

Chairs' Summary of the Retreat

"Beyond the 4th UPR Cycle: Strengthening the Process for Transformative Human Rights Impact"

Rabat, Morocco, 5-6 June 2026

I. Context and objectives

1. From 5 to 6 June 2026, the Kingdom of Morocco organized in Rabat an international Retreat under the theme "Beyond the 4th UPR Cycle: Strengthening the Process for Transformative Human Rights Impact", in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UPR Info.

2. The Retreat took place at a particularly significant moment for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), as the international community marks the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Human Rights Council (HRC) and as the fourth cycle of the UPR approaches its conclusion. It provided a timely opportunity to take stock of lessons learned and to contribute to forward-looking reflections ahead of the fifth cycle.

3. The objectives of the Retreat were twofold. First, it sought to contribute to ongoing reflections on possible technical and procedural adjustments to the UPR, in light of lessons learned, discussions on efficiency, and the need to preserve the mechanism's core principles of universality, equal treatment, inclusivity and cooperation. Second, it aimed to strengthen the substantive effectiveness of the UPR by focusing on implementation, follow-up, monitoring and impact at the national level.

4. The President of the HRC and representatives of twenty-six Member States participated in the Retreat, alongside representatives of OHCHR, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, United Nations entities, international organizations, civil society organizations, academics and independent experts.

5. The discussions were structured around five themes: strengthening national ownership and implementation; exploring procedural adjustments for the next cycle; better integration of new technologies into the UPR process; financial and technical assistance; and the exchange of good practices.

II. Overall message

6. Participants reaffirmed that the UPR remains one of the most important achievements of the HRC and one of the most widely supported mechanisms of the international human rights system. Its universality, equal treatment of States, periodicity, cooperative nature, transparency and openness to stakeholder engagement were repeatedly recognized as essential foundations to be preserved. Participants also noted that, by encouraging regular assessment, dialogue and institutional reform, the UPR can contribute to stronger national human rights frameworks.

7. At the same time, participants underlined that preserving the mechanism is not enough. The credibility of the UPR in the fifth cycle will increasingly depend on its ability to strengthen implementation and to ensure that recommendations are followed up, translated into action and connected to measurable improvements in the enjoyment of human rights.

III. Implementation, national ownership and role of actors

8. Discussions emphasized that closing the implementation gap should be a central priority for the fifth cycle. The review generates visibility, political attention and recommendations, but these do not automatically translate into national action. Participants underlined that implementation requires political commitment, planning, coordination, resources, monitoring and sustained follow-up between cycles.

9. Participants highlighted the importance of improving the quality and usability of recommendations. Recommending States were encouraged to formulate recommendations that are more specific, targeted, measurable, actionable and adapted to national contexts, while remaining grounded in international human rights standards.

10. Clustering recommendations around thematic areas was considered useful to facilitate implementation, avoid unnecessary duplication and support more coherent follow-up. At the same time, it was noted that repetition of recommendations is not necessarily negative, as it may reflect the persistence or importance of certain human rights issues. Participants also underlined the need for indicators, criteria or methodologies to measure progress and assess implementation over time.

11. National implementation plans, roadmaps and National Action Plans for Human Rights were identified as potentially important tools to translate recommendations into priorities, responsibilities, coordination arrangements, timelines, indicators and support needs. Some participants also emphasized the value of mid-term reporting or self-evaluation by States under review to assess progress between cycles. Others also underlined the importance of integrating UPR recommendations into existing policy frameworks.

12. Participants underlined that national ownership should not be understood as the responsibility of the executive branch alone. While States retain the primary responsibility for implementation, many recommendations require the involvement of sectoral ministries, parliaments, judicial actors, local and regional authorities, NHRIs, and civil society organizations.

13. The role of parliaments was highlighted as particularly important where implementation requires legislative reform, budgetary oversight or political accountability. Participants also stressed the importance of strengthening the role of NHRIs in implementation and follow-up. In this context, a specific proposal was discussed to allow A-status NHRIs to participate in the UPR review and to take the floor independently, including after the State under review introduces its national report. Participants also emphasized that civil society participation, recognized as essential to the UPR, must be safeguarded, including by protecting those engaging with the mechanism from reprisals.

14. The central role of National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs) was strongly emphasized. Participants considered that NMIRFs should serve not only as reporting structures, but also as coordination mechanisms capable of clarifying responsibilities, reducing fragmentation, facilitating consultation with stakeholders and ensuring continuity between reporting,

implementation and follow-up. Their mandate, capacity, visibility and sustainability were identified as important conditions for effectiveness. In this regard, reference could be made to the Marrakesh Guidance Framework.

IV. Procedural adjustments and safeguards

15. Participants recognized that discussions on efficiency and procedural adjustments are necessary in the current context, including in light of financial constraints affecting the United Nations system. However, they emphasized that cost-effectiveness should not undermine the core purpose, principles, quality or inclusivity of the UPR. Efficiency should be understood as a way to strengthen the value and impact of the mechanism, not merely to reduce costs.

16. The possible submission of recommendations in writing before the review was received by some participants as an option worth further consideration, particularly for its potential to improve preparation, reduce duplication, facilitate clustering and allow more time for substantive dialogue. Participants emphasized, however, that any such development should preserve the interactive nature of the review and guarantee in-room participation. Written recommendations should therefore complement, not replace, public and interactive State-to-State dialogue.

17. Some participants also raised the possibility of extending the duration of the UPR cycle and reducing the number of States reviewed during each Working Group session, provided that this would be accompanied by stronger inter-cycle follow-up, including a mandatory mid-term evaluation or self-assessment by the State under review.

18. Participants also discussed whether the adoption process at the Working Group stage could be streamlined, while preserving the final adoption of UPR outcomes by the HRC under item 6. In this context, some participants suggested that the item 6 adoption could be used more effectively as a forward-looking moment, allowing the State under review to present its implementation plan or strategy and allowing other States to indicate possible technical assistance or support.

19. Non-cooperation was also discussed. Participants noted that such situations do not undermine the overall achievements of the UPR and that existing precedents may provide guidance. They also underlined the need to continue reflecting on how such situations should be addressed in a manner consistent with the principles and cooperative nature of the mechanism.

20. Participants also encouraged practical measures to improve the preparation and quality of the review, including the early publication of OHCHR documentation, clearer guidance for recommendations, better use of advance questions, and possible standard templates where these would support efficiency without creating unnecessary complexity.

V. New technologies, cooperation and resources

21. Participants agreed that digital tools and new technologies offer significant potential to support the UPR, particularly in relation to the submission of information, recommendation management, clustering, translation, data management and the tracking of implementation. Existing tools, including OHCHR platforms, the National Recommendations Tracking Database, the Universal Human Rights Index and UPR Info's database, were recognized as important resources.

22. Participants emphasized that digital tools should be better synchronized with one another and, where relevant, with national systems, treaty body recommendations, special procedure recommendations and other global human rights platforms. Such tools should help alert, prompt and connect actors, rather than merely store information.

23. Participants stressed that the use of technology must remain ethical, transparent, sustainable and human rights compliant. Particular attention should be paid to digital divides, offline accessibility, local languages, bias, data governance, human oversight and the need to ensure that no State or stakeholder is left behind.

24. Webcasting and hybrid or remote participation were recognized as important tools for accessibility and inclusivity, particularly for smaller delegations, civil society organizations and stakeholders facing financial or logistical barriers. Participants underlined the need to secure adequate resources to preserve these forms of participation.

25. Participants recognized the importance of financial and technical assistance to support implementation, participation and capacity-building. The two OHCHR voluntary funds, including those supporting participation and implementation, were recognized as important tools, and participants stressed the need for predictable resources, stronger fundraising and continued support for human rights advisers and technical assistance at the national and regional levels.

26. The role of United Nations Country Teams, development actors, bilateral partners, regional mechanisms and South-South or triangular cooperation was also highlighted. Participants emphasized the need to better connect UPR recommendations with national development strategies, SDG implementation, cooperation frameworks and public policies, where relevant and consistent with human rights obligations.

27. Peer-to-peer learning, regional platforms and the exchange of good practices were identified as important avenues for strengthening implementation. Participants noted that good practices should not only be showcased, but also assessed in terms of their sustainability, adaptability, institutional anchoring and ability to contribute to measurable change.

VI. Way forward

28. At the conclusion of the Retreat, the co-organizers undertook to prepare a final report reflecting the main issues, areas of convergence and proposals discussed during the meeting.

29. The outcomes of the Retreat will be disseminated with a view to informing structured inter-cycle discussions on the preparation of the fifth cycle of the UPR, in close dialogue and cooperation with the President of the Human Rights Council and relevant stakeholders.