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Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

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UN Special Procedures

Limits of Impact Addressing Challenges

Report by Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights



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Foreword



There is no doubt that the crisis facing the international human rights system will not be a temporary one unless bold and unconventional steps for reform are taken, including enhancing the efficiency of international human rights mechanisms, with a focus on UN special procedures. The significance of special procedures is self-evident; they serve as the ears and eyes of Human Rights Council. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan described them as the "jewel in the crown" of the international human rights system due to their influential role in limiting human rights violations and taking preventive measures to avert these violations and other harmful practices against individuals and communities.

Unfortunately, Special procedures face multiple challenges in a world rife with crises, the most significant of which is the liquidity crisis affecting United Nations system. This crisis impacts the activities of mandate holders and hampers their work. Additionally, some mandate holders within Special procedures face harassment and intimidation due to their work, with a clear example being the threats faced by Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. Furthermore, some mandate holders receive only limited cooperation from member states, and the establishment of new mandates without the consent of the concerned state poses a challenge to facilitating the work of some mandate holders.

However, addressing these challenges faced by Special procedures is not a fantasy. There is an opportunity to explore avenues for sustainable funding that is not tied to specific agendas imposed on mandate holders. This report includes specific proposals for increasing funding for special procedures. Additionally, there is a necessity for ongoing dialogue between special procedures and member states to improve human rights conditions, along with the need to provide technical assistance to countries seeking such help without exerting pressure on them. All these steps are likely to enhance the effectiveness of special procedures and implement the resolutions of the General Assembly and Human Rights Council in this regard.

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Chairman of Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Introduction

Special procedures are considered one of the fundamental pillars of the international system for the protection of human rights. They consist of a group of independent experts tasked with mandates aimed at providing reports and advice on human rights issues, whether from a thematic perspective addressing specific issues or from a country-specific perspective focusing on human rights conditions in particular states. According to the latest statistics, there are 60 mandate holders, divided into 46 thematic mandates and 14 country-specific mandates, reflecting the increasing importance of this mechanism in enhancing accountability at the international level.

The roots of special procedures date back to 1967, when United Nations Human Rights Commission—later replaced by Human Rights Council—established a working group to investigate the human rights situation in South Africa. Over time, this mechanism evolved and became one of the most important tools relied upon by the international community to monitor and analyze human rights conditions globally. Mandate holders have the authority to collect information, conduct independent investigations, and prepare recommendations based on international human rights law standards.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described Special procedures as the "jewel in the crown" of the international human rights system, noting that they represent the "eyes and ears of Human Rights Council" due to their unique ability to gather information from multiple sources around the world. This makes them a vital tool for amplifying the voices of victims and affected communities. This mechanism is distinguished by its ability to go beyond the halls of UN through field visits to countries where human rights violations may occur. These visits allow mandate holders the opportunity to meet directly with victims, civil society representatives, and government officials, giving them a comparative advantage over other mechanisms, such as treaty bodies, which primarily rely on reports submitted by states.

Human Rights Council, in its resolution 6/42, emphasized the essential role of special procedures in preventing serious human rights violations through various mechanisms that include monitoring, reporting, and making recommendations to states and relevant entities. The Council also urged mandate holders to develop a practical approach to enhance the prevention of these violations and to integrate this preventive dimension into their assessments and recommendations, ensuring the protection of human rights before violations occur, rather than only after they have happened.



Mandate holders within Special procedures possess multiple powers that enable them to effectively carry out their mandates. These powers include conducting field visits to assess human rights conditions on the ground and sending official communications to governments and other actors regarding alleged violations, along with providing specific recommendations for addressing them. They prepare thematic reports based on reliable evidence and data and hold consultations with experts and stakeholders to deepen the understanding of the issues they address. Additionally, mandate holders engage in advocacy activities and raise awareness about human rights issues within their mandates. They carry out these tasks completely independently from the UN, as they are unpaid experts, which enhances their neutrality and independence, allowing them to provide objective assessments free from political or financial pressures.

As part of its efforts to enhance the effectiveness of international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, **Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights** presents this report as part of a series aimed at evaluating and analyzing the challenges facing special procedures, while proposing innovative solutions to enhance their effectiveness. Maat has chosen the 58th session of Human Rights Council as an appropriate platform for disseminating this report, given the importance of this session in discussing issues related to the reform of international human rights mechanisms.

This report aims to highlight the current challenges facing special procedures, particularly in light of the unprecedented financial crisis affecting the United Nations, which directly impacts the ability of mandate holders to effectively carry out their mandates. The report also reviews the impact of the work of mandate holders within Special procedures framework and presents practical proposals to enhance the efficiency of this mechanism, contributing to the improvement of human rights conditions on the ground. Furthermore, the report discusses developments related to General Assembly Resolution 57/300 of 2003, which called for a review of special procedures to streamline their work and enhance their effectiveness, within a broader context of reforming UN human rights system.

This report represents a step towards strengthening the independence and empowerment of special procedures, ensuring their continued role as a key tool for monitoring and analyzing human rights conditions globally, thereby enhancing states' commitment to the recommendations issued by these procedures and achieving more effective protection of human rights worldwide.

First: Challenges Facing Special Procedures

Despite the notable development witnessed by the system of special procedures, along with the reinforcement of its significance as one of the core mechanisms for the protection of human rights, this mechanism still faces fundamental obstacles that hinder its effectiveness and limit its capacity to fully achieve its goals. This section of the report outlines the main challenges confronting mandate holders, which require innovative solutions to ensure the sustainability of the role of special procedures and enhance their effectiveness.

1. Liquidity Crisis in United Nations and Its Impact on Special Procedures

United Nations system is suffering from a worsening financial crisis, which has directly reflected on the activities of mandate holders within Special procedures framework. The unprecedented level of unpaid contributions from member states has led to a reduction in the resources available to support the work of independent experts. According to UN Secretary-General, this crisis peaked at the end of 2023, when the organization recorded the highest level of arrears in the payment of regular budget assessments in its history, impacting the implementation of many essential activities.

Estimates suggest that the cash shortfall in United Nations' regular budget could reach \$382 million by the end of 2025,¹ posing a direct threat to the sustainability of Special procedures' work. This is due to their heavy reliance on UN funding to implement their mandates, including country visits, report preparation, and consultations with stakeholders. This shortfall restricts the ability of mandate holders to perform their duties effectively, potentially weakening the oversight role of this mechanism and limiting its impact on promoting and protecting human rights globally.

In light of this reality, there is an urgent need to explore sustainable funding sources to support Special procedures system, without compromising its independence or affecting the objectivity of its work. This is essential to ensure its continuity as a cornerstone of the international system for the protection of human rights. Consequently, this impacts the overall human rights pillar, which is one of the three pillars of UN system. Funding for human rights, by the end of 2024, is expected to be less than 5% of the UN's regular budget.² The financial crisis has affected mandate holders, evident in the restricted access of some mandate holders to

¹ Improving the financial situation of the United Nations: report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4078425?ln=en&v=pdf>

² Joint Declaration adopted by the 30th Annual Meeting of Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Chairpersons of the Working Groups of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, <https://tinyurl.com/ammwjvdx>

targeted countries for their visits.³ Each mandate holder is supposed to conduct two country visits annually. Another clear impact of the liquidity crisis is the postponement of the thirtieth annual meeting of mandate holders from June to December 2024.⁴ These obstacles limit the ability of mandate holders to access countries to verify alleged violations on the ground, thereby hindering the enhancement of victims' rights. Maat believes that the liquidity crisis facing UN necessitates the exploration of sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure the continuity of Special procedures' work, especially amid recurring financial crises affecting various bodies of the organization, including Human Rights Council. Sustainable funding would enable this mechanism to effectively carry out its mandates, free from the financial constraints that hinder its core activities, such as country visits, report preparation, and communication with relevant parties.

For example, the estimated cost of operating one special procedure mandate for three years is approximately \$1.5 million, and this figure may exceed that in some cases. However, member states advocating for the establishment of new mandates by submitting draft resolutions to Human Rights Council often fail to allocate sufficient financial and human resources to ensure these mandates are activated properly. This leads to an increasing gap between the number of newly established mandates and the resources available to support them, overshadowing the ability of special procedures to effectively fulfill their oversight role.⁵

This unbalanced expansion has led to additional challenges, as the establishment of new mandates is viewed negatively in light of the limited available resources, which have not kept pace with the continuous growth of Special procedures system. As the number of mandates increases, so does the number of periodic reports that need translation and publication, along with the need for staff to coordinate the work of mandate holders. This places an additional burden on the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is responsible for providing administrative and technical support to mandate holders.

In this context, it becomes essential to reconsider the funding mechanisms for special procedures to ensure a balance between the number of existing mandates and the resources allocated to them. Innovative funding strategies based on sustainability and transparency

³ Until December 31, 2024, out of 193 member states of the United Nations, 173 countries have been visited, representing at least (89.64%) by one of the delegates appointed from the mechanisms of special procedures, while 20 countries were not visited, which represents about (10.4%) yet. Among the latter, 3 countries did not receive visit requests, and 15 countries refused to accept the requests for visiting, and among them, two countries agreed to visit visit not yet.

⁴ 30th Annual Meeting of Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Chairs of Working Groups, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/events/meetings/2024/30th-annual-meeting-special-rapporteurs-independent-experts-and-chairs-working>

⁵ Special Procedures: Determinants of Influence. https://www.universal-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/URG_Human_rights_special_procedures_pge_by_pge_hd.pdf



should be adopted, without compromising the independence of mandate holders or imposing political agendas that could harm the credibility of this international mechanism.

Sources of Funding for Special Procedures

There are three sources of funding for Special procedures that mandate holders utilize to carry out their assigned tasks:⁶

- **Regular Budget Contributions:** A portion of the costs for support and travel for field visits by mandate holders is funded through the assessed contributions of member states in United Nations' regular budget.
- **Voluntary Contributions:** The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights utilizes voluntary contributions from member states to provide additional support for Special procedures.
- **External Funding:** Mandate holders may also receive external funding from entities such as non-governmental organizations and certain private institutions to help finance their work.⁷

2. Acts of Intimidation and Harassment Against Mandate Holders: Challenge to Independence of Special Procedures

Some mandate holders within Special procedures face acts of intimidation and harassment as a result of carrying out their responsibilities, posing a direct threat to their independence and their ability to assess human rights situations objectively and impartially. Targeting mandate holders is one of the serious challenges that undermine the effectiveness of this mechanism, as certain parties seek to undermine their work through political pressures and personal threats, potentially limiting their capacity to fulfill their mandates freely and safely.

In this context, Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967, has faced intimidation and harassment following the events that erupted on October 7, 2023. These threats included pressures exerted by the Israeli occupation authorities on some countries to prevent her from being received on their territories, as well as receiving death threats,⁸ in a clear attempt to undermine her work and deter her from exercising her mandate freely and independently.

⁶ United Nations: Information on Independent Human Rights Experts and Their Work, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107361.pdf>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Standing with the UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese in Face of Israeli-Led, Western-Backed, Intensified Attacks Amid Ongoing Genocide, <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/24806.html>

According to Code of Conduct for special procedures, the freedom of mandate holders to assess human rights situations within their mandates must be ensured, free from any interference or pressures that could affect their conclusions or recommendations.⁹ Acts of intimidation and harassment against mandate holders not only violate their independence but also undermine UN human rights system, which relies on the work of these experts to expose violations and enhance accountability.

Maat believes that protecting mandate holders and ensuring their ability to perform their duties without pressure is the responsibility of Human Rights Council and UN as a whole. Mechanisms for protection should be strengthened, and accountability must be ensured for those who engage in intimidation, preserving the integrity and independence of special procedures as one of the essential pillars for the international protection of human rights.

3. Issue of Creating Mandates Without the Consent of Concerned States and Its Impact on the Effectiveness of Special Procedures

Human Rights Council continues to rely, based on draft resolutions submitted by member states, on creating specific mandates for certain countries without obtaining the consent of the concerned states or consulting with them. This approach undermines the effectiveness of special procedures, as mandate holders face significant challenges in carrying out their tasks due to the refusal of targeted states to cooperate with them or allow them entry to conduct field assessments. In such cases, the role of Special Rapporteur is limited to preparing and submitting reports to Human Rights Council without the ability to gather direct information or communicate with victims and stakeholders, thus weakening the practical nature and actual impact of their mandates.

Additionally, the establishment of these mandates without the consent of the concerned states exacerbates tensions between Human Rights Council and some governments, placing mandate holders in direct conflict with the relevant states rather than working to stimulate dialogue and achieve cooperation to improve human rights conditions. Among the 14 existing country-specific mandates,¹⁰ it is rare for the concerned state to agree to cooperate with the relevant special procedure, rendering many of these mandates ineffective at times.

For instance, during the interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's report at the 55th session of Human Rights Council, Sudan rejected the establishment or renewal of any mechanisms without the approval of the concerned state, noting that this leads to jurisdictional

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ See, <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewAllCountryMandates.aspx>

overlaps with other mechanisms and undermines their effectiveness. Maat believes that the continuation of this approach by Western countries in adopting draft resolutions to create and renew country-specific mandates without international consensus will entrench fundamental disagreements over these mechanisms, increasing polarization within Human Rights Council and prompting targeted states to reject any cooperation with mandate holders, negatively impacting the credibility and effectiveness of the international human rights system.

Therefore, it is essential to adopt new approaches that ensure the involvement of concerned states in the process of creating and renewing country-specific mandates, focusing on dialogue and trust-building rather than imposing oversight mechanisms without consensus. This could enhance cooperation opportunities and support the effectiveness of the work of special procedures.

4. Weak Implementation of Decisions Issued by Human Rights Council

Maat observes that one of the most significant challenges facing special procedures is the weak compliance of mandate holders with numerous decisions issued by Human Rights Council, as well as with decisions previously made by the Human Rights Committee. This refusal to adhere to decisions hinders progress and limits the impact of this important UN mechanism.

This challenge is particularly evident in Resolution 76 of 2004,¹¹ issued by the Human Rights Committee, which requires all mandate holders to submit follow-up reports alongside their annual reports. These reports should reflect the achievements and best practices realized during the year, as well as the challenges faced by the mandate and suggestions for improvements to enhance future effectiveness.

However, Maat notes that more than 50% of mandate holders have not complied with this resolution, indicating a significant shortfall in the implementation and adherence to UN decisions.¹² This reveals a deficiency in the level of follow-up and accountability within Human Rights Council itself, limiting the transparency and accountability that should characterize the work of special procedures.

This issue is one of the foremost obstacles affecting the effectiveness of special procedures in achieving their goals. Periodic reports are supposed to enhance communication between mandate holders and member states, allowing for an accurate assessment of progress made in the field of human rights and identifying obstacles that hinder the implementation of

¹¹ Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2004/76: Human Rights and Special Procedures, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unchr/2004/en/36515>

¹² Ibid

recommendations. Additionally, non-compliance with decisions increases the ambiguity regarding the actual impact of special procedures and undermines confidence in their ability to effect meaningful change in human rights conditions.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen follow-up mechanisms and impose penalties or corrective measures on mandate holders who disregard UN decisions. This would ensure full compliance with these decisions and enhance the credibility and overall effectiveness of special procedures.

5. Limited Response from Member States to Communications and Visits

Maat notes that member states of United Nations exhibit a limited response to the messages and communications from special procedures, with a response rate of only 46.6% for the total communications sent in 2024, which amounted to 665 alerts.¹³ This figure reflects a lack of response from a significant number of states, indicating a shortfall in cooperation with international human rights mechanisms.

For instance, the United States received one of the highest numbers of communications in 2024, with 73 alerts sent to it. However, the U.S. only responded to 22 alerts, representing just 30.1% of the total communications it received.¹⁴ This demonstrates a substantial lack of positive engagement with the alerts from special procedures, making the U.S. a prominent example of a state that does not show sufficient cooperation with the mechanism.

This lack of response persists in other contexts as well, with some countries ignoring the majority of communications referred to them by special procedures. This undermines the effectiveness of the mechanism and diminishes its impact on combating violations and protecting human rights.

Regarding field visits, some countries continue to refuse cooperation or accept limited visits from mandate holders. From 1992 until May 2024, mandate holders completed 1,582 visits to 177 countries. However, some nations refuse to accept certain mandates, particularly those related to the human rights situation within those countries. Some states cooperate partially or selectively, accepting specific visits or responding to alerts but refusing to allow field visits, which affects the ability of mandate holders to conduct comprehensive assessments of potential violations occurring within these countries.

¹³ See, <https://shorturl.at/OAQ7k>

¹⁴ Index of Human Rights Council Member States, <https://maatpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Index-of-Human-Rights-Council-Member-States.pdf>



Nonetheless, some countries cooperate more significantly with the mechanism, accepting invitations from mandate holders to visit their territories more readily compared to others. In this context, it is important to highlight the countries that continue to cooperate, reflecting their commitment to promoting human rights within the framework of UN mechanisms.

Table 1: Countries Most Welcoming to Mandate Holders

State	Number of Visits Accepted
Haiti	61
Sudan	42
Cambodia	40
Palestinian territories	33

6. Difficulty in Accessing Complaints Mechanism

The complaints system within Special procedures is a fundamental tool that allows victims to submit their grievances regarding violations they face. However, this system encounters a significant challenge related to accessibility. Many victims face substantial obstacles that prevent them from benefiting from this system, undermining the ability of special procedures to achieve a meaningful impact in the realm of human rights protection.

One of the main obstacles is the exclusion of victims who lack the means to access the mechanism. Many victims, especially in remote areas or politically sensitive contexts, lack the resources needed to connect with non-governmental organizations that can assist them in filing complaints. Access to this mechanism is limited to those victims who can reach out to NGOs or who have legal or social support networks capable of helping them navigate the complex process of filing complaints.

Additionally, victims encounter language barriers, as the complaint submission platform and available guidance materials are only in English. This exacerbates linguistic obstacles and excludes many victims who do not speak English, making it difficult for them to understand the procedures and submit their complaints accurately. Consequently, the benefits of this system are restricted to a specific demographic, potentially located in English-speaking regions or those with resources to support this group.

Thus, there is an urgent need to develop the complaints mechanism within special procedures to make it more accessible for all victims, regardless of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. This would enhance the inclusivity of the mechanism and increase its capacity to provide effective protection for human rights in various contexts.

7. Lack of a Mechanism to Follow Up on Special Procedures' Recommendations

Special procedures of United Nations face a critical challenge regarding the absence of a systematic and effective mechanism for following up on the implementation of recommendations made by special rapporteurs after their field visits to the relevant countries. In comparison to other human rights mechanisms, such as treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, which have specific and clear mechanisms for tracking the implementation of recommendations, special procedures lack an effective mechanism to ensure monitoring after the report is submitted to Human Rights Council.

Typically, a special rapporteur's field visit concludes with a report containing a set of recommendations aimed at improving the human rights situation in the concerned state. However, there is no systematic tracking of the implementation of these recommendations once the report is delivered, hindering the ability of special procedures to ascertain whether the recommendations have been implemented or are in progress.

This issue reflects a deficiency in accountability and transparency, as it remains unclear whether the concerned states have taken tangible steps to implement the recommendations. This weakens the effectiveness of special procedures in impacting the improvement of human rights conditions on the ground.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish a more systematic follow-up mechanism that ensures accountability and allows for clear and transparent tracking of the progress in implementing recommendations. This mechanism could include periodic reports from the concerned states on implementation actions or an independent oversight body monitoring the implementation process and informing Human Rights Council and member states about the progress achieved.

8. Limited Consensus on Supporting Special Procedures System and Challenges to Its Reform

Under General Assembly Resolution 60/251, which established Human Rights Council, it was stipulated that the Council's work, including Special procedures system, should be reviewed five years after its establishment. Theoretically, this resolution was intended to provide an

opportunity for states to assess the challenges facing special procedures and offer suggestions to enhance their effectiveness, enabling the system to respond more effectively to its core mission of addressing "situations that reveal a consistent pattern of human rights violations."

However, in practice, the 2011 reviews did not yield significant progress in reforming Special procedures system. On the contrary, the review highlighted increasing differences among states regarding the nature of the mechanism and the roles assigned to it. A total of 437 proposals were submitted by states regarding the reform of special procedures, reflecting diverse viewpoints on issues of independence and accountability for mandate holders. Notably, 154 proposals, or 35% of the total, addressed these concerns. Meanwhile, 31 proposals focused on the issue of "the proliferation" of mandates, indicating some states' apprehension about the expansion of new mandates.

Additionally, 75 proposals were made on how to address the non-cooperation of states with mandate holders, while 74 proposals were dedicated to supporting the General Secretariat and managing the resources necessary for special procedures. Furthermore, 20 proposals pertained to implementation and follow-up, reflecting a divergence of opinions regarding ways to enhance the system's effectiveness in tracking and implementing recommendations.

These proposals illustrate a lack of consensus on the specific issues that need reform within Special procedures system, highlighting the variance among states regarding priorities and approaches that should be adopted to strengthen this mechanism.

9. Need for Enhanced Financial Transparency in Special Procedures

Financial transparency is one of the foremost challenges facing UN special procedures, leading to ongoing debates among member states. Maat notes that this issue is sensitive and raises numerous concerns, particularly regarding funding sources and the pressures that mandate holders may face due to external funding.

According to Code of Conduct for special procedures, mandate holders are prohibited from accepting gifts or donations from any government or non-governmental entity in relation to their activities, ensuring their independence and protection from external influences. Additionally, the resolutions of Human Rights Council emphasize the necessity for special procedures to be funded in a completely transparent manner, with full disclosure of any funding received from any source.



Enhancing financial transparency is crucial to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of Special procedures, ensuring that they operate without undue influence and can fulfill their vital role in promoting and protecting human rights globally.

However, reports from United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services in 2011 indicate concerns about the existence of undisclosed agreements between mandate holders and funding entities, raising questions about the integrity and independence of procedures. Despite actions taken in this regard, such as the 2015 resolution requiring mandate holders to disclose foreign funding and make this information accessible to the public, this disclosure remains non-mandatory and is subject to minimal oversight by United Nations officials.

This issue highlights the urgent need to enhance financial transparency in the funding of special procedures by ensuring mandatory disclosure of all financial sources with a strict oversight mechanism to guarantee that funding is not influenced by external pressures or agendas that could affect the independence of mandate holders and their ability to perform their duties objectively and impartially.

Second: Positive Impact of Special Procedures

1. Legislative Reform

Special procedures are among the most prominent tools that contribute to achieving legislative reforms in member states through constructive dialogue led by mandate holders with relevant bodies in targeted countries. This dialogue serves as an effective mechanism to advocate for the repeal of restrictive legislation that affects rights and freedoms or to activate new legislation that helps promote and protect rights.

For example, in March 2024, Kazakhstan repealed a bill aimed at restricting media freedom, a bill that had faced severe criticism from civil society. The repeal of this law followed dialogue discussions held with Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, who expressed concerns about the potential impact of this bill on freedom of opinion, expression, and media freedom in Kazakhstan as a whole.¹⁵

An additional example of the positive impact of special procedures was observed in Lebanon, where the Lebanese Ministry of Labor issued the "Unified Employment Contract" on September 9, 2020, for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. This contract included extensive rights for workers, such as personal freedom (the right to move freely and to possess a mobile phone) and full respect for their rights, including a work limit of 48 hours per week, as well as the retention of personal documents by the worker. The issuance of this contract was a response to an urgent call made by Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls on July 17, 2020, concerning the situation of domestic workers in Lebanon.

Additionally, in 2018, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery published a report on domestic servitude, drawing attention to the deplorable conditions of domestic workers in Lebanon, which contributed to prompting Lebanese authorities to take tangible steps to improve the conditions of these workers.

2. Revealing Violations Related to Contemporary Slavery

Among the notable positive impacts of special procedures is the revelation of violations related to contemporary slavery, which is one of the issues that receives particular attention from international human rights mechanisms. In this context, investigative reports revealed the

¹⁵ Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28183>

involvement of major technology companies such as Google, Apple, and Instagram in facilitating markets for sale through their platforms, where users of these applications in Kuwait were found to be engaging in modern slavery by advertising humans for sale on social media.

This type of violation was highlighted thanks to Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, who organized, in collaboration with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a screening of a documentary film that shed light on slavery in Kuwait. This film was presented during United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights in 2019. The documentary created significant pressure on social media platforms, leading Instagram to respond by closing 703 accounts involved in promoting content related to modern slavery online, in addition to banning advertisements that promoted these issues.

In 2017, Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar conducted a field visit to the area affected by violence against the Rohingya in Rakhine State. During this visit, numerous grave violations were documented, including mass killings, rape, and forced displacement. These reports contributed to increasing international pressure on the Myanmar government, which resulted in sanctions imposed by various countries and international bodies. The reports of Special Rapporteur also became a focal point for issuing international resolutions condemning the violence directed against the Rohingya.

This type of action demonstrates the remarkable ability of special procedures to combat contemporary slavery, whether through revealing violations or exerting pressure on relevant parties to take tangible steps against this phenomenon.

3. Exploring Harmful Practices Affecting Children

Special rapporteurs have contributed to uncovering numerous harmful practices affecting children by initiating investigations into violations that may have occurred over long periods. For instance, in a significant move, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children issued a call to the Holy See or "Vatican" regarding allegations of ongoing sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy. In response to this call, Pope Francis announced the decision to lift "pontifical secrecy" regarding cases of sexual assaults against minors, a decision that had a significant impact on changing the Vatican's stance on handling these issues.

Until the lifting of secrecy, the Vatican had kept violations related to children confidential, allegedly to ensure the privacy of victims and to protect the reputations of the accused. However, following this change, the Vatican issued a guide on July 16, 2020, for Catholic bishops worldwide on how to document and address allegations related to sexual abuse of minor children. Later, on June 21, 2021, a group of special mandate holders in United Nations urged

the Holy See to ensure that alleged offenders in cases of child sexual abuse are held accountable, reflecting the importance of transparency and accountability in such matters to ensure that there is no impunity.

These examples reflect the role of special procedures in motivating positive change at both the international and local policy levels in the protection of children from violations.

4. Anticipating Emerging Issues

Special procedures often excel at anticipating emerging issues that may threaten human rights, as they identify new challenges and alert the international community to them. For instance, the Working Group on Mercenaries was among the first to highlight the dangers posed by the phenomenon of mercenaries in armed conflicts, emphasizing the negative impacts of this phenomenon on security and human rights in conflict-affected areas.

There was also another initiative in September 2021 from Special Rapporteur on Toxic Substances and Human Rights, who warned of the increasing risks associated with toxic substances in plastics. Special Rapporteur urged the international community to take effective measures to mitigate the negative impacts of these substances on human health and the environment. These examples are part of the efforts of special procedures to anticipate emerging issues that may lead to future human rights crises and play an important role in prompting states to take preventive measures to protect human rights and the environment.

5. Protecting Individuals Seeking Cooperation with United Nations System

Special rapporteurs have continued to advocate for the issues of individuals who seek to cooperate with United Nations system and face threats, intimidation, and acts of retaliation. In 2024, special procedures issued nine communications directed at eight countries concerning cases of intimidation and harassment against individuals attempting to cooperate with UN mechanisms. These incidents were also documented in reports presented to Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, as well as in oral statements made by mandate holders during council meetings.

These efforts have contributed to providing a form of protection for individuals at risk due to their cooperation with the international system, enhancing the ability of these individuals to share important information regarding human rights violations without fear of retaliation.

6. Advising Member States

Special procedures provide guidance and advice to member states on how to align their laws and policies with international human rights standards. For instance, in Uruguay, following a visit by Special Rapporteur on Torture, an urgent need for reforms in the criminal justice system was identified. In response, UN Country Team in Uruguay developed a joint program to support legal and policy changes, enabling individuals to better exercise their rights.

These efforts reflect the capacity of special procedures to effect tangible changes in the legal systems of member states in accordance with international standards, contributing to the improvement of human rights conditions at the national level.

7. Defending Right to Freedom for Detained Individuals

Discussions led by special rapporteurs with the countries they visited have resulted in the release of some prisoners. For instance, in November 2024, Algerian authorities released journalist Ihsan Qadi along with eight others who had been detained for criticizing the state, following appeals from several mandate holders. Similarly, in 2018, Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples visited Guatemala, where she met with several prisoners defending their land rights. In April 2019, human rights defender Chub was released after about nine months following Special Rapporteur's visit, with reports indicating that Special Rapporteur's focus on this issue in her end-of-mission statement and subsequent report played a crucial role in his release. Another example occurred in July 2020 when lawyers in Pakistan thanked UN special rapporteurs for their repeated appeals and correspondence over more than five years for the release of juvenile Muhammad Iqbal in Punjab, who had spent 21 years in prison awaiting execution for a crime committed while he was a minor. Subsequently, the Lahore High Court issued an order to commute his death sentence to life imprisonment.

Third: Specific Suggestions for Improving Special Procedures

Through the challenges identified by Maat, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of United Nations' special procedures:

1. Establishment of Voluntary Fund to Support Special Procedures

Maat recommends the creation of a voluntary fund to support special procedures. This fund could primarily receive financing from UN member states, with the possibility of also accepting grants from the private sector and individual donors. This fund aims to alleviate liquidity crises and ensure the continued effectiveness of special procedures.

2. Providing Specialized Training for Mandate Holders

Maat sees the necessity of providing appropriate training for newly appointed mandate holders through a dedicated training program specifically for special rapporteurs upon their appointment. This will help enhance their understanding of Special procedures system and improve their efficiency in working with states and relevant stakeholders.

3. Providing Technical Assistance Without Pressure

Maat emphasizes the importance of providing technical assistance to member states without imposing any pressures, while also standardizing capacities through Special mandates for states. Technical assistance should not be accompanied by pressures that could affect the independence of mandate holders or the cooperation among relevant parties.

4. Effective Communication with Civil Society

Based on the opinions of former mandate holders, Maat believes that cooperation and communication with civil society are fundamental criteria for the effectiveness of mandate holders. It also stresses the importance of avoiding duplicative work with specific organizations while excluding others within the framework of special procedures, thus promoting open and transparent interaction with all stakeholders.

5. Updating Information on Special Procedures Website

Maat notes that some information on Special Procedures website is outdated. For example, although the Chair of the Coordinating Committee for Special Procedures indicated in 2019 that an update of Manual of Operations for Special Procedures was underway, the version currently available on the site is still an old one from 2008. This information should be updated periodically to ensure that accurate and current data is accessible to all users.¹⁶

¹⁶ Manual of Operations of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

Recommendations

1. **Study Creation of Voluntary Fund to Support Special Procedures:** Maat calls on UN member states to consider the proposal to establish a voluntary fund to support special procedures and to present a draft resolution regarding this proposal at the 60th session of Human Rights Council, aiming to implement this approach practically and effectively.
2. **Enhance Integrity and Independence of Mandate Holders:** Maat encourages Human Rights Council to take necessary measures to ensure that all mandate holders within the framework of special procedures enjoy independence, integrity, and complete neutrality, enabling them to perform their duties effectively in achieving the objectives of their mandates.
3. **Prepare Annual Reports from Office of the High Commissioner:** Maat calls on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide annual reports that include budget allocations for each mandate within Special Procedures system, ensuring transparency and accountability in resource allocation.
4. **Manage Funding through Office of High Commissioner:** Any additional funding for mandate holders should be channelled through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights directly, without being provided directly to mandate holders, to ensure transparency and neutrality in resource allocation.
5. **Comprehensive Disclosure of Off-Budget Financial Support:** Special procedures reports submitted to Human Rights Council should include all details related to any off-budget financial support allocated for reporting purposes, ensuring transparency and accountability in financing.
6. **Avoid Establishing Country-Specific Mandates Without Consent of Concerned States:** Maat advocates for avoiding the establishment of country-specific mandates without the consent of the affected states, preserving the principle of cooperation and full respect for state sovereignty.
7. **Stop Acts of Intimidation and Harassment Against Mandate Holders:** Immediate measures should be taken to stop any acts of intimidation or harassment against mandate-holders within the framework of special procedures, ensuring that they can perform their duties in a safe environment free from threats.
8. **Enhance Communication with Civil Society:** Maat calls on mandate-holders within the framework of special procedures to maintain open communication channels with civil



society, through regular consultations and keeping civil society informed of any updates regarding the work of special procedures.

9. **Make Manual of Operations Available in Multiple Languages:** Consideration should be given to making the Manual of Operations for special procedures available in all UN languages, to ensure comprehensive and effective access to information for all stakeholders around the world.