

Human Rights Council

Intersessional panel discussion on the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights

Concept note (as of 17 August 2017)

- Date and venue:** Monday, 4 September 2017, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva
- Objectives:** The panel discussion aims:
- to identify ways in which local government can promote, protect and fulfil human rights effectively, particularly in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda;
 - to identify challenges, share good practices and promote a better understanding of the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights;
 - to exchange views with regard to role of local public officials in addressing needs and priorities related to the realization of human rights at the local level;
 - to examine the findings and recommendations of the Advisory Committee and other Human Rights Council mechanisms on the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Chair:** H.E. Mr. Mouayed Saleh, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statement:** Ms. Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Moderator:** Mr. John Fisher, Geneva Advocacy Director, Human Rights Watch
- Panellists:**
- Ms. Katharina Pabel (Austria), Member of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee and Professor of Public Law at the University of Linz
 - Mr. An Hee-jung (Republic of Korea), Governor of South Chungcheong Province
 - Mr. José Cruz-Osario (Mexico), Team Leader, Responsive and Accountable Institutions, Governance and Peacebuilding Group, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, United Nations Development Programme
 - Ms. Wanjiru Gikonyo (Kenya), National Coordinator and a founder of The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA)
- Outcome:** In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 33/8, the High Commissioner will prepare a summary report on the discussions held and recommendations made during the panel discussion, for submission to the Human Rights Council at its 38th session.
- Mandate:** In its resolution 33/8 entitled "Local government and human rights", the Human Rights Council decided to convene between its thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth sessions a panel discussion on the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights, the objective of which would be to identify ways in which local government can promote, protect and fulfil human rights effectively, particularly in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in close cooperation with the national Government.
- Format:** The OHCHR opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists, the latter introduced and guided by the moderator, will be followed by an interactive discussion with States and observers intervening from the floor. The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups will be moved to the beginning of the list. States and observers,

including representatives of civil society, will take the floor for a 2-minute intervention each (total 45 minutes), followed by responses from the panellists (15 minutes). A second round of interventions from the floor (45 minutes) will be followed by responses and concluding remarks from the panellists and the moderator (15 minutes). The interventions of States and observers may include questions to the panellists and the sharing of experiences in order to stimulate a constructive debate.

Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

Background: As a matter of international law, the State is one single entity, regardless of its unitary or federal nature and internal administrative division. While the central government has the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights, a State may and often does delegate implementation to lower tiers of government, including local authorities. Local authorities are obliged to comply, within their local competences, with the duties stemming from international human rights obligations of the State. Local authorities are actually those who frequently translate national human rights strategies and policies into practical application. Local authorities are close to the everyday needs of the inhabitants, and when performing their functions, local authorities take decisions relating in particular to the rights to education, adequate housing, health and the environment of its inhabitants. Local authorities have a responsibility to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as persons with disabilities, minorities, migrants, indigenous communities, children and older persons. Local authorities also take decisions relating to the right to freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly, and freedom of religion and belief. Local officials therefore have a responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and through their actions to refrain from interfering with the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms of all persons within its jurisdiction.

All the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a local dimension that is essential to their achievement. Local governments have a critical role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, given their proximity to the population, their role in delivering basic public services and their ability to take integrated approaches. Local governments and their associations need to be strengthened to engage in the implementation process of the SDGs. All local governments need to have the means and the capacity to improve administration, anticipate demands, plan and implement solutions. Support to local governments, including through adequate human and financial resources, is needed to allow them to fulfil their critical role in realizing the SDGs.

This activity builds on earlier research work carried out on the subject, including by the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, as well as relevant resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council.

Background documents:

- Human Rights Council resolutions [33/8](#) (29 September 2016), [27/4](#) (25 September 2014) and [24/2](#) (26 September 2013) on local government and human rights
- Final report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights (2015) ([A/HRC/30/49](#))
- [General Assembly resolution 70/1](#) (25 September 2015), “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”
- [Economic and Social Council resolution 2016/26](#) (27 July 2016), “Report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its fifteenth session”
- [Report of United Cities and Local Governments](#) entitled “The Sustainable Development Goals. What Local Governments Need to Know”
