Follow-Up to the Report on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka

Briefing note

The report of the Internal Review Panel on UN Action in Sri Lanka, published in November 2012, concluded that there had been a “systemic failure” of the UN in particular during the final stages of the conflict, and made a number of recommendations on how to improve on UN action in crises. In December 2012 the Secretary-General asked the Deputy Secretary-General to oversee an internal process to follow up on the report’s recommendations. A Working Group was established in January 2013, with representatives from 12 UN Departments and Agencies. A small Secretariat, headed by ASG Michael Keating (former DSRSG/RC/HC in Afghanistan) and staffed by two officers seconded by OHCHR and OCHA, supports the Deputy Secretary-General.

The follow-up process is a forward-looking exercise that seeks to identify practical ways in which the UN system can better protect people in crisis contexts. Five priority areas have been identified:

1. The UN must hardwire its responsibilities regarding grave violations of human rights into the lifecycle of all staff – particularly at the senior level – to ensure that human rights truly become part of the system’s DNA.
2. The UN must engage more strategically and pro-actively with Member States and other stakeholders, including civil society. This requires an ‘Article 99 attitude’ – a willingness to raise difficult issues even when Member States are not prepared to hear them.
3. The UN must ensure that its footprint (staff, structures) in countries where grave human rights violations are taking place (or may take place) is fit for purpose, most especially in countries where there is no political or peacekeeping mission. This requires improving the selection of Resident Coordinators and significantly stepping up the level of support provided to them, particularly on political and human rights issues.
4. The UN must streamline and systematize crisis coordination mechanisms at headquarters for non-mission settings, and develop and implement holistic strategies to protect people leveraging its diverse mandates at national, regional and global levels.
5. The UN must strengthen its human rights and protection capacities, including through more coordinated and complementary working methods, especially with regard to information management and advocacy.

At the outcome of this process, in June 2013, the Deputy Secretary-General will submit to the Secretary-General a report recommending specific actions to be implemented.

The Secretariat of this process would welcome NGOs’ views particularly on how the UN can better work with NGOs and civil society to protect people in crisis contexts.

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