



## **The Carter Center and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

### **Human Rights and Election Standards Conference**

Concept Note  
October 18, 2017

Art. 21 of the UDHR highlights the role of elections in ensuring that citizens are able to participate in the public affairs of their country. This obligation is reiterated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and is elaborated on in other international and regional treaties. During the last decade, election observation organizations and assistance providers have been increasingly referring to international human rights law in their work. In parallel, international human rights mechanisms also have considered election related issues in their work. However, the two communities of experts and practitioners generally have operated in separate spheres and have not come together to find ways to collaborate and cooperate on common goal.

To address this gap, since 2015 the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and The Carter Center have been collaborating on a series of workshops that have convened members of the election observation and assistance and human rights communities. The initiative builds on the past decade of Carter Center work to develop stronger links between human rights standards and related obligations for democratic elections, and also amplifies the OHCHR's persistent efforts to advance the right to participate in public affairs and other rights associated with electoral processes.

The overarching goal of the workshop series has been to invite reflection on the elements of a human rights-based approach to elections and advance strategies for collaboration between human rights experts and electoral practitioners at the national, regional, and international levels. Three workshop meetings were held in 2016 and 2017 focusing on special procedures mandate holders, members of treaty bodies, and States that have given or received recommendations on elections in the UPR process. In each meeting election observation and assistance providers developed recommendations for how the two communities could better cooperate in the future.

**December 2017 Conference:** The final conference of the series will take place at The Carter Center in Atlanta, GA on Dec. 4-5, 2017. The goal of the conference is to finalize a *Human Rights and Elections Plan of Action*, that will elaborate on the many useful recommendations developed during the previous workshops and identify key ways in which the cooperation fostered thus far can be continued.

The final conference will take place over one and a half days. The first day of the workshop will be a technical working meeting, focused on the review and refinement of the draft Plan of Action. The second day of the meeting will focus on agreement on the draft by meeting participants.

The participants in this final conference will largely be those who have been invited to or have attended previous workshops in the series, or who currently have mandates relevant to elections and human rights.

*Background: Human Rights and Elections Standards: Previous Meetings*

The Human Rights and Election Standards initiative was launched in a conference held in Atlanta in February 2015. Envisioned as the first in a series of meetings and workshops, the launch conference was attended by leading election practitioners and experts and representatives of the human rights mechanisms at the United Nations, the African Union, and other inter-governmental organizations.

Following the 2015 launch, the first of three focused workshops was held in January 2016 in Atlanta. The workshop was attended by a small number of thematic and geographic mandate Special Rapporteurs as well as election assistance practitioners and experts from organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the OSCE, IFES and others. Workshop participants considered the opportunities and challenges of increasing collaboration between special rapporteurs and the election assistance community, and practical suggestions for continued collaboration.

The second workshop was held in June 2016 in Geneva. Using a similar model to the first workshop with Special Rapporteurs, the June 2016 workshop brought together members of key treaty monitoring bodies along with election practitioner groups. Workshop participants examined the opportunities and challenges of increasing collaboration between treaty monitoring bodies and election assistance community, and practical suggestions for continued collaboration.

The third workshop was held in February 2017 in Geneva and brought together election practitioners and representatives of States that have participated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and have given or received recommendations on elections. During the workshop, participants discussed the use of the UPR to encourage democratic processes, and how election practitioners can more effectively engage with the UPR process.

**Human Rights and Election Standards Conference**  
**DRAFT - Outline Agenda**

*(all times are tentative and subject to change)*

**Sunday, December 3, 2017**

19:30                      Welcome Dinner  
*Location TBD*

**Monday, December 4, 2017**

7:30 - 9:00              Board of Councilors (optional)  
*(Hear about Carter Center programs, as well as off-the-record remarks, from former President Jimmy Carter in this optional event with Atlanta community leaders)*

9:00 – 10:30            Welcome and Introductions  
Review of Agenda and Goals of the Meeting  
Background on the Initiative and Outcomes of Previous Meetings

10:30 – 11:00           Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:30           Human Rights and Elections – working together in closing civic space  
*In this session, participants will discuss the current human rights and electoral context that shapes the work of the human rights and elections communities. In addition, participants will have an opportunity to discuss the most pressing challenges that the two communities face.*

12:30 – 14:00           Lunch

14:00 – 17:30           Review of the draft Plan of Action

17:30 – 19:00           Reception at The Carter Center

**Tuesday, December 5, 2017**

10:00 – 12:00           Finalization of the revised draft Plan of Action

12:00 – 13:30           Lunch

13:30 – 14:30           Endorsement of the Plan of Action  
Closing Remarks by Mona Rishmawi and Jimmy Carter

14:30                      Meeting Close