The crucial role of NGOs in the Universal Periodic Reviews is expressly recognised by the UN Member State and in the founding resolution of the mechanism. Since the UPR was introduced in 2007, Civil Society Organisations, and Human Rights Defenders have constantly engaged in the process, in order to effect positive change for human rights across the world. The role of Civil Society has proven to be vital for the success of the UPR.

To date the UPR has achieved 100% participation rate, with each UN member State having engaged in the mechanism. The peer review nature of the UPR continues to encourage global dialogue on human rights and has ensured that all countries, regardless of geographical, economic, or political influence, are accountable both nationally and internationally for their adherence to universal human rights standards.

Without the critical voice of civil society, UNANIMA International, within this process, the UPR would run the risk of becoming merely a talking shop for human rights. Through the engagement of all of the UPR is constantly able to achieve a real impact on the ground.

The Universal Periodic Review was established in 2006, under the remit of the United Nations Human Rights Council, in order to address gaps in the UN Human Rights infrastructure and to compliment the work of both the Treaty Body and Special Procedures systems. The UPR ensures equal treatment of all UN Member States and, that all human rights issues are discussed on a recurring basis. During the first UPR cycle, from 2008 to 2011, each UN Member States had its human rights standards scrutinised through the peer to peer human rights monitoring mechanism. Ahead of the second cycle in 2012 slight modifications were made to improve the process. At this time, the UPR was already being hailed as a success due to the fact that, for the first time, all UN Member States had voluntarily subjected their human rights records to international scrutiny. The UPR then took roots as a crucial human rights mechanism. However, the question remained for many: was the UPR also effective in changing the human rights situation on the ground? There have been a number of studies produced over the years including, “Beyond Promises, in 2014: The Impact of the UPR on the ground” and, in 2016, “The Butterfly Effect: Spreading good practice of UPR implementation”. These studies conclusively present evidence that shows the UPR has proven itself as an effective platform for discussion at an international level and that it has a positive impact on human rights at a national level. We are now into the third cycle (2017); every Member State has had their human rights reviewed twice, in Geneva, Switzerland. Roughly 55,000 recommendations have been made and approximately 72% have been supported.
The UPR process is cyclical in nature, repeating every 5 years. Every review follows the same format in Geneva. Each examination, conducted, by the UPR Working Group, takes three and a half hours. The State under Review is given a total of 70 minutes to address the working group. This time is usually to make introductory remarks, summarising their National Report, and to offer closing remarks once the Chair of the Working Groups concludes the interactive dialogue. The State under Review can also take the floor during the interactive dialogue to both to respond to questions, submitted in advance of during the review, and provide States with additional information. 140 minutes are allocated to the Interactive Dialogue of the Working Group Session. States participating in the review, known as Recommending States, have the opportunity to ask questions, not comments and, crucially, make recommendations to the State under Review.

To assist the process, in each review, three Member States, sitting as voting members of the HRC, are chosen to serve as the “Troika”. The Troika has two main responsibilities. Firstly, to receive all advance questions and relay them to the States under Review and secondly to help prepare the report of the Working Group with the assistance of the HRC Secretariat and the State under Review. The State under Review has the right to refuse one of the chosen countries and has the option for their regional group to be represented as one of the Troika Members. At the same time the Recommending States may also excuse itself from serving as troika member. Each member of the Troika can still make recommendations to the State under Review and participate as any other UN Member State in the Working Group.
Background Documentation

UPR examinations are based on the content of three reports, designed to outline the progress and challenges of the human rights situations since the previous review.

1. National Report
The SuR explains accomplishments and challenges in implementing recommendations since the previous review (10,700 words). This report should be based on broad consultations at the national level with relevant stakeholders.

2. Compilation of UN information
The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) compiles information it receives from various UN agencies, special procedures and treaty bodies about developments in the human rights situation in the SuR since the previous cycle (5,350 words).

3. Stakeholder Summary
OHCHR summarises reports, submitted by NHRIs and CSOs, on the human rights situation in the SuR (5,350 words).

Stakeholders can propose draft recommendations to the Recommending States of the UPR Working Group. This process ensures that Recommending States have access to information from sources other than the government of the State under Review when making their comments and recommendations at the UPR examination. Members of Civil Society etc. cannot take the floor at the review itself. Therefore submitting information and draft recommendations to be included in the Stakeholders Summary is a crucial element of Civil Society organisation involvement.

Who participates in the UPR?

The multiple parties that engage in the UPR can be split into three categories; Un Member States, UN Agencies, and other Stakeholders.

UN Member States

The peer-to-peer nature of the review ensures that whilst the State under Review is the focal point, the work of the Recommending States is crucial. The State under Review must submit its National Report, upon which it is based. THE Recommending State scrutinises this report and offers recommendations for the progress of human rights in the State under Review.

UN Agencies

The OHCHR Compiles UN information on the State under Review, gathering information from UN Agencies, for example, OHCHR country offices, as well as reports submitted to Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures. This information forms the second document upon which the UPR is based.
**Other Stakeholders**

The OHCHR recognises “civil society actors, national human rights institutions, human rights defenders, academic institutions, ombudspersons and regional organisations” as “Other Stakeholders”. Their submissions are collated by the OHCHR to make up the third document for the review, the,” summary of other stakeholders information”.

**Why should Civil Society partake in the UPR?**

Civil Society engagement in the UPR has proven to be crucial for its success in implementing progressive policies on human rights across the globe. Without the voice and work of Civil Society Organisations, and Human Rights Defenders running throughout the UPR, the Geneva based review process would have less of an impact on the ground.
Four reasons for Civil Society Organisations to engage in the Universal Periodic Reviews:

1) The Mechanism works
   Over the course of the first two cycles of the UPR the mechanism has had 100% participation by UN Member States, regardless of political, economic, or conflict situations.

2) Through the UPR Governments and Civil Society can be brought together.
   A holistic approach to implementation of UPR recommendations is not only advised but proves time and time again to be the most sustainable method for improvements in human rights. At a time of restricting Civil Society space, the UPR legitimises the human rights discourse and offers what is sometimes the only opportunity to engage on human rights issues with the government.

3) Civil Society Organisations can be strengthened through the process
   By working on the UPR, national and international Civil Society Organisations can be brought together, where collaboration and coalitions can strengthen their work. Civil Society Organisations working on different issues have cooperated for the first time through the UPR.

4) It provides a great opportunity to increase awareness about human rights issues in a country.
   The UPR is webcast, which makes it more accessible. In addition, it usually gets more press coverage than other human rights mechanisms, and in some cases parliamentarians are also involved. Civil Society actors can use the UPR to increase awareness on human rights issues, and to exert more pressure on a State to respect human rights in general.

When and how can Civil Society engage in the UPR?

The UPR is a cyclical Process with the State being reviewed once every five years. There are multiple points of entry for civil society actors throughout the process.
1. Preparation for the Review – As the date for the Geneva based review approaches, States, UN agencies, and other stakeholders are once again called upon to submit their reports on the human rights situation on the ground. The State under Review is strongly encouraged to conduct national consultations with civil society actors to ensure a realistic portrayal of the state of human rights in their country.

2. Review to Adoption - This consists of the 3.5 hour working group session during which the State under Review presents its National Report and responds to questions and comments from other UN Member States. The Draft Working Group Reports, for each State under Review, are released no later than a week after the review. Approximately three to four months later, during the Human Rights Council plenary sessions, the Final Reports are adopted. Civil Society cannot take the floor during the review itself, but it can make statements during the adoption of the UPR reports.

3. Implementation of Recommendations – Once the Human Rights Council has adopted the Final Report the State under Review can begin working towards implementing the UPR recommendations. States that take a holistic approach to implementation, by engaging civil society, National Human Rights Institutions, the business sector, and key government ministries for example, are likely to ensure implementation of recommendations. States and Civil Society actors are also encouraged to submit mid-Term Reports at the half way point of the UPR cycle.
Preparation for the Review

Each UPR takes approximately five years. One year before the UPR examination in Geneva, the attention of all stakeholders moves towards the UPR reporting processes.

- Ongoing: Monitor implementation of recommendations
- 12 months before: Raise awareness of the upcoming UPR, Identify new challenges
- 12-6 months before: Participate in National Consultations
- 6-7 months before: Write submissions for OHCHR, Include Matrix
- 2 months before: Advocate to RS, Hold In-country Pre-sessions
- 1 month before: Engage in advocacy in Geneva, using the UPR Info Pre-sessions
- The Review: The 3 1/2 hour examination of the SuR in Geneva
Drafting UPR Recommendations

The S. M. A. R. T. Method applied to the UPR adds helpful criteria for writing precise and action-oriented recommendations. These should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Effective recommendations are the most important outcome of the review process in Geneva.

Examples of some recommendations made to Poland at 2017 UPR:

- Intensify its measures and initiatives to support persons with disabilities
- Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- Accede to and fully implement the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions in order to secure the basic rights of stateless persons and introduce a formal statelessness determination procedure
- Allocate the necessary resources to the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights
- Reinforce Institutional and Administrative measures, including the reestablishment of the Council for the Prevention of Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance
- Publicly denounce anti-Semitic and other hate speech and acts at the highest levels of government, as well as support tolerance awareness – raising and training efforts
Conducting Advocacy and raising awareness during the UPR Process

Sustained advocacy throughout and between UPR cycles is critical to keep the mechanism on the agenda of the government and for raising awareness of, human rights issues. Prior to the UPR examination in Geneva, advocacy often refers to the work of Civil Society Organisations to influence Recommending States that have an interest in a certain State or issue at the upcoming review. It is critical that civil society actors engage in effective advocacy with these targeted Recommending States as this can lead to the incorporation of their priority issues in UPR advanced questions and recommendations.

UPR Advocacy Checklist
The Review and the Human Rights Council Adoption

UPR examinations, and adoptions of subsequent reports, take place over a period of approximately months. During this time there are multiple opportunities for civil society and UN Member States to interact and discuss how to further progress human rights through the UPR. During the Working Group Sessions only Member States can take the floor, though Civil Society could see engaging in this phase of the UPR as a possible waste of time and resources. However, as I discovered there are many ways in which Civil Society Organisations can have an effective impact on the UPR during the examinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSIBLE ACTIONS</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
<th>CAUTIONS</th>
<th>TIPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending the UPR WG Session, in Geneva</td>
<td>- Monitor the review on social media channels</td>
<td>- Costly when you cannot take the floor</td>
<td>- Follow UPR Info social media stream</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Make contact with sympathetic RS</td>
<td>- Difficult to arrange meetings with States given busy UPR timetable</td>
<td>- Ask Geneva-based partners to monitor and attend meetings</td>
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<td>- Make contact with the State delegation</td>
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<td>- Make contact with International CSOs and partner organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watch/broadcast the UN webcast live or at a later time, in-country</td>
<td>- Use the opportunity to raise awareness about the process</td>
<td>- Live streams can breakdown due to limited internet connections</td>
<td>- If hosting a viewing, have alternative plans in case of technical failures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Know the recommendations prior to the draft report publication</td>
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<td>- Hold the event a day after, when the webcast is available</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Host other civil society actors in viewing event, developing UPR CSO bonds</td>
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<td>- Register and gather contact details and area of work of all those in attendance of a viewing</td>
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<td>- Access the review at a more appropriate time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hold/Participate in events on the situation, in-country</td>
<td>- Continue to raise awareness of issues and the country specific context</td>
<td>- Attendance may be low due to lack of awareness around the UPR</td>
<td>- If events are planned include a range of speakers, such as Ambassadors, or Geneva-based panellists via video link, to draw attention to the event</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Connect with Geneva based international non-governmental community</td>
<td>- Impact limited as UPR statements are finalised at this stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press briefings and releases, in Geneva and/or in-country</td>
<td>- Writing a press release ensures a focus on priority issues</td>
<td>- Unless the reporter/outlet has a basic understanding of the mechanism misreporting can occur</td>
<td>- Provide briefings for journalist</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provides media outlets with digestible information on the event</td>
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<td>- Invite media outlets to UPR Info led training</td>
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</table>
Timeline for Civil Society Organisation engagement in UPR

When and how to maximise civil society impact at the UPR

6 months - 1 year before the review

- Encourage your State to hold national consultations before drafting its report
  - The HRC encourages States to prepare their report through a broad consultation process at the national level with all relevant stakeholders (resolution 5/1). Use this to make sure the SuR adopts an open and transparent process.

- Attend National Consultations if they are taking place, if there are none organised approach the SuR to advocate for your issues to be included in the SuR's report.
  - SuR has to submit its report 3 months before the review.
  - Refer to consultations (or lack thereof) in advocacy with RS to reinforce your position, especially if you raised issues during consultations which were not considered.

4-6 months before the review

- Prepare Advocacy Factsheets
  - Select key issues to advocate on (ideally no more than 4). Draft a short paragraph to explain each issue, and include draft S.M.A.R.T recommendations, and questions. Include a short paragraph about your CSO.

- Identify RS for advocacy
  - Use UPR Info's database to assess which States are interested in your issues and draft your Advocacy Factsheet accordingly. Check which States that made recommendations during the previous UPRs and note which RS may be interested in your State's UPR.

Do not forget to refer to your UPR CSO Submission, if submitted.
3-4 months before the review

- Contact embassies
  - Identify and contact the person/team working on the UPR at the embassies in the SuR. Provide them with the Advocacy Factsheets and make follow-up calls.
  - Organise a briefing for several (e.g., all European embassies/all Latin American embassies) at once, or all embassies at the same time. It is more efficient and can help initiate discussions.
  - Not all embassies have a person dedicated to the UPR nor do they all know about the UPR. If necessary, ask for the person in charge of human rights. Be ready to explain what the UPR is during your meeting.

1-2 months before the review

- Consult the SuR National Report, the UN Agencies Compilation, and the CSO Submissions
  - Read the documents to check whether issues raised in your written submission have been included. If they have, add the references in your Advocacy Factsheets and mention it to the States you approach.

- Contact Permanent Missions in Geneva
  - Contact the UPR or human rights team. Send your Advocacy Factsheets and make follow-up contact.

- Participate in UPR Info's Pre-sessions
  - The public Pre-sessions are an opportunity to deliver a 5 to 10-minute statement including suggested questions and recommendations to the international community ahead of the UPR. More details are available at: www.upr-info.org/pre-sessions
  - Avoid contacting Mission staff during the HRC sessions. If such a session is held a month prior to the UPR, try to target State representatives a couple of weeks before and then the week after.
THE REVIEW

- Attend the UPR in Geneva or follow proceedings via the webcast and UPR Info social media channels
  - https://twitter.com/UPRinfo
  - https://www.facebook.com/UPRinfo/
- Organise events around the UPR and invite key actors and partners, including the media.

2 days after the review

- Read the Outcome Report on the OHCHR extranet (or UPR Info website)
  - If you were unable to follow the review, use this report to assess whether your issues were raised, whether they have resulted in recommendations, and whether they were “supported” or simply “noted”. Report the outcome to colleagues and other partners.

- Contact the States that incorporated your concerns
  - If a State incorporated your recommendations, contact them to thank them for their support.

0-3 months after the review/before the adoption of the Outcome Report at the HRC Session

- Advocate to the SuR to accept recommendations and plan implementation
  - Request a meeting with SuR’s representatives of the relevant ministries to discuss recommendations and advocate for them to be accepted when the UPR report is adopted.
  - Recommendations that “enjoy the support” of the SuR are considered accepted.

- Do not forget to involve the national human rights institution of your country and supportive members of Parliament in your activities.
3-12 months after the Review

Follow-up on recommendations

Follow up with your government to offer assistance in implementing recommendations, including through a draft action plan.

Maintain a dialogue on noted recommendations

If recommendations were noted, follow up with the State to discuss the reasons why.

2.5 years after the Review

Submit a Mid-term Report

Write and submit a mid-term report on the implementation of recommendations and encourage others, including the SuR to submit their own.

3.5-4 years after the Review

Initiate a dialogue on the next review cycle

Encourage the State to hold national consultations involving civil society in an effective manner in preparation for the next UPR.

Follow up with the embassies/Missions that made your recommendations

Provide updated information on the implementation, or lack thereof, especially if they were accepted and encourage them to follow up with the State bilaterally.

If it may not be possible to work with the same Embassy/Mission staff, in which case prepare a short briefing on your organisation, your previous work with the RS, and your key areas of interest.

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