



UPR Info Pre-sessions

Empowering human rights
voices from the ground

UPR
INFO

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Empowering human rights voices
from the ground





A publication by

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UPR Info is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland. It aims to raise awareness of the Universal Periodic Review and to provide capacity-building tools to all stakeholders, such as United Nations (UN) Member States, civil society, media, and academics.



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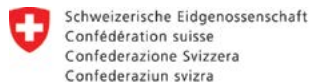
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#Presessions

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Introduction

Having reached the end of the second cycle of the UPR, and before the international community embarks on the third cycle in 2017, it is an opportune time to evaluate the mechanism's achievements and challenges. Over its two cycles, the UPR has levelled the playing field for all countries, with its unparalleled 100% participation rate from all corners, cultures and political fabrics of the world. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, all 193 UN Member States have duly taken their seat at the table. It is through this truly global dialogue that the UPR has consolidated the recognition that human rights are not a matter of irreproachable sovereign concern, but are subject to both national and international accountability.

Civil society plays a critical role in the UPR, as expressly recognised in founding HRC Resolution 5/1. Through the two first cycles, civil society organisations (CSOs) have explored numerous ways to engage in the process and to have an impact on its outcome. One of the most successful has been through advocacy. While not being able to speak during the review of their governments, and therefore impart their recommendations, CSOs have worked hard to ensure that their views would nonetheless be reflected. More than submission writing, advocacy has become the centre of CSOs' efforts in the lead up to the UPR process.

To strengthen these voices in the second cycle, *UPR Info* introduced in 2012 its Pre-sessions programme. Organised three times a year in Geneva, the international conferences have become an integral part of the UPR process. They provide a unique opportunity for CSOs to brief State delegations on the human rights situation in the State under review (SuR). The Pre-sessions can be considered now as the largest civil society platform for human rights advocacy in the world.

UPR Info is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, on the doorstep of *Palais des Nations*. The organisation was founded in 2008, following the inception of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism by the Human Rights Council (HRC) of the United Nations (UN).

UPR Info is the first and only organisation focusing specifically on the UPR process. The organisation's main goal is to ensure that all stakeholders can access the UPR as

an effective political mechanism to advance the realisation of human rights on the ground. The organisation's extensive experience in the UPR is unique as it addresses all human rights issues in all countries, without discrimination or politicisation. Throughout its various international and in-country activities, in particular the *Pre-sessions* programme, *UPR Info* has supported UPR stakeholders on almost 150 countries to date.

Aim of the publication

This publication aims to take stock of the five-year Pre-sessions programme, drawing on testimony from former Pre-session participants, including States, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), national and international CSOs. The results of the evaluation, coupled with the lessons learned by *UPR Info* will serve two purposes. The first objective, reflected in **Part I** of this publication, will evaluate what the Pre-sessions have accomplished to date, and how they can be improved upon going forward. The methodology of the evaluation is outlined in detail below. The second objective of the publication is to serve as a guide for future participants – both civil society and State representatives – as to what they can expect and gain from participation at the Pre-sessions. This is discussed below in **Part II**.

Methodology

The results and outcomes of this publication derive from an extensive evaluation conducted by *UPR Info* from August to November 2016. *UPR Info* reached out to key UPR stakeholders who had previously participated in the Pre-sessions to learn about their experience of the programme. The evaluation is based on two sources of information-gathering; 1) direct interviews and 2) surveys conducted by questionnaire. The composition of the study was as follows: 75 national CSOs; 14 international CSOs; eight NHRIs; and seven States (Permanent Missions to the United Nations in Geneva). The study was conducted as broadly as possible across all regions and in three languages; English, French and Spanish. In total, participants represented 44 countries; Australia; Austria; Belarus; Belgium; Canada; Czech Republic; Denmark; Fiji; Georgia; Greece; Haiti; Honduras; Ireland; Jamaica; Lebanon; Libya; Malawi; Malaysia; Maldives; Mauritania; Moldova; Mongolia; Mozambique; Namibia; Nepal; New Zealand; Niger; Paraguay; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; Singapore; Somalia; South Sudan; Sudan; Suriname; Sweden; Switzerland; Tanzania; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Togo; Uruguay; Venezuela; and Zimbabwe.

During the evaluation, participants were asked a multitude of questions, ranging from practical aspects to conceptual design of the Pre-sessions programme. One of the principal aims of the study was to learn from the experiences of the participants with a view towards improving the Pre-sessions. In this regard, civil society and NHRI participants were asked to critically reflect on a number of elements, such as:

- The extent to which the Pre-sessions met expectations;
- Whether the Pre-sessions proved to be effective from an advocacy perspective (bilateral follow-up with Recommending States (RS) and/or SuR);
- Whether interventions had an impact on the UPR recommendations; and
- Suggestions for improving various aspects of the Pre-sessions.

A second aim of the study was to gather information on strategies and experiences that worked well for civil society and NHRI Pre-session participants. These elements would provide the basis for best practices, practical advice and successful case studies. Future Pre-session speakers could then use this publication as a guide to

plan their interventions and participation from what had worked well previously. Questions included:

- Approaches to advocacy around the Pre-sessions; individual or concerted effort with other speakers;
- Planning trip to Geneva – important considerations;
- The highlights of the Pre-sessions experience; and
- General advice for future civil society participants;

For State delegates who were interviewed for the evaluation, the questions were constructed to understand the extent to which the Pre-sessions impacted their preparation for the UPR. The aim here was to ensure that Pre-sessions were providing an effective service to States in their information-gathering for UPR recommendations. State participants were therefore also asked to give their frank appraisal, as well as possible means for improvement. Questions included:

- Motivation and frequency of attending Pre-sessions;
- Expectations from the Pre-sessions – whether they impact UPR recommendations;
- Level of satisfaction with the format and range of human rights issues;
- Whether Pre-sessions lead to bilateral advocacy;
- How civil society can prepare effectively; and
- Areas for improvement.

Having evaluated, quantitatively and qualitatively, answers over **100** interviews and questionnaires inclusive, *UPR Info* presents its conclusive findings in “*UPR Info: Empowering human rights voices from the ground*”.



High attendance for the Pre-session of Nepal (October 2015)

Part I

Assessment of the Pre-sessions (2012–2016)

Part I has been prepared with the input of 104 former Pre-session participants, both State and civil society alike. Over the next two chapters, *UPR Info* endeavours to provide a holistic evaluation of the Pre-sessions programme since it was launched in 2012. The assessment aims to be self-reflective, identifying strengths, weaknesses and room for improvement to be built upon going forward into the UPR's third cycle.



CSOs speakers at the Pre-session of Lebanon (October 2016)

1. UPR Info Pre-sessions

This chapter will discuss the inception of the Pre-sessions programme. It will look at the history and context of civil society engagement in the UPR, including the formal processes and related challenges. The chapter will then follow the development of the Pre-sessions; the objectives they pursue, as well as the organisations that have participated.

1.1 History

The Pre-sessions were introduced in 2012, at the beginning of the second cycle of the UPR. *UPR Info* was acutely aware that the formal UPR structure limited the extent to which civil society could engage dynamically with the process. The main means for civil society to contribute to the UPR's information-gathering is by preparing a written stakeholder submission to be submitted from six to seven months in advance of the State's Review. This means that there is an information void of several months between the date of submission and the date of the review, where crucial human rights developments cannot be raised. In terms of content of the submissions, the strict word limit (either 2,815 or 5,630 words for individual and joint submissions respectively) also limits the degree of detail that civil society can provide. In addition, the large volume of the information received from all of the civil society submissions is then summarised into a single ten-page document by the UPR Branch at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Furthermore, these documents are published on a date very close to the actual Review, preventing diplomats to familiarise themselves with issues raised by civil society. Finally, civil society is not allowed to take the floor at the review, preventing them from directly addressing the UPR Working Group. Nevertheless, some CSOs sought to come to Geneva to conduct advocacy in the days of the UPR, not fully cognisant of the fact that, at this late stage, the recommendations had already been drafted. Thus their efforts were to a large extent in vein. Overall, while the role of CSOs was duly recognised by the legal foundation of the UPR, civil society was not optimising the new opportunities brought by the mechanism, unfamiliar with the timeline and impact of specific advocacy activities.

Having in mind these limited avenues of engagement, the Pre-sessions were introduced with a dual aim. Firstly, the Pre-sessions offered civil society an international platform to directly advocate to State delegations ahead of the UPR session; and secondly to facilitate diplomatic delegations to ascertain information on countries' human rights landscapes. The ultimate aim of the Pre-sessions was to ensure that the recommendations that would be made at the Review would be specific and well-targeted.

At the beginning of the Pre-sessions programme for UPR session 13, a high proportion of speakers were from international CSOs, many of whom had a presence in Geneva. However, as the programme developed throughout the sessions, and as its potential became known across the civil society community, voices from national CSOs and NHRIs became more and more engaged. The Pre-sessions have since evolved to become the largest CSO platform for human rights advocacy in the world run by a non-profit organisation. To date, we have offered human rights defenders the opportunity to speak on 149 countries across the globe.¹ National CSOs in the majority of these States have limited financial resources and/or are isolated geographically, making it difficult to arrange the trip to Geneva. In such situations, *UPR Info* reached out to international CSOs to see whether they can speak on behalf of national partners, though this has not always proven possible. It is hoped that in the third cycle there will be increased financial and technical support available for civil society to access the UPR, including the Pre-sessions.

As the Pre-sessions become more and more enshrined in the UPR process, their impact is being recognised at a high level. *UPR Info* has had the honour to welcome several influential human rights voices to deliver keynote addresses at the Pre-



Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Kate Gilmore. Opening address at the UPR Info Pre-sessions ahead of the 26th UPR Session (October 2016)

sessions. Throughout 2015, the former President of the Human Rights Council (HRC), H.E. Joachim R cker, and the former Vice-President the HRC, H.E. Juan Esteban Aguirre Mart nez, both joined the Pre-sessions as guest speakers. Ambassador R cker commended CSOs and NHRIs engaging in the Pre-sessions for their commitment to the UPR mechanism, describing them as “key actors in delivering human rights”. Most recently, in October 2016, *UPR Info* was honoured to welcome the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Kate Gilmore, to open the final series of Pre-sessions of the UPR’s second cycle. The Deputy High Commissioner hailed the work of CSOs working on human rights, while highlighting the State’s responsibility to foster an open space for civil society: *“There is no purpose of government without the enhancement of the people it governs; it is a service not a control. Civil society is the purpose, the ability for the people to contribute to a community, create safe spaces, and unity.”*

Officials from States to the UN have praised the important role that CSOs play in informing delegations ahead of the Review, resulting in a strong legitimisation of civil society in the UPR process.



The Pre-sessions have become an institution in Geneva, upon which States and civil society are firmly relying upon.

H.E. Mr Juan Esteban Aguirre Mart nez, former Vice-president of the Human Rights Council. Opening Statement at the Pre-sessions ahead of the 22nd UPR (April 2015)

2012

UPR session 13: Algeria; Bahrain; Brazil; Ecuador; India; Indonesia; Morocco; Netherlands; Philippines; Poland; South Africa; Tunisia; and United Kingdom

UPR session 14: Argentina; Benin; Ghana; Guatemala; Japan; Pakistan; Peru; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; Switzerland; Ukraine; and Zambia

UPR session 15: Botswana; Burundi; France; Israel; Luxembourg; Mali; Montenegro; Romania; Serbia; and United Arab Emirates (UAE)

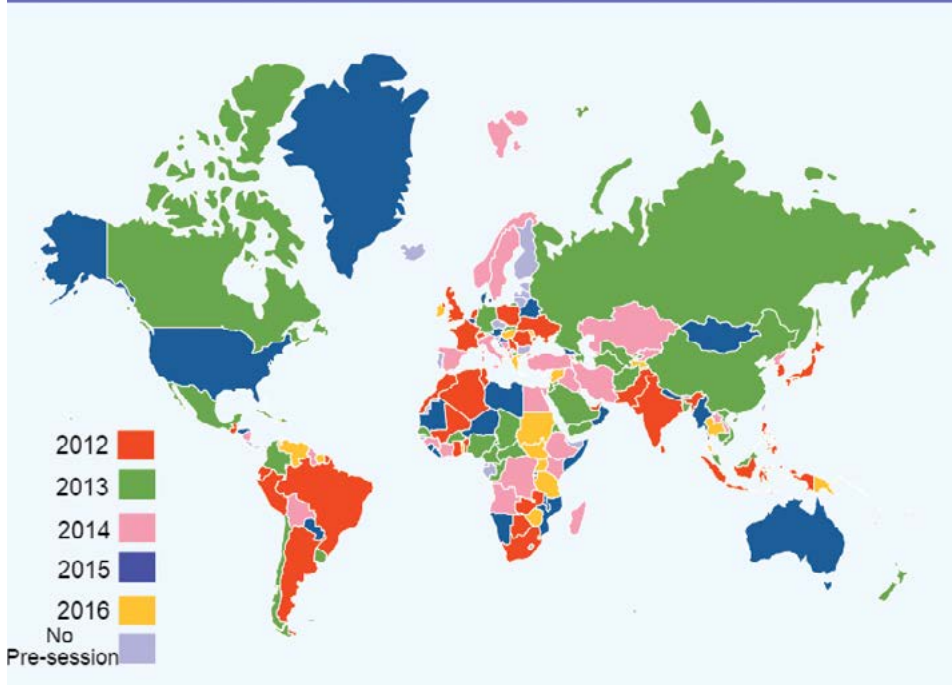
2013

UPR session 16: Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Burkina Faso; Cameroon; Canada; Colombia; Cuba; Germany; Russian Federation; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; and Uzbekistan

UPR session 17: Central African Republic; Chad; China; Congo (Republic of); Jordan; Malaysia; Mexico; Nigeria; Saudi Arabia; and Senegal

UPR session 18: Afghanistan; Cambodia; Chile; Dominican Republic; Eritrea; New Zealand; Macedonia; Slovakia; Uruguay; Vietnam; and Yemen

States reviewed at the Pre-sessions



2014

UPR session 19: Albania; Côte d'Ivoire; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Congo (Democratic Republic of); Equatorial Guinea; Ethiopia; Nicaragua; Norway; and Qatar

UPR session 20: Angola; Bolivia; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Egypt; El Salvador; Fiji; Gambia; Iran; Iraq; Italy; Kazakhstan; and Madagascar

UPR session 21: Armenia; Guinea; Guyana; Kenya; Kiribati; Kuwait; Kyrgyzstan; Laos; Spain; Turkey; and Sweden

2015

UPR session 22: Belarus; Croatia; Honduras; Jamaica; Liberia; Libya; Malawi; Maldives; Mongolia; and the United States of America

UPR session 23: Austria; Australia; Georgia; Lebanon; Mauritania; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Oman; and Rwanda

UPR session 24: Belgium; Denmark; Mozambique; Namibia; Niger; Paraguay; Sierra Leone; Singapore; and Somalia

2016

UPR session 25: Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; Sudan; Suriname; Swaziland; Tajikistan; Tanzania; and Thailand

UPR session 26: Haiti; Moldova; South Sudan; Syria; Timor-Leste; Togo; Uganda; Venezuela; and Zimbabwe

1.2 Objectives

UPR Info Pre-sessions pursue two main objectives to benefit Permanent Missions and civil society alike:

✓ **Supporting bottom-up advocacy at the UPR**

For grassroots CSOs working on the ground, the international human rights mechanisms can seem inaccessible and far removed from their day-to-day work. Yet, the UPR has the ability to bring about real change in even the most remote areas. What is needed is reliable and detailed information from the ground about the human rights issues faced by the population, and how recommendations should be structured to adequately address these challenges. The Pre-sessions serve as a unique sounding board for grassroots and national voices to bring their knowledge and experience to the attention of the international community. Upon returning to their home countries after participating at the Pre-sessions, civil society speakers feel a sense of ownership and vested interest in the UPR process. They are also inclined to share their Pre-sessions experience with their colleagues and communities, which helps to popularise the UPR and raise aware on the impact it can have for all rights holders.

✓ **Providing Permanent Missions with first-hand sources of information**

The Pre-sessions represent a prime opportunity for Permanent Missions to save time by engaging with both national and international CSOs in a single forum. Compared with having to read the large quantity of UPR written submissions, the Pre-sessions bring the information to life by affording the RS the opportunity to hear the human rights testimony first-hand. Permanent Missions can also send questions in advance to *UPR Info*, which the moderator will ask to the civil society speakers during the Pre-sessions. The questions offer the opportunity to gain information on the level of implementation of previous recommendations, as well as the broader human rights context.

1.3 Pre-session participants

149 countries were reviewed at the Pre-sessions in 2012–2016, averaging at 10/11 Pre-sessions per series. The composition and number of panellist speakers shows the extent to which the event has been a veritable multistakeholder exercise. To date, over 700 organisations have spoken at the Pre-sessions, representing:

- ✎ **467 national CSOs;**
- ✎ **206 international CSOs; and**
- ✎ **33 NHRIs.**

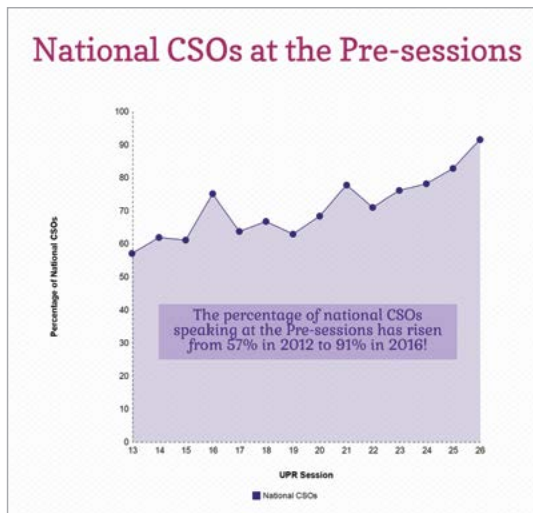
In addition to broad representation of speakers, the amount of Permanent Missions who have attended the Pre-sessions is a sure sign of the event's success. Since 2012, **150 Permanent Missions** have attended the Pre-sessions to listen to the testimony of human rights advocates from every corner of the world.

National Civil Society Organisations



Georgian CSOs discuss the human rights situation at their country's Pre-session (October 2015)

UPR Info endeavours to prioritise the participation of national CSOs at Pre-session panels in order to give maximum exposure to voices from the ground. At the very first series of UPR Pre-sessions in 2012, **57%** of speakers were national CSOs. This relatively low figure represented a period where the Pre-sessions programme was in its early stages, and not much was known about it at the national level.



By contrast, at the last series of Pre-sessions in 2016, the percentage of national voices had risen substantially to **91%**. This can be attributed to the fact that the Pre-sessions have garnered strong reputation across the international human rights community, which has in turn filtered down to national actors. In addition, *UPR Info*'s regional offices in Kenya and Thailand have been engaging more and more across Africa and Asia since their establishment in 2015. As such, the organisation's human rights network is expanding and demand for our activities is growing.

International Civil Society Organisations

UPR Info maintains strong ties with international human rights organisations, based in Geneva and abroad. Indeed, at the outset of the Pre-sessions programme in 2012, it was our international CSO partners that stepped in to ensure that there was a civil society presence to raise the human rights concerns of numerous countries. To date, 206 international CSOs have joined the panel at the Pre-sessions, accounting for 29% of all Pre-session speakers. Their interventions are rooted in first-hand human rights testimonials that they have received from their partners on the ground.



It has become increasingly frequent for international CSOs to support the travel of their members or colleagues from the field, to participate at the Pre-sessions. Another key role of international CSOs is to join the panel where national voices or unable to do so. This can happen in two types of situations. Firstly, where the State to be reviewed is geographically remote, it is not always feasible for many, if any, national CSOs to make the trip. In this situation, it is often their international partners who speak on the panel to represent the local voices. This has been the case for the Pre-sessions on States such as Maldives, Nauru, and Samoa, where international and national voices came together to make a compete panel. The second situation where international CSOs take the floor is in situations where human rights defenders from the ground have been prevented from travelling to Geneva, notwithstanding their will to participate. Unfortunately, this situation has arisen on a few occasions throughout the Pre-sessions history (see **chapter 5.2** below). In such cases, international CSOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights, and the International Service for Human Rights have stepped in to ensure that the Pre-sessions have gone ahead. This show of international collaboration

and support for national civil society countered the coercive tactics by State authorities to suppress critique of the country’s human rights situation. This is an unfortunate situation that is even less acceptable in a process that puts the spirit of cooperation at its centre, where States have praised the UPR as a unique mechanism, offering space for civil society. Fortunately, the vast majority of States has fully embraced this dynamic, distancing themselves from the few that try to undermine the integrity and inclusiveness of the UPR process.

National Human Rights Institutions

To date, 33 NHRIs have participated at the Pre-sessions. While the number may seem low when compared to the 149 States that have featured at the Pre-sessions, it must be borne in mind that not every State has a NHRI, and not every NHRI is engaged in the UPR process. *UPR Info* is committed to engaging with more and more NHRIs throughout the Pre-sessions. NHRIs are strategically positioned to play a key role in the UPR process as they are often well-placed to



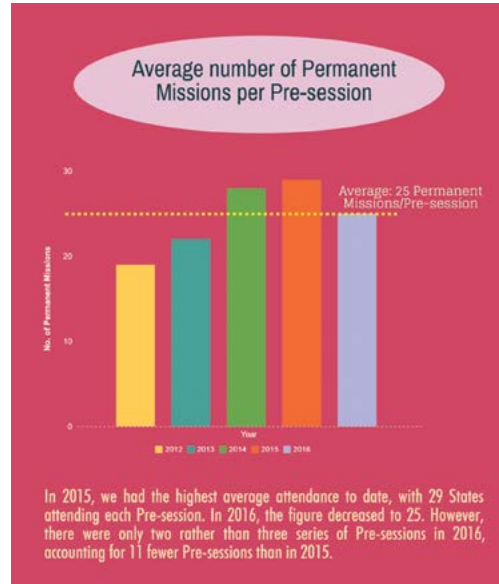
provide a critical and independent overview on a broad range of human rights issues in the SuR. NHRIs can also act as a key bridging partner between Government and civil society, throughout all stages of the UPR, in particular at the implementation stage. In our experience, several NHRIs stood out for their important role in fostering dialogue between State and civil society representatives, in particular, the NHRIs in Australia, Denmark, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Malaysia, Namibia, Nepal, and Niger. At the same time, other NHRIs that were newer to the UPR such as in Austria, Ireland, Moldova, Oman, and Zimbabwe, also expressed interest to engage more in the process, including through the Pre-sessions.

Comparing participation rates from Pre-sessions in 2012 and 2016, NHRI engagement has increased significantly. For the three series of Pre-sessions in 2012, only two NHRIs participated as speakers. By contrast, in 2016, though there were only two series of Pre-sessions, there were still 10 NHRIs on the speaker panel. *UPR Info* will continue to reach out to NHRIs in the third cycle to ensure the Pre-sessions retain their importance for all UPR stakeholders.

Permanent Missions

The core objective of the Pre-sessions is to shape the recommendations that States will make at the UPR. It is therefore crucial that the Pre-sessions are well-attended by the Permanent Missions (PMs). To date, 150 out of the 178 Permanent Missions located in Geneva have attended the Pre-sessions. Indeed, as the reputation of the Pre-sessions grows, the number of new Missions in attendance is constantly increasing.

The Pre-sessions have been well-attended by State delegates, with 2015 having the highest average participation of Permanent Missions since the Programme began. **29** Missions were present on average at each Pre-session in 2015, a number that has been steadily growing since 2012, where the average number was **19**. 2016 saw a slight decrease in the average number of Permanent Missions to 25 per Pre-session. This can notably be explained by the fact that there were only two series of Pre-sessions, where normally there would have been three. As such, there were **11** fewer Pre-sessions in 2016 than in 2015. This was on account of the third cycle being postponed until 2017.



The Pre-sessions are a symbiotic event for CSOs and State delegates alike. CSOs get the opportunity to lobby a large number of diplomatic delegations, while the Missions are offered an interactive account of the human rights situation on the ground, helping them in the preparation of the recommendations. Importantly, the Pre-sessions offer the delegates a very time-efficient way in which to brief themselves on the human rights record, rather than having to rely on a large volume of written submissions and compiled reports. Feedback received from the Permanent Missions has been strongly positive. In particular, State delegates have appreciated the broad range of topics covered by the speakers, normally shared first-hand by the rights holders themselves.



Thank you and your whole team for providing my Mission with such a unique opportunity to have a meaningful and open discussion with relevant stakeholders of the upcoming UPR session.

Mr Carlos Zorilla, Permanent Mission of Mexico

In addition, States found that engaging bilaterally at the sidelines of the Pre-sessions allowed them to learn about the relevant issues on a more in-depth basis.

Importantly, the attendance of the State under Review at its own Pre-session is getting stronger each year. Their participation offers an opportunity for dialogue between the State and its national civil society. In 2012, 63% of Permanent Missions attended their own Pre-session. By 2015 however, this figure had increased by thirty percentage points, where 93% of SuR attended their own Pre-session.



Because of the value of dialogue, we think that it is necessary to have discussions and be open to observations ... [The Pre-sessions] give us an opportunity to hear our own civil society as it communicates its views to the Geneva community about the [UPR] report.”

H.E. Mothusi Bruce Rabasha Palai, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Botswana

The record-holder for the highest attendance to date goes to the Pre-session of the **United States of America** (April 2015). The event was attended by over 50 Permanent Missions!

1.4 UPR Info grantees

UPR Info has a limited amount of funds to support poor and marginalised communities to engage in international human rights advocacy. Since 2013, *UPR Info* has supported CSOs from almost thirty countries to participate at the Pre-sessions: Angola, Armenia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Mongolia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, and Uganda.

In recent years, our support has further helped the participation of CSOs that also form part of *UPR Info*'s Follow-up programme. Implementation of recommendations is the focus of the Follow-up programme, taking place in our partner countries after the UPR Working Group stage.² The first step of engagement is to identify civil society grantees with whom *UPR Info* can work with before and after the UPR. These grantees of the Follow-up programme are supported by *UPR Info* to travel to Geneva in order to participate at the Pre-sessions and to participate in an advanced UPR training. After the Pre-sessions, *UPR Info* supports the CSO partners for the implementation of recommendations. Viewed holistically, the Pre-sessions and Follow-up programme represent *UPR Info*'s continuum of engagement before and after the UPR. The



Ugandan CSOs participating in advanced training ahead of the country's Pre-sessions (October 2016)

complementarily of both programmes ensures impact and sustainability of the UPR on the ground, as the programmes are designed to include all actors in the implementation of the recommendations.

In addition to these travel grants, *UPR Info* has also been able to support francophone human rights defenders to participate at the Pre-sessions. This grant is particularly relevant in the context of Geneva, where French is the primary language, as well as being a core language of diplomacy spoken widely throughout the United Nations. In this regard, the participation of human rights defenders from 11 countries has been supported to date: Armenia; Croatia; Guinea; Guyana; Haiti; Laos; Lebanon; Mauritania; Niger; Rwanda; and Togo.

Finally, in 2016, courtesy of increased financial support, *UPR Info* was able to bring human rights defenders to Geneva to speak at the Pre-sessions of South Sudan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Going forward into the third cycle, *UPR Info* hopes to be able to extend its financial and technical support to more grantees for improved and



Thai CSOs engaging in dialogue with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland (March 2016)



Five national CSOs take the floor at the Pre-session of Zimbabwe (October 2016)

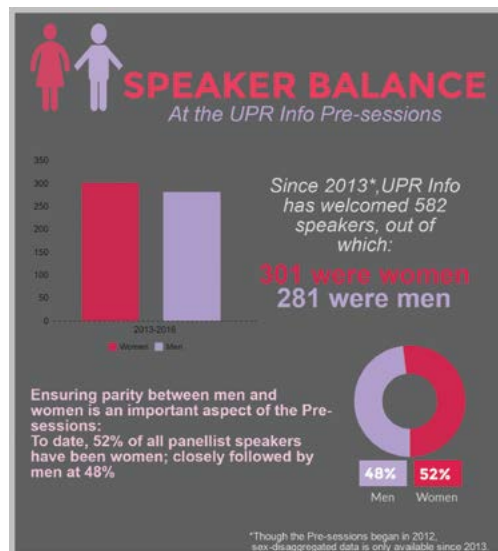
sustainable engagement throughout all stages of the UPR. Both the Pre-sessions and Follow-up programme will also be developing to include new steps in its activities, including the organisation of in-country Pre-sessions (see [chapter 10.1](#) below).

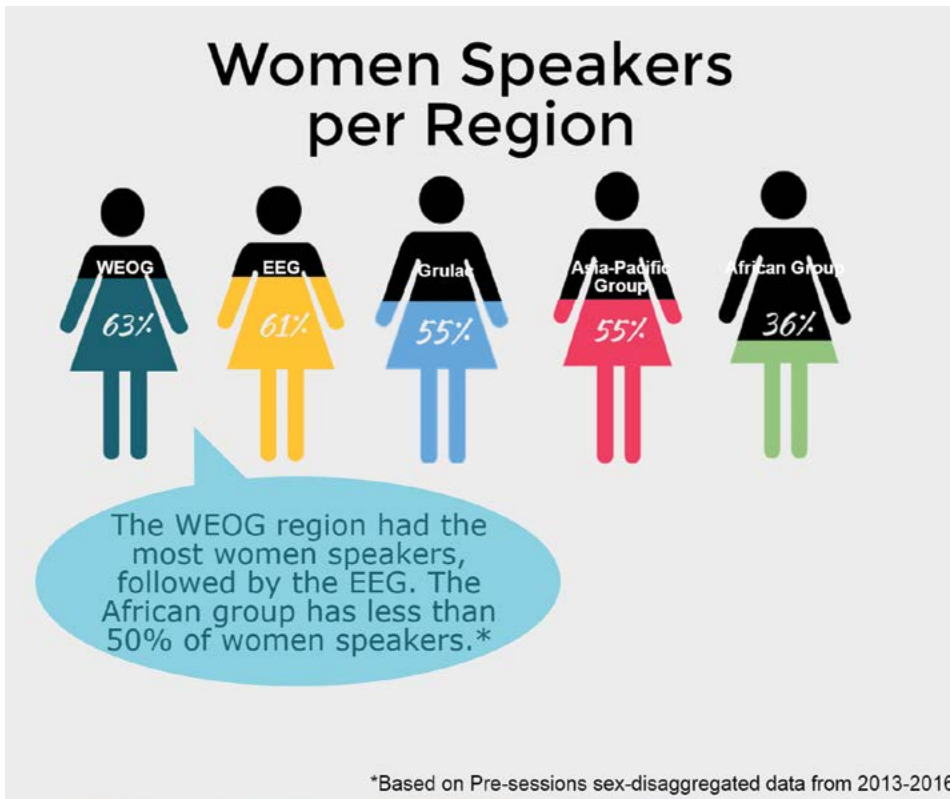
1.5 Gender integration throughout the Pre-sessions

Recognising the transversal nature of gender across all human rights, both civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, *UPR Info* is committed to mainstreaming gender throughout its activities. *UPR Info* systematically integrates a gender perspective at its Pre-sessions to ensure that gender balance and diversity is represented at the international advocacy platform.

Since the beginning of Pre-sessions in 2012, *UPR Info* has ensured a balance of male/female speakers. To date, **52%** of all our panellists have been women.

Nevertheless, there are certain imbalances across geographical regions in terms of the composition of Pre-session speakers.³ For example, for Pre-session countries located in the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) and the Eastern European Group, women account for **more than 60%** of the panellist speakers. In the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) speakers were comprised of 55% of women, and 45% of men, an almost 50:50 composition. However, the speakers on Pre-session countries located in the African Group have a significant underrepresentation of women, accounting for only 36% of speakers have been women. Since the establishment of *UPR Info* Africa in 2015, the organisation is now working closer with CSOs on the





ground ahead of the Geneva Pre-sessions. In this sense, it is an objective of *UPR Info* to strongly encourage African CSOs to nominate more women representatives to speak at the Pre-sessions.

Gender mainstreaming throughout all our activities, including the Pre-sessions and Follow-up Programme, is a core organisation strategy adopted by all three offices of *UPR Info*. Maintaining parity between the sexes is only one step, *albeit* an important consideration, towards integrating gender. *UPR Info* also adopts a broad understanding of the term gender to include more than a binary distinction of men and women. Ensuring diversity, including recognising different forms of gender identity and expression, is also a key consideration for *UPR Info*. The Pre-sessions are a platform for *all* civil society voices, in particular those who have been marginalised on any grounds. As we move towards the third cycle of the UPR, we will continue to ensure that the Pre-sessions remain an inclusive event representing a diversity of voices, including on the basis of gender.

Gender diversity at the Pre-sessions: Samoa

UPR Info held a Pre-session on Samoa in April 2016, one month before the State's second cycle review. The Samoan CSO, *Samoa Fa'afafine Association (SFA)*, travelled half way across the world to Geneva to ensure that national voices were represented at the State's Pre-session. The organisation's representative made a compelling presentation to promote gender equality in Samoa, including non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. While culturally Samoa recognises four genders – male, female, *Fa'afafine* and *Fa'afatama* – legal recognition is limited to the binary distinction of either a man or woman. Despite reforms in the labour code to protect Samoans from discrimination on the basis of sexual identity, no anti-discrimination provisions exist to protect gender identity and expression. The civil society representative also highlighted the challenges of ensuring gender recognition on identity documents (birth certificates, drivers licence and passport) for individuals who have undergone gender confirmation surgery.

In parallel with the Pre-session in Geneva, CSOs in Samoa organised a national Pre-session, modelled after the *UPR Info* event. This provided a platform for dialogue at the national level amongst Government, development partners and civil society, to further discuss recommendations on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues in Samoa.

The intensive national and international advocacy efforts of SFA and partner CSOs yielded significant success at the UPR; **eight States** made recommendations on the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity during Samoa's review. Since the adoption of Samoa's UPR Report in September 2016, SFA is continuing its advocacy activities through its Community Consultation on Human Rights (Fa'afafine Week Programme) to foster frank conversation with Government leaders, law reformers and community leaders on the noted UPR recommendations concerning SOGI and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) issues in Samoa. SFA believes that stakeholders on all sides are now ready to engage meaningfully on the issues.

2. Impact of the Pre-sessions

UPR Info has been organising Pre-sessions since 2012 and has amassed five years of experience in the process. Yet, every series of Pre-sessions brings with it new challenges, successes and ideas. Crucial to the success of the Pre-sessions is learning from the objective experiences of our partners – CSOs, NHRIs and States. After every series of Pre-sessions, *UPR Info* circulates a questionnaire to all CSO and NHRI participants to ask for critical feedback across numerous elements of the event, including format, expectations and impact on the recommendations. In addition, *UPR Info* is constant discussion with States about their assessment of the Pre-sessions and how we can improve them to make the event as effective as possible in facilitating their engagement with civil society. In this chapter, we introduce the main findings.

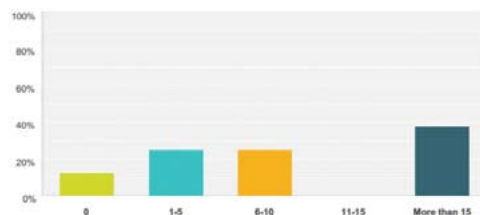
2.1 CSO influence the UPR outcomes

While conducting its evaluation, *UPR Info* was humbled to receive a significant amount of positive feedback on the Pre-sessions. By and large, States and civil society alike found that the Pre-sessions played a critical role in the UPR process, providing a much-needed space for stakeholders to come together in a constructive and informative environment.

In terms of CSO speakers seeing their issues reflected in the recommendations at the UPR, the impact was impressive across the board. To take the most recent data of UPR session 25 as an illustration (May 2016), CSO and NHRI speakers were asked to rate the level of impact they felt their participation in the Pre-session had on the review of their country. 50% of respondents felt their participation had a significant impact, while 38% believed that their participation had a strong impact. Only one respondent could not rate the level of impact of his participation.

Another question to measure impact looked at the number of recommendations that respondents raised at the

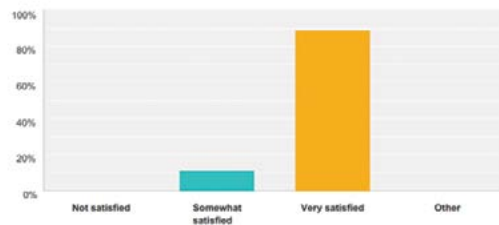
Q13 How many of your recommendations, proposed at the Pre-session, were used/quoted by recommending States at the UPR?



Pre-sessions that were ultimately used by recommending States at the UPR. An impressive 38% of respondents remarked that more than 15 of their recommendations were ultimately used; 25% of respondents said between six and ten recommendations, while a further 25% had between one and five of their recommendations incorporated by States. Only one respondent answered that zero of the organisation’s recommendations were used by States. He explained that the issue covered by the organisation – inhumane treatment of military conscripts and forced conscription – was “too sensitive” an issue for States to raise due to diplomatic sensitivities. Nevertheless, the respondent still believed that the organisation’s participation at the Pre-sessions had a significant impact on the State’s UPR, as it allowed them the opportunity to start a discussion with the diplomatic Missions. He believed that over time, the information on military practices in the State would filter into the process.

At the time of writing, it was too early to pose questions regarding the recommendations made the participants of session 26 as the UPR review was to be held in November 2016. However, other questions were asked to measure the level of satisfaction of the participants on the overall format of the Pre-session. In the questionnaire, 90% of respondents said they were very satisfied, and 10% said somewhat satisfied. The respondent who was somewhat satisfied explained his sole concern of being limited by the speaker time to deliver the presentation.

Q6 Were you satisfied with the format of the event? (For example, the room, space provided for NGO documentation, the moderation of the panel by the chair, etc.)



Examples of successful civil society advocacy

Nepal: women’s rights

Panellists from the organisations *Himalayan Human Rights Monitors* and *Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre* raised the issues of women’s rights in Nepal, in particular addressing the State’s weak laws against gender-based violence. One of the recommendations put forward by the speakers, representing many CSO voices in Nepal, was to reform the narrow definition of rape, which included a 35-day statute of limitation for reporting. This specific recommendation was raised by four States in the formal recommendations. Following the recommendations made on that issue, Nepal extended the timeframe to 180 days, and has stated it will consider further prolongation.



Rwanda: the rights of indigenous peoples

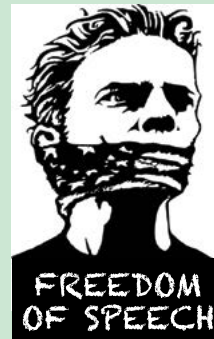
During the Pre-session of Rwanda ahead of its second cycle, a member of the indigenous Batwa people explained the marginalisation experienced by his community in the country. The Batwa population had been dispossessed of their traditional land, and had their



forestry way of life destroyed. Consequently 87% of the population lived in extreme poverty. In addition, there was neither access to legal recourse nor programmes in place to support the rehabilitation of the Batwa. While only three recommendations were made on the rights of the Batwa in the first cycle, the issue was significantly more visible in the second cycle, yielding nine recommendations in total.

Mongolia: decriminalisation of defamation

A further concrete example of effective civil society advocacy can be seen in the case of the Pre-session of Mongolia. *Globe International Center Mongolia*, a CSO championing the role of civil society and democracy in the country, included a recommendation calling for the decriminalisation of defamation. The United States, the Czech Republic and Ireland all included a recommendation calling for the decriminalisation of defamation, with each State having been present for Mongolia's Pre-session.



2.2 Ensuring universality

Universality of opportunities is *the* defining trademark of the UPR. All States are equally treated and have an identical role to play in the UPR. This principle was also mirrored at the Pre-sessions, which were organised on every country, providing there was an availability of civil society. In addition, all Permanent Missions in Geneva – without exception – were invited to attend the Pre-sessions, including the State under Review. This reflected both universality and transparency, two important cornerstones in multilateral, multistakeholder engagement. To date, 150 out of the 178 (84%) Permanent Missions in Geneva have attended the Pre-sessions, highlighting the event's universal relevance.

2.3 Legitimising civil society participation in the UPR

By inviting Permanent Missions from all regions to attend the Pre-sessions, including those that do not habitually meet with CSOs, *UPR Info* facilitated the beginning of a dialogue between States and civil society. In addition, *UPR Info* also brought together the SuR to meet with their own CSOs, which provided an opportunity to strengthen relations and engagement at the national level. The transparent nature of the Pre-sessions has built trust between the parties, where engagement was promoted through a constructive and collaborative spirit.

2.4 Preparing the ground for specific recommendations

According to our analysis, only 34% of the recommendations made over the two cycles of UPR contain specific actions.⁴ *UPR Info* aimed to enhance the quality and specificity of recommendations to be made by diplomats during the UPR by working with CSOs in advance of their participation at the Pre-sessions. Through our advanced training, we advised civil society speakers on how to formulate action-orientated, specific recommendations to be included in their presentations. Our collaborative efforts have met with some indicators of success in the pursuit of this mission. Between the first six rounds of the Pre-sessions (2012–2014) and the following six (2014–2016), the specific recommendations increased from 31% to 39% respectively.⁵ This success, though seemingly technical in nature, has significant impact for national CSOs and Governments. When it comes to vague recommendations, many governments do not know what activities to undertake in order to realise full implementation. On the other hand, as recommendations become more precise, there is an increased likelihood that civil society can work with governments to accomplish specific human rights improvements. In addition, it is easier for all stakeholders to assess the level of implementation of specific recommendations, and gauge what further measures need to be taken.

2.5 Continuity of recommendations

In addition to encouraging specific recommendations, *UPR Info* also recommended to CSO speakers to make reference to the recommendations raised during the State's previous cycle. The rationale here was to ensure that each cycle of the UPR is not seen as a stand-alone examination undertaken in a vacuum. Rather, each review was a new chapter in the State's human rights narrative building on the previous one, where recommendations reflected the improvements made and persisting challenges since the last review.

3. Best practices

Throughout our five year experience of the Pre-session programme, coupled with the results from our evaluation, *UPR Info* has been able to identify best practices to advise future participants. The following represents some of the strategies and tools that have been found to have high impact at the Pre-sessions:

3.1 Coordinated civil society

Particularly well-organised UPR coalitions were seen at the Pre-sessions of Armenia, Australia, Ireland, Kenya, Malaysia, Mongolia, Moldova, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Uganda, United States of America, and Venezuela. While formal UPR coalitions are the structure best fitted to concerted advocacy at the Pre-sessions, yet even informal collaborations can make a good impression on the Recommending States. Where diplomats see a united and coherent voice amongst civil society, the impact of their collective statements is significantly increased. In terms of bilateral advocacy, CSOs can employ a strategy to each meet with different representatives, making sure that all participants have a particular issues that they will raise amongst target States.



We broke up into thematic groups so that States interested in a particular topic was approached by the relevant thematic group. This strategy allowed us to have more informal meetings and ensured that the States we approached were those working on our particular issues.

Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR, 2016.

In addition to coordinating with other panellists for the Pre-sessions, relationships can also be built for strategic collaboration throughout additional phases of the UPR. Feedback from participants regarding their interaction with other speaker organisations after the Pre-sessions showed a strong inclination of continued

cooperation. For Pre-session participants of the 22nd and 23rd UPR sessions, 94% said that they continued to collaborate with one another whilst doing advocacy work in Geneva and in-country. A similar result was seen from the evaluation of participants of the 25th UPR session, which showed that 90% of CSOs continued to work together. Working in either formal coalitions or informal partnerships is an effective strategy to influence UPR recommendations. It presents a united and professional civil society, showing consistency and reliability of the information being shared.

3.2 Partnering with international partners

Both State and civil society participants made the point that national CSOs can enhance their advocacy potential by partnering with international CSOs working on the same issue in Geneva. International CSOs generally have a strong network of diplomatic colleagues, as well as experience with arranging bilateral meetings with the Permanent Missions, and thus can help local partners in their lobbying activities. One State delegate commented that while the highlight of the Pre-sessions event is receiving information from grassroots activists, they can sometimes benefit from having an experienced international CSO to join them in meetings to make sure that the flow of information is clear and to the point.

UPR Info has seen fruitful partnerships amongst numerous international and national CSOs in the context of the Pre-sessions, including: *La Fédération internationale de l'Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture* (FIACAT) and its national association in Belgium; Forum Asia and its member organisation from Myanmar; Franciscans International and CSO partners from Kenya and Ivory Coast; International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) and its partners organisations from Hungary, Samoa, Suriname, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe; and World Vision and its national chapter in Niger.

3.3 Advocacy Factsheets

Where there is strong coordination amongst national civil society, in particular UPR coalitions, CSOs should strongly consider collectively preparing UPR advocacy factsheets. The factsheets are a collection of individual documents, each focussing on a particular human rights topic. Together the documents provide a comprehensive overview of the human rights situation within the country, including how certain issues have been reflected in the State's UPR. Crucially, the factsheets include recommendations and written questions that civil society would like to see raised at the UPR. The idea for UPR factsheets originated with the Human Rights NGO Forum of Mongolia ahead of the State's UPR in 2015, and proved to be a success at the country's Pre-session.⁶ Since then, civil society groups from several States have followed suit, including Australia, Moldova, Myanmar, Thailand, Uganda, and Venezuela.⁷ States' feedback on the factsheets has been resoundingly positive; delegates are particularly impressed by the coherence and clarity of the publications, where each



Civil society UPR Advocacy Factsheets: Australia, Mongolia, Moldova, Myanmar, Thailand, Uganda, and Venezuela

issue contextualised at the beginning of each factsheet, followed by the relevant recommendations. CSO participants interested in producing similar UPR advocacy factsheets for their own State can take inspiration from the examples produced by civil society in the seven countries mentioned.

Panellists’ highlights of the Pre-sessions

“ This was the first time that local CSOs from my country were afforded the opportunity to lobby diplomats at the international arena. This was a hallmark event and an empowering experience.”

“ Being able to meet diplomats separately, who were brought together by the Pre-sessions. The event itself was important because there were so many people there.”

“ The Pre-sessions create a space to allow for everyone to come together – CSOs and States.”

“Looking around the room and seeing that interest in my country was high, including from States not initially part of our lobbying strategy. From our side, we presented a unified civil society, taking a collaborative approach.”

“Being a grassroots CSO from the ground, it was great to see that the Permanent Missions were very interested in what we had to say. It was our first time to address sovereign states.”

3.4 Case study: Myanmar

UPR Info Asia spearheaded the first in-country Pre-sessions (discussed in **chapter 10.1**), ahead of Myanmar’s second UPR, scheduled for November 2015. As a first step, in June 2015, *UPR Info Asia* extensively trained more than 30 grass-roots and national CSOs in Myanmar. In September 2015, *UPR Info Asia*, in partnership with the national CSO *Equality Myanmar*, organised diplomatic dialogues amongst CSOs and local



National CSOs from Myanmar travel to Geneva to participate at the country’s Pre-session, supported by UPR Info Asia Regional Director, Emilie Pradichit (October 2015)

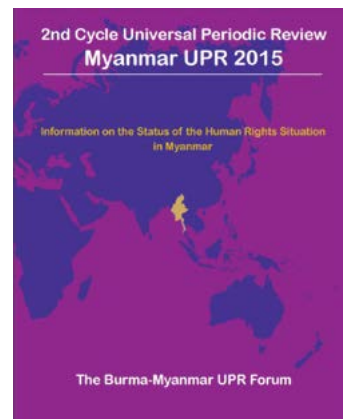
embassies in view of the UPR of Myanmar. This first of these dialogues was held in Yangon, Myanmar, while a second meeting, following the same format, was repeated in Bangkok, Thailand. The events mirrored the Geneva Pre-sessions, and aimed at increasing the impact of Myanmar CSOs in influencing the language and issues that would be raised in the recommendations at the UPR. As a final step in October 2015, one month ahead of the review, *UPR Info Asia’s* Regional Director accompanied the human rights defenders of the Burma-Myanmar Forum to Geneva to support the pinnacle of their lobbying activities at the international Pre-session of Myanmar.



Myanmar civil society speaking on the rights of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (October 2015)

During the Pre-session in Geneva, one CSO speaker delivered a particularly poignant presentation on the rights of the Rohingya; a Muslim minority in Myanmar that faces systematic discrimination and persecution. The speaker called for recommendations to be made with regard to the “1982 Citizenship Law” and “Race and Religion Protection Law” – both of which discriminate against the Rohingya Muslims. His concerns were heard, and incorporated into several official recommendations made by numerous States, including: Germany; Turkey; Iceland; Saudi Arabia; USA; Japan; Denmark; Italy; Czech Republic; Canada; and Australia. Of these eleven States, seven were present at the Pre-session of Myanmar.

A crucial advocacy tool prepared by *UPR Info Asia* and the Burma-Myanmar Forum ahead of the Pre-sessions was the country-specific human rights factsheets entitled, “Information on the Status of human rights in Myanmar”.⁸ The publication consisted of UPR-orientated advocacy factsheets that represented the human rights concerns of local civil society across 16 thematic areas: 1) Myanmar’s 2008 Constitution; 2) Human Rights Protection and Legal Reform; 3) Freedom of Opinion and Expression; 4) Human Rights Defenders; 5) Torture; 6) Impunity and Right to Remedy; 7) The State of Armed Conflict; 8) The Collective Rights of Indigenous People; 9) Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons; 10) Land Rights; 11) Freedom of Religion or Belief; 12) The Persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State; 13) The Rights of the Child; 14) The Education Reform; 15) Women’s Rights; and 16) Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression (SOGIE) Rights.



These training sessions and diplomatic dialogues in Yangon, Bangkok and Geneva combined to provide a unique opportunity to train and support former political prisoners. For the first time in their lives, human rights defenders from Myanmar were able to conduct advocacy at the highest international level.

4. Lessons learned: managing expectations

Notwithstanding the many areas of satisfaction that were highlighted throughout the evaluation, panellists were also frank in sharing their constructive criticism on certain issues. While CSOs were very enthusiastic about the general training introduced for all participants in October 2016 (see [chapter 10.2](#) below), the training was only offered in English. This linguistic barrier unfortunately prevented certain CSOs from participating. Going forward, depending on the demand and available financial resources, *UPR Info* will evaluate the possibility of providing interpretation for the training session.

Another issue that was raised on several occasions in the feedback from CSO and NHRIs participants was the limited speaker time to deliver the presentations. Indeed, *UPR Info* is fully cognisant of the fact that the seven minutes speaker time is highly restrictive. Unfortunately, to be able to accommodate anywhere from ten to fourteen Pre-sessions per series, it is necessary to limit each Pre-session to one hour. As such, taking into consideration that there are on average five speakers, the seven minute limit is to ensure that all speakers have time to make an initial presentation. The remaining time is then reserved for an interactive dialogue amongst the moderator and panellists, and then the panellists and Permanent Missions. To mitigate the limited time for presentations, panellists can include their full range of issues in their advocacy statements that they distribute at the venue. In addition, information that was unable to be delivered during the Pre-session can be shared in the bilateral dialogues with States.

Finally, two related issues were cause for disappointment amongst several CSO participants; the lack of questions from States, and the lack of high-level diplomatic representatives in the State delegations. *UPR Info* discussed both of these questions with the Permanent Missions who participated in the Pre-sessions evaluation. With regard to the amount of questions posed by the States, Permanent Missions were keen to assure that a lack of questions from the floor did not mean a lack of interest. On the contrary, one State explained that few questions normally meant that the presentations were clear and informative, and did not require further clarification from questions. Several delegate offered the point of view that not all diplomats come

prepared to every Pre-session. In addition, the diplomatic attendance often reflects the integration of the country in the international system; the more the country is visible, the more diplomats will attend the Pre-session. Thus, speakers should not be disheartened if it is not always high level participation from the States.

Recognising the valid concerns of the CSO speakers, *UPR Info* introduced new means for Permanent Missions to submit questions anonymously (see **chapter 10.3** below). *UPR Info* also discusses in person with the Permanent Missions during the Human Rights Council and during the UPR Working Group sessions to invite the diplomats in person. Over the five years of the programme, the overall State participation has been very satisfactory with an average of 25 Permanent Missions per meeting.

Advice from former participants to future participants

Throughout the evaluation, former Pre-session participants were asked what advice they would give to future panellist speakers.

- ✓ “Optimise the time in Geneva by organising an agenda of meetings with the Permanent Missions well in advance. It is important to reach out to Missions before leaving your home country.”
- ✓ “Time management. Prepare concise statements and concentrate on just one or two issues.”
- ✓ “Establish a relationship with an international organisation that can help to arrange an agenda for meetings with diplomats.”
- ✓ “Engage with diplomats both at the embassies at home and through the Permanent Missions in Geneva. Having dialogue at both levels works well.”
- ✓ “Coordinate with other speakers on the panel to make sure all human rights concerns are covered.”
- ✓ “Use Power Point, but don’t overload each frame with too many words; 1–3 brief points per frame.”

5. Future challenges

5.1 Limited financial support for CSOs

UPR Info has encountered time and time again in its organisation of the Pre-sessions the difficulty for many CSOs to find funding to support their international participation. To date, the *UN Voluntary Fund for Participation* in the UPR is only accessible for States. Going into the UPR's third cycle, *UPR Info* hopes to stimulate dialogue for a similar fund to be established to support



civil society engagement in the UPR, including for advocacy activities such as access to the Pre-sessions. There is no denying that establishing such a fund is an ambitious objective. Yet, the UN and its donating Member States should recognise that it is a *sine qua non* condition of the effectiveness and success of the UPR that civil society participates in every step of the process. Their engagement should extend from providing information for recommendations to supporting their implementation.

Indeed, it is generally civil society that has the expertise and experience to know how to strategically phrase the action of a particular UPR recommendation, and how the recommendation can best be implemented to benefit the rights holders. Without access to an international fund, civil society has to find other sources of financing for its projects related to UPR. The challenge is that funding is a constant concern for CSOs, especially at a time when the availability of resources for human rights activities is becoming increasingly competitive. Thus, there is a real risk that key civil society actors cannot fully engage in the UPR. *UPR Info* looks forward to stimulating a dialogue on this issue, and hopes that all stakeholders will strive to make the third cycle as inclusive and accessible as possible.

5.2 Reprisals



The safety of our partners is of utmost importance to our *UPR Info*. It should be borne in mind that the Pre-sessions are open to the public, and all Permanent Missions, including the State under review, are invited to attend. This could cause concern in terms of safety.

Each speaker of the Pre-sessions receives *UPR Info's* Guidelines on Reprisals, as well as information on numerous resources to support human rights defenders who fear intimidation or reprisals. Speakers are also given direct-line contact information for the Pre-sessions programme manager, whom they may contact at any time should they feel in any way uneasy about their participation.

Cases of intimidation have been rare at the Pre-sessions. However, *UPR Info* has experienced situations in the past where selected CSO speakers were prevented from travelling to Geneva by State authorities, such as in Sudan. In another case, in South Sudan, we had to make the tough decision to discourage certain speakers from participating, as we received information that there was a real and serious risk of reprisals against them. In both of these grave situations, *UPR Info* brought the information to the highest levels of the OHCHR, the Human Rights Council and with Permanent Missions. Similarly, some CSOs, as in Venezuela, endured smear campaigns for their participation.

As the Pre-sessions become more and more integrated in the UPR process, their purview is constantly increasing and the CSOs who take the floor will be more visible, thus more susceptible to face reprisals.

Part II

Guide for Pre-session participants

Part II of the publication is prepared as a guide for future Pre-session participants on how they can engage with the programme. The following chapter will discuss practicalities from how to apply to be a speaker, to what to include in Pre-session presentations to ensure that their advocacy issues resonate effectively with the audience.



The flyer features a world map background with the text "UPR Info Pre-Sessions UPR 26" in purple. Below the title, it states "5 - 7 October 2016, Centre International de Conférences, Geneva". The flyer is decorated with flags of various countries, including Haiti, Spain, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Togo, Uganda, Uganda, and Vanuatu. A video player is embedded at the bottom, showing a woman speaking at a microphone. To the left of the video, it says "Watch this video to find out how the Pre-Sessions can help you". The UPR INFO logo is in the bottom left, and Facebook and Twitter icons are in the bottom right.

Pre-sessions informational flyer ahead of the 26th UPR session (October 2016)

1. Format

The *UPR Info* Pre-sessions take place three times a year in Geneva, Switzerland, normally in early April, October and December. Each series of Pre-sessions is intentionally organised to take place one month before the UPR Working Group, as this is a strategic time when States are preparing to draft recommendations. The exact drafting process varies from State to State. While a number of States prepare the recommendations from their capitals, other States delegate the process to their Permanent Mission in Geneva. In either case, the Permanent Missions in Geneva play a crucial information-gathering role in determining the issues that will form the basis of their recommendations, in line with their national priorities.

In keeping with the principles of universality and transparency, the Pre-sessions are a public event. *UPR Info* invites all the Permanent Missions to attend the Pre-sessions, including the SuR. Civil society organisations that are not amongst the panellist speakers are also welcome to attend the Pre-sessions. Indeed, the Pre-sessions can be equally beneficial for non-speaker CSOs, which can utilise the event's momentum to arrange bilateral meetings with the State delegates present.

Each Pre-session is country-specific, and lasts for one hour in total. There is usually an extended coffee break between each Pre-session to allow for a change-over of the outgoing and incoming panellists, as well as time for participants to engage in discussion with States. Upon arrival at the Pre-sessions venue, civil society speakers deposit hardcopies of their statements, factsheets and other advocacy papers in a designated area. Non-speaker CSOs are also permitted to bring along their publications for distribution. When the Permanent Missions arrive to the Pre-sessions, they are then able to gather all the relevant civil society documentation.

The Pre-session panels are facilitated by the *UPR Info* moderator. At the beginning of the Pre-session, the moderator gives a brief overview of the State's UPR record, including how many recommendations were accepted and noted at the previous reviews. The moderator then gives the floor to the civil society speakers to make their presentation. There are normally five to six panellist speakers per Pre-session. Each speaker has between five to seven minutes to make their main presentation, which can be delivered either as an oral statement or by Power Point. In general, presentations should be made in **English or French**. After each speaker has presented, the moderator summarises the different issues that have been raised, and then asks some general questions to the panellists. After additional comments have been made, the moderator opens the floor for questions, giving the Permanent Missions an opportunity to follow up on the panellists' presentations. Neither non-speaker CSOs nor the SuR can ask questions to the panellists.

There can be up to fourteen Pre-sessions per series, in accordance with the UPR calendar. Since 2012, the average number of Pre-sessions per series has been between 10 and 11, which run over three to four days consecutively. There are situations where it is not possible for civil society to travel to Geneva, in particular for those organisations from remote parts of the world. In this regard, international CSOs are not always knowledgeable of the situation to be able to speak on their behalf. At a minimum, there needs to be at least four civil society speakers per State to enable *UPR Info* to organise a Pre-session. However, *UPR Info* does its best to make the platform as accessible as possible for civil society voices willing to travel to Geneva. There have been situations where there have been three CSO representatives from two different States, which made it possible for a dual Pre-session. In such an event, all six speakers sit at the panel at the same time, where there is no break between the country discussions. The Pre-session begins by civil society from State A making their presentations, and is then immediately followed by civil society from State B. The Permanent Missions in the audience then have the opportunity to ask questions to whomever of the speakers from either or both States.

During each series of Pre-sessions, *UPR Info* hosts an evening drinks reception, where Permanent Missions, national and international CSOs are all invited. The event offers an opportunity for participants to meet in an informal social setting to continue the discussion from the Pre-sessions. The reception offers invaluable networking opportunities; for example, CSOs from the Republic of Congo, who were not acquainted with each other, decided to set up a UPR coalition during such a drinks reception.



UPR Info's Pre-sessions drinks reception, ahead of the 26th session of the UPR Working Group

2. How can CSOs apply to participate at the Pre-sessions?

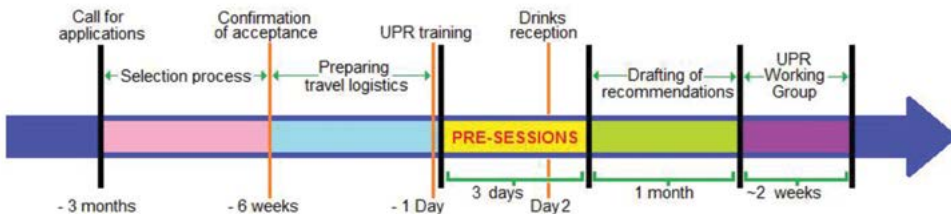
The selection process of CSOs is relatively long and starts quite early. Approximately three to four months in advance of the Pre-sessions, *UPR Info* opens its call for applications for all CSOs and NHRIs wishing to take the floor at the Pre-sessions. Interested parties are required to complete an application form that helps the organisers to understand the CSO's engagement in the UPR process. Questions include:

- A brief description of the aim and work of the organisation;
- The issue(s) the statement will address;
- Whether the organisation is part of a coalition; and
- To what extent the organisation engaged in previous UPR cycles.

All applicant organisations must also submit a copy of their most recent UPR submission, in addition to the completed application form.

UPR Info disseminates the call for applications as widely as possible, and encourages international CSOs to further share with local partners. Since NHRIs are, on most occasions, relevant human rights actors, *UPR Info* encourages them to take part in the pre-sessions and allocates them a slot.

After the call has been published, CSOs and NHRIs have a window of approximately three weeks to send their applications. After the deadline has passed, it takes a further two weeks for the selected applicants to be notified. In total, the application process from launch to selection takes up to six weeks. This allows sufficient time for successful applicants to make the necessary travel and visa arrangements.



Pre-sessions timeline

3. Selection criteria

Through the Pre-sessions, *UPR Info* aims to perpetuate the UPR's spirit of cooperation and dialogue by bringing together States and civil society alike. It is therefore crucial to ensure that the selected CSO speakers enter into the process with a professional and constructive demeanour. They must be cognisant of, and willing to engage in an ultimately political process, with the strengths and limitations this entails. Similarly, it must be clear from their organisations' missions and activities that they seek to improve the human rights situation in the country, including through utilising the UPR.

An objective set of criteria has been applied since 2012 for the selection of speakers. Priority is given to CSOs satisfying the following conditions:

- Grassroots and national CSOs; because they ensure a bottom-up approach to advocacy, placing local voices at the forefront of international human rights dialogue;
- National coalitions; CSOs working in coalitions benefit from the collective knowledge of each of its members, as they often represent a large spectrum of human rights, and their engagement tends to be more sustainable;
- CSOs that have submitted a report to the UPR and are committed to engaging in the process, in particular in the implementation phase;
- A broad representation of the various human rights issues representing the concerns of the local population. In particular, a balance is sought amongst civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights;
- Ensuring a gender perspective for each Pre-session; where possible, gender parity amongst panellists is also sought (see [chapter 1.5](#) above).

As the Pre-sessions become integrated and recognised within the UPR process, the number of applications for speaker positions is increasing. Thus, the selection process is becoming more and more competitive. For example, in the case of Nepal's Pre-session in 2015, over 40 CSOs applied to fill the five speaker positions. *UPR Info* continues to apply its uniform, objective criteria when selecting the panellists, but inevitably not all applicants can be chosen. For CSO applicants who are not selected as speakers, they can still benefit by attending the Pre-sessions in the audience. In addition, they are welcome to join the other Pre-session events, including the UPR training and drinks reception. Indeed, as mentioned above, non-speaker CSOs can fully engage in lobbying activities around the Pre-sessions, maximising the opportunity that Permanent Missions are inclined to meet with civil society during this period.

4. CSO and NHRI preparation for the Pre-sessions

For CSOs and NHRIs, participation at the Pre-sessions means more than just turning up to speak at a conference. There are many aspects that need to be considered carefully in preparation for the Pre-sessions, not least arranging international travel and logistics. Getting to Geneva is only one aspect; the actual participation at the event itself also needs to be planned in advance. It is crucial that each organisation develops an advocacy strategy that will maximise the visibility of their human rights issue at the Pre-sessions. The section aims to advise future CSOs and NHRIs of important considerations that should be borne in mind in preparation for the Pre-sessions, including feedback received from former participants.

Support for the Pre-sessions

The Pre-sessions have been made possible thanks to the generous support of the programme's donors: the City of Geneva; the Canton of Geneva; the Swiss Confederation; and Irish Aid. *UPR Info* has also been grateful to count the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom as additional patrons of the Pre-sessions in 2015 and 2016. In addition, UN Agencies (such as UN Development Programme, OHCHR) and Foundations (such as Open Society Foundations, National Endowment for Democracy) have supported the travel costs of numerous human rights defenders to participate at the Pre-sessions.

Participants who need to organise accommodation for the Pre-sessions are strongly encouraged to contact the Geneva Welcome Centre (*Le Centre d'Accueil – Genève Internationale*, "CAGI"). Within the CAGI, the Delegates Welcome



Service support CSO and NHRI delegates with many practical aspects of their stay in Geneva, including logistical support for the planning of accommodation, and may grant financial aid to reduce the cost. Demands for financial aid are examined on a case-by-case basis. The Service takes into account the delegate's own funds and those of the organisation that he/she is representing. In addition to supporting accommodation, CAGI also offers numerous other services free of charge, including access to computer rooms and printers, as well as use of a meeting venue.⁹ Participants wishing to avail of CAGI support should contact the organisation as soon as possible upon confirming their participation for the Pre-sessions.

5. Speaker guidelines

As the Pre-session programme has developed over the years, *UPR Info* has learned to pre-empt the questions and advice sought by participants. All participants now receive country-specific speaker guidelines that include the following information:

- Information on the date, time and location of the Pre-session;
- Instructions on the format of the presentation, including the speaker time, and templates for preparing the written statement and Power Point presentation;
- Advice on how to find accommodation in Geneva;
- Visa support from *UPR Info*;
- Preparing advocacy strategies in Geneva, including how to engage with Permanent Missions; and
- Safety considerations that all speakers should bear in mind in preparation for the Pre-sessions.

6. Collaboration with co-panellists

In addition to receiving the speaker guidelines, all selected panellists are introduced to one another via email early in the process. *UPR Info* also informs the panellists of the issues each organisation plans to raise in their presentations. This introduction is an important step as it allows participants to know the topics that will be covered at the Pre-session, providing impetus to streamline presentations to prevent overlap. In addition, if participants notice that an important issue is missing from the list, they are encouraged to coordinate with one another to ensure that it can be incorporated. While *UPR Info* arranges facilitates initial communication between the participants, there is also an element of autonomy left to the speakers to organise and harmonise their presentations.

7. The three Ps of Pre-sessions

Planning

Significant preparation is needed in advance of CSO and NHRI participation at the Pre-sessions. Firstly, if the organisation is travelling from abroad, it will need to check whether a visa is required to enter Switzerland. If a visa is required, *UPR Info* will support the application by issuing a letter of invitation. As *UPR Info* arranges logistics for over fifty CSOs and NHRIs per series of Pre-sessions, it is important to inform us well in advance about the required visa support. In addition, arranging the visa interview remains the responsibility of each participant. Reserving flights and

accommodation should also be done early (for accommodation, see the “CAGI” service below). Based on the feedback of our former participants, CSOs and NHRIs should plan to stay in Geneva for approximately **three to four nights**, if financial resources so permit. The exact length of the stay should depend on the date of the country’s Pre-session, and whether the organisation plans to participate in both the UPR training and the networking reception (discussed above). In addition to the logistical aspects, the participants should also identify the Permanent Missions they wish to target for bilateral meetings. It is strongly encouraged to reach out to State delegations in advance of the trip to Geneva, which will increase the likelihood of finding a suitable time and date for a meeting.

Presenting

The presentation delivered by CSOs and NHRIs at the Pre-sessions is the core activity of their participation and thus it should be prepared carefully. *UPR Info* shares templates of structured oral statements and Power Point presentations that can be adapted for specific issues and country context. *UPR Info* asks to receive speakers’ draft presentations approximately one week in advance of the Pre-sessions. This provides an opportunity to receive feedback from the organisers as to the overall structure and length of the intervention. It is often the case that CSO and NHRI participants try to fit too much into their presentations, notwithstanding the limited time they will have for its delivery. In such circumstances, *UPR Info* will make suggestions to reduce the content in order to be deliverable within the available time. In any case, it is important to remember that longer versions of the statements and more comprehensive advocacy documentation can always be distributed at the Pre-session to supplement the information delivered in the presentation. A final consideration for speakers’ presentations is whether to make an oral statement only, or whether to also use Power Point (discussed in **chapter 8** below). Above all else, speakers should remember to deliver their presentation at a reasonable and steady pace, so that the audience can follow. It is critical that speakers rehearse their presentation in order to feel comfortable with the content and time limit. If the country’s Pre-session is not the first of the morning, participants should consider joining the audience for other Pre-sessions in order to familiarise themselves with the format.

Persuading

As an international advocacy platform, the Pre-sessions are all about persuading the audience – Permanent Missions – to make UPR recommendations on certain human rights issues. Having in mind that each State only has a limited amount of time to make recommendations during the review at the Working Group, Pre-session speakers should strategise as to how they can make a compelling case for their issue to be included. The first step of convincing States to engage with their issue is by delivering a coherent and well-structured presentation at the Pre-session. This should include examples of

action-orientated and specific recommendations that address the issue, and can also include advance questions for the State under Review. Participants should also pre-empt the questions that the Permanent Missions may ask them, and have the answers prepared. Another important advocacy step is to arrange bilateral meetings with States in the week of the Pre-sessions. It is often through these one-on-one meetings that participants can elaborate in more detail on their human rights issue, and in so doing build a closer rapport with the State delegation. Finally, participants can also use the bilateral meetings to ask to be put in touch with the State's representation in the State under Review. As soon as participants return home after the Pre-sessions, it is useful to follow up directly with the in-country representation to further discuss the issue and why it should be included in the UPR recommendations. Remember – a persuasive advocate is a perseverant advocate!

8. Presentations

UPR Info has seen over 700 CSO and NHRI presentations since 2012. Our organisation has received feedback from both civil society and States alike on what has and has not worked in terms of structure, content and means of delivery. The following are guidelines for presentations based on the significant experience of *UPR Info* and feedback of former Pre-session participants:

- ✎ The aim of the statement is not to read the organisation's UPR stakeholder submission in its entirety, but to share some key information and recommendations with the Permanent Missions. After the intervention, CSOs and NHRIs may be asked by diplomats to develop more on the status of implementation of a given recommendation. Therefore, CSOs and NHRIs should have some answers prepared with regard to those recommendations falling under your area of expertise.
- ✎ In order to make the presentation as engaging as possible, it is advisable to avoid reading your statement word-for-word. Try to speak to the audience with as much eye contact as possible. It is highly encouraged to use a Power Point presentation highlighting the main issues raised in a statement (i.e. suggested recommendations and questions). **Every State interviewed as part of the Pre-sessions evaluation commented that presentations delivered through Power Point are more effective at engaging and keeping the attention of the audience.** In addition, the vast majority of former speakers strongly encouraged the use of Power Point. For panellists who do decide to use Power Point, it is crucial that slides and text are used sparingly. It is sufficient to limit the information to bullet points of the human rights issue being raised, plus the organisation's suggested recommendations and advance questions.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">HUMAN RIGHTS IN COUNTRY X</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">UPR Info Pre-sessions</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Situation in Country X</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation of previous recommendation made by (country X that made recommendation) ➤ New developments ➤ New needs | <p style="text-align: center;">Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish a ... ➤ Amend the law ... ➤ Set up an inter-ministerial commission |
|--|---|---|

8.1 Structuring the statement

Each speaker will receive an exemplar statement from *UPR Info* that can serve as a good starting point to structure the intervention. In general, the following elements should be included:

- 1) Presentation of the organisation (give a brief overview of the group you are representing. State if it is part of a coalition and mention your engagement in the UPR process so far);
- 2) Succinct explanation as to whether national consultations took place for the drafting of the national report;
- 3) Brief presentation of the plan of your statement. Indicate the number of issues you will raise and in which order;
- 4) Selection of issues: It is important to break down your issues. Women, children, minorities, indigenous peoples etc. can contain several sub-issues such as violence, discrimination, trafficking, education, and many more. Select a limited number of issues. For each issue, repeat Step 1 to 3 as described below.

Step 1: Give an update on the recommendations from the previous review dealing with this issue (do not hesitate to cite the name of the countries that made those recommendations). **Remember to use UPR Info's database to find a list of all previous recommendations made to the State under Review.**¹⁰

Step 2: Describe how the situation on that issue has evolved in the country since the last review, highlight achievements and remaining gaps. **Empirical evidence from reliable resources is compelling information for States.**

Step 3: Suggest two or three specific recommendations and two or three advance questions. **Though underutilised in the UPR process, advance questions have significant potential to shed spotlight on States seeking to elude their international human rights responsibilities.**

8.2 Timing and speaker sequence

In general, where there are five speakers on the panel, each participant will have **5 to 7 minutes** to make his/her presentation. Timing is strictly observed by the moderator in the interest of fairness, so that each panellist has the same opportunity. CSOs and NHRIs are afforded the same time limit, though NHRIs generally speak first as they tend to provide a broader overview of human rights issues. Generally speaking, when there is a combination of national and international CSOs on the panel, national CSOs speak first. Where CSOs have coordinated the presentations to be read in a specific sequence, *UPR Info* is happy to facilitate the speaking order. Providing timing is adhered to, there are generally a couple of minutes at the end of the presentations, before questions from the floor, where speakers have an additional opportunity to make concluding comments.

8.3 Languages

In general, to reflect the UN Secretariat working languages, English and French are the primary channels of communication at the Pre-sessions. As such, *UPR Info* is normally able to provide French to English interpretation, where needed. In order to increase accessibility for Francophone diplomats we also piloted full interpretation (*i.e.* at all Pre-sessions) from English into French. Unfortunately, after having introduced full interpretation in 2015, we saw that our initial objective, namely to attract an increase of diplomats from Francophone Africa, had not proved particularly successful. Although these series of Pre-sessions were well attended (33 Permanent Missions on average), the interpretation service did not improve in terms of Francophone diplomats. We have therefore shifted our efforts, and have decided to focus solely on full interpretation from French into English.

UPR Info recognises that many countries have neither English nor French as an official language, and thus the requirement of presenting in one or the other can be restrictive. Where only a few of the selected speakers are uncomfortable in English or French, *UPR Info* may ask whether there is another speaker within the organisation who can represent the organisation instead. However, in a situation where the majority of CSO and NHRI speakers of a particular country are unable to present in English or French, *UPR Info* will do its best to provide simultaneous interpretation from another language if possible.

9. Bilateral advocacy

While the Pre-sessions represent a unique multilateral advocacy opportunity, the potential of bilateral meetings should not be underestimated. Indeed, as discussed previously, it is often through these personal meetings that CSOs can provide the State delegations with more in-depth information and context on their advocacy issue. Permanent Missions in Geneva have a good reputation for their willingness to engage with civil society. According to feedback from the diplomats themselves, the Missions are inclined to set aside time during the week of the Pre-sessions to meet with CSOs bilaterally, either at the venue itself, or if possible, at the Mission. Regardless of where the meeting should take place, it is crucial that CSOs reach out to Missions a couple of weeks in advance of the Pre-sessions to allow enough time to find a suitable date. It is useful to have a personal name for the human rights officer at the Mission. This can be found by looking in the United Nations “Blue Book”.¹¹

Bearing in mind that CSOs normally only have a few days in Geneva, it is prudent to conduct a **stakeholder mapping** while creating your Pre-sessions strategy. Stakeholder mapping is a process used to identify key individuals that are important in fulfilling your advocacy objectives. In the case of the Pre-sessions, the target audience is the Permanent Missions. Bearing in mind the limited time and human capacity of national CSOs while in Geneva, it is important to prioritise what States are most relevant to meet. To complete this stakeholder mapping – identifying the States – you should be influenced by:

- What States made recommendations to your country on your issue in the previous cycle? (**use UPR Info database**);
- Are there certain States that have your issue as a foreign policy objective? (e.g. on the protection of human rights defenders: Norway, Ireland, Czech Republic, Netherlands, and Switzerland; right to water and sanitation: Spain, Malaysia, Bolivia, and Egypt) (**use UPR Info statistics**);¹² and
- If your issue was neither raised in previous cycles nor seems to be a foreign policy priority, are there in any case certain States that make recommendations to all States under review? (e.g. Canada and Spain)

Finally, it is important to consider another key stakeholder: the State under Review. If at all possible, CSOs should reach out to their own State representative to try to arrange a meeting while you are in Geneva. By engaging with your own delegation, you can foster a relationship for cooperation and collaboration during the implementation stage of UPR recommendations. *UPR Info* systematically invites all States under review to the Pre-sessions. Nevertheless, it can show transparency and good will if CSO speakers also reach out in advance of the Pre-session.

10. New Modalities

10.1 In-country Pre-sessions

Since their establishment in 2015, *UPR Info Asia* and *UPR Info Africa* have been instrumental in bringing together CSOs to help strengthen their collective voices. The offices serve to support multistakeholder engagement at the local, domestic and regional levels, where *UPR Info* engages with civil society, national human rights institutions, government, UN bodies, and academic institutions. The regional offices have begun to organise in-country Pre-sessions in advance of the Geneva-based Pre-sessions, to offer further opportunity to CSOs to brief embassies on the



In-country Pre-session in Kampala, Uganda (August 2016), organised by UPR Info Africa and HURINET

recommendations they would like States to make at the UPR. These national human rights conferences reinforce the message that CSOs will make in Geneva. In this sense, civil society concerns are likely to be communicated from the diplomats in attendance at the national Pre-sessions to their colleagues in the capital and also to their Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the UN.



UPR Info Africa Regional Director, Gilbert Onyango, addressing the Uganda Pre-session (August 2016)

The aims of the *UPR Info* Pre-Sessions held at the country level are to brief the local media and engage in dialogue with diplomats on pressing human rights issues. These events offer a unique opportunity for local and national civil society to raise its concerns, provide first-hand information and data from the ground, as well as evidence-based solutions through offering Recommending States precise and concrete UPR recommendations. To date, in-country Pre-sessions

have been held in Myanmar, Thailand, Tanzania, and Uganda, led by our Asia and Africa offices respectively. Given the significant impact the in-country Pre-sessions have yielded thus far, these national conferences are set to become a more systematic feature as we move into the third cycle.

10.2 Open training

As part of the Follow-up programme, *UPR Info* grantees from our target countries participate in a one-day advanced UPR training one day before the Pre-session. This training is country-specific, and discusses not only the Pre-sessions but also the implementation stage of the UPR, the core focus of the Follow-up programme. These training have proved very popular amongst participants. Seeing the demand for broader inclusion, we have now opened up our trainings to non-speaker as well as speaker participants from our target countries. The rationale is that it takes all civil society, not only Pre-session panellists, to ensure effective collaboration for the implementation of recommendations.

In 2016, due to the organisation's increase in human resources, *UPR Info* was able to offer it as a general training to all non-grantee Pre-session speakers. The pilot training first took place ahead of the 26th UPR session, bringing together some 50 civil society participants from: Haiti, Moldova, Syria, Timor-Leste, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. It enabled participants to be guided through a wide range of UPR topics in preparation of the Pre-sessions and broader advocacy strategies CSOs should adopt at different stages of the process.

The training garnered high attendance. This prompted *UPR Info* to take the decision to continue organising a broad UPR training for all Pre-session participants, both speakers and non-speakers, ahead of every session. Participation is open to both civil society and NHRIs. While the training so far has only been available in English, *UPR Info* will examine the possibility to provide interpretation into different languages. The aim of the training will be to prepare CSOs to make quality interventions at the Pre-sessions, and to teach them how to fully utilise the advocacy platform even in the case that they are not speakers. Through this preparation, the ultimate goal is that better recommendations are made at the UPR.

10.3 Questions to the panellists

As with the UPR itself, the Pre-sessions lack a degree of interaction between the panellists and the audience. Having discussed the situation with numerous stakeholders, *UPR Info* has introduced new avenues for States to ask questions to the speakers without having to do so aloud at the Pre-sessions themselves. When sending out our invitations to Permanent Missions, we now offer the opportunity for States to send questions in advance to *UPR Info*, which the moderator can ask directly to the speakers, and where the State has the option to remain anonymous. In addition,

in 2016, *UPR Info* introduced a further means for posing questions, *via* Twitter messenger during the Pre-session. This offers delegates the opportunity to ask specific questions based on the speakers' presentations, but still allows the element of anonymity. Though this method is new, the initial results have been encouraging; we received several questions through this channel at the Pre-sessions in 2016. *UPR Info* will continue to encourage States to make questions, by either traditional or more technological means.

10.4 Live coverage on social media

As part of its improved communications strategy, *UPR Info* provides live coverage of the Pre-sessions via its Twitter account. Having in mind that the Pre-sessions cannot be broadcasted or recorded due to safety concerns for our speakers, *UPR Info* fills the information void by providing detailed accounts of the discussion in live Tweets. Ahead of each Pre-session, *UPR Info*'s communications team asks the speakers whether they would like to be involved in the content of the Tweets. In general, participants are eager for *UPR Info* to include the organisations' Twitter handles as it is an effective way for their participation to be popularised amongst their colleagues and members back home.

Conclusion

In the five years since the programme's inception, the Pre-sessions have become an integral part of the UPR process, and represent the largest international human rights advocacy platform of its type. Much like the UPR itself, the Pre-sessions have redefined the traditional adversarial paradigm between CSOs and States, proving the transformative nature of multistakeholder dialogue. Permanent Missions in Geneva have led by example in showing their diplomatic and political counterparts at home and abroad that engagement with civil society can be a truly fruitful exercise for all parties. By actively participating at the Pre-sessions, the message of the Permanent Missions is clear; while the UPR is a State-led process, civil society – as officially recognised stakeholders – must also have their voices heard.

For their part, CSO and NHRI speakers have tirelessly and courageously championed the human rights concerns of their people, often travelling across the world in order to reach their target audience in Geneva. Together, over 700 speakers and 150 Permanent Missions have come together at the Pre-sessions to help shape the international human rights discourse on 149 States, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. The constructive interaction between these agents of change gives efficacy to the universality of the UPR, and illustrates that the mechanism is only as strong as the sum of the engagement from all sides.

Recognising the utility and demand for the Pre-sessions, *UPR Info* is continuously motivated to keep improving the programme's format and scope. This evaluation has offered a timely opportunity for self-reflection, as we move into the UPR's third cycle in 2017. The feedback has unveiled several areas for improvement, such as: stimulating more interactive dialogue between panellists and States; streamlining and consolidating electronic documentation for States after each Pre-session; ensuring more equally distributed gender parity across regions; and accommodating more linguistic diversity in the UPR trainings. These issues will be examined closely by *UPR Info*, where the organisation will discuss with all relevant stakeholders to find the best ways forward.



In conclusion, *UPR Info* wishes to express its profound thanks to all its partners who have participated both in this evaluation and in the Pre-sessions themselves over the last five years. We reserve special thanks to our donors for making the realisation of the programme possible. From an organisational perspective, it has been a deeply rewarding and humbling experience for *UPR Info* to offer grassroots human rights activists an international platform in Geneva, the human rights capital of the world. By witnessing how their human rights experiences resonate with diplomats and seeing their issues being reflected in States' recommendations, *UPR Info* is convinced of the tangible impact of the Pre-sessions. We remain committed to working for continued cooperation and dialogue between civil society and States, and looks forward to engaging with partners, both old and new, in 2017 and beyond.

Notes

- 1 Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Kingdom, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

It was not possible to organise Pre-sessions on the remaining 44 countries due to the limited number of CSOs participating in the UPR: Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bulgaria, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cape Verde, Comoros, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Djibouti, Dominica, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Iceland, Latvia, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Monaco, San Marino, Panama, Saint Lucia, Sao Tome & Principe, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu.

- 2 Information on *UPR Info's* Follow-up programme is available here:
<https://www.upr-info.org/followup/>
- 3 As per the five United Nations Regional Groups of Member States:
<http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml>
- 4 Sessions 1–24; the most current data available as of November 2016.
- 5 Sessions 13–18 (2012–2014) and sessions 19–24 (2014–2016). A breakdown of all recommendations is available at:
https://www.upr-info.org/database/statistics/index_action.php
- 6 The factsheets for the second UPR of Mongolia are available here:
https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/mongolia/session_22_-_may_2015/upr_advocacy_factsheets_mngof_en.pdf
- 7 UPR Advocacy Factsheets, Australia:
<http://hrlc.org.au/universal-periodic-review-of-australia-in-november-2015-ngo-materials/>

UPR Advocacy Factsheets, Moldova:
<https://www.upr-info.org/en/review/Moldova-%28Republic-of%29/Session-26---November-2016/Miscellaneous-documents#top>

UPR Advocacy Factsheets, Myanmar:
https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/pdf/upr_advocacy_factsheets_-_myanmar2015.pdf

UPR Advocacy Factsheets, Thailand:
https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/pdf/upr_advocacy_factsheets_-_thailand2016-en.pdf

UPR Advocacy Factsheets, Uganda:

<https://www.upr-info.org/en/review/Uganda/Session-26---November-2016/Miscellaneous-documents>

UPR Advocacy Factsheets, Venezuela:

<https://www.upr-info.org/en/review/Venezuela-%28Bolivarian-Republic-of%29/Session-26---November-2016/Miscellaneous-documents#top>

- 8 https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/myanmar/session_23_-_november_2015/upr_advocacy_factsheets_-_myanmar2015.pdf
- 9 **More information on the service provided by CAGI can be found here:**
<http://www.cagi.ch/en/delegates-welcome/accommodation-for-delegates.php>
- 10 <https://www.upr-info.org/database/>
- 11 <http://s.upr-info.org/2gLSApq>
- 12 https://www.upr-info.org/database/statistics/index_issues.php?fk_issue=5&cycle=

