

Concept Note
Expert Group Meeting on the application of a human rights-based approach to policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity in humanitarian settings

Date: 7-8 May 2019
Venue: Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland
Chair: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

I. Background

In September 2018, the Human Rights Council adopted [resolution 39/10](#) on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights in humanitarian settings. The resolution requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “in collaboration with the Inter-agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and other United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, international human rights mechanisms, entities providing humanitarian assistance and civil society organizations, to organize a two-day meeting in 2019 to discuss good practices, gaps and challenges in the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity in humanitarian settings, and to submit a summary report thereon to the Human Rights Council at its forty-second session”.

The resolution builds on previous Human Rights Council resolutions on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights, including [resolution 21/6](#), in which the Council welcomed the [technical guidance](#) on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes for the reduction of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.¹ Resolution 39/10 also takes note with appreciation of the [report](#) of OHCHR on the follow-up on the application of the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity,² encouraging all stakeholders to consider the recommendations contained therein. This report also offers initial observations on the application of a human rights-based approach to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity in humanitarian settings, a dimension that was not the focus of the technical guidance. However, the risk of dying in pregnancy or childbirth is considerably higher in fragile settings,³ and these settings present distinct challenges for the application of a human rights-based approach, including in service provision, which require dedicated attention. The Human Rights Council has therefore identified a need to further discuss, examine and consider if and how a human rights-based approach has been implemented in and would contribute to humanitarian efforts and what are the remaining gaps.

II. Focus and objectives of the Expert Meeting

The expert group meeting will seek to complement existing efforts and processes towards deepened understanding and strengthened integration of human rights into humanitarian action, including in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Secretary-General’s Global Strategy for Women’s Children’s and Adolescents’ Health, including its Independent Accountability Panel, and the work of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises (IAWG). Key related frameworks and processes will also be brought into the discussions, including, among others, the IASC, including the health cluster and protection cluster and its area of responsibility on gender-based violence; the Humanitarian Programme Cycle; Sphere Standards; PMNCH, and the Security Council’s women, peace and security agenda.

The expert meeting will offer a unique opportunity for diverse stakeholders to share, exchange and discuss good practices, challenges and gaps concerning the application and operationalization of a human rights-based

¹ A/HRC/RES/21/6; A/HRC/21/22.

² A/HRC/39/26.

³ In countries designated as fragile states, the estimated lifetime risk of maternal mortality is 1 in 54. See WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and the United Nations Population Division, Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2015, at 26 (2012), available at http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/194254/1/9789241565141_eng.pdf

approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity in humanitarian settings.

Stakeholders operating in humanitarian contexts have already undertaken a number of initiatives from different entry points to implement aspects of a human rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health. The discussion at and recommendations resulting from the workshop will recognise, build on and feed into these important existing and on-going efforts and processes. More specifically, it will seek to: identify impact and draw on good practices; deepen an understanding of applicable international legal frameworks and the role of human rights; highlight commonalities and interlinkages between human rights, humanitarian, gender-based violence, public health and sustainable development frameworks and approaches; unpack holistic approaches that place the individual woman and girl at the centre; and identify on-the-ground challenges in implementation and potential gaps, including in relation to coordination and accountability to affected populations. In addition, it will provide a space to share experiences and enhance a common understanding of how a human rights-based approach to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity can be further operationalized in humanitarian contexts.

III. Participants, Methodology and Format of the Expert Group Meeting

The expert meeting will bring together approximately 30 experts representing different stakeholders, including United Nations agencies and entities providing humanitarian assistance, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises, relevant cluster coordination leads and accountability mechanisms, research institutions, and civil society experts, including first responders. Specific interest, expertise and/or experience in advancing the application of a human rights-based approach in humanitarian settings have been taken into consideration in selecting the invited experts. The meeting is not intended to be a public meeting but rather a safe space for invited experts and practitioners who seek to further articulate and advance a human rights based approach in this area and share their experiences and views. The expert meeting will aim at an interactive discussion involving all participants, moderated by a moderator. Each session will be initiated by a short expert presentation, including on examples of illustrative case studies, which also sets out key reflective questions, followed by plenary discussion. All participants are invited to share their experiences and insights, in particular as regards good practices and impact as well as research and data gaps and the real on-the-ground challenges, restrictions and limitations faced in implementing a human rights-based approach to eliminating preventable maternal mortality and morbidity in humanitarian settings.

A background note will be produced to help frame the discussions and come to a common understanding of the international legal framework, as well as the guiding principles, definitions, language and approaches used by the different participating stakeholders. The background note and meeting agenda will be circulated to the participants ahead of the meeting. The meeting will take place in English.

IV. Outcome

OHCHR will prepare and publish a summary report on the expert group meeting, containing good practices and recommendations addressed to all actors, as requested by the Human Rights Council resolution 39/10. The report will be submitted to the Human Rights Council at its 42nd session. This report will also feed into on-going collaborative processes between all stakeholders to advance a holistic, integrated approach and strengthen the operationalization of a human rights-based approach in humanitarian settings.

V. Background documents

- Technical Guidance on the Application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity ([A/HRC/21/22](#))
- Follow-up report on the application of the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity ([A/HRC/39/26](#))
- HRC Resolution on Preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights in humanitarian settings ([A/HRC/RES/39/10](#))
- HRC Resolution on Preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights ([A/HRC/RES/21/6](#))