responded by **applying their unique mandate and functions** in parallel, yet diverse, ways to engage in **action** addressing the situation; and enjoyed **similar forms of support and engagement** with local stakeholders and the UN bodies and mechanisms.*

*This speaks for the importance of **documenting the lessons learned** for circulation and replication, to which study should contribute.*



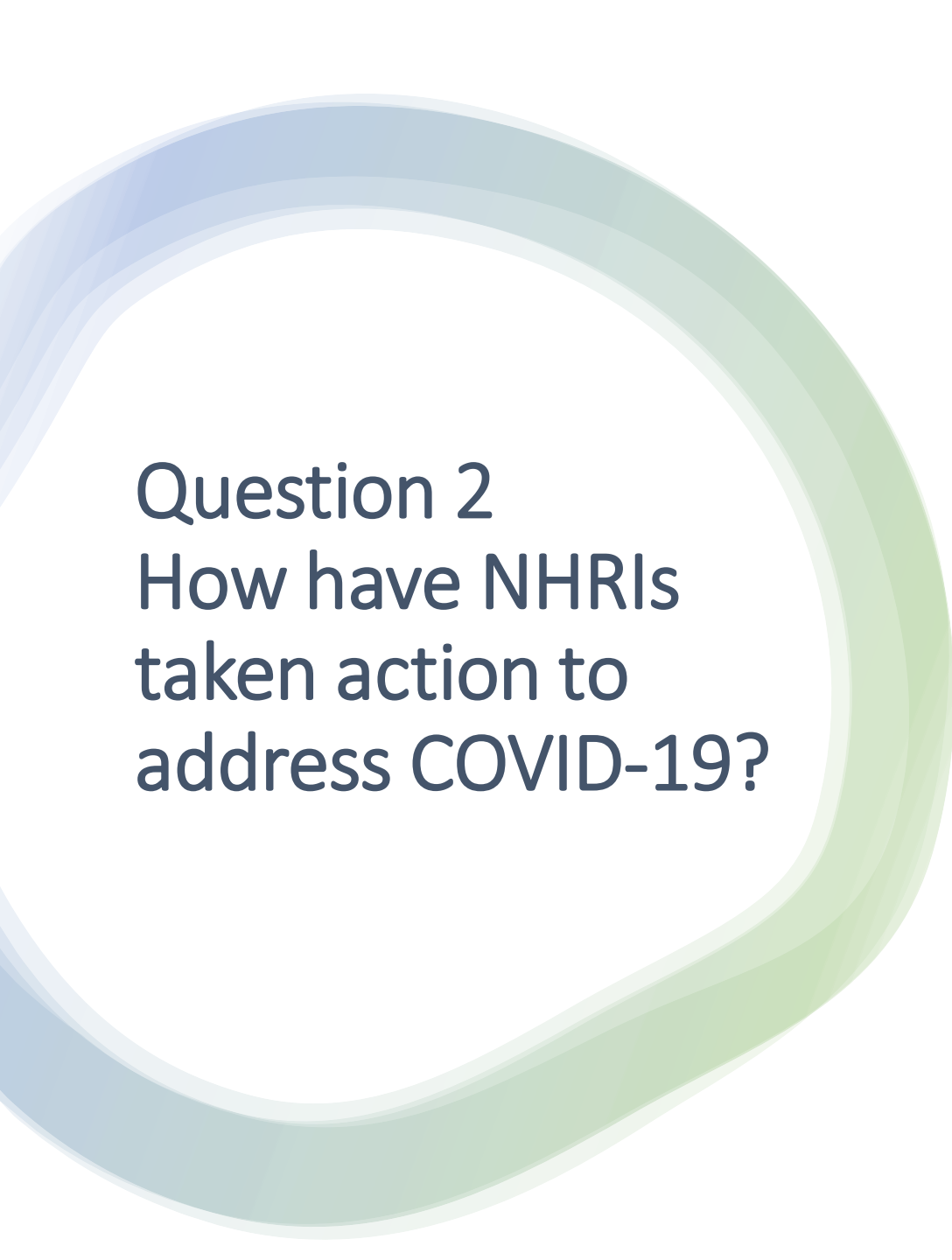
Question 1

How has COVID-19 affected individual NHRIs ?

We know already now that NHRIs themselves have in many cases been negatively affected!

- Staff members or members of their governing bodies themselves have been infected by COVID-19.
- From the early start of the pandemic, many NHRIs have been forced to limit or bar access to their premises. This has led to a detrimental effect on their **ability to be “accessible”**.
- NHRIs’ work has been affected, especially aspects of **conducting outreach and monitoring** e.g. due to **curfews and other restrictions of movement**

We find that this question has, only to some extent, been addressed systematically internationally. The study should therefore mark a positive contribution, and we hope that NHRIs may be highly motivated to respond to this line of inquiry.



Question 2

How have NHRIs taken action to address COVID-19?

There is likely no NHRI in the world which has not, in one way or another, addressed COVID-19!

As mentioned above, we see that actions taken by NHRIs have a transglobal nature, and so the study will include relevant examples from Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Americas.

An interesting observation:

NHRIs initiating major initiatives, some of them bold and/or innovative, actually come from “the global South” and/or countries with weaker infrastructure or internal problems in various forms!

How have NHRIs applied their mandates of promotion and protection?

- Almost every NHRI has used their communicative mandate to publish **statements**:

Their message has been clear: *Restrictive action taken must be proportional and non-discriminatory and must first and foremost ensure that the rights and needs of the most vulnerable in society are catered for, not least under states of emergency and curfew.*

- Many NHRIs have also taken very **concrete action**:
 - Extensive **monitoring** of **situations** and **facilities**, and analysis of findings and data
 - **Drawing the attention of the authorities to such situations** and requesting/suggesting remedial action
 - Providing **service delivery** to address the basic needs of the most vulnerable
 - **Dissemination of public information**, e.g. through radio spots and media campaigns, human rights education, and by reaching out to specific sectors in society
 - **Contributing to digitalisation e.g. for accessibility**, including developed **mobile apps and established hotlines**, and **providing space on own website** for both informative communication and for complaints and monitoring

In their scope of action, NHRIs have focused on a broad range of **themes**, spanning the full human rights spectrum.

A few examples of areas where NHRIs have focused their efforts on addressing COVID-19 pandemic impact:

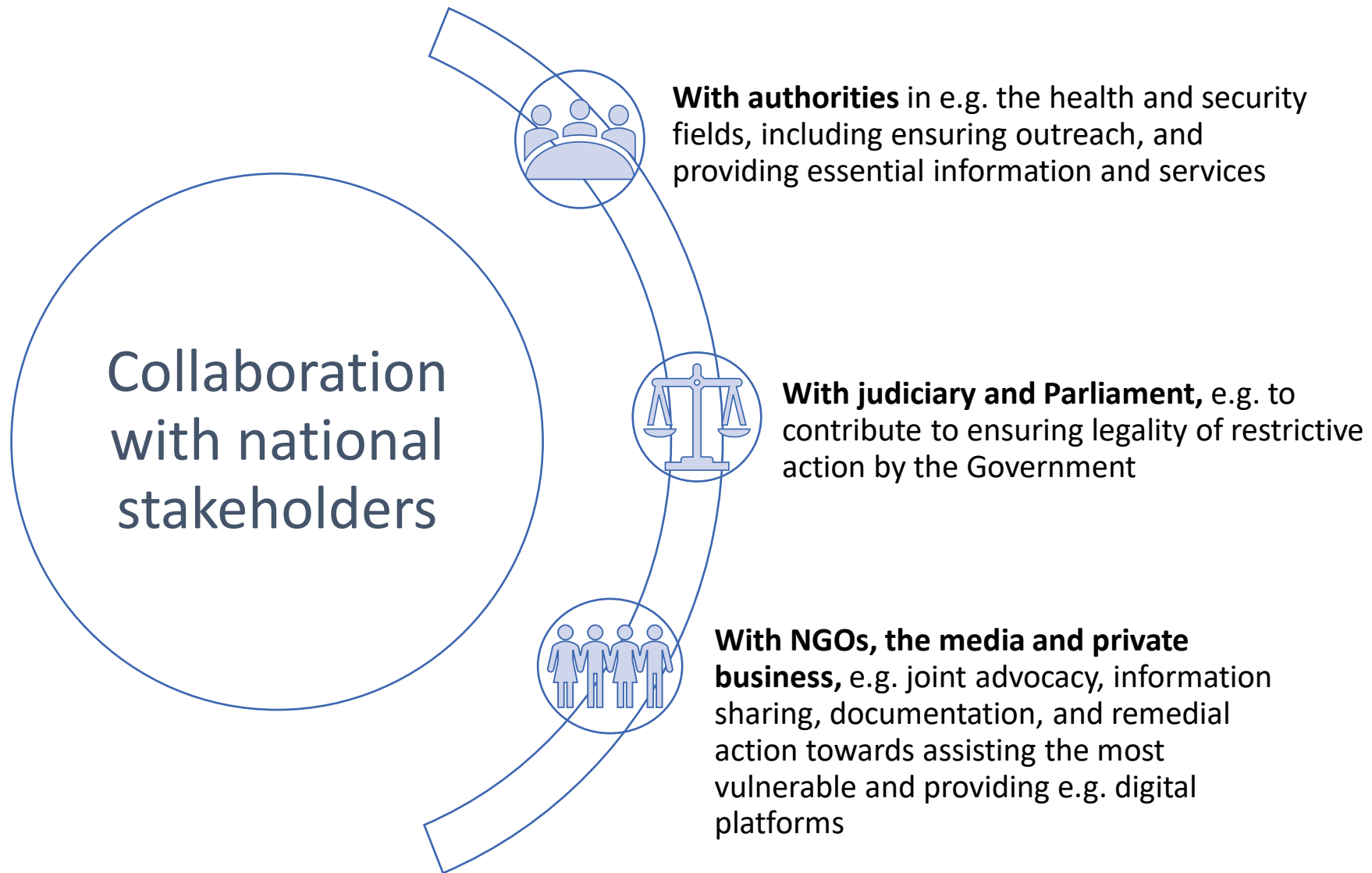
- **Social conflict and xenophobia**, calling for **non-discrimination** as a core principle
- Persons living with **disability**, in any form, including mental disability, and the elderly
- Individuals under **detention** or with restricted **freedom of movement** in any form, e.g. in criminal justice or for those living in care/assisted living
- Residents under **poor living conditions**, including migrants and internally displaced communities
- Freedom of the **media** and protection of journalists who report on the situation unfolding nationally
- Negative **gender impact**, where women and girls are further at risk, both short and long term
- Finally, protecting **health personnel and frontline COVID-19 workers**



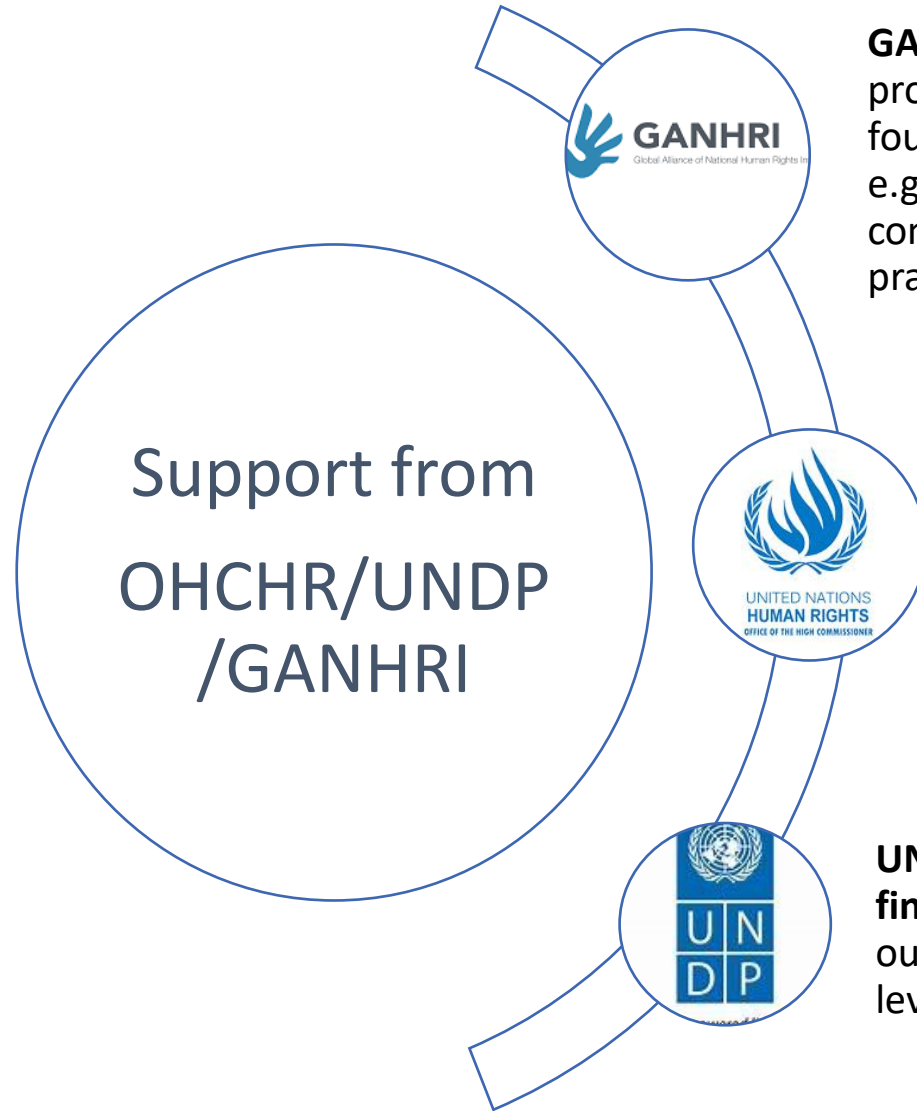
Question 3

How has NHRIs' collaboration with other national stakeholders and each other; and support from UNDP/OHCHR/GANHRI support to NHRIs proven effective?

Brief conclusion: both have proven to be essential – and multi-faceted!



- *All have provided access and links to and with global and regional mechanisms, e.g. mandate holders and treaty bodies, as well as regional inter-governmental bodies.*
- *Support of bilateral donors has followed suit and, in many cases, engage in support in complementarity with the other actors.*



GANHRI and the regional secretariats have provided NHRIs with extensive support of and have found ways to **collaborate and exchange practice** e.g. through interactive webinars and learning communities for inspiration and mapping of good practice.

OHCHR has ensured accurate **situation monitoring across all regions** to monitor and assess the patterns of response and human rights impact by governments. Furthermore, provided technical support, guidance and activity funding.

UNDP has provided substantial **technical and financial support** to NHRIs for the activities outlined above, regionally as well as at country level.

Key Takeaways

The study will be completed in the coming months. However the following is already clear:

- **By virtue of their unique institutional quality – broad and comprehensive mandates, and effective operations, functions and infrastructure - NHRIs have, around the world, played and will continue to play an absolutely critical role in protecting and promoting human rights of the most vulnerable in their society.**
- **During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen this to an unprecedented extent; however, we also see how critical the support - internal as well as external - is to ensure that NHRIs are enabled to take such decisive action.**
- **The lessons learned from the dramatic events of 2020 must be harvested through studies such as this one and applied to inform our future direction.**



Thank you