

**REPORT
ON THE 24th SESSION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE VOLUNTARY FUND FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION
IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

30 January – 1 February 2006

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

1. The 24th session of the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights (VFTC) took place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva from 30 January – 1 February 2006 under the chairmanship of Thomas Hammarberg. All members of the Board - Ligia Bolivar Osuna, Mary Chinery-Hesse, Vitit Muntarhorn, and Viacheslav Bakhmin - attended the full session.
2. The secretariat was provided by the Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Section of OHCHR: Peter Hellmers, Hannah Wu, Teresa Albero, Josette d'Agostino, and Janet Weiler.
3. The overall objective of the session was to focus on the implications of the recent reform initiatives for the Technical Cooperation Programme in order to establish clearly defined policy guidance to staff, as well as to ensure appropriate understanding and expectations from partners. A discussion paper on “technical cooperation programme policy and operational framework” was prepared by the Secretariat. The table of contents for the full set of documentation provided to the Board can be found in the annex.
4. A more analytical report reflecting the discussion and the recommendations of the Board of Trustees at the current session was prepared and submitted to the Commission on Human Rights at the completion of the Board’s meeting in February 2006. The present report is thus simplified and serves as a descriptive note for the file.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OVERVIEW OF THE TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME, INCLUDING FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE VFTC

5. The Board adopted the agenda, pointing out the particular importance of the current session in terms of timing – the development of the OHCHR Plan of Action and the doubling of the regular budget for the Office over a period of five years. These developments represent a revolution in the UN Human Rights Programme.
6. The following documents provided to the Board aimed at forming a broad picture of the current Technical Cooperation Programme: the 2004 report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Human Rights, a policy paper on “OHCHR’s technical cooperation programme and Action 2”, the 2005 list of projects and new requests for technical cooperation, a Fact Sheet on technical cooperation, a note on technical cooperation developed during the drafting of the Plan of Action, and information on the VFTC.
7. The Board discussed the situation of the VFTC with OHCHR colleagues from the Resource Mobilization Unit and the Administration. The trend of increased funding with less earmarking

is expected to continue. The new Strategic Management Plan for 2006-7 presents the overall office priorities, with no explicit section on the VFTC.

III. UN REFORM AND OHCHR PRIORITIES – UPDATES ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

8. A member of the OHCHR Steering Committee on the implementation of the Plan of Action briefed the Board on the process of the Plan of Action follow-up including the work of the numerous task forces, and particularly in the area of country engagement. The Board was pleased to note the systematic manner of carrying through the vision of the Plan of Action and the emphasis on being proactive and strategic. The Board noted the central place of the geographic desk officer and the need to strengthen this profile and function, including by upgrading the position and changing the title.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

9. The Board reviewed the Secretariat's discussion paper on a technical cooperation policy and operation framework in the context of the UN reform and the OHCHR Plan of Action and made initial recommendations to the Office on a number of key issues.
10. The Board recommended that the Office seize the moment to reaffirm its positions on human rights firmly and forcefully; otherwise misconceptions will be legitimized. As one of the three pillars, human rights are an integral part of the United Nations Programme. The full mandate of the High Commissioner should not be subject to negotiation and needs no justification.
11. The Summit and the subsequent increase in the Office's regular budget will raise high expectations. The Office needs to be well prepared for having the capacity to provide prompt and appropriate responses. Work is required to inform Governments clearly about the implications of the reform.
12. The Board acknowledged the importance of prioritization and recommended that the Office develop a long-term vision. The application of established criteria will be most challenging to the Office, particularly during the transitional period. The Board recommends that the Office strike the difficult balance of respecting the set priorities while maintaining a certain level of flexibility and planning capacity for addressing emerging situations.
13. One value-added of the Office is "quality". The Technical Cooperation Programme must strive for a combination of utmost human rights competence, pedagogical methodologies, cultural sensitivities, and a sound strategic vision. The Board pointed out in particular that the technical know-how alone is often inadequate; advice from the Office also needs to be strategic and contextually appropriate.
14. The Board warned of the possible risk of the Office becoming introverted, with the kind of growth envisaged and the emphasis on self-strengthening. It stressed that securing partnerships is more than ever important. It recommends that a meeting between the HC and the new UNDP administrator take place at an early date.

V. APPLICATION OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Colleagues, including the coordinator of the Europe, North America, and Central Asia team, the coordinator of the Arab Region team, the desk officer for Nepal and the desk officer for China shared with the Board their experience and views on the key elements of a policy and operational framework – criteria for technical cooperation, implementation modalities, including country operations and situations without a field presence.
16. The discussion with colleagues pointed to the importance of applying policy considerations to specific situations for the development of an overall framework for the Technical Cooperation Programme. The discussion paper and the Board’s discussion represented a serious effort in this respect and an important first step. More work will be required in order to reach conclusions.
17. The Board also held a discussion on the programme and substantive identity of the Technical Cooperation Programme with the new Chief of Branch from RRDB, the coordinator of the Rule of Law unit who also led the work of the task force on thematic expertise, the coordinator of the Methodology and Training Unit, and the coordinator of the National Institutions team.

VI. EXCHANGE WITH THE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS FROM OHCHR

18. The Deputy High Commissioner, the CBB Chief of Branch and several other key stakeholders from the Office discussed with the Board recent reform initiatives and the priority setting exercise. The Board was impressed with the amount of serious effort and progress the Office has made in a short period of time. It advocated that the Office would need to develop adequate capacity to respond properly to the high expectations of the Office. It also recommended that the Office focus its attention on quality and on securing partnerships.

VII. MEETING WITH MEMBER STATES

19. In a spirit of transparency and in keeping with its tradition, the Board met with representatives of Member States. Briefing material containing information on the work of the Board and on the financial status of the VFTC had been sent to Member States in advance. The Deputy High Commissioner, the Principle Officer of the Administration, CBB Chief of Branch, and other OHCHR colleagues also participated in the briefing.
20. In his presentation, the Chairperson of the Board expressed support for the direction in which the Office is heading and the approach taken by the Office within the overall framework of the UN reform. He stressed that the increase in regular budget should not be understood as downplaying the need for cooperation with other partners. The Office has been engaged in the important work on country engagement criteria, which he hoped would be made public soon. He also emphasised the principle of the High Commissioner’s full mandate – any presence in the field represents the full mandate of the High Commissioner. The Chairperson pointed out the need to build national capacity for human rights protection and empowerment, as real changes take place at the national level. The Technical Cooperation Programme focuses on providing quality long-term support. The Office will need to strike a balance between setting clear priorities and reserving the capacity to respond to emerging situations.

21. With regard to the VFTC, the Chairperson appealed for universal backing without strings attached. The need for funding under the VFTC remains even with the increase in the regular budget. More funding will allow more effective work to be carried out in the field.
22. One of the inquiries from Member States concerned the implications of the Office's holistic approach towards country engagement on the use of the VFTC, which is not visible in the new Strategic Management Plan 2006-7. The Secretariat pointed out the legislative mandate from the Commission on Human Rights establishing the VFTC. It allows the Office to receive funding with light earmarking to technical cooperation activities in general and separate tracking on the use of the fund. One government announced its intention to continue to provide such lightly earmarked contributions to the VFTC this year. The Deputy High Commissioner noted that the issue may deserve further attention.
23. The issue of working with other UN agencies at the national level was raised. On the one hand, there were concerns about how seriously other agencies take Action 2. On the other hand, there was a call for OHCHR to give priority to building synergy with other agencies. In this connection, the Chairperson of the Board underlined the importance of human rights, as one of the three pillars of the UN, being integrated in the country programmes of the UN.
24. Other issues raised included the Democracy Fund, criteria for technical cooperation, and lessons-learned exercises. The Secretariat briefed on OHCHR work in all these areas.

VIII. FUTURE WORK OF THE BOARD

25. The Board decided to hold its next two sessions on 13-16 June and 7-10 November 2006. The focus of the upcoming meetings will be influenced by developments occurring in the Office. The areas which the Board intends to discuss at its future sessions include:
 - Continuation of the discussion on a policy and operational framework
 - Criteria for various forms of field presences
 - The functioning of the various funds and their relation to the VFTC
 - The Human Rights Council, Peace-Building Commission, and the Democracy Fund and the Technical Cooperation Programme
 - Synergy and partnership, including with the World Bank
 - Professionalization of human rights field staff – update on the joint project with the University of Nottingham.
26. It was recommended that the two new members who will join the Board at its next session be given a briefing in Geneva by the Secretariat one day in advance of the session.

Annexes:

- Table of contents for documentation for the 24th session of the Board
- Agenda of the 24th Session of the Board