CONCEPT NOTE

12th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

“THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: WHAT ROLE FOR NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS?”

8-10 October, 2015
Hyatt Regency Hotel, Merida, Mexico

I. Background
The International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) at its General Meeting held in Geneva in March 2015 confirmed the decision by the ICC Bureau at its meeting held in October 2014 in Johannesburg, South Africa to host the 12th ICC International Conference in the Americas. This is in accordance with established practice that the hosting of ICC’s International Conferences rotate on a regional basis.

In consultation with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the General Meeting also accepted the nomination of the A-status National Human Rights Commission of Mexico by the Americas Network of national human rights institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights as the host of the ICC International Conference. Further, it was agreed that the theme would be: “The Sustainable Development Goals: What role for National Human Rights Institutions?” The International Conference will be held from 8th to 9th October 2015 in Merida, Mexico.

The purpose of the ICCs International Conferences are to develop and strengthen cooperation between national institutions, to promote the establishment or strengthening of ties of friendship and solidarity between participants, to discuss items on the agenda and ensure their follow up at the national level. This International Conference will draw on NHRI experiences with addressing development-related issues in order to identify means through which NHRI can play a role in the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Follow up and Review processes.

The International Conference will be hosted and organized by the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico (CNDH) in collaboration with the International Coordinating Committee of national institutions for the promotion and protection of Human Rights (ICC), and in consultation with and under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
II. Context

By the time the ICC International Conference takes place, Heads of States will have in September 2015 adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the “2015 UN Summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda”. This new 2030 Agenda which follows on from the Millennium Development Goals will provide a globally agreed blueprint which will shape sustainable development across the globe until 2030. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda will be an historical opportunity to adopt a more holistic approach to development that promises to build on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to make use of lessons learnt in their implementation and to address not only their gaps but to also take into account both new and emerging challenges. The MDG results achieved by 2015 do not mark an end point but rather act as a springboard for the achievement of sustainable development within a set timeframe.

Although the MDG process led to significant progress in achieving the realisation of certain economic and social rights, it failed to adopt a human rights-based approach. Human rights were therefore not considered in a consistent or comprehensive manner when States sought to achieve the MDGs. This resulted in uneven progress across regions and countries exacerbated by conflict, gender inequality, poverty and environmental threats. The 2030 Agenda aims to address these and other shortcomings having been agreed to by consensus by Member States after the most inclusive consultative process in the history of the United Nations, with contributions not only from Member States but other stakeholders such as civil society organisations and UN agencies, the new 2030 Agenda has the ambition to transform the world.

The new 2030 Agenda marks an important paradigm shift towards an equitable and sustainable world that is human rights-based. It is explicitly grounded in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights treaties and instruments including the Declaration on the Right to Development. References to human rights are included throughout the 2030 Agenda, including prominent language in the Agenda’s Preamble and Declaration. This is reinforced by the recognition that implementation must remain consistent with relevant international rules and commitments.

The 17 SDGs together with their 169 underlying targets will guide international development priorities up to 2030 and they “mirror(s) the broader international human rights framework, including elements of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, as well as the right to development and set specific targets for disadvantaged groups.” The 2030 Agenda reflects a universal approach to development designed to ensure that it echoes the Secretary-General’s call that “no one will be left behind”.

Although the goals and targets do not explicitly mention particular human rights, the issues covered effectively mirror the international human rights framework encompassing civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the right to development. This will provide new opportunities for mainstreaming human rights into development. The 2030 Agenda will also provide a new vehicle through which human rights can be claimed and governments held accountable to their international obligations.

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<th>SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS²</th>
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<td>Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere</td>
<td>Goal 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries</td>
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¹ Ibid paragraph 83
The SDGs are underpinned by an ambitious set of Means of Implementation for each Goal and targets. The 2030 Agenda also calls for robust, inclusive and transparent Follow-up and review frameworks guided by a set of principles, which recognises that Follow-up and review processes will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people; thereby ensuring respect for human rights with a particular focus on the poorest and most vulnerable.

The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) established in accordance with the Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions (Paris Principles) are uniquely placed to act as a bridge between stakeholders and ensure that national sustainable development processes and outcomes are planned, implemented and monitored in a participatory, transparent and accountable manner based on disaggregated human rights data. NHRIs can influence the national process of implementation and accountability to ensure human rights are integrated in the process of tailoring and tracking goals, targets and indicators nationally. In addition they can provide advice to government on a human rights-centered approach to implementation of the SDGs paying particular attention to ensuring that the principles of equality and non-discrimination are given effect to.

NHRIs as independent institutions of accountability were engaged in many different activities to promote and protect human rights in the implementation of the MDGs within the context of promoting greater understanding, awareness and respect for human rights in these goals.

3 UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/48/134 adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993
In a similar manner and in accordance with the functions and responsibilities accorded NHRIs under the Paris Principles, NHRIs can leverage their functions to make distinctive and valuable contributions to the implementation and Follow-up and review processes of the SDGs thereby facilitating the creation of enhanced accountability mechanisms. NHRIs can act as a catalyst for monitoring that is participatory, evidence-based, transparent and accountable. Furthermore, NHRIs can promote remedies for all human rights violations and can use their protection powers to address serious human rights concerns linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. NHRIs powers to undertake investigations or inquiries, legal powers to intervene in court cases or undertake strategic litigation, as well as individual complaints handling mechanisms, can all have a role in ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

There are also some specific Goals where NHRIs are uniquely placed to contribute and assist in their achievement. For example, Goal 10 speaks directly to reducing inequality thereby ensuring that the principles of equality and non-discrimination are inextricably infused into the Agenda. Also, for NHRIs, Goal 16 is one of the most important goals that speaks directly to the role that they play in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, promoting access to information and advocating for accountable and inclusive institutions.

At an international level, NHRIs can help inform global accountability mechanisms linked to the Post-2015 Development Agenda, such as the High Level Political Forum held under the auspices of ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly as well as regional and national reviews.

**The role of the ICC in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Whilst NHRIs were not formally recognized in the process of developing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the ICC as the international umbrella association for NHRIs addressed an open letter to the UN Secretary-General setting out NHRIs support for the SDG process and a willingness to contribute and engage.

The ICC and its members have monitored the post 2015 development agenda process, established a Working Group in anticipation of NHRIs unique and important role in the implementation of the SDGs.

The Working Group aims at promoting and protecting human rights within the context of sustainable development by:

1) Harnessing the influence of NHRIs to promote the strongest possible inclusion of human rights in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2) Ensuring that NHRIs are prepared to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of human rights through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3) Increasing the recognition of the important role of NHRIs in promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of human rights through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The International Conference will provide an opportunity to further consolidate the leadership role that the ICC can play in assisting NHRIs to engage effectively with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to promote increased recognition of the role of NHRIs and determine priorities and activities for the ICC Working Group on Sustainable Development in support thereof.

**The role of strategic partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

NHRIs have become increasingly recognised during the past 20 years as important and even critical role players in the promotion and protection of human rights. NHRIs have sought to build strategic partnerships
with key stakeholders, most notably with the OHCHR which through the National Institutions and Regional Mechanism Section (NIRMS) acts as Secretariat to the ICC. In addition, the UN through the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies, its’ agencies, mechanisms and processes have provided important entry points for NHRIs in facilitating their contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights at a domestic level. The OHCHR provides regular support to NHRIs including assisting in their establishment and providing support, such as capacity development programmes, in order to strengthen them.

OHCHR has played a pivotal role in advocating for an understanding of the human rights implications of the new 2030 Agenda and has also provided critical perspectives on the accountability mechanisms through a human rights lens and the measurement of progress using human rights indicators. OHCHR will thus inevitably play an important role in supporting NHRIs’ work in relation to the achievement of the SDGs.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a key strategic partner of the ICC and NHRIs and has worked to support NHRIs in over 90 countries. In 2013, the UNDP adopted a new Strategic Plan which enhances its focus in pursuing its core goal to assist countries eradicate poverty while reducing inequalities and exclusion and also makes explicit reference to supporting NHRIs. In addition, UNDP has undertaken a restructuring process which has aligned human rights and the rule of law more prominently into UNDP’s overall work. The opportunities that these commitments provide are important for NHRIs work in promoting sustainable development that is grounded in human rights. The ICC has enjoyed a strategic tri-partite partnership with both OHCHR and UNDP since 2011 which aims to closely coordinate support to NHRIs and the ICC and its regional networks, share knowledge and experience.

Other specialised UN agencies such as United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will also provide much needed support domestically in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs in as far they relate to their specific mandates.

Emerging partners for NHRIs such as the European Union also provide key entry points for NHRIs. In a meeting in June 2015 during the annual European Development Days Event, the EU held a special session for NHRIs, highlighting the important role that NHRIs can play in promoting and protecting human rights in the post 2015 agenda for development, including development, and affirmed its commitment to work closely with NHRIs in advancing human rights.

Role of Civil Society Organisations and other key stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Paris Principles recognise the need for NHRIs to interact closely with civil society organisations (CSOs) and other human rights organisations in their efforts to promote and protect human rights. Indeed, collaboration between NHRIs and with CSOs presents an important opportunity to embed a culture of human rights within each State and where such partnerships are strong there have been positive strides in the effective promotion and protection of human rights. The work on MDGs provided valuable lessons on how States, business, civil society organisations and NHRIs can work together to promote development practices underpinned by human rights. While the primary responsibility for implementation of the SDGs rests with States, achieving the desired results requires a concerted effort from a myriad of stakeholders including civil society. This is particularly important as realising the promise “Leave No one Behind” requires that people themselves become active agents in the implementation process. In order to do, the people at the grassroots

need to be reached and mobilised into action. In many contexts it is the civil society organisations that are well-rooted at the community level and who assist NHRIs in the implementation and monitoring processes.

Other actors such as academic institutions contribute to building NHRIs through providing theoretical and technical capacities in dealing with human rights issues and support capacity to produce evidence-based research and findings. Actors such as parliaments serve as an oversight mechanism. Besides creating domestic legal frameworks and ensuring States’ compliance with human rights norms and standards, Parliaments facilitate the work of NHRIs and are a crucial mechanism for holding States accountable for the implementation of policies and programmes and in turn influencing the strides that a State may take in achieving its development targets. Working together with NHRIs, parliaments can ensure that national priorities conform to international human rights norms and standards.

The International Conference will seek to identify the opportunities for collaboration between NHRIs and key actors including civil society organisations, academic institutions, business, Parliaments and other actors to ensure that there is a high level of participation and inclusion and that when the national priorities are set they will bring about transformative change.

III. Sub-themes
The International Conference will have a number of sub-themes, these are:
1. The intersection between human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals
2. The role of NHRIs in the design, adoption and implementation of national implementation plans
3. New opportunities for NHRIs in ensuring the promotion and protection of rights of vulnerable groups through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
4. NHRIs role in holding government accountable to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at national, regional and global levels.
5. Cooperation between NHRIs and other actors such as CSOs, Parliament and business in the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda.

IV. Objectives of the Conference
The overall objective of the Conference is to explore the roles and opportunities that national human rights institutions (NHRIs) have to promote and protect human rights within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In particular the objectives will be to:
a) Ensure that NHRIs are fully informed about the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Developments as well as the opportunities and challenges that the SDGs provide for the promotion and protection of human rights.
b) Discuss and explore the potential roles that NHRIs can play with regards to promoting a human rights-based approach to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.
c) Share lessons learnt and best practices from NHRIs work around the globe that could contribute towards the Follow-up, review and monitoring of the implementation plans and strategies created to achieve the SDGs.

V. Expected Outcome
The adoption by consensus of an ICC Declaration on The Role of NHRIs in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Merida Declaration) that will serve as a clear reference point and guide for NHRIs, and shared with governments, UN agencies, civil society and other stakeholders. The Declaration will set out
The additional following outcomes are expected:

a) NHRIs will develop a broad understanding of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the role that is expected of them in the implementation and follow up and review processes thereof.

b) NHRIs will share best practices of monitoring the implementation and achievement of civil, political, economic and social rights with a view to developing these approaches in accordance with their anticipated role in relation to the SDGs.

c) NHRIs will develop strategies to engage governments and international bodies on their monitoring role and contribution towards the SDG process, in particular the adoption of a human rights based approach.

d) Discuss and agree on a roadmap and activities of the ICC Working Group on Sustainable Development.

VI. Participation

All NHRIs and the regional coordinating committees will be invited to the International Conference. In addition, the following stakeholders will be invited:

- The High Commissioner for Human Rights or his Representative as well as members of his office in charge of national institutions
- The UNDP Administrator or her Representative as well as members of her office
- Representatives from UN agencies including OHCHR, UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA and other agencies as appropriate
- Human rights experts
- International, regional and the host country human rights associations and non-governmental organisations
- Representatives of States including officials of the host country and members of the diplomatic corps whose country have a national institutions or intend to have one

State representatives shall attend only the opening and closing sessions of the International Conference.

VII. Dates and Venue

The International Conference will be held from 8th to 9th October 2015 in Merida, Mexico at the Hyatt Hotel. In addition the ICC Bureau Meeting will be held on 6th and 7th October 2015 and regional NHRI networks will hold meetings in the afternoon of the 7th October 2015.

VIII. Working Methods

The International Conference shall be held in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of International Conferences of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights adopted by NHRIs at their ICC meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland on 17 April 2002. In terms thereof, a preparatory General Committee (Prep Com) consists of staff representing the host institutions CNDH, the ICC Chairperson, and the OHCHR will be established. The programme of the International Conference will be prepared in close consultation between the host national institution, the CNDH, the ICC Chairperson and his delegated officials and ICC members and the OHCHR. The ICC membership will be consulted on and kept informed of conference preparations.
The Conference will be chaired by the host national institution, in line with the Rules of Procedure. At its Opening Session, the International Conference shall formally appoint: the general Preparatory Committee; the Drafting Committee of the Merida Declaration; and the Rapporteur-General.

The International Conference will be held in all four ICC official languages; namely, Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided and conference documents translated.

The International Conference will feature multi-stakeholder panel discussions on the selected topics. In the process of drafting the Merida Declaration, Regional Working Groups will be established and each working group will be assigned a Resource Person in order to provide technical support. A Guidance Note will be presented by each Resource Person, including the major questions that should be answered by the Regional Working Groups. Each group will select a Rapporteur to present its report to the plenary. The Rapporteurs will formulate input to the Drafting Committee in order to prepare a draft Merida Declaration which will be presented, discussed and adopted in the final plenary session.