

What do the United Nations do?



Step 5a - What do the United Nations (UN) do to promote and protect human rights?

This is the most difficult part of the project, so you might consider going through it in plenum with the help of an “expert”.

It might be your teacher, or you might invite somebody from UN or an NGO to assist you. It is important that you understand that human rights are much more than words on a paper.

The UN has for instance established several human rights mechanisms to monitor the implementation of human rights standards worldwide.

If you visit the website of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights www.ohchr.org and browse around a little, you will quickly get an impression of the complexity of the organization and the enormity of papers (treaties, conventions, declarations etc.) it has produced over the last 73 years. You might for instance have a look at **Universal Rights Instruments** and **The Core**

International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies.

So, the following text is a very short summary of some of the most important aspects of what the United Nations do to promote and protect human rights.

Promoting and protecting human rights is one of the United Nation’s fundamental goals. UN works actively to define, help implement, and monitor international human rights standards. **The General Assembly**, for example, has adopted some 80 human rights conventions and declarations since 1948.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) has the lead responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights, and for mainstreaming human rights within the UN. It has been given a **unique mandate** to do so by the international community, through the General Assembly.

The UN has established some human rights mechanisms to monitor the implementation of human rights standards worldwide. These bodies are all distinct from UN Human Rights and include the:

- **Human Rights Council**, an intergovernmental body of 47 member states elected the UN General Assembly
- **Ten human rights treaty bodies**
- Independent thematic and country experts, **known as the special procedures**, who are appointed by the Human Rights Council to report and advise on human rights

Judicial organs in the UN family, such as the International Criminal Court, and specialized criminal tribunals established by the Security Council, work to ensure justice in cases of gross human rights violations.

What are the human rights treaty bodies?

The human rights treaty bodies are committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of the **core international human rights treaties**. Each State party to a treaty has an obligation to take steps to ensure that everyone in the State can enjoy the rights set out in the treaty.



Currently, there are nine human rights international treaties, and one optional protocol, from which 10 treaty bodies have been established. The treaty bodies are composed of independent experts of recognized competence in human rights, who are nominated and elected for fixed renewable terms of four years by State parties.



UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva Photo: UN Photo/Violain Martin

What are Universal Periodic Reviews?

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. The UPR is a State-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations. Here you can see the **documentation by country: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway**.

Here is an example: Denmark for the Human Rights Examination in May 2021 - Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR)

The examination takes place under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council, where all UN member states report on - and are examined on an equal footing in - the overall human rights situation in the country in question.

Prior to the examination, the Danish government prepared a national report on the human rights situation in Denmark. In parallel, relevant civil society organizations have prepared reports for the Human Rights Council with their assessment of the human rights situation in Denmark and made suggestions for recommendations.

As part of the preparation of the Danish report, a number of meetings and public hearings have been held around Denmark to gather information about issues that should be included in the examination. The draft report has also been submitted for public consultation in November 2020.

National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights

Council resolution 16/21, March 2021

The Danish government submitted the national report to the UN in February 2021. Based on the national report and civil society's parallel reports, all UN member states will have the opportunity to submit questions and recommendations to Denmark in the field of human rights on 6 May 2021.

From the Danish Institute for Human Rights' **report to the UN in connection with Denmark's UPR assessment**, it appears, that there were 13 areas in particular, that should be in focus when Denmark's compliance with human rights was to be examined by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2021.

Background

The primary objective of the UPR is to strengthen respect for human rights in practice, i.e., not only in word and intent, but also by ensuring that the individual human being can actually feel a difference.

All 193 UN member states must pass an 'exam' in human rights at intervals of about 5 years, where standards and fulfilment of obligations are reviewed.

The UPR is thus a mandatory assessment system in which UN member states participate one by one in an interactive dialogue in which the country's overall human rights situation is discussed, and where the other UN member states make recommendations on how the country in question can promote respect for and ensure effective observance of human rights for the benefit of its citizens.

You might want to get further information on the [website](#) of the Danish Ministry of Foreign affairs

Two NGOs assist in checking the implementation of the human standards worldwide.





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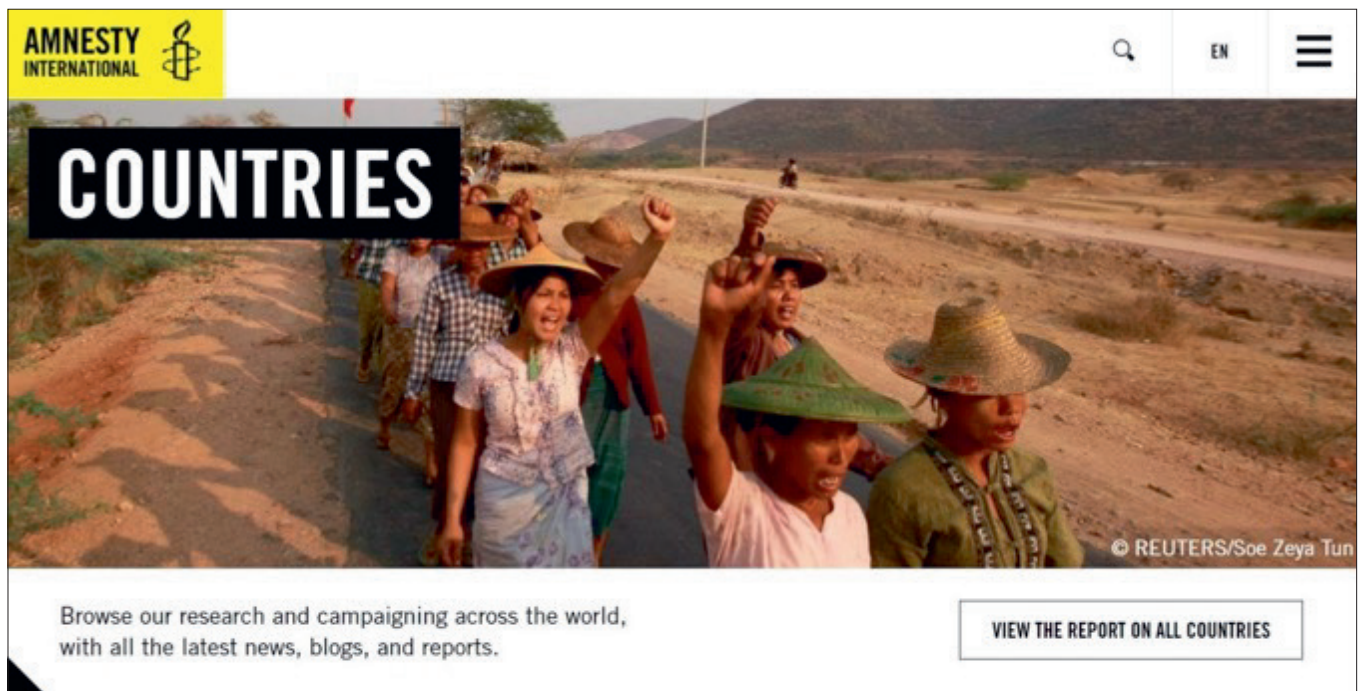
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Human Rights Watch’s 31st annual review of human rights practices around the globe. It summarizes key human rights issues in more than 90 countries and territories worldwide, drawing on events from the previous year. The Nordic countries are not included. [Learn more here](#)

Amnesty International documents the standards of human rights in 149 countries around the globe each year. Including the Nordic Countries. Have a look at the standards of [your country here](#).



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