
The Commonwealth Secretariat*

The first year of the UPR

The first year of the new review process has been one of some uncertainty, lack of familiarity, learning, frankness, defensiveness, hope, optimism, relief and much more. As was to be expected, the process has not been without difficulties, but it was by no means a failure. On the contrary, there have been substantive and positive developments and the whole process has been more successful than some expected.

There was understandable scepticism⁵ from several quarters before the UPR started and in its very early days there was suspicion that powerful countries would somehow avoid a meaningful critique and that the 'usual suspects' would be the focus of attention. The legacy of the defunct Commission was strong indeed. Informal conversations with many stakeholders suggest strongly that much of the scepticism has dissipated. The potential of the UPR seems to be coming through and goodwill and commitment to the process is growing. This bodes well for the future success of the UPR.

Twelve Commonwealth countries underwent the Geneva element of the UPR in 2008: The Bahamas, Barbados, Botswana, Ghana, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Tuvalu, UK and Zambia. Their domestic contexts, challenges and successes are diverse: some have been involved in negotiations that have given birth to and shaped the UPR; others do not have missions in Geneva and were unfamiliar with both the HRC and the UPR. This is a considerable disadvantage and small states with resource constraints have keenly felt the challenges of participation and familiarity.

The following chapters focus on lessons to be learned from the first year of the UPR and have been contributed by a small state, an NHRI umbrella organisation and an NGO.

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