
Introduction

The Commonwealth Secretariat is fully committed to supporting both the new universal review process and the active, informed and full participation of states and stakeholders from the Commonwealth. Thanks to financial support from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), in March 2008 the Secretariat's Human Rights Unit (HRU) began an detailed programme of work that addressed these objectives. The programme has four key elements:

- Sharing technical information about the procedure and modalities;
- Building the capacity and confidence of states in engaging and maximising the outcomes of their engagement in the process;
- Building stakeholder knowledge of, and participation in, the process;
- Learning from states and stakeholders that have been through the Geneva element of the UPR.

These elements have been pursued in a variety of ways: a series of seminars that included both states and stakeholders; observation of Commonwealth state sessions during the UPR process in Geneva; and participation in non-Commonwealth seminars on the UPR. Staff from the UN participated in and supported all the HRU seminars. Their knowledge of the UPR has been a critical part of the information-sharing component and they have readily promoted the HRU's efforts to disseminate information.

This publication draws together important strands of the discussions held during the first year of the UPR, especially in terms of contributions from states and stakeholders and from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). The Secretariat's expertise about the new process has grown during this first year and we are now looked to for advice and input from many quarters, including some that are outside the Commonwealth. In this publication we offer commentary on the process and some initial quantitative analysis of the interactive dialogue and recommendations as experienced by Commonwealth states.

Key messages that emerge from this document are that:

- Many parties, both states and stakeholders, find the new process unfamiliar and confusing;
- This uncertainty did not stand in the way of enthusiasm among states that went through the UPR process in 2008;

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- Much goodwill was extended by states under review towards the UPR;
 - Some saw the Geneva element as a dialogue and exchange rather than as an examination;
 - The states that felt they gained the most were those that treated the UPR as a chance to listen, learn and harness support;
 - The first year of the UPR has been a great learning experience;
 - Attention must now be paid to follow-up;
 - Consultation and co-operation across sectors indicate not only conformity with UPR guidelines, but also good practice in the promotion of human rights;
 - There is no one right model for UPR engagement – many are documented herein.

One year into the UPR, this publication compiles experiences, draws together recommendations and considers ways forward that may be able to strengthen the process and bring the UPR home to the peoples of the Commonwealth. These are still early days, but taking stock is always a useful exercise. In 2010, half-way through the UPR cycle, the Human Rights Unit will hold a review meeting. At that point we aim to pull together further experiences to strengthen the shaping of good practice, that has been started but not completed at this point.

I hope that this publication will be of use to those coming to the UPR for the first time – both states and stakeholders – and in the discussions that are now beginning about follow-up. I offer my thanks to those who have contributed to the publication, either by allowing their talks to be edited and published or by writing new pieces. Together we have taken forward the spirit of collaboration embodied in the UPR. I affirm the willingness of the HRU to offer advice and support in the preparation stage for states coming up for the UPR and for stakeholders that will be participating in the process and in the implementation phases.

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