

Chapter 3.

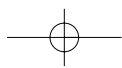
Working together to promote human rights, democracy and good governance

90. The Millennium Declaration commits the nations of the world “to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.” In it, world leaders resolve “to strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights.” They also commit “to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries” and “to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information.” These closely interconnected commitments have required integrated approaches and actions by all parties and challenged the UN system to set the pace. This chapter covers the system’s work underway in terms of three interlocked and mutually reinforcing objectives: advancing human rights, promoting democracy and strengthening good governance.

Advancing human rights

91. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the system of human rights treaties together provide a comprehensive framework for action by Member States and by the organizations of the UN system. Within this framework, the UN system contributes to advancing human rights by:

- promoting the signing and ratification of human rights-related international treaties;
- supporting the UN human rights mechanisms, both governmental and expert;
- assisting in the development and clarification of human rights norms and standards;
- addressing issues of impunity, particularly during, but also after conflict;
- extending assistance to governments and civil society organizations in promoting and protecting human rights;
- supporting human rights education programmes;
- helping to develop and monitor the independence of the judiciary;
- promoting women’s human rights and the elimination of violence against women, including through assisting the effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women;
- increasing knowledge of governments, civil society organizations and UN partners in the practical application of human rights instruments to advance public health, particularly child and adolescent health and reproductive health;
- promoting greater awareness of the links between human rights, gender and HIV/AIDS, in order to strengthen responses to the pandemic; and
- extending support in respect of prison and detention centre monitoring.



92. In response to the Millennium Declaration, the UN system has initiated a major renewed effort to mainstream human rights in its activities and programmes and to pursue a rights-based approach to development.

93. To achieve greater coherence in UN efforts to build national systems of human rights protection, the Office of the High-Commissioner for Human rights (OHCHR) and its UN system partners are pursuing the “Action 2 Initiative,” put forward in the Secretary-General’s 2002 report on UN reform. Action 2 seeks to foster a common understanding of the linkages between human rights, development and humanitarian assistance throughout the UN system. It has led to the establishment of thematic groups dealing with human rights issues in UN country teams and has promoted joint programming to support national efforts to foster a culture of human rights. It also aims to support Member States in the ratification of human rights treaties. As part of Action 2, human rights advisers have been assigned to a number of UN country offices, in order to enhance assistance by UN country teams in creating and strengthening national systems of human rights protection. In a related effort, steps are being taken to enhance OHCHR’s capacity to train UN country teams.

94. The Millennium Declaration puts a strong emphasis on protecting the vulnerable. Since its adoption, inter-agency collaboration on that front has intensified, particularly in protecting the human rights of women, indigenous peoples, children and migrants. (See also box 2.12, Inter-agency collaboration on gender equality and empowerment of women.)

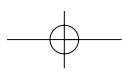
Box 3.1

Protecting the rights of the vulnerable

Gender. Collaboration across the UN system on gender has grown in the context of system-wide preparations for the Beijing Conference and its aftermath. The focus has been on the advancement of women and on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. (See also Box 2.12, Inter-agency collaboration on gender equality and empowerment of women.)

Reproductive health and population. To advance the right to health in vulnerable populations, the UN system has established an inter-agency project, Strengthening Voices for Reproductive Health, which works to support governments and their partners in improving the quality of reproductive health care through empowering communities, particularly women and young people. The project is being carried out by an interregional partnership among ILO/STEP, UNICEF and WHO, under the leadership of UNFPA. It focuses on increasing users’ demand for quality services through rights-based, gender-sensitive participatory mechanisms, which strengthen women’s voices to dialogue with health-service providers.

Indigenous peoples. An informal contact group on indigenous peoples was established in the early 1990s, after the adoption of the ILO’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention and the UN’s pioneering work in this field. As a follow-up to the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the UN established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2001 to coordinate relevant system-wide actions. The Permanent Forum has now completed the first three years of its mandate, with a unique structure, composed in equal parts of government representatives and representatives of indigenous peoples. The Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues assists the Permanent Forum in its work. (continued on following page)



Box 3.1

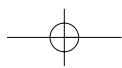
Protecting the rights of the vulnerable (continued from previous page)

Children. Through collaboration with a wide range of actors, the UN system has made progress in building a worldwide culture of protection of children and youth. It has contributed to raising national standards, in areas ranging from children and armed conflict, to combatting the sale of children, child prostitution, pornography and violence against children. Current efforts emphasize building systems of protection through improved legislation, attitudinal change and children's own knowledge and skills.

Migrants. Considerable work has been ongoing within and between parts of the UN system, in close collaboration with regional institutions, to protect migrants and their families. A growing awareness exists of the threats to human rights and dignity from the increased trafficking of migrants, resulting in an increase in modern-day slavery. Coordination among different parts of the system focuses on both the management of migration and on ways to combat trafficking.

95. The UN and many of the concerned specialized agencies have actively pursued ways to harmonize and render more effective the various monitoring mechanisms mandated to review the implementation of State Parties' obligations under human rights treaties, including through more integrated reporting. The ILO, for example, is reviewing its supervisory system, with a view towards modernizing and strengthening it. UNESCO has recently adopted a new human rights policy and is currently reviewing the functioning and effectiveness of its supervisory systems. WHO is developing a comprehensive policy framework for health and human rights, and it has initiated national activities to assist Member States in effectively implementing the recommendations of treaty bodies on health matters, particularly in relation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The UN system is actively promoting mutual reinforcement among the different oversight mechanisms.

96. As evident in the previous chapter, a rights-based approach to development has increasingly guided the work of UN system organizations and inter-agency collaboration in both development and human rights. From the perspective of the system's human rights work, notable examples include: the technical assistance provided by OHCHR; the ILO's collaborative Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC); UNICEF's and inter-agency work on the protection of children's rights; the joint programme of OHCHR and UNDP on Human Rights Strengthening (HURIST); WHO's focus on the protection and fulfilment of health-related rights of children and adolescents; UNFPA's work on reproductive health and rights; the establishment by FAO member states, with the support of OHCHR, of an Intergovernmental Working Group, which adopted Voluntary Guidelines to achieve "the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security"; and the joint implementation by UN-Habitat and OHCHR of the UN Housing Rights Programme, as part of the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure. Through inter-agency initiatives such as these, which often cut across institutional boundaries, UN organizations are acting to build synergies among their respective mandates and strengths to optimize impact.



Promoting democracy

97. In the same year that Member States pledged in the Millennium Declaration to strengthen their capacity to implement the principles and practices of democracy, the General Assembly adopted a comprehensive resolution (A/RES/55/96) providing extensive guidelines on principles and processes that should orient Member States in promoting and consolidating democracy.²¹ Pluralism, the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening the rule of law, an electoral system that provides for the free and fair expression of the people's will, a legal framework that enables wide participation of civil society, good governance as defined in the Millennium Declaration and the promotion of sustainable development are all highlighted in the resolution, each in its own right and as linked, integral components of the democratic process.

98. These pledges and guidelines have provided new momentum and further direction to inter-agency collaboration to support the spread of democracy and strengthen democratic institutions, in ways that help Member States reinforce and operationalize the key linkages stressed by the Assembly. This collaboration has been most visible in UN support for the rebuilding of civil, political and judicial institutions and its electoral support to countries emerging from crisis and conflict. Many UN organizations have expanded the range of their activities in this area, focusing on different, but related aspects of capacity-building.

99. In more than 85 countries, UN organizations have provided various forms of electoral assistance, covering different aspects of the electoral process: from voter education programmes, electoral monitoring and observation to providing essential information on the conduct of elections.

Box 3.2

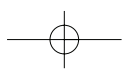
Electoral assistance

The electoral assistance provided by the UN system can be grouped into three categories: technical assistance; the organization and conduct of elections; and observation or monitoring of elections and participation, where elections are expected to play a significant role in the peace-building phase of political negotiations. While technical assistance tends to be provided in politically stable contexts, the organization and conduct of elections takes place almost exclusively in post-conflict conditions. Cases where a major peacekeeping and peace-building mission has included an electoral assistance component have been increasing. Recent examples are Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Sierra Leone.

The United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UN-DPA) serves as the first formal contact point for receiving requests for electoral assistance. The Electoral Assistance Division of UN-DPA assists in evaluating these requests, coordinates the provision of electoral assistance by the UN system and ensures a consistent application of standards for the duration of a given project.

The Department collaborates with UNDP, whose field presence facilitates timely responses to electoral assistance requests and the mobilization of resources to meet them. Other UN partners include the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN-DPKO), when peacekeeping missions have an electoral component.

21. In that resolution, the Assembly noted a wide range of regional and inter-regional initiatives to advance democracy, including the Warsaw Declaration of the Community of Democracies that counts more than 100 country signatures (see A/55/328, annex I). In 2002 the Community endorsed the Seoul Plan of Action (see A/57/618, annex I), which listed the essential elements of representative democracy and set forth a range of measures to promote it.



100. Another key aspect of the system's contribution to building and strengthening democratic institutions is the provision of support to civil society organizations, such as human rights watchdog groups, trade unions and employers' organizations, and sports organizations that help foster youth participation. At the same time, NGOs have increasingly become active partners of governments and the UN system in providing technical assistance and essential services. (See also box 2.26, Partnerships with civil society.)

101. The UN system has given special attention to supporting the active participation of youth in the policy dialogue and decision-making processes taking place at the national and local levels. In the recent period, the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals has provided a main focus for this effort. In different countries and regions, particularly Southern Africa and East Asia, UN agencies have been helping young people: to identify projects that they could implement themselves to contribute to the achievement of the MDGs; to initiate campaigns to create awareness of the MDGs; and to mobilize support for the MDGs from community groups, civil society organizations and local institutions.

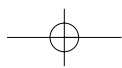
102. A common objective of UN system organizations is to support national efforts to further freedom of expression and democratic debate. Different UN organizations are carrying out extensive work toward these ends, particularly UNESCO and UNDP, working closely with other institutions such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union. UNESCO has pursued its work on strengthening the media from the same perspective.

Strengthening governance

103. At the Millennium Summit, world leaders highlighted the key role of effective, transparent and accountable governance in eradicating poverty and achieving the other objectives of the Millennium Declaration. In many parts of the world, citizens have increasingly demanded: a stronger voice in public policy; improved delivery of services; and greater openness and accountability in the way that governments function. Many governments have responded by: introducing reforms; strengthening public institutions; broadening citizen participation in governmental processes; and striving to deliver more and better services, particularly to the poor and most marginalized.

104. The work of UN organizations in this area focuses on capacity-building to advance: decentralization; transparency and accountability; "engaged governance," which focuses on mainstreaming citizen participation in public policy; the application of information and communications technology (ICT); and strengthened capacities for data gathering and statistical analysis.

105. Decentralized governance has increasingly drawn recognition as a key means of empowering local communities to fight poverty and to improve the delivery of essential services. UN agencies have supported decentralization in various ways—from providing technical advisory services and helping to enhance institutional and human capacities to supporting knowledge sharing, information exchange and the dissemination of best practices. Examples include:



- Inter-agency collaboration with the UN Centre for Regional Development to support government decentralization programmes, including on regional development planning and implementation, through training and skills-upgrading of public sector employees;²²
- UN-Habitat implementing campaigns, global programmes, regional and technical cooperation projects and other initiatives to improve urban governance in more than 40 countries, with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of slum dwellers;
- UNICEF, in partnership with the UN and UNFPA, helping raise awareness of the importance of birth registration and strengthened civil registration systems; and
- The collaborative work of OHCHR and UNDP designed to identify and to draw lessons from good governance practices that have had an impact on the promotion of human rights.

106. UN organizations have engaged in related efforts to help countries promote transparent and accountable governance, with some key examples, including:

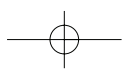
- UNDP devoting more than half of its global technical assistance expenditures to activities in this field and supporting efforts in 135 countries to build national capacities for improved and accountable governance;
- the World Bank's support for broad public sector governance reforms in many countries, through the strengthening of public financial management, public administration and accountability, and institutional checks and balances; and
- IMF's support for increased transparency and accountability in public sector governance, through larger budgetary outlays and monitoring government expenditures on poverty eradication programmes, as well as the provision of technical assistance in such areas as tax policy and administration, both in order to generate the resources needed for poverty eradication.

107. The UN Secretariat, UNDP and ECA are stepping up support for the efforts of African governments, regional bodies and the NEPAD Secretariat towards transparent and accountable governance in Africa. A recent study by ECA, *Striving for Good Governance in Africa*, found that electoral processes in Africa have become more transparent, voter participation has increased to a high level and political parties have grown stronger.²³ The study also underscored the need for improvement in such areas as tax evasion and corruption; reform of the police and military; and independence of electoral commissions. It called for urgent action to strengthen parliaments, preserve judicial autonomy, improve public sector performance, support the development of professional media, encourage private investment and decentralize service delivery. At the regional level, UN system activities have included technical and advisory support to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) of the African Union and assistance to the African Governance Forum (AGF) in mobilizing governments and civil society to build networks of African practitioners engaged in governance.

108. To help ensure that institutional and regulatory frameworks are in place to guard against corrupt practices, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has launched a global programme, in the context of the follow-up to UN Convention Against Corruption.

22. The United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), established in 1971 in Nagoya, Japan, conducts research and training in local and regional development, targeting developing and transitional economies. The Centre's programmes focus on socially and environmentally sustainable development.

23. *Striving for Good Governance in Africa*, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, 2005.



With the World Bank, UNDP, OECD, regional development banks and bilateral development agencies, UNODC has initiated the establishment of the International Group for Anti-Corruption Cooperation (IGAC) to enhance coordination, undertake joint activities and develop a database of past, current and future anti-corruption projects and activities.

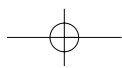
109. “Engaged governance” is another key ingredient in advancing poverty eradication and broad-based development by promoting greater participation of citizens and civil society institutions in public governance. In many countries, policy-making is no longer confined to representative government and now engages a wide spectrum of civil society institutions. UN system organizations have supported broader citizen participation in governance by providing technical and advisory services and other forms of assistance; by promoting information sharing and dissemination of good practices; and by fostering partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations. A noteworthy initiative in this regard is ILO’s “Practical Guide for Strengthening Social Dialogue in Public Service Reform,” which serves as a key instrument in the training of public service managers and other civil servants involved in reform programmes.

110. UN organizations have actively promoted the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a tool for strengthening public sector management and for improving the quality and delivery of public services:

- The United Nations Online Network on Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN), managed by UN-DESA, facilitates dialogue among various stakeholders, expanded collaboration among governments and access to research, training practices, methodologies and technical assistance projects in the field of public administration;²⁴
- UNCTAD is strengthening the debt management capacity of developing and transition economies through the use of a computerized debt-management system, which enables the concerned government ministries to establish a complete and up-to-date debt database, to provide timely and accurate debt statistics and to undertake appropriate debt analysis;
- A UN-DESA assistance programme on strengthening parliamentary information systems in Africa started in pilot form in a number of countries and is now expanding to the whole region;
- In partnership with the African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development (CAFRAD) and the NEPAD Secretariat, UN-DESA is pursuing an e-Africa initiative to improve the capacity of African governments to make use of ICT for effective governance;²⁵
- SMART (Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsible and Transparent) governance, a World-Bank supported programme in Andhra Pradesh, India, makes use of the Internet to implement such reforms as “one-stop shops for citizen services” and digital registration of deeds; and
- The UN Centre for Regional Development is helping improve the skills and knowledge of African civil servants in ICT development and applications through training.

24. Committed to integrity and excellence, UNPAN is designed to promote the sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices throughout the world in sound public policies, effective public administration and efficient civil services, through capacity-building and cooperation among the Member States, with emphasis on South-South cooperation.

25. CAFRAD is a Pan African intergovernmental organization, established in 1964 by African governments, with the support of UNESCO. It is the first uniquely Pan-African training and research center in the continent for the improvement of public administration and governance systems in Africa. Its headquarters is located in Tangier, Morocco.



111. Finally, UN organizations have joined forces to support countries in building statistical capacity, particularly in the analysis and monitoring of progress towards the achievement of the MDGs. (See also box 2.4, Tracking progress on the MDGs.) Examples of collaborative work in this area include:

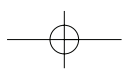
- The UN, UNDP, World Bank, UNFPA and UN-Habitat have teamed up with governments, bilateral donors and civil society organizations to conduct training in such areas as the preparation of MDG indicators, use of alternative data sources and data analysis and methodologies;
- ECA is helping administer a comprehensive set of indicators in 30 African countries in order to capture major data on governance, including political representation, institutional effectiveness and accountability, economic management and corporate governance;
- The World Bank, the UN, UNDP, UNFPA and other system organizations have joined OECD in the project, “Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-First Century” (PARIS 21), which aims to improve statistical support for monitoring development goals;
- Several UN organizations are working together to plan for the next census round, from 2005 to 2010; and
- A new global partnership—Health Metrics Network—has been launched to facilitate better health information at the country, regional and global levels.

Challenges

112. Active inter-agency collaboration is increasingly a major feature of the UN system’s activities to advance human rights, democracy and good governance. Nonetheless, the system has not yet fully instituted a comprehensive system-wide approach that effectively links all these activities in a mutually reinforcing way and that maximizes its collective capacity to further this key dimension of the Millennium Declaration. The system also confronts the related challenge of effectively integrating its work in these areas with its activities in development and in conflict prevention, at the global and the country levels.

113. The integration of human rights activities into the UN system’s development and peace and security agenda continues to pose major challenges. Further progress in this direction will require not only intensified efforts at joint programming among the secretariats, but also more extensive and effective interactions among the system’s inter-governmental bodies. In the short term, the focus should be on:

- mainstreaming human rights into the policies and programmes of UN organizations and promoting wider acceptance of the rights-based approach to development;
- addressing in a more deliberate, forceful way respect for human rights in conflict situations;
- establishing additional means of providing systematic assistance to states in their efforts to implement recommendations of UN human rights bodies at the national level;
- broadening and intensifying support for national human rights protection systems;
- enhancing collective efforts to work with young people to utilize their potential for advocacy and support;
- strengthening human rights training for institutions involved in law enforcement;
- continuing advocacy to encourage ratification of human rights treaties and the removal of reservations to treaties already ratified; and
- improving procedures for supervising implementation of State Party obligations, principally through monitoring by the relevant human rights treaty bodies.



114. In an environment of intense anti-terrorism measures, promoting the observance of human rights and ensuring that counter-terrorism measures comply with international human rights obligations raise new issues for the work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and requires new attention by the UN system.

115. Inadequacies in resources continue to limit the capacity of UN organizations to meet growing support requirements in human rights areas and to hamper efforts to mainstream human rights into the development and peace and security agendas; they need to be addressed across the system.

116. As in human rights, in the related area of support to democratic processes, the work of the UN system needs to be guided by a more comprehensive system-wide strategy, rooted in the Millennium Declaration, and to be mainstreamed more effectively in the system's overall plans and activities in pursuit of the Declaration's objectives. The universality, legitimacy and impartiality of the UN system gives it a distinct advantage in fostering inclusive democratic processes, which has yet to be fully exploited.

117. In the area of good governance, the UN system, in partnership with regional and civil society organizations, needs to integrate more purposefully its various activities in building capacities to advance the rule of law. To reinforce the rule of law, the United Nations has developed a "Strategy for an Era of Application of International Law: Action Plan" that provides guidelines for Member States' participation in compliance with the international treaty framework and aims to help States to prepare the necessary implementing legislation. Moving forward, the focus should be on:

- integrating more systematically the rule of law and transitional justice into the strategic and operational planning of peace operations;
- updating and expanding the UN guidelines, manuals and tools on rule of law topics;
- elaborating new and enhanced tools and mechanisms for transitional justice and for justice sector development;
- ensuring that all programmes and policies that support constitutional, judicial and legislative reform also promote gender equality;
- stepping up training on the rule of law and transitional justice; and
- developing further indicators of good governance, grounded in the provisions of the Millennium Declaration.

118. The Secretary-General, in his report to the 2005 World Summit, highlighted various ways to enhance UN efforts to secure for all peoples the "freedom to live in dignity," through promoting the rule of law, human rights and democracy. The future work of the UN system in these and related areas will be framed by the Summit's outcome.

