
Collaborating with the Commonwealth Secretariat

It is a great privilege to be asked to contribute to the Commonwealth Secretariat's publication in the Universal Periodic Review.

The UPR is one of the most important innovations of the United Nations Human Rights Council. That is why we all need to build a review mechanism that is open and transparent, as well as consistent and co-operative. As one of the first countries to be reviewed, the UK aimed to establish a positive precedent. We have approached the process candidly, constructively and co-operatively, and we encourage other states to do the same. In order to ensure that the UPR fulfils its mandate and is a truly universal process, we have participated actively in every review. We have asked questions and made recommendations to every state reviewed so far.

We are delighted to be able to support and participate in the series of seminars that the Secretariat's Human Rights Unit is running to prepare states for their reviews. Because we were reviewed in the first week of the UPR, we hoped that others would find our experience helpful in their own preparations. These seminars have also been enormously helpful to us, as we have gained a wealth of ideas from others and improved our understanding of human rights within the Commonwealth. We hope to continue our fruitful partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat to offer support to states during the follow-up process and implementation of recommendations.

A key component of a successful UPR process is the involvement of civil society. Civil society played an important part in the preparation of our own review. We are working to encourage other participating governments to take a similar approach and to raise awareness of the UPR process among civil society organisations (CSOs) around the world.

A good review allows countries to take a self-critical look at their own human rights situation, to discuss the challenges they face with peers and take steps to improve the human rights situation in their countries. A successful review is not one in which no criticisms are made; every state has human rights challenges. Ultimately each review is a success if it leads to the country concerned addressing those challenges in co-operation with others, and improving people's lives.

I look forward to sharing our experience with my colleagues in other Commonwealth countries as more of us move towards the implementation phase and the prospect of showing progress in our second reviews.

Susan Hyland

Head of Human Rights, Democracy and Governance Group
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK