

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Process of the United Nations Human Rights Council

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Abstract

In a world where international human rights monitoring mechanisms are becoming increasingly complex and multilayered, questioning the role and status of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in these processes is not only a scientific necessity but also a practical imperative. Among these mechanisms, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)—one of the few human rights instruments with global coverage—places all states, regardless of their political or geographical standing, under equal evaluation. Although this participatory process is formally organized among states, in practice, it remains incomplete and less effective without the active, purposeful, and structured involvement of actors such as NGOs. These organizations, relying on evidence, civic capacities, and an independent perspective, offer a complementary and alternative picture of the human rights situation. However, this participation is not without challenges; rather, it presents a field where opportunities and threats intersect. On the one hand, it enhances transparency, accountability, and the amplification of marginalized voices. On the other hand, it raises concerns about the credibility, neutrality, and political motivations of certain reports. Accordingly, this article, through a descriptive-analytical approach, explores the role of NGOs across three levels: report preparation, formal and informal engagement, and follow-up on recommendations. It argues that when NGO reports are well-structured, strongly evidenced, and include practical recommendations, they can attain the highest levels of impact and legitimacy. In this context, the article also provides an analytical case study of Iran's 2025 UPR cycle.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); Human Rights Council; Universal Periodic Review (UPR); Transparency; Neutrality.

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