Global conference discusses roles of NHRIs in protecting the rights of conflict-affected populations and vulnerable groups

Geneva I Kyiv 24 November 2016 - Representatives from national human rights institutions (NHRIs), the United Nations, Council of Europe, OSCE, diplomatic missions, civil society organisations, public and government institutions and the media met in Kyiv, Ukraine, to discuss how NHRIs can work to ensure the protection and respect of human rights of conflict-affected populations and groups in focus in the context of conflict.

The International Conference was co-organised by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights of Ukraine – Ukraine’s Paris Principles accredited NHRI and member of GANHRI – and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the support of Denmark's Embassy in Ukraine.

The Conference was held in follow up to the International Conference on the roles of NHRIs in conflict and post-conflict situations, held in Kiev in October 2015, and which resulted in the adoption of the Kyiv Declaration.

“NHRIs can play a unique and important role in assisting conflict-affected population and victims, in particular those most vulnerable and disproportionately affected by conflict- NHRIs can fulfill this role by applying their broad human rights mandate functions under the UN Paris Principles, at all stages of the conflict cycle” said Katharina Rose, Geneva Representative of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), addressing the Conference.
In particular, NHRIs can

- **Conduct investigations** into the situation of particular groups, to identify their needs measures for prevention;
- **Handle complaints** from rights-holders and affected groups;
- **Monitor and document discrimination and violations** of conflict-affected groups and victims. NHRIs can collect and disaggregate data to identify the impact of the conflict on different groups, and can report this to national and international protection mechanisms such as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. This is essential not only to protect those affected during conflict by alerting relevant protection mechanisms, but also, in the long term, to restore justice, ensure effective remedies and combat impunity;
- **Serve a unique independent bridging role**, especially between the state, rights-holders and affected communities;
- **Encourage ratification of international human rights instruments** and the development of national legislation and policies which specifically recognise and protect vulnerable and other groups and that are in line with international human rights standards;
- **Promote human rights education and training** with all sectors of society, which supports the development of a vibrant civil society and the respect for human rights and the rule of law; and
- **Give a voice to the voiceless** and provide **assistance to victims** in access to justice and reparations.

The degree to which NHRIs can engage during conflict is highly context-specific and regularly NHRIs themselves face additional, specific challenges in times of conflict, including security issues and threats for their own staff and operations.

"It is important that state authorities recognise the role of NHRIs and take due consideration of their recommendations. The international community has a responsibility to support
NHRIs, all the more so when they operate in conflict and face threats and other acts of intimidation."

Also speaking at the Conference, Fiona Frazer, OHCHR's Head of Mission to Ukraine said that “Ukraine is fortunate to have a strong, independent and fully functioning national human rights institution, which under the leadership of Commissioner Valeryia Lutkoska plays a fundamental role in addressing many of today’s human rights challenges in the country. We are grateful for the partnership and close cooperation."

As envisioned in the 2015 Kyiv Declaration, GANHRI is working closely with NHRI regional networks and global partners, in particular UNDP and OHCHR, to support NHRIs in conflict and post conflict situation.

This includes serving as knowledge broker and providing platforms for exchanges with and among NHRIs across all regions on experiences and lessons in protecting human rights in conflict situations, including at the GANHRI Annual Conference in March 2016 in Geneva, and during the joint UNDP-GANHRI-OHCHR Seminar in June in New York.

“NHRIs in conflict” and “NHRIs and the SDG” will also be among the thematic priorities of GANHRI's next three year strategic plan (2017-2019) and is confirmed to become a strategic priority under the global Tripartite Partnership between GANHRI, UNDP and OHCHR.

The roles of NHRIs in prevention, during conflict and peacebuilding have also acknowledged at United Nations level, most recently with the adoption of an NHRI indicator under Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals and by the Human Rights Council in its resolution on prevention, which specifically recognises NHRIs' roles in conflict prevention and calls on all states to establish NHRIs and strengthen existing ones in line with the Paris Principles.

Related documents:

i) Kyiv Declaration on the Roles of NHRIs in conflict and post-conflict
ii) Report from the International Conference on NHRIs in conflict and post-conflict, October 2015

Date: 24 November 2016

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