

## RESEARCH BRIEF

# OPERATIONALIZING PREVENTION - HOW THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM CAN CONNECT EARLY WARNING TO ACTION

### INTRODUCTION

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/251 of 2006 tasked the Human Rights Council (HRC) to 'address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations', as well as to 'contribute, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies'.<sup>1</sup> This positions the prevention of large-scale human rights violations as a top priority of the UN's human rights system.

In 2016, the HRC stressed the 'need to develop further the concept of the prevention of human rights violations and to step up efforts to raise awareness of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights in order to encourage its reflection in relevant policies and strategies at the national, regional and international levels'.<sup>2</sup> A few years later, HRC Resolution 45/31 of 2020 called on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 'to identify, verify, manage and analyze data and early warning signs emanating from all sources, including from States, human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, human rights defenders, United Nations country teams and the Office's field presences'.<sup>3</sup> Where these patterns are identified, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should 'continue to bring that information to the attention of the members and observers of the Human Rights Council in a manner that reflects the urgency of the situation'.<sup>4</sup>

Prior and current initiatives of OHCHR have sought to support the operationalization of the HRC's prevention mandate. This has included projects to develop and track early warning signals, such as project *Kassandra* and *Civic Space Pulse*.<sup>5</sup> OHCHR has expanded its presence in New York to better collaborate with the conflict prevention efforts of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and has built a large field presence, including alongside UN peace operations. These efforts have increased the ability of the UN's human rights system to identify signals of deterioration and escalation in many settings. However, nearly two decades after the establishment of the HRC, there is widespread acknowledgement that the UN's human rights system has yet to fully realize its prevention mandate.<sup>6</sup> In particular, human rights experts have highlighted a gap between early warning and early action to prevent large-scale violations and escalation into violent conflict.<sup>7</sup>

DECEMBER 2024 | ADAM DAY AND EMMA BAPT

This publication has been externally peer-reviewed

The present project is focused on two questions: (1) How can the UN's human rights system better meet its early warning function? And (2) Can early warning signals be better connected to early action across the UN system? Our first report *From Signals to Action: How the UN Human Rights System Can Deliver Early Warning and Conflict Prevention (2025)*, suggests that the HRC, together with OHCHR, provides a unique and empirically rich ecosystem for identifying drivers and potential early warning signs of conflict.<sup>8</sup> Adopting a 'big data' approach to the information produced by the UN's human rights system across five conflict case studies – Syria (2011), Mali (2012), South Sudan (2013), Ukraine (2014) and Myanmar (2017) – the report offers cross-cutting findings, examples of good practice and recommendations for better connecting human rights to the broader UN peace and security architecture. In the context of an often-stalled Security Council, unwillingness by member states to take preventive action and somewhat limited General Assembly powers, the HRC offers a crucial forum for enhancing the UN's prevention role. This builds on an earlier policy brief, *Delivering the Right to Peace: Towards a Strengthened Role of the Human Rights Council in the UN's Peace and Security Framework (2023)*, which proposes that the UN's human rights system could play a greater role in addressing the risks of violent conflict.<sup>9</sup> This ongoing research echoes key messages from the 2024 Geneva Peace Week, which highlighted how the human rights system can play an even more important role in conflict prevention.

This second report builds on prior research efforts by focusing on specific ways the UN's human rights system can connect early warning signals to specific responses, processes and programmes. It identifies potential policy and operational steps to improve the prevention role of the UN's human rights system and offers concrete recommendations for the UN system and beyond. Actionable ideas and innovative approaches to enhancing the HRC's conflict prevention role are especially important in the context of the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR).

Specifically, this paper seeks to respond to the following questions: Are there ways to connect early warning signals to processes and actions by the HRC or others? What technical and structural changes to the HRC might be needed to implement previous recommendations proposed, aggregate early warning data and tell a more compelling story offered by early warning signals produced by the human rights system? How could these signals be brought to the New York ecosystem, including, for example, the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)? Are there architectural changes in New York, Geneva and ongoing processes such as the 2025 PBAR that might be needed?

## CHALLENGES FOR OPERATIONALIZING PREVENTION

This section summarizes the key challenges for operationalizing the HRC's prevention mandate. While these likely resonate and are largely familiar within the UN's human rights system, other parts of the broader UN system may understand prevention and/or the HRC's prevention mandate differently. This section aims to provide a framing of the current challenges facing the prevention of violent conflict today. Addressing these challenges will be key to enhancing the operationalization of prevention within and beyond the UN's human rights system.

- 1. What is 'prevention'?** In 2016, the UN Security Council's and General Assembly's twin resolutions on sustaining peace defined prevention as the avoidance of 'the outbreak, escalation, recurrence, or continuation of conflict'<sup>10</sup> Within OHCHR, prevention is understood as the avoidance of human rights violations, generally recognized as a 'precursor' of conflict.<sup>11</sup> While there is a clear relationship between violent conflict and large-scale human rights violations, the two issues are not synonymous. Preventing human rights violations may require a different set of approaches than preventing violent conflict. One of the most frequent opening questions with experts in this field is 'What are we trying to prevent?'. The lack of a clear understanding of the term could undermine a common approach and/or affect how priorities are set. For the purposes of this report, we focus on how the UN's human rights system can reduce the risks of widespread violence, which could include settings recognized as threats to international peace and security, but also large-scale violent conflict and/or human rights violations within a country.<sup>12</sup>
- 2. When is prevention?** Prevention is most typically understood in operational terms as actions to reduce the risks of imminent violence and/or human rights violations. Over the past decade, the UN has increasingly understood prevention more broadly to include 'upstream' efforts to address the root causes of violent conflict.<sup>13</sup> Today, there is consensus that prevention should include both operational and structural efforts. For example, the 2018 United Nations and World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report notes that prevention requires 'proactively addressing deeper, underlying risks that prevent sustainable development and peace'.<sup>14</sup> Within the UN's human rights system, OHCHR specifically

took up the 'pathways' approach in its strategic plan, and experts reporting to the HRC have argued that prevention should also include 'structural prevention, which is meant to unlock systemic violations and reduce the long-term likelihood of violations'.<sup>15</sup>

Expansion of the concept of prevention is helpful on many fronts, including the many efforts to orient the development, human rights and other work of the UN system towards a common set of objectives. However, there is a downside to an overbroad use of 'prevention': it can become diluted and come to mean nearly any activity in a fragile, conflict-prone setting. This can lead to challenges of prioritization and triage: how to choose activities that are most likely and/or effective at reducing the risks of widespread violence?

- 3. The complex causal links between human rights violations and conflict:** A wide range of scholarship has explored the complex causal relationships between human rights violations and conflict.<sup>16</sup> In some instances, the relationship is clear, especially when large-scale human rights violations are perpetrated against a protected class of people, or when human rights violations are part of an ongoing conflict. OHCHR has consistently highlighted the links between human rights and conflict.<sup>17</sup> Several UN initiatives such as the Human Rights Up Front Initiative, Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence,<sup>18</sup> the mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide<sup>19</sup> and the Office of Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect's Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes have worked to strengthen the UN's capacity to identify early warning signs of serious human rights violations and potential conflict, including across its human rights, peace and security and development pillars.<sup>20</sup>

However, in many instances, human rights violations play an indirect role in driving conflict risks. For example, social and economic rights may be inhibited, leading to deeper social divides, inequalities and grievances, which the UN and World Bank *Pathways* report notes are some of the main drivers of conflict.<sup>21</sup> These more indirect causal relationships can be difficult to capture in a prevention context.
- 4. Aggregating early warning signals:** One of the key findings in *From Signals to Action* is that early warning signs of human rights violations, which may lead

to potential increased violence and/or conflict, are often buried within the UN's human rights system reporting.<sup>22</sup> As of today, there is no systematic way to bring these signals together, analyse them collectively and assess their potential to escalate into violence. This makes an analysis of trends, patterns and/or escalatory dynamics by the HRC and OHCHR difficult and, in many cases, impossible. Moreover, many of the most frequently occurring signals (e.g. unequal treatment of groups, domestic forms of violence and socio-economic inequalities) occur in reports that are unlikely to be considered by conflict prevention actors.

- 5. Political will:** Most actions by the UN's human rights system were taken in response to the onset of conflict, rather than before widespread violence broke out. This is in part due to issues of consent and assertions of sovereignty by national governments, but also resistance by a wide range of actors against international involvement in domestic matters. In simple terms, political leaders tend to resist interventions and resolve issues themselves, hoping to stay off the international agenda.

This dynamic can be seen in efforts to keep settings off the Security Council's agenda, but also within the UN's human rights system. For example, the HRC's Special Procedures heavily depend on government response, levels of cooperation from relevant stakeholders and the ability to access interlocutors in difficult-to-reach settings.<sup>23</sup> Country cooperation is crucial for allowing access to territories at high risk of human rights violations, and to information that may be closely held by governments. In fact, as discussed below, the lack of country cooperation with the HRC's Special Procedures can itself be an early warning sign, for example, of increasing government violence and shrinking civic space.

- 6. Recurrent vs first-instance violence:** The case studies examined in our first report highlight that international attention to fragile, conflict-prone settings is fleeting and inconsistent.<sup>24</sup> Intense international scrutiny of a rapidly escalating situation may allow for action by the HRC and/or the Security Council, but that often subsides quite quickly. And in terms of the HRC's involvement, international attention may only arise once a relatively high level of violence has already occurred. This makes the UN system more likely to identify recurring conflicts

(e.g. recurring cycles of conflict in Mali since 2012) than newly emerging ones, or ones that have displayed low levels of violence for long periods of time. As noted in the *Pathways* report, 'prolonged violent conflict may become more complex and multidimensional ... as a conflict continues, the original drivers are more likely to transform and require different solutions'.<sup>25</sup>

This presents a unique set of prevention challenges: 'new' conflicts often arise from deeply entrenched and historical patterns, requiring long-term structural change. In several country case studies in *From Signals to Action*, unequal distribution of power and resources across political groups was a clear driver of violent conflict.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the immediate trigger for violence requires a specific short-term response; for example, the deployment of mediation expertise, peacekeeping troops and/or observers. These capacities may be available in settings that have experienced violence for decades and already have a significant UN presence on the ground (e.g. peacekeeping settings) but are difficult to generate in settings that have not been on the international agenda for long periods of time.

- 7. A narrowing role for the UN:** The past decade has seen a narrowing of space for the UN to play a peacemaking role in major conflict settings. This is in part due to paralysis in the UN Security Council, as well as a willingness of major powers and regional actors to seek out other forums for conflict resolution.<sup>27</sup> As the Secretary-General's *A New Agenda for Peace* notes, a loss of trust in the multilateral system has led to a shrinking space for the UN to prevent and resolve conflicts.<sup>28</sup> The dwindling role of the UN as a peacemaker likely means it is less well positioned to play a conflict prevention role as well. How to create more scope for manoeuvre so the UN can play a preventive role is one of the key objectives of this research.

## AREAS FOR OPERATIONALIZATION

Operationalizing the role of human rights in conflict prevention will require efforts across a wide range of areas. Drawing on in-depth case studies examined in the first report of this project, as well as a wide range of expert consultations, we have identified the following key areas where the prevention mandate of the UN's human rights system could be more effectively operationalized:

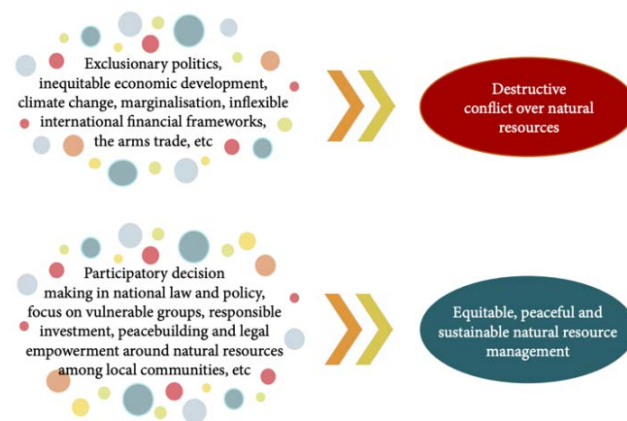
- 1. Coverage discrepancies:** UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 of 2006 establishing the Human Rights Council recognized 'the importance of ensuring universality, objectivity and non-selectivity in the consideration of human rights issues, and the elimination of double standards and politicization'.<sup>29</sup> However, the country cases examined in *From Signals to Action* displayed a significant variance in coverage in the lead-up to the conflict outbreaks considered.<sup>30</sup> Across the Special Procedures' annual thematic reports collected for the 5 case studies examined, there were only 18 mentions of South Sudan in the 2009–2013 period. In contrast, there were 469 mentions of Syria between 2007 and 2011; 248 of Myanmar between 2013 and 2017; 176 of Mali between 2008 and 2012 and 210 mentions of Ukraine between 2010 and 2014. These disparities are in part the result of whether countries are placed on the HRC agenda, whether Special Rapporteurs are granted access to at-risk areas via country visits and whether global political attention has yet shifted to these countries. More generally, however, they suggest that more should be done by the HRC to translate early warning signals into more consistent focus and coverage as negative trends within a given country increase over time.
- 2. Bringing economic, social and cultural rights into focus:** General Assembly Resolution 60/251 also argues that 'all human rights must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis'.<sup>31</sup> While there is ample evidence that violations of economic, social and cultural rights constitute key causes, consequences or even predictors of violence, social unrest and conflict, no unified methodology has yet been developed to identify early tensions that could allow more specific and targeted interventions – particularly around economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>32</sup> *From Signals to Action* found that some of the

most important early warning signals produced by the UN's human rights system related to economic, social and cultural rights. For example, in the lead-up to the 2016 and 2017 military crackdowns against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, violations of economic, social and cultural rights, particularly of minority and vulnerable groups, were not only consistently highlighted in the HRC's reporting but were clearly linked to patterns of discrimination against Rohingya Muslims.<sup>33</sup> However, in several other cases, coverage of violations of economic, social and cultural violations remained poor or scattered across the system. For example, prior to the South Sudan war in 2013, indicators relating to socio-economic inequality, violations of economic, social and cultural rights and access to resources such as healthcare and sanitation, provided important signals of growing conflict risks, but were scattered across the HRC's reporting. While some reports highlighted food and water insecurity and scarcity, these were not aggregated into clear signals of the trends or links between resources and unrest.<sup>34</sup> Similarly in Syria, despite some reports mentioning the lack of economic, social and cultural rights of religious and ethnic minorities and the growing humanitarian crisis in the lead-up to the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, most of these emerged at the onset of the conflict. HRC reporting also provided only a few insights into underlying socioeconomic inequalities and grievances in the years prior to 2011. This raises the question: Could the human rights system develop a more robust, consistent tracking and response to violations of economic, social and cultural rights? Could bodies like the Security Council become more open to receiving information related to these rights?

- 3. Focusing on water and land:** Our previous case study findings strongly support earlier studies on the importance of environmental rights and natural resource management to conflict prevention - notably water and land.<sup>35</sup> These refer to questions of access to natural resources and have been directly tied to conflict risks where resource variability and mismanagement can create and exacerbate tensions.<sup>36</sup> Importantly in this regard, the first annual report of the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and Environment notes that the fulfilment of procedural rights, including effective and equitable public participation in decision making, contributes to 'more transparent, better informed and more responsive' environment policy.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in

several cases examined, the UN's human rights system generated important early warning signals related to access to these critical resources. For example, in the five years leading up to the outbreak of the Malian civil war in 2012, evidence of poor access to food, water and other life-sustaining resources were a clear signal that the underlying causes of conflict were not being addressed.<sup>38</sup> In South Sudan, HRC reports covering ongoing developments in the years prior to the 2013 civil war highlighted continuing food and water insecurity and scarcity, but failed to provide clear signals as to trends or links between resources and unrest.<sup>39</sup> In other cases such as Syria, indicators such as food and water insecurity, droughts or flooding and social unrest only appeared in 2010, well into severe fallout from the worst drought in Syria's modern history.<sup>40</sup> A greater focus on water, land and food is not only important to identify warning signals around access to resources, but also presents an important pathway to more equitable, participatory conflict resolution approaches. Rather than only paying attention to the national political level, more granular analysis of competition over resources could generate more participatory responses, bringing in affected communities to policymaking in a way that could head off or alleviate grievances.

4. **Responding to signals around political and civic space:** Previous research suggests that some of the most acute early warning signals of violent conflict concern crackdowns on political and civic space.<sup>41</sup> Attacks on human rights defenders, inhibiting the ability of political parties to operate and heavy-handed police and judicial responses are clear signs that a situation may be escalating. In multiple situations like these, the UN's human rights system produces some of the most detailed and robust reporting, often with actionable recommendations focused on the judicial and rule-of-law institutions. For example, reporting on the targeting of human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society organizations in the lead-up to the Syrian civil war peaked in 2011.<sup>42</sup> In Myanmar, human rights indicators related to civic space such as instances of hate speech and/or propaganda, attacks on freedom of expression (including press freedom) and restrictions imposed on non-governmental organizations operating in Myanmar were frequently referenced in the HRC's reporting on Myanmar.<sup>43</sup> Indicators relating to civic space, specifically hate speech and its effects on



incitement to hatred and violence, may be some of the most crucial signals for identifying potential conflict.

5. **Identifying trends, patterns, and/or escalatory dynamics:** Much of the human rights reporting offers specific data points without any aggregating analysis of trends, patterns and/or escalatory dynamics. For example, we may see reports of X number of human rights violations and Y number of domestic violence cases, but without more analysis, we do not know whether this constitutes a trend or how the issues might be related. One of the contributions of our first report was to help aggregate information and develop a sense of these trends. Our Myanmar case study, for example, demonstrates a clear trend of diminishing political space and rising human rights violations against political actors and minority groups in the lead-up to the 2017 crisis.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that the UN's human rights system could dedicate greater resources and focus to identifying cross-cutting trends, bringing together some of the key indicators into a more holistic picture of the trajectory within a given setting.
6. **Understanding cross-border dynamics:** The fact that the UN's human rights reporting is nationally based, drawing on government reports and in-country data, means that cross-border dynamics are often missing. For example, HRC reports in the lead-up to the 2014 war in Ukraine highlighted increasingly clear signs of deepening social divides between 2010 and 2014, an important factor in Russia's decision to invade. However, nationally based reporting made it difficult to situate these divides within broader regional dynamics.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the relationships between countries like Myanmar, Syria and Mali and their neighbours are of fundamental importance to the

conflicts that emerged in these settings. But without the broader context of regional dynamics, human rights reports are difficult to use as an early warning signal. Across the UN system, significant efforts have been made to strengthen regional conflict prevention responses. These include the creation in 2018 of regional groupings within the UN's DPPA and Department of Peace Operations, the establishment of Regional Collaborative Platforms around the world and the expansion of the number of regionally based offices in recent years.<sup>46</sup> UN special political missions such as the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) were designed to bring a transnational or regional approach to prevention.<sup>47</sup> Further, under the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, efforts have also been made to strengthen cooperation with regional organizations around human rights issues.<sup>48</sup> However, as highlighted by our case studies, these efforts have yet to produce a consistent set of strategies and approaches to address cross-border and/or regional dynamics when early warning signals arise.

**7. Expanding accountability:** The case studies also consistently point to the lack of accountability as a key driver of conflict risks. This can take the form of grievances when a government cracks down on protests with impunity (e.g. in Syria prior to 2011 and Myanmar prior to 2017). This can also appear when judicial systems are weak and unable to provide basic protections to minority or other vulnerable groups (e.g. in Mali). Further, it can manifest in more social and economic terms as a lack of access to basic resources, without recourse to governance institutions that can guarantee fair and equitable resource distribution. We found that the language of accountability tends to generate sovereignty barriers – especially when human rights reports are highlighting poor governance by the state – but it can also be more creatively used to generate resources and/or demonstrate progress. How to use accountability as an early warning and response tool is an important question of this study.

**8. Bringing Geneva and New York closer on prevention:** At the 2024 Geneva Peace Week's eleventh edition, the Permanent Representative of Switzerland, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl, argued that 'Our most urgent work is prevention ... it is a huge topic for the Pact of the Future and an opportunity

where Geneva and New York can work more closely together'.<sup>49</sup> Her comment draws from the significant efforts over the past two decades to improve the relationship between the Geneva-based organizations focused on human rights and humanitarian issues and the New York-based bodies leading on peace and security, most notably the Security Council.<sup>50</sup>

There are real challenges in terms of the political and structural links between the UN's human rights systems in Geneva and New York. In recent years, even the idea of inviting the Chair of the PBC to brief UN actors in Geneva has proved an impossible task.<sup>51</sup> More ambitious proposals to regularly interface between the HRC and the Security Council, or to allow the High Commissioner to brief the Security Council on emerging crises, appear impossible as well. As discussed below, operationalizing prevention will need to consider a broader range of processes, forums and approaches to create connective tissues between the two sets of institutions.

## 4. PUTTING PREVENTION INTO PRACTICE

The HRC (together with OHCHR) provides a unique and empirically rich ecosystem for identifying drivers and potential early warning signs of conflict. However, without significant efforts to connect the HRC more directly and systematically, and more broadly, to the UN's peace and security system, the HRC will remain largely sidelined from more direct prevention efforts and key information will remain buried in its reporting. To play an enhanced prevention role that successfully contributes to the UN system, the UN should make significant structural and process changes, both within the HRC and the peace and security architecture. The benefits of a more rights-driven approach to peace and security are numerous, while the negative implications of 'more of the same' for the onset and development of future conflicts are heavy.<sup>52</sup>

This section provides a range of proposals for how human rights could be better positioned within the broader UN system, offering a sense of the mechanisms, capacities and resources that might be required.

**1. Mandate the human rights system to produce standalone reports focused on the links between rights and conflict.** In producing *From Signals to Action*, the research team sifted through hundreds of documents to identify key terms associated with 75 selected human rights indicators across 14 categories to get a sense of whether conflict was anticipated by human rights actors.<sup>53</sup> From this work, it was possible to tell a story of worrying trends, loss of space for human rights and increasingly frequent warnings of social and economic systems under stress in multiple settings. However, it should not require such a deep dive into the available data to encounter this narrative. Instead, the human rights system should be encouraged and capacitated to aggregate and analyse its own data, producing reports that tell a clear story of what is happening in a fragile setting and how it evolves over time. Translating some of the highly technical language, while necessary for some contexts, into a simpler story would be an important first step.

This would not need to start from scratch. As a 2018 publication from the Quaker United Nations Office has pointed out, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) offers an important early warning and prevention function that has been under-utilized to date.<sup>54</sup> Our Myanmar, South Sudan and Mali case studies suggest that the

UPR may be one of the untapped resources for conflict prevention.<sup>55</sup> Could the UPR be upgraded to include more specific categories related to peace? Could more UN agencies (including peacebuilders) be encouraged to base their in-country programming more specifically on the UPR process? Could the UPR become more of a forum for including the views of a broader range of actors, including more civil society groups, to better reflect the realities on the ground?

- 2. Build a knowledge repository on the causal links between human rights violations and conflict.** While the causal links between human rights violations and conflict are well understood within the UN's human rights world, this knowledge is not necessarily well understood in the broader multilateral system. As part of the knowledge production and management function of OHCHR, a specific line of work could be introduced to focus on the links between human rights and violent conflict. This could draw on the enormous existing body of information generated by the human rights system, using the methodology and databases created for this project as a starting point. The goal should be to build an empirically rigorous, data-driven argument for addressing human rights as part of conflict prevention. Partnering with independent human rights-oriented organizations that produce independent data could add legitimacy and local involvement in this future endeavor.
- 3. Guide special procedures of the Human Rights Council - mandated independent human rights experts - enabling them to translate human rights signals into prevention actions.** Special Rapporteurs and others reporting within the human rights system should be encouraged to see their roles as directly serving a conflict prevention function. When providing recommendations and shaping their reporting, a specific focus on reducing the risks of escalation should be part of their work. In discussions with several experts in this field, there was a clear appetite to receive greater instruction, guidance and lessons in this arena. Here, OHCHR could produce guidance and lessons for Special Rapporteurs to understand their role as serving conflict prevention more specifically, including some practical guidance on how to contextualize their reporting. More ambitiously, reports by rapporteurs could contain a section focused on how addressing human rights issues



could contribute to a reduction in risks of violence within a given setting.

Other specific steps that could be considered for mandate holders within the human rights system include:

- Offering specific, time-bound recommendations to national actors during in-country visits, focused on conflict-prevention goals
- Including Sustainable Development Goal 16 recommendations in every report, focused on building national justice systems
- Including mandate holders' work in national peacebuilding planning and programming by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. **Link human rights reporting to accountability mechanisms, processes and institutions.**

Commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and other accountability mechanisms created and mandated by the HRC provide essential information on ongoing human rights violations and evolving human rights situations in a consistent manner, provided their mandate is extended. While these mechanisms tend to be created once a conflict has started, some remain in place over extended periods of time (e.g. the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) to which the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFMM) handed over its evidence in 2019; and the still-active Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, established in 2011 by the HRC). Earlier and more frequent use of these kinds of mechanisms to spotlight human rights violations in a given setting could bolster the HRC's early response capacities.

Here, the use of lighter accountability processes – for example, direct support to local judicial processes, or use of independent fact-finding missions on a more regular basis – would strengthen the human rights system's response to early signals of conflict. This could be particularly important in contexts where longstanding accountability mechanisms (e.g. Syria, Myanmar) track human rights violations which may draw attention to recurring cycles of violence and conflict.

#### 5. **Integrate economic, social, and cultural rights into peacebuilding.** Today's peacebuilding approaches

focus largely on political and civil rights, aiming at improving political participation and addressing national-level political settlements. While there has been an increasing focus on more 'upstream' work by the development system, the core concepts of economic, social and cultural rights have not yet become part of the UN's peacebuilding vernacular or programming. Nor has the information generated by the human rights system around these rights been systematically linked to the UN's peacebuilding architecture. The 2025 PBAR is an opportunity to present specific information-sharing processes and capacities to ensure that reporting on economic, social and cultural rights is systematically provided to the PBSO and the PBC.

However, this could go a step further: the UN's peacebuilding approach could itself become more focused on social, cultural and economic rights. For example, projects could include key indicators of improved access to natural resources, more equitable distribution of political power amongst groups and protection of religious and other minority groups. In simple terms, this could mean the UN's peacebuilding is reoriented around issues relating to underlying inequalities and grievances.

#### 6. **Bring 'pathways' back into focus.** The previous recommendation squarely aligns with the 2018 UN/World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report, which recognizes that inequality and marginalization of groups is a primary conflict driver.<sup>57</sup> Our research directly supports the *Pathways* report's analysis, strengthening the finding that inequalities amongst groups is one of the most important early indicators of violent conflict.<sup>58</sup> As such, we believe that a return to the *Pathways* approach could help create more common ground between the peacebuilding and human rights pillars of the UN.

Specifically, *Pathways* found that the greatest risk of violent conflict arose from the mobilization of group-based grievances stemming from perceptions of inequality, exclusion and injustice. The report explains that the most common 'arenas of contestation' are (a) power and governance, (b) land and natural resources, (c) service delivery and (d) security and justice.<sup>59</sup> The report emphasizes that the risk of violence increased in situations of weak state capacity or legitimacy, especially when the state itself generated inequality and exclusion, or in the context of human rights abuses.<sup>60</sup> Conversely, countries

experiencing less violence had adopted inclusive forms of political, economic and social governance.

While the *Pathways* report resists proposing any ‘recipe’ for effective prevention efforts, it notes that one common element of successful prevention efforts is when societies create and address long-term structural factors (e.g., grievances) and institutional weaknesses, as well as the near-term incentives of actors. It recommends three specific steps to re-emphasize prevention and shift approaches to more directly address issues of inequality, exclusion and injustice: (a) developing risk-based national strategies for prevention; (b) aligning peace, security and development for prevention and (c) overcoming barriers to cooperation and investment in prevention.<sup>61</sup>

Our findings align directly with these recommendations, but we believe human rights should be even more central to prevention efforts. For example, when developing national strategies for prevention, these should be grounded in human rights commitments and specific capacities to hold all actors accountable. Given that our research shows that the human rights system is already producing some of the most detailed information and analysis on inequality, marginalization and discrimination, this should be directly tied to the UN’s broader prevention efforts.

- 7. Build a natural resources management capacity within UN peacebuilding.** Our findings suggest that effective peacebuilding efforts will need to engage directly with questions of natural resource management, particularly around food, water and land. Building local capacities to govern these resources peacefully may be some of the most impactful work the UN can do. The UN system’s ability to provide such expertise and advice may require it to dedicate more resources to the task. As part of the 2025 PBAR, a key question should concern what new skill sets, capacities and resources might be required to provide support on natural resources management at both national and local levels. Here, existing human rights capacities on the ground should be considered, as these already generate some of the most important information regarding natural resources.

It should be noted that the UN already has some capacities to monitor and analyse the links between natural resources and conflict. Within UN missions such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

(MONUSCO), the UN has been mandated to address the links between criminal networks, armed groups and natural resources, including with dedicated analytic capacities.<sup>62</sup> However, to date, this has been a largely security-focused role, examining how armed groups can profit from the exploitation of resources.<sup>63</sup> Our report suggests an expanded analytic frame, examining how access to a broader range of resources – water and land in particular – may be unequally distributed, creating the kind of inequality amongst groups that can drive conflict. Specific expertise within the UN system mandated to advise governments and communities on the equitable distribution of such resources would give the UN a significant prevention capacity.

- 8. Formalize information-sharing across the UN system.** Only 1 of the 46 Special Procedures thematic mandate holders holds a formal mandate to work in coordination with the UN’s peace and security architecture: the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.<sup>64</sup> While the HRC and OHCHR have found a range of innovative and informal ways of sharing information (e.g. through Arria-formula meetings, briefings by the High Commissioner and -brown bag lunches with DPPA, among others), these are ad hoc and insufficient vis-à-vis the scope of the challenge. If the UN system is to rise to the ambition set out in the 2006 creation of the HRC, its work needs to be more systematically linked to the UN’s peace and security architecture. As a first step, we propose that the question of using human rights early warning signals for prevention should be part of the upcoming PBAR in 2025. Could the PBAR consider how the human rights system could be better harnessed for prevention, including via the enormous body of data it produces via its human rights reporting? However, other more concrete actions could be considered. For example, OHCHR could be capacitated with an ‘early warning centre’ that could focus exclusively on emerging risks in real time.<sup>65</sup> There already exists a United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre that captures many urgent issues as they arise, but this reports solely within the UN’s peace and security structure. Indeed, a mirror version of this centre, based within OHCHR, could help feed emerging human rights trends more directly into the peace and security system.

**9. Provide greater resources and attention to in-country cooperation.** Across the relevant cases examined in *From Signals to Action*, annual reporting from Special Procedures thematic and country mandate holders noted issues related to a lack of cooperation from the host country. This was most evident in failures by national governments to grant country visit requests or cooperate with investigations by fact-finding missions or other in-country accountability mechanisms. For example, state visits to Syria were never granted in the five years prior to the outbreak of the war, nor was access granted to the Fact-Finding Mission on Syria established several weeks following the onset of violent protests in March 2011.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, Special Procedures can operate without country visits, but country cooperation is crucial in allowing access to territories at high risk of and/or experiencing human rights violations. Some concrete steps could include greater resources for Special Procedures mandate holders to work on country cooperation, possibly even a fund to assist in implementing some of their recommendations.

The examined cases also suggest that more could be done to provide governments with a platform to tell their own stories of success. Frequently, the human rights agenda is seen as a set of reprimands for inaction or a warning sign to the international community. This overlooks the chance for governments to report on their positive progress, possibly incentivizing greater investment in governance capacities showing positive results. Here, a recommendation by the Universal Rights Group could be adopted: states could be encouraged to voluntarily provide information regarding implementation of human rights recommendations, including reporting on gaps in their own capacities and requests for support. This could be achieved by a 'voluntary annual platform' under item 10 of the HRC's agenda.<sup>67</sup>

**10. Engage beyond the national level – regional prevention.** The case studies strongly point to the limits of relying solely on national-level information to identify and respond to conflict risks. Violent conflict in settings like Syria, Mali and Myanmar are driven by regional dynamics including cross-border flows of arms, people and resources, as well as shifting climate patterns. Here, the human rights system may present a gap at the regional level. Some country-specific mandate holders are able to incorporate some regional dynamics

into their reporting but, in general, are limited to the situation in the country. Similarly, thematic mandate holders can capture trends at the regional level but tend to focus on their specific set of rights (e.g. of youth, women). Workshops on regional arrangements to support human rights offer one concrete effort in this context but have tended to be informal and have lacked concrete follow-on mechanisms.<sup>68</sup> Could the human rights system develop more regionally focused reporting and follow-on processes, perhaps partnering more directly with regional organizations like the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the League of Arab States (LAS) and others, to develop a common analysis of regional trends and joint strategies?

**11. Expand the use of HRC Special Procedures country-specific mandates.** Previous research has highlighted the important role of the Special Procedures in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.<sup>69</sup> In general, Special Procedures have lived up to their role as 'mechanisms for early detection of problematic human rights situations and sustained protection'.<sup>70</sup> In particular, Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts with specific country mandates have ensured the HRC's sustained attention on individual country contexts, offering more in-depth analysis of deteriorating human rights situations than thematic mandates which cover multiple contexts.

Our case study on Myanmar illustrates how the reporting of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar during the five years prior to the outbreak of conflict against Rohingya Muslims in October 2016 and August 2017 helped to bring attention to conflict early warnings.<sup>71</sup> In this case, the Special Rapporteur's consistent reporting during the period examined (2013–2017) raised many of the early warning signs of an impending genocide against the Rohingya community. While the link to more impactful responses by the broader UN system was missing, such detailed reporting could serve a wider range of contexts where the risks of escalation are similarly high.

While HRC country mandates cannot possibly stretch across every country, an expanded and well-resourced programme of work around the world would benefit both the Special Procedures as a whole and the broader human rights system. More Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts with country mandates would

also be better placed to identify trends, patterns and escalatory dynamics given their focused attention on a particular country context.

**12. Build synergies with the UN's climate, peace and security agenda.** The data collected for the case studies examined pointed to limited instances where the HRC identified environmental human rights violations. One of the challenges is that the HRC's Special Procedures 'does not collect information on environmental human rights violations at a sufficiently granular level to be of early warning value'.<sup>72</sup> However, a large and growing body of research points to the clear role of environmental change in driving conflict risks, including through extreme weather, shocks to agricultural systems and changing access to resources.<sup>73</sup>

Here, the UN's human rights system may provide an important and under-utilized source of information. Specifically, our research found that the information generated by the human rights system demonstrated some conflict risks around access to resources, food insecurity and violations of the right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment. Much of this information was largely disconnected from the peace and security pillar of the UN.<sup>74</sup> Developing better information sharing, forums for exchange and opportunities for Special Procedures to feed into the climate-security agenda of the UN could make a real difference in this area. Indeed, including OHCHR more directly within the work of the UN's Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) would be a concrete step towards improving information flows.<sup>75</sup>

**13. Integrate prevention, peace and security into HRC Special Procedures mandates.** Since HRC Resolution 45/31 of 2020, which urges 'all mechanisms of the Human Rights Council to integrate prevention into their work and, where appropriate, into their reporting, in accordance with their respective mandates', there have been increased efforts in making the HRC's Special Procedures more relevant for prevention, as well as for peacebuilding.<sup>76</sup> Sixteen, or 35 percent, of the 46 Special Procedures thematic mandate holders include prevention in their mandates and/or relate to peace and security issues.<sup>77</sup> Annual meetings of the Special Procedures in the last years have raised issues related to prevention and peace and security.<sup>78</sup> However, while prevention has been described as a 'cross-cutting priority', Special Procedures mandates have not

systematically adopted a prevention strategy. A previous recommendation called on Special Procedures to adopt a 'prevention lens in their work, particularly in the way they frame their analyses and recommendations'.<sup>79</sup> Could there be a more formalized way of integrating prevention across all Special Procedures mandates? This would require significant effort to convince the mandates' penholders to ensure a prevention lens in Special Procedures' reporting, including their recommendations.

**14. Use UN peace operations to improve the connection between human rights and peacebuilding.** Our case studies highlight that many of the clearest early warning signals concerned the recurrence of violence in areas experiencing long-term cycles of conflict. In settings like Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and South Sudan, decades of violent conflict have meant that patterns of violence quickly reassert themselves. But this also means that the UN often has more capacities on the ground to generate early warning and response. Indeed, in settings like Mali and South Sudan, a UN peace operation was on the ground during the period leading up to the outbreak of civil war. This offers further opportunities to deepen the connections between human rights and peacebuilding.

Over the past three decades, human rights have become a more central aspect of UN peacekeeping.<sup>80</sup> In 1991, only the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador included a human rights element, whereas today every major peacekeeping mission has a human rights mandate and component. This has led to greater incorporation of human rights-based analysis in the reporting on peace operations to the Security Council.<sup>81</sup> Today, with protection of civilians the highest priority of all major peacekeeping missions, and Security Council mandates consistently including human rights as a standalone area, the contributions of human rights to mission mandates, as well as other cross-cutting mission functions and objectives, are widely recognized.<sup>82</sup>

This could offer an opportunity for more direct contact between the HRC and the Security Council. For example, as part of the human rights mandates of peace operations, the High Commissioner for Human Rights could be asked to brief the Security Council on a more regular basis. Of course, issues of political will amongst member states present a hurdle. But especially as large peace operations continue to phase down, there could

be more opportunities to place human rights concerns more centrally within mission transition processes, potentially offering a chance for greater information-sharing between Geneva and New York.

**15. Strengthen the Secretary-General's hand.** One of the most important conflict prevention tools in the UN system is Article 99 of the UN Charter. This provides the Secretary-General with the right to bring potential threats to international peace and security to the attention of the Security Council. There are numerous early examples of the Secretary-General using this power, including in the Congo (1960), Iran (1979) and Lebanon (1989).<sup>83</sup> However, in the past 15 years, there exist very few instances of the Secretary-General's use of this article, with Gaza in 2024 as almost the sole example.<sup>84</sup> Here, the human rights system could help strengthen the Secretary-General's hand, providing both actionable information and a clear set of warning messages in the lead-up to conflict.

There is some precedent for this. In 2014, the HRC sent the findings from the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic report to both the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for action, which the Secretary-General forwarded to the Security Council.<sup>85</sup> This suggests a more active potential role for the Secretary-General in connecting the work of the HRC to the Security Council. Indeed, a more frequent use of Article 99 would align with Kofi Annan's In Larger Freedom report (2005), Ban Ki-Moon's Human Rights Up Front initiative (2013) and Antonio Guterres' Call to Action on Human Rights (2020), all of which call for greater coherence between human rights and peace and security.<sup>86</sup>

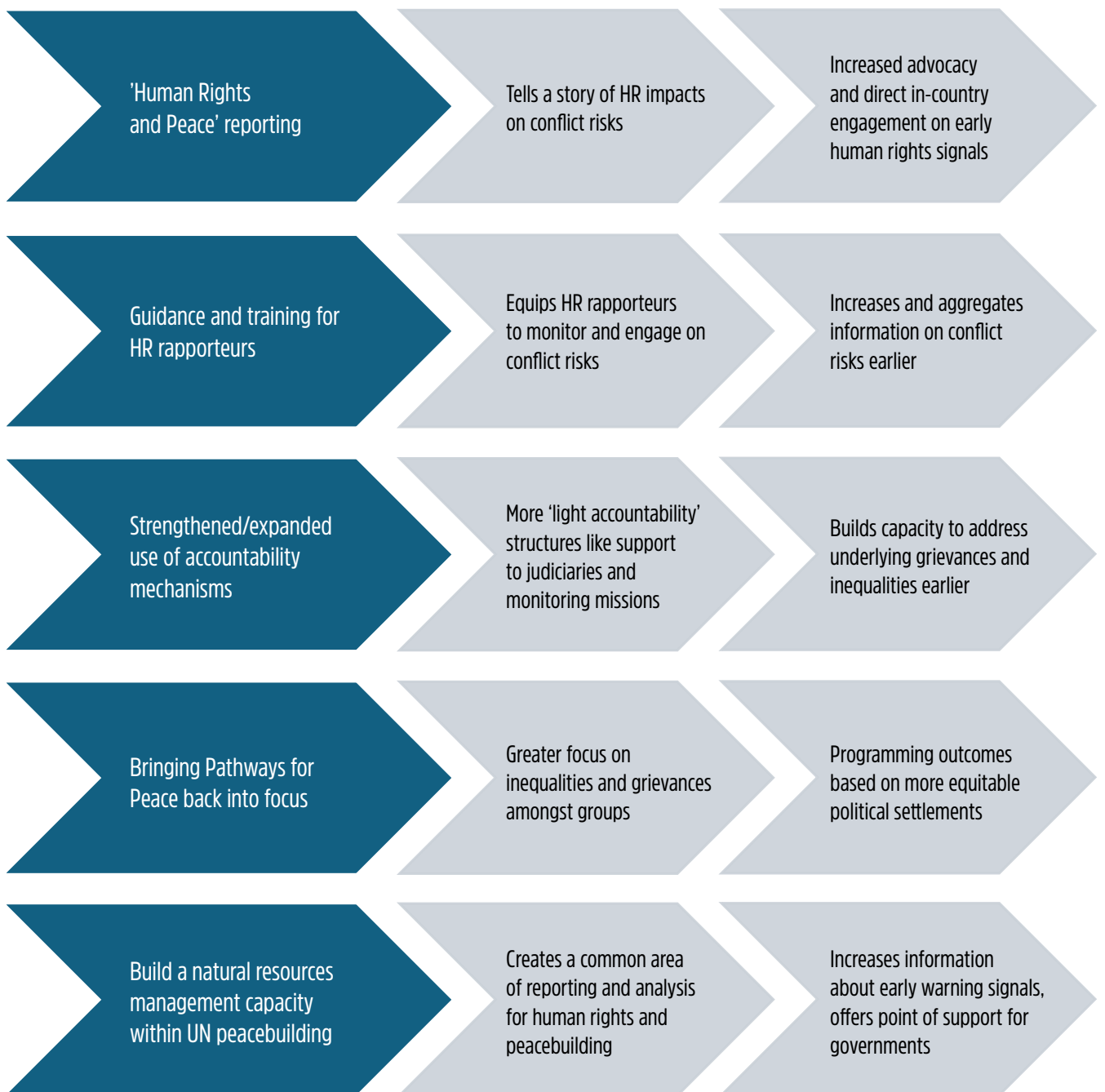
Taken together, these recommendations would help the UN's human rights architecture to more effectively drive the UN's prevention work. They would also help the UN system prioritize resources and focus energy where it is most likely to play a strong catalytic role and help to stop violent trends before they escalate into conflict. As such, these changes would contribute to the Secretary-General's top three priorities of 'prevention, prevention, prevention'.<sup>87</sup>

## 5. ENVISIONING ACTION

HRC Resolution 45/31 of 2020 recognizes that the HRC ‘may resort, on a case-by-case basis and where appropriate, to work formats that enhance dialogue and cooperation with the State and region concerned, with the aim of addressing the root causes of and preventing further human rights violations and responding promptly to human rights emergencies’.<sup>88</sup> Building on the ‘big data’ approach applied to the five conflict case studies examined in *From Signals to Action: How the UN Human Rights System Can Deliver Early Warning and Conflict Prevention* (2025), this final section offers several illustrations of how the UN’s human rights system could translate early warning signals produced by the human rights system into action.

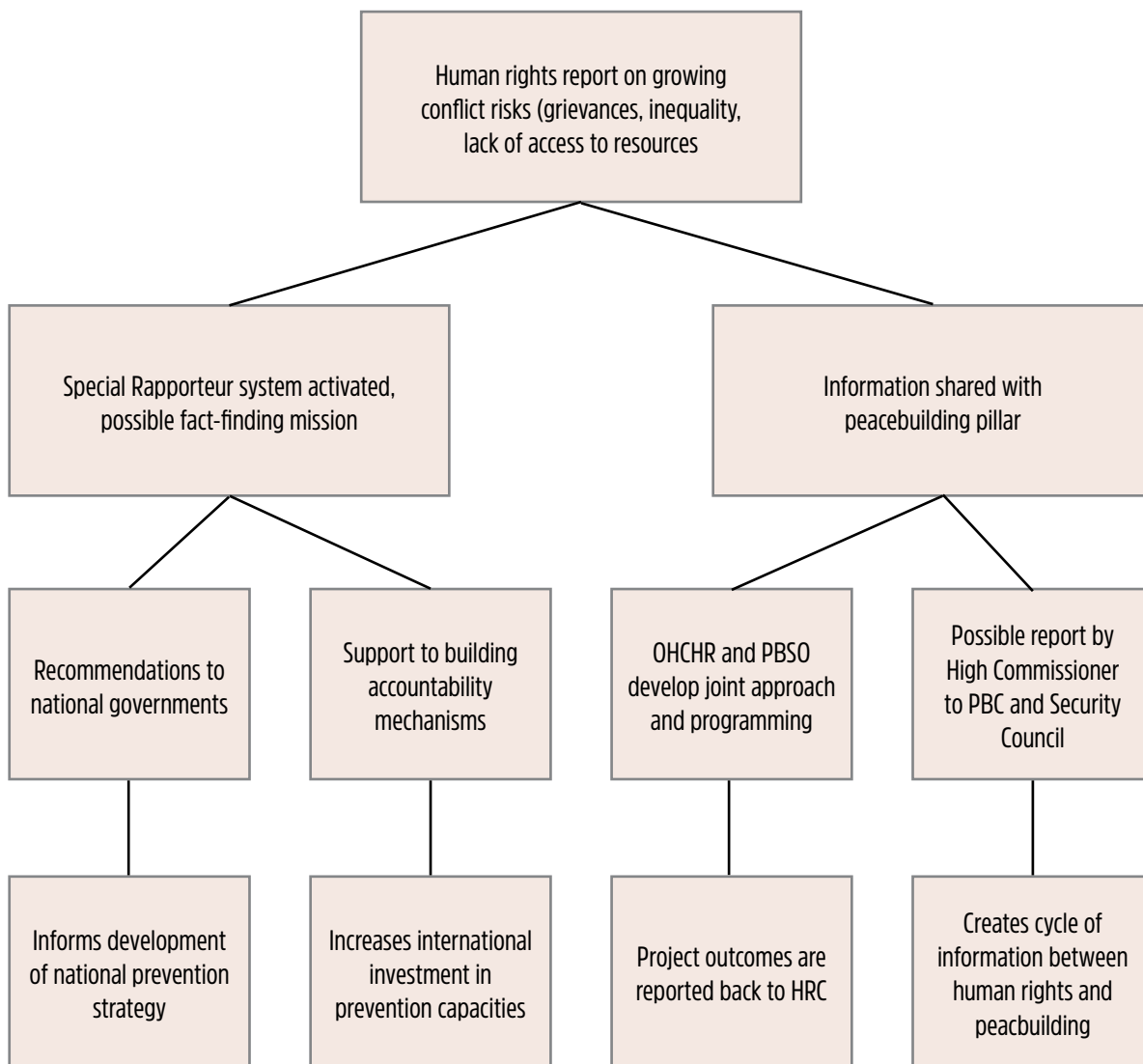
### ILLUSTRATION 1: A PACKAGE OF REFORMS TO IMPROVE PREVENTION

Upcoming processes, including the UN’s PBAR in 2025 and follow-on to the Human Rights at 75 initiative, could be used to produce a ‘package’ of reforms aimed at addressing the challenges identified in this report. Such a package might look like this:



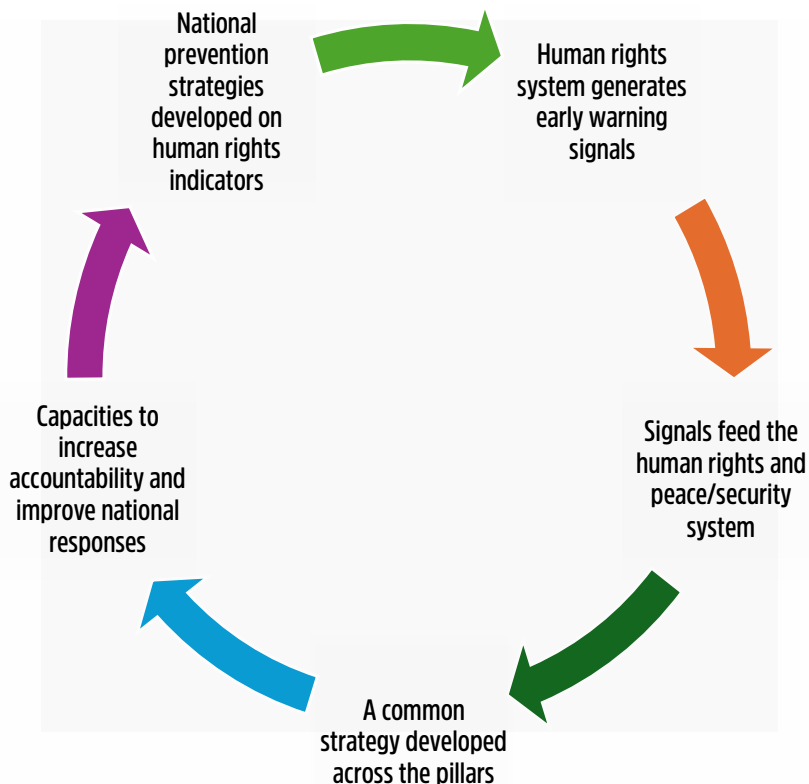
## ILLUSTRATION 2: A 'DECISION TREE' FOR PREVENTION

Another way to envision the recommendations proposed in this report is via a 'decision tree', indicating how an early warning signal might be translated into specific actions by both the human rights and peacebuilding pillars of the UN. Building on the proposals above, such a decision tree could take the form of a response to the early warning signals generated by the UN's human rights system:



### ILLUSTRATION 3: A VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF CONFLICT PREVENTION

This final illustration demonstrates how an improved connection between the UN’s human rights system and the broader peace and security architecture could feed a ‘virtuous cycle’ of prevention. As information flows improve, these could inform greater accountability efforts, which could in turn become the basis for the national prevention strategies called for in the *New Agenda for Peace*.<sup>89</sup> Basing these strategies on clear human rights indicators could provide a framework for more focused reporting on emerging human rights trends, in turn improving the system’s early warning function.





## 6. CONCLUSION

The UN's prevention mandate stands to gain immensely from the actionable strategies outlined in this report, which emphasize the need to bridge the persistent gap between early warning and early action. By fostering a closer connection between the HRC and the broader UN peace and security architecture, the organization could more effectively identify and act on emerging threats to human rights. Key recommendations include developing a systematic framework for aggregating and analysing early warning data, particularly those concerning economic, social and cultural rights, which often serve as precursors to conflict. By improving the capacity of the UN's human rights system to flag trends and patterns, these measures ensure that actionable insights are no longer buried in extensive reporting but are brought to the forefront of international decision-making processes.

Strengthening cross-pillar cooperation between Geneva-based human rights entities and New York's peace and security mechanisms is also central to operationalizing the prevention mandate. Concrete steps such as establishing formalized information-sharing channels, creating specialized early warning centres and enhancing the integration of human rights reporting into peacebuilding efforts can significantly bolster the UN's conflict prevention role. For instance, recommendations to provide guidance for Special Rapporteurs to frame their analysis and recommendations within conflict prevention contexts and to expand the use of country-specific mandates directly address existing gaps in responsiveness. Furthermore, prioritizing cross-border dynamics and regional conflict analysis would help ensure that prevention strategies account for broader geopolitical influences, making interventions more comprehensive and effective.

In addition to structural enhancements, the report highlights the importance of embedding accountability mechanisms and addressing systemic inequalities that fuel conflict. Incorporating insights from economic, social and cultural rights violations into peacebuilding initiatives would allow for a deeper focus on root causes, such as resource distribution, marginalization and governance weaknesses. These measures align with the 2018 UN and World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report, which identifies inequality and exclusion as critical drivers of violent conflict. By reorienting peacebuilding around these dimensions and fostering greater collaboration with regional organizations, the UN can create a virtuous cycle of prevention. These steps,

combined with efforts to empower the Secretary-General to act decisively on early warnings, position the UN to fulfil its prevention mandate with greater precision and impact, advancing global peace and safeguarding human dignity.

## END NOTES

- 1 UNGA Res 60/251, 3 April 2006, §3.
- 2 HRC Res 33/6, 5 October 2016, §9.
- 3 HRC Res 45/31, 14 October 2020, §5.
- 4 *Ibid.*, §6.
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- 43 See the Myanmar case study in Day and Bapt, From Signals to Action, supra fn 8.
- 44 *Ibid*.
- 45 Our research found that the most frequently captured early warning signs across all of the UN's human rights system reporting on Ukraine between 2010 and 2014 included instances of racial, religious, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation discrimination (131 mentions between 2010 and 2014, particularly racially-motivated offences and activities by extremist organizations); instances or risk of racial hatred, religious, ethnic and inter-communal violence (60 mentions between 2010 and 2014) and occurrences of torture and ill-treatment (89 mentions). For more detail, see Ukraine case study, *ibid*.
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- 48 The Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights notes: 'We will seize every opportunity to engage with different stakeholders, particularly Member States, on human rights and humanitarian concerns, including enhanced support to national human rights institutions. It also means continued engagement with the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council, as well as bilaterally and at the regional level to resolve human rights and humanitarian challenges.' See A. Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights, United Nations, 2020, p 11, [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/2020\\_sq\\_call\\_to\\_action\\_for\\_hr\\_the\\_highest\\_aspiration.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/2020_sq_call_to_action_for_hr_the_highest_aspiration.pdf) (last accessed 15 February 2025).
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- 50 For more on this, see QUNO, Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace: Project Report: Exploring the Universal Periodic Review, April 2018, [https://quno.org/sites/default/files/resources/QUNO%20Integrating%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Sustaining%20Peace\\_FOR%20WEB.pdf](https://quno.org/sites/default/files/resources/QUNO%20Integrating%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Sustaining%20Peace_FOR%20WEB.pdf) (last accessed 15 February 2025), p 4; QUNO and OHCHR, Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace, supra fn 23, p. 25, 26; Limon and Montoya, The Prevention Council, supra fn 6, p 37.
- 51 HRC Res 45/31, supra fn 3, §9 calls on 'the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, commencing in 2021, to brief, on an annual basis, the Human Rights Council, during one of its regular sessions, under agenda item 3, on the work of the Commission, including in relation to country situations that are on the Council's agenda'. As of the time of research, a briefing by the PBC Chair has not yet taken place.
- 52 The 2023 Delivering the Right to Peace report argues that 'a more rights-driven approach to peace and security could (a) benefit from the dynamic and empirically rich ecosystem of the HRC and OHCHR, (b) align the UN more directly to address the root causes of violent conflict, and (c) open the potential for more creative use of forums beyond the SC'. See Day and Harper, Delivering the Right to Peace, supra fn 9, p 13.
- 53 Day and Bapt, From Signals to Action, supra fn 8.
- 54 See F. Foster, QUNO, Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace, supra fn 23, p 12.
- 55 See Myanmar, South Sudan and Mali case study observations in Day and Bapt, From Signals to Action, supra fn 8. In these three cases, the UPRs which took place during the periods examined raised several human rights issues of concern, included recommendations to protect against human rights violations, and called on national governments to address deteriorating human rights situations.
- 56 For a more detailed set of recommendations, see F. Foster, QUNO and OHCHR, Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace, supra fn 23, p 25.
- 57 UN and World Bank Group, Pathways for Peace, supra fn 14, p 5.
- 58 See Day and Bapt, From Signals to Action, supra fn 8, p 14. The report findings suggest that 'the human rights system produces some of the most detailed and robust findings on marginalization, discrimination, and inequality, which the broader UN system could benefit from'. See also Day, Changes in the Global Conflict Landscape Since 'Pathways for Peace': How the UN Can Meet New and Emerging Prevention Challenges, UN and World Bank Group, March 2023, [https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/sites/pathways/files/2023-04/Adam%20Day\\_UNU\\_Changes%20in%20Global%20Conflict%20Landscape.pdf](https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/sites/pathways/files/2023-04/Adam%20Day_UNU_Changes%20in%20Global%20Conflict%20Landscape.pdf) (last accessed 15

February 2025).

59 UN and World Bank Group, Pathways for Peace, supra fn 14, Chapter 5: 'What People Fight Over: Arenas of Contestation'.

60 Ibid, p xviii.

61 For more detail see ibid, pp xxv–xxvii.

62 MONUSCO's mandate urges the Mission 'to work with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes to seek political solutions to stop the cross-border flows of armed combatants, arms and natural resources that threaten peace and stability in the DRC' and calls for the continued provision of 'good offices and technical advice to the Government of the DRC ... with a view to preventing illegal exploitation of natural resources by armed groups and criminal networks supporting them'. See UNSC Res 2765, 20 December 2024, §§19, 36(n).

63 See, for example, L. McCreedy, 'What Can MONUSCO Do to Better Address the Political Economy of Conflict in DRC?', International Peace Institute Global Observatory, 6 January 2022, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/01/what-can-monusco-do-to-better-address-the-political-economy-of-conflict-in-drc/> (last accessed 15 February 2025).

64 The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism includes engagement with New-York based peace and security bodies, among others, the UN Security Council, its Counter-Terrorism Committee, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, including entities such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs. See HRC Res 15/15, 7 October 2010.

65 A similar idea for an 'early warning unit (a kind of "UN situations room") staffed by senior human rights analysts' was previously put forward by the Universal Rights Group. See Limon and Montoya, The Prevention Council, supra fn 6, p 55.

66 In her statement introducing the preliminary report on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic in June 2011, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Navi Pillay argued that 'despite several official communications requesting the Government of Syria to grant access to the Fact-Finding Mission, I have received no response from the Government. This lack of responsiveness severely hampers our work. Due to the impossibility to deploy to Syria, my team is gathering information from outside the country'. See United Nations, 'Statement of Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Introduction of Preliminary Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic', 15 June 2011, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2011/06/statement-ms-navi-pillay-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights> (last accessed 15 February 2025).

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69 See for example, F. Foster, QUNO and OHCHR, Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace, supra fn 21; 'Call to Action on Human Rights: How the "Special Procedures" Help Sustain Peace', Medium, 28 February 2022, <https://medium.com/dppa-politically-speaking/call-to-action-on-human-rights-how-human-rights-special-procedures-help-sustain-peace-14e50fa335a0> (last accessed 15 February 2025).

70 B. Ki-Moon, 'Remarks to the Opening of the Seventh Session of the Human Rights Council', 3 March 2008, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2008-03-03/remarks-the-opening-of-the-seventh-session-of-the-human-rights-council> (last accessed 15 February 2025).

71 For more detail see the Myanmar case study in Day and Bapt, From Signals to Action, supra fn 8.

72 Harper and Ubushieva, Environmental Human Rights as a Tool in Early Warning and Conflict Prevention, supra fn 7.

73 See, for example, C. S. Hendrix, V. Koubi, J. Selby, A. Siddiqi and N.Von Uexkull, 'Climate Change and Conflict', 4 Nature Reviews Earth & Environment 3 (2023); A. Day and J. Caus, Conflict Prevention in an Era of Climate Change: Adapting the UN to Climate-Security Risks, United Nations University, 2020, <https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:7632/UNUClimateSecurity.pdf> (last accessed 15 February 2025); B. Tesfaye, Climate Change and Conflict in the Sahel, Council on Foreign Relations, November 2022 <https://www.cfr.org/report/climate-change-and-conflict-sahel> (last accessed 15 February 2025); N. Von Uexkull and H. Buhaug, 'Security Implications of Climate Change: A Decade of Scientific Progress', 58 Journal of Peace Research 1 (2021).

74 See Day and Bapt, supra fn 8, 'Conclusions and Recommendations'.

75 For more on the UN's Climate Security Mechanism, see United Nations Environment Programme, 'Climate Security Mechanisms (CSM)', <https://www.unep.org/topics/disasters-and-conflicts/environment-security/climate-security-mechanism-csm> (last accessed 15 February 2025).

76 HRC Res 45/31, supra fn 3. For a discussion of Special Procedures mandates' thematic focus to sustain peace, see F. Foster, QUNO and OHCHR, Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace, supra fn 23, pp 13–23.

77 Some of these include: Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination. For a repository of all current Special Procedures thematic mandates see, OHCHR, 'Thematic mandates', <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewAllCountryMandates.aspx?Type=TM> (last accessed 15 February 2025). These do not include the 14 Special Procedures country mandates: <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewAllCountryMandates.aspx> (last accessed 15 February 2025).

78 See, for example, Activities of special rapporteurs, independent experts and working groups of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council undertaken in 2022, including updated information on special procedures and information on the twenty-eighth annual meeting of special rapporteurs, independent experts and chairs of working groups: Report of the Secretariat, UN doc A/HRC/52/70, 4 April 2023.

79 Study on the Contribution of the Special Procedures in Assisting States and Other Stakeholders in the Prevention of Human Rights Violations and Abuses Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN doc A/HRC/48/21, 13 October, 2021, p 1. As the study argues, 'in terms of design, it is important for the Human Rights Council to ensure that all resolutions creating or renewing a special procedure's mandate contain a reference to prevention. With regard to execution, special procedures, working in close cooperation with States and other stakeholders, including United Nations entities, should adopt a prevention lens in their work, including in terms of how they frame their analyses and recommendations, and should identify short-, medium- and long-term prevention goals' (§87).

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors would like to acknowledge the methodology and research design of Erica Harper, Head of Research and Policy Studies at The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, as well as her invaluable feedback and comments. Many thanks go to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) for its invaluable financial support for this project, as well as the support of the Peace and Human Rights Division. This research is independent and does not necessarily reflect the position of the FDFA.

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