



Commonwealth Forum of
National Human Rights Institutions

31 MARCH 2025

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2026

*“A sustainable culture of human
rights for a resilient future”*



COMMONWEALTH FORUM OF NATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND NHRI SAMOA – CHAIR
2024-2026

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FOREWORD



Talofa lava.

As the Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the Acting Ombudsman of the Office of the Ombudsman and NHRI Samoa, I am happy to present the forum's Strategic Plan for the 2024-2026 term.

The Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights remains focused on its vision for the Commonwealth where human rights are respected, protected and enjoyed by its citizens. We will continue the leadership and work of the Forum and building on its past achievements and strategic directions. This plan will again assess the issue of its long-term stability in recognition as a recognised legal entity and in ensuring a strategic and impactful approach to promoting and protecting human rights in the Commonwealth through the establishment of a permanent secretariat.

The Forum commits to previous declarations and commitments in particular, the Apia Declaration 2024 to call on the representatives of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to demonstrate support and commitment for human rights and to put the human rights of all Commonwealth peoples at the center of their deliberations and decisions.”

This plan's theme, “A sustainable culture of human rights for a resilient future’ will be realized by the following five strategic pillars and will guide the forums’ collaboration in this term:

- I. Resilient democratic institutions to uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.
- II. A resilient environment to combat climate change.
- III. Resilient economies that support recovery and prosperity.
- IV. Resilient societies to empower individuals for a peaceful and productive life and,
- V. Strengthening our Organization

The forum relies on its members to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of this plan through self-regulating the pillars through individual NHRI activities, sharing best practices, identifying emerging issues, and supporting delivery of our strategic pillars which in turn will achieve the theme of this plan.

I understand that the forum has encountered a number of hurdles along the way and we will be challenged again with the same issues. I trust in the resilience and commitment of individual NHRIs and its network to continue to rise above these challenges.

May we continue to enhance our global network of national Human Rights Institutions working to ensure that international human rights standards are respected and “A sustainable culture of human rights for a resilient future across the Commonwealth.

Maulaivao Pepe Seiuli

1.BACKGROUND, VISION & MISSION

The Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) is an informal and inclusive body of Commonwealth National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and other national accountability mechanisms with a human rights mandate. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) play an important role in ensuring that internationally accepted human rights standards result in improved enjoyment of human rights on the ground within their respective countries. The mandate of the CFNHRI is to promote networking, sharing of information, experiences and best practices, encouraging countries to establish Paris Principle-compliant NHRIs, and assisting national institutions to fulfil their mandated activities. The Forum is intended to complement and support, and not to duplicate, the activities of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) which is now known as the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), and existing regional coordination or accreditation bodies.

Vision: The CFNHRI's vision is "A Commonwealth where human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled".

Mission: To ensure that international human rights standards are realised in practice across the Commonwealth by supporting the development of NHRIs and their effectiveness.

Objectives:

- Enhancing the effectiveness and independence of NHRIs within the Commonwealth countries
- Strengthening cooperation between NHRIs and the Commonwealth Secretariat
- Supporting the work of NHRIs in promoting human rights in line with the Commonwealth Charter & the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Providing a collective voice for NHRIs to influence human rights policies within the Commonwealth.

2. REVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE 2022-2024 TERM

• Strategic Achievements:

- Adoption of the 2022 – 2024 Strategic Plan, focused on Sports, Business, Climate Change, Women’s rights and health.
- Organisation of annual meetings in Geneva (2023-2024) to discuss progress and collaboration among NHRIs
- Expansion of CFNHRI membership, now at 47 members, with new additions from countries such as Togo.

• Key Statements and Declarations (2022-2024)

- September 2022: Statement on the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
- October 2022: Statement on Australia’s draft resolution on National Human Rights Institutions at the 51st Human Rights Council session.
- December 2022, December 2023: Human Rights Day Declaration.
- April 2023, April 2024: Declaration marking the 29th and the 30th Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

• Joint initiatives and Partnerships

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with CIAT on Climate Change and Human Rights (August 2023).
- Development of joint project proposals, particularly on climate change advocacy.

• Website Updates and Publications

- Updated the CFNHRI website with key resources, including a press release on the CFNHRI Working Group on Sport and Human Rights titled “Unity the Goal for First Commonwealth Sport and Human Rights Working Group”
- Posted the latest issue of The Parliamentarian (published on 6 September 2023) featuring an article by the CFNHRI Chairperson on page 202.

3. STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS

In line with our Apia Declaration the plan is organised into five key strategic pillars:

Pillar 1: Resilient democratic institutions, upholding human rights, democracy and rule of law

Democratic institutions are systems in society that allow for the participation of citizens in decision-making, including through free and fair elections. It includes the three branches of Government such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. These are the guarantors in their respective spheres of the rule of law, the promotion and protection of fundamental human

rights and adherence to principles of good governance. NHRIs are key in ensuring that the Government is accountable for their decisions and maintain a standard of integrity for which they have been instituted by the people. Other key elements that are required in democratic societies that uphold human rights include: constitutional and legal framework which guarantees human rights; independent civil society; and free media.

1. **Free and fair elections:** measures to ensure free, fair and transparent elections with equal access to voting, and address challenges such as electoral fraud.
2. **Constitutional and legal framework:** strengthening laws and policies that promote and protect human rights for all without discrimination.
3. **Independent judiciary:** ensuring that the judiciary is free from political interference and can uphold the rule of law impartially
4. **Freedom of media and protection of whistleblowers:** protecting the rights of journalists to report freely without fear of censorship, harassment or violence, as well as whistleblowers to disclose issues of public interest.
5. **Independent civil society:** ensuring active participation of civil society organizations in the democratic process, including policymaking and monitoring government actions.
6. **Anti-corruption measures:** ensuring robust mechanisms to combat corruption within government institutions to maintain public trust and accountability.

Pillar 2: Resilient environment to combat climate change

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution, is increasingly affecting the human rights of people across the globe. From climate-change induced displacement to pollution that is contaminating water sources, the global environmental crisis is disproportionately impacting the world's most marginalised communities. The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment has now been recognized since 2022, which provides a framework for NHRIs, to hold governments, polluters and all those responsible for environmental harm to account.

1. **Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment:** recognizing the right of all individuals to live in a healthy environment, free from pollution and environmental degradation including by strengthening national and international legal frameworks to protect the environment and address climate change effectively. Ensuring access to clean and safe water, which is increasingly threatened by climate change; protecting the right to food by promoting sustainable agricultural practices; addressing the health impacts of climate change, such as increased incidence of heat-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, and respiratory issues due to pollution.

2. **Climate justice:** addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable and marginalised communities and ensuring that climate policies are equitable and inclusive.
3. **Indigenous people's rights:** protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, whose lands and livelihoods are often most affected by climate change and ensuring their participation in climate decision-making processes.
4. **Displacement and migration:** addressing the human rights of individuals and communities displaced by climate change, including access to housing, healthcare, and legal protection, and preservation of culture and national identity.
5. **Business and human rights:** holding businesses accountable for their environmental impact and ensuring they adopt sustainable and human rights-compliant practices.

Pillar 3: Resilient economies that support recovery and prosperity

The multiple crises that surround us – from rising inequalities both within and between countries with deepening levels of poverty on the one hand and extreme concentrations of wealth and power on the other, to environmental degradation due to unsustainable consumption and production patterns – are reminders that in many countries, economic policies are not working for the people and the planet. Key elements in ensuring resilient economies include promoting economic policies and practices that are environmentally sustainable and do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs; addressing income inequality; guaranteeing the protection of labour rights; ensuring access to education and skills development; strengthening social protection systems; promoting women's economic empowerment; digital inclusion; and supporting socially and environmentally responsible businesses.

1. **Economic Inequality:** addressing disparities in income and wealth distribution and ensuring that economic growth benefits all segments of society, particularly marginalised and vulnerable groups.'
2. **Labour rights:** Ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to unionise. This includes addressing issues such as child labour, forced labour, and exploitation in the workplace.
3. **Access to education and skills development:** Promoting equal access to quality education and vocational training to equip individuals with the skills needed for a changing economy, thereby enhancing their economic opportunities.

4. **Social protection systems:** Strengthening social safety nets, such as unemployment benefits, healthcare, and pensions, to protect individuals from economic shocks and ensure a basic standard of living.
5. **Gender equality:** Promoting women's economic empowerment and addressing barriers to their full participation in the economy, including pay gaps, discrimination, and lack of access to financial resources.
6. **Environmental sustainability:** balancing economic growth with environmental protection, ensuring that development does not come at the cost of environmental degradation, which disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, including indigenous peoples' rights to land and cultural heritage.
7. **Digital Inclusion:** ensuring that all individuals have access to digital technologies and the internet, which are increasingly essential for economic participation and access to services and information.
8. **Corporate responsibility:** encouraging businesses to adopt responsible practices that respect human rights, including in their supply chains, and to contribute positively to the communities in which they operate – while also holding businesses that violate human rights and cause environmental harm accountable.
9. **Migration and refugee rights:** addressing the economic integration of migrants and refugees, ensuring they have access to employment opportunities and are protected from exploitation.
10. **Sustainable development:** promoting economic policies and practices that are environmentally sustainable and do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Pillar 4: Resilient societies to empower individuals for a peaceful and productive life

A resilient society is composed of individuals who are able to participate in decision-making processes and are able to live a peaceful and productive lives. Key human rights elements include the right to health, where all individuals have access to quality healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as mental health care services; right to education which is fundamental for personal development and economic participation; freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation; ensuring access to justice to resolve disputes peacefully; ensuring that everyone has access to decent work and economic opportunities; promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups in all aspects of society; promoting the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly which are vital for a vibrant and resilient society; and ensuring the protection and development of children.

1. **Right to health:** ensuring affordable access to quality healthcare for all, including sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as mental health services, which is essential for individuals to lead productive lives.
2. **Right to education:** Guaranteeing access to quality education for all children and adults, which is fundamental for personal development and economic participation.
3. **Freedom from violence:** Addressing domestic violence, gender-based violence, and community violence to ensure that individuals can live safety and security.
4. **Access to justice:** Ensuring that all individuals have access to fair and efficient legal systems to protect their rights and resolve disputes.
5. **Economic opportunities:** ensuring that everyone has access to decent work and economic opportunities, which are key to leading productive lives.
6. **Social inclusion:** promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups, such as persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and persons of diverse gender identity and sexual orientation, in all aspects of society.
7. **Freedom of expression and assembly:** promoting the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, which are vital for a vibrant and resilient society.
8. **Children's rights:** ensuring the protection and development of children, including their right to education, health and protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.

Pillar 5: Strengthening our organization

The lack of participation at the Biennial Conference 2024 in Apia and the March 2025 Annual General Meeting in Geneva question the purpose and existence of the forum. Many challenging factors from distance and remoteness, lack of funding support for smaller NHRIs, non-recognition as a legal entity and the question of whether a permanent secretariat should be re-considered against no funding support are areas will revisit again in this plan. The governance structure with regards to the working groups and review of TOR of the forum and also the steering committee in strengthening its governance structure.

1. Review the terms of reference of the Steering Committee and confirm members for the next term.
2. Plan, design and implement capacity building programs through webinars, sharing experiences on human rights challenges and best practices
3. Ensure the forum will be registered as a legal entity.

4. Review position for a Permanent Secretariat
5. Revive working groups and members
 - a. Business and Human Rights
 - b. Sports and Human Rights
 - c. Climate Change and Human Rights
 - d. Women and Girl's Rights; and
 - e. Health and Human Rights

4. Implementation Approach

a. Utilization of Working Groups

Working groups are instrumental in diving deep into specific human rights issues. These groups allow members to explore critical areas in more detail. Members of the CFNHRI that are leading these working groups are on a voluntary basis with the sole interest to assist and share best practices on the topics which they are grouped into. We commend their work in the last two years in promoting and protecting human rights and look forward to their utilising the strategic priority areas organised into the following 5 key strategic pillars when carrying out their work.

- Business and Human Rights – Pillars 1, 3 and 4
- Sports and Human Rights- Pillars 1 and 4
- Climate and Human Rights- Pillars 1 and 2
- Women & Girls Rights- Pillars 1 and 4
- Health and Human Rights- Pillars 1 and 4

b. Steering Committee

The successful implementation of Pillar 5 relies on the commitment and leadership of the Steering Committee.

5. SUCCESS MEASURES

Our Strategic Plan will lead to the following changes:

➤ Robust Governance

- Members recognise CFNHRI as an effective and professional Forum of NHRIs.
- The Forum is accountable to members through effective communication.
- CFNHRI is able to effectively influence the human rights agenda at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM).

➤ Communication

- Members indicate that the accountability of the Forum to its members has strengthened.
- Member NHRIs are recognised for their vital role in promoting, protecting and improving human rights in the Commonwealth.
- Evidence of strengthened relationships between Commonwealth NHRIs and collaboration in addressing shared challenges.
- Members provide positive feedback on website and recognise it as an effective communication tool.
- The website is successfully updated and maintained.

6. MONITORING

This document aims to provide an overview of the Forum's strategic direction for a two-year period. This strategic plan will be monitored on an annual basis by the Steering Committee. Progress will be reviewed and discussed by the membership at the Forum's annual meeting, quarterly steering committee meeting and others.