



## **ORAL STATEMENT BY CHRISTOPHER SIDOTI, CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE VFTC<sup>1</sup>**

**President, Deputy High Commissioner, Excellencies, distinguished  
representatives of member and observer States and of civil society**

Thank you for your opening comments, Deputy High Commissioner, and congratulations on your appointment. The Board of Trustees<sup>2</sup> looks forward to working closely with you in your new role and to continue to work closely with the High Commissioner for Human Rights herself and the staff of her Office.

I present this report to the Human Rights Council, following resolution 18/18, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights (VFTC).

The VFTC, established by the Commission on Human Rights, is the second largest trust fund administered by OHCHR. The Fund provides financial support for international technical cooperation at the field level to build and strengthen national capacities, including national institutions and civil society, for improved domestic implementation of the international human rights standards. Technical cooperation in the field of human rights, as supported by the Voluntary Fund, has developed greatly since the Fund's establishment, reflecting greater commitment to implement human rights standards at the national level and cooperation at the international level. Since the introduction of the UPR we have witnessed a further increase in the demand for technical cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> In relation to the presentation of the Report of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, A/HRC/23/16, 4 April 2013 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> The Board's five members, appointed by the Secretary General from the five geographic regions, are Deepika Udagama (Sri Lanka), Fatima Mbaye (Mauritania), Mariclaire Acosta Urquidi (Mexico), Sozar Subari (Georgia) and myself, Christopher Sidoti (Australia). The Board's Chairpersonship rotates annually among its members and I currently have that responsibility.



The Board itself became fully operational in 1993. Recently its mandate has been extended to cover as well the work of the Voluntary Fund on Technical Cooperation and Assistance of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR Trust Fund on Technical Cooperation). The Board appreciates this decision of the Secretary General in view of the relevance and complementarities of the two Funds.

### **Distinguished Members of the Council,**

The Board's role has changed significantly since its establishment. During its first decade it would review and determine funding applications on an individual basis, a task that became increasingly heavy and increasingly intrusive into the management of the High Commissioner's Office. From 2003, as the High Commissioner expanded her own field presences, the Board stepped back from micromanagement in favor of broader oversight of the VFTC. As reported to and endorsed by the Council in 2008 the Board now offers advice to the High Commissioner and her Office on policy orientation and strategy in strengthening technical cooperation in the field of human rights.

As part of this still developing role, the Board decided in 2011 to hold one of its two annual meetings where the High Commissioner has a field presence, so that it acquires more direct knowledge of the nature and effectiveness of the High Commissioner's technical cooperation work. The other meeting is held in Geneva furthering our overview of the technical cooperation programme through discussions with the various divisions and sections of the Office. These complementary meetings enable the Board to provide strategic and policy guidance and advice on the Office's technical cooperation activities.

The Board's report today covers its thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh sessions and an update of the use of the Fund during the period under review, supplementing the annual report to the Human Rights Council.

At its thirty-sixth session, held in Geneva from 23 to 26 April 2012, the Board was briefed on the implementation of the OHCHR 2012-2013 Management Plan, focusing specifically at the country and regional levels and on developments by thematic priority. During that session, the Board met with relevant OHCHR divisions and



sections in Geneva and provided its strategic and policy views on implementation of the technical cooperation components of the plan.

The thirty-seventh session of the Board of Trustees was held in the field, in Mauritania and Tunisia from 28 January to 2 February 2013. The field visit provided the Board with an opportunity to develop its own knowledge of the real needs of field presences and to obtain its own insight into the actual and potential uses of the Voluntary Fund. During the visit the Board again examined achievements, thematic priorities, constraints and challenges, this time in North Africa. The Board has found these visits very fruitful and will continue to make them on an annual basis to other countries in other regions.

As part of the Board's role in providing strategic and policy advice to the High Commissioner and her Office, the Board Members have participated actively, at the invitation of the Office, in the OHCHR Regional Consultations on the preparation of the new four-year plan. In this way the individual regional expertise of Board members was made available to the High Commissioner in a more direct form than previously. Through our participation in these consultations, we were able to offer our views and advice, based on our experience and expertise, on effective avenues for the Office to continue strengthening its technical cooperation work within each region as integral part of the OHCHR's overall programme.

Through these three approaches – the broad overview meeting in Geneva, the focused field visits and the participation in strategic planning – and the close collaboration with the various parts of the Office, the Board is able to identify and advise on

- the challenges and possibilities experienced by field presences in the area of technical cooperation
- best practices in the implementation of technical cooperation generally and
- the design and implementation of the technical cooperation work of the Office specific to each region.



The Board is convinced that this increased interaction at various levels is furthering its capacities to contribute more effectively to the technical cooperation efforts of the Office, including strengthening its strategy, policy and practice.

### **Distinguished Members of the Council,**

In the discussions and visits of the Board a number of key components of effective technical cooperation by OHCHR have become evident.

First, effective technical cooperation is based on the universality and indivisibility of all human rights and includes both the protection and the promotion of human rights. How this is realised will vary from country to country, however, the inclusion of both protection and promotion should be common to all situations and contexts.

Second, effective technical cooperation focuses on building and strengthening national frameworks and institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, including the rule of law, legal and political accountability, democratically elected parliaments, independent courts and independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs). Efforts to strengthen national human rights protection systems should include investing in NHRIs, specifically in the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles.

Third, effective technical cooperation reflects national development objectives, to ensure the highest levels of ownership and sustainability as well as to respond to genuine national interest, commitments and efforts for human rights promotion and protection.

Fourth, effective technical cooperation is formulated and implemented with the broadest possible participation of all elements of national societies, including state institutions (the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government), NHRIs and civil society. It is also linked with regional and sub-regional human rights mechanisms. Partnerships are critical for OHCHR to deliver its mandate effectively, particularly in the case of technical cooperation.

Fifth, effective technical cooperation is linked to follow-up on implementation of recommendations and concluding observations from international human rights



mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, the Special Procedures and the Treaty Monitoring Bodies. A very welcome example of this is the recent effort of the Office to establish guidance for Field Presences on the UPR Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance. The follow-up of the recommendations of the international human rights mechanisms are necessarily interlinked with the core work of the field presences.

Sixth, effective technical cooperation is mainstreamed through all UN agencies and operations in each country and region. Human Rights Advisers (HRAs) to UN Country Teams are one good example of this. The Board has been up-dated on the implementation of the joint UNDG Strategy for the Deployment of Human Rights Advisers to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams. The Board also emphasises the strategic importance of the cooperation between OHCHR and UNDP at country level by all types of UN human rights field presences.

Seventh, linking effective technical cooperation with existing thematic priorities of the Office is essential to contribute to the achievement of the Office's identified Expected Accomplishments.

### **Distinguished Members of the Council,**

In 2012 the Fund continued to provide resources for technical cooperation to build strong human rights frameworks at national level. In doing so, however, the Fund's reserves were further depleted because of the increasing demand for technical cooperation assistance and the continuing lower level of donations. During the period 1 January to 31 December 2012 \$18.5 million were received in new contributions but expenditures amounted to \$24.2 million, producing a short fall of \$5.7 million. Funds accumulated from previous years allowed OHCHR to cover the funding gap in 2012 but reserves are not unlimited. The present situation is unsustainable even in the short term.

The overarching objective of the work supported by the Voluntary Fund in 2012 remained institution-building and the development of local capacities to improve respect for and protection of human rights.



During the period under review, the Voluntary Fund has offered assistance in a wide range of substantive activities undertaken in 36 different countries and territories. This includes support to 19 human rights advisers,<sup>3</sup> 11 human rights components of peace missions<sup>4</sup> and 6 country offices.<sup>5</sup> The details of these are provided in the 2012 annual report of the VFTC and the OHCHR Annual Report 2012.

Despite the tangible results in many parts of the world of the technical cooperation work of OHCHR, the financial situation of the Fund is a serious concern. The Board takes this opportunity to encourage States and others to contribute to the Fund. At this particularly challenging time the Board encourages increased donation of un-earmarked contributions that allow flexibility in the management of the technical cooperation programme as a whole. Indeed, many projects are currently suffering from cash-flow problems and, if the trends of increasing demand and decreasing supply continue, OHCHR will be substantially limited in its capacity to deliver its technical cooperation as expected and as required.

**President, Distinguished Members of the Council,**

The Board encourages contributions to the Fund from a wide range of donors, including traditional donors, States that benefit from the Fund, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, philanthropic trusts and individuals. Their contributions to the Fund have been very welcome and are greatly encouraged.

The Board expresses its deep appreciation for the quality of assistance we receive from our Secretariat and also from offices of the OHCHR. We are encouraged by the deep commitment and high level of competence of so many of those we work with and so many of those we meet during the course of our work.

I thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> Chad, Ecuador, Great Lakes, Honduras, Kenya, Madagascar, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Maldives, Malawi, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, South Caucasus (Georgia), Ukraine, Yemen and Zimbabwe. Burundi will be discontinued in July 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan (2), Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur (Sudan), Libya, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia (2) and Timor-Leste.

<sup>5</sup> Bolivia, Kosovo, Mauritania, Mexico, Palestine and Togo.