

OHCHR comments on DFID's MAR Assessment

28 February 2011

The following commentary includes substantive and factual clarifications in relation to Mr. Anthony Smith's communication to the Deputy High Commissioner dated 14 February 2011.

Description of Organization

- ▶ Regarding the nature of the work of OHCHR, we would like to stress that OHCHR can only engage fully with a country through government consent. Hence, OHCHR's work as the UN's main body for human rights is carried out openly and transparently in full view of the international community. However, in some situations findings are kept confidential in order to protect victims or witnesses from potential repercussions, or at the explicit request of States. Recently, OHCHR has responded swiftly to the challenges presented by the turmoil in North Africa by dispatching a highly visible investigative team to Tunisia and is ready to take similar action in other countries in North Africa.
- ▶ OHCHR does not provide support to the General Assembly's Third Committee, rather its programmes are reviewed by the Third Committee who also approves or disapproves requests to increase OHCHR's share of regular budget funding.
- ▶ The 2010-2011 Strategic Management Plan covers six thematic areas of work i.e.: discrimination; impunity; economic, social and cultural rights; migration; armed conflict; and strengthened support to the human rights mechanisms. The five areas highlighted in the 2008-2009 Strategic Management Plan i.e.: leadership; country engagement; partnerships; UN human rights mechanisms; and management and planning were derived from former High Commissioner Louise Arbour's Plan of Action (2006 – 2011) to double OHCHR's resources as per the decision taken by leaders at the 2005 World Summit.
- ▶ OHCHR human rights advisers in UN country teams are distinct from human rights sections within UN peacekeeping operations in several aspects, including in size and scope. Whereas human rights advisers usually work alone and are funded either directly by OHCHR or co-funded with UNDP through the undg mechanism, human rights sections within UN peacekeeping operations comprise larger teams of human rights officers funded by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, with OHCHR providing complementary funding for activities.
- ▶ All voluntary contributions provided to OHCHR are converted into US dollars since this is the main currency used by the UN for its financial transactions. Therefore, it should be noted that OHCHR's assessment that income will shrink in future years can, in addition to being a result of the global financial crisis, be attributed to currency depreciations against the US dollar, not the Swiss Franc.

1. Contribution to UK Development Objectives

1a. Critical role in meeting international objectives

- ▶ We would like to highlight the fact that as shown by the recent turmoil in many Arab States, including those with a relatively high per capita income, human rights and development, including poverty reduction, are intrinsically linked and interdependent. Therefore, we would like to express our disappointment that this linkage has not been clearly reflected in the assessment despite OHCHR's efforts to provide extensive information on this subject.

5. Strategic and Performance Management

- ▶ While we appreciate DFID's assessment under point 10 that there is a relatively high likelihood of positive change in OHCHR, recent efforts at improving results-based management, including the introduction of a new set of expected accomplishments and indicators of performance together with an electronic tracking system (database) could have been more clearly reflected here.

6. Financial Resources Management

- ▶ We would like to stress that OHCHR's Financial Management Committee reviews once a month expenditure performance in great detail on a project-by-project basis. Resources are subsequently redeployed, as necessary, from under-performing projects to more effective and/or productive programmes. We therefore do not agree with the assessment that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that OHCHR has processes in place that manage poorly performing projects and programmes.

7. Cost and Value Consciousness

- ▶ While it is true that OHCHR has limited flexibility and scope for cost control due to its status as a department of the UN Secretariat, OHCHR does not believe that it should be assessed on the basis of the performance of another UN organization i.e. UNDP which is often used as an implementing agent for OHCHR's field based programmes for lack of independent capacity to pay bills and receive funds locally. Rather, an assessment of current UN Secretariat practices in the area of financial management and control, together with support for more delegation of authority to OHCHR, would better serve our shared objective of ensuring best value for money.

9. Transparency and Accountability

- ▶ It should be noted that OHCHR's Strategic Management Plan is produced once every two years, not annually.
- ▶ OHCHR does not report directly to the General Assembly. However, the High Commissioner's annual report to the Human Rights Council is also made available to bodies of the General Assembly such as its 3rd and 5th committees.
