



## Session 5

### How ombuds institutions can contribute to sustainable development: Linkages with the SDGs

#### Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, complemented by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a systematic blueprint to harmonize global policy around economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The Agenda has firm and established links with other global agendas and frameworks, such as the Sustaining Peace agenda to prevent violent conflict and has galvanized international structures and states to converge around the common purpose of sustainable development. Intrinsic to the 2030 Agenda is the recognition of security as an enabler of and precondition for development, specifically in SDG16 which aims to promote peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. These three dimensions of SDG 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions – are further segmented into ten targets specifying desired policy outcomes, each in turn, monitored with indicators that vary in degrees of precision.

Arguably, the work of ombuds institutions contributes to all SDG16 targets, yet of particular relevance for ombuds institutions for the armed forces are targets 16.6 and 16.7. With the aim to “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” and to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making” these targets embody principles of good governance, and significantly overlap with the mandate of ombuds institutions. By receiving, investigating, and rectifying individual grievances and complaints, ombuds institutions help to prevent human rights abuses, eliminate waste and maladministration and contribute to the overall good governance of the security sector, thus, acting as enabling bodies of SDG16 as a whole. The role of ombuds institutions in achieving SDG16 is furthermore explicitly recognized in target 16.A which uses the existence of national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles as a measuring stick for its implementation.

#### Challenges

Yet, despite the evident linkage between the work of ombuds institutions and SDG16, there is a significant gap in the global policy discourse regarding the transformative role security sector oversight bodies can have in the implementation of SDG16. Consequently, minimal guidance exists for states concerning ways to integrate SDG16 within national policy plans and thereby contribute to its achievement. DCAF is currently addressing this deficit, engaging policy circles and harnessing research with the goal of repositioning ombuds institutions as enablers of SDG16 – both globally and domestically. Ombuds institutions can themselves play a role in this endeavor, by showcasing the natural link between their work and the SDG16 and taking pro-active steps in aligning and reframing their strategic priorities with the SDGs.

#### Entry points

- **Data collection:** Ombuds institutions are naturally positioned to collect large amounts of data. Receiving individual complaints, initiating investigations, and issuing reports and



recommendations necessitate sophisticated data collection methods, as well as the capacity to store them. The resulting databases are relevant in informing the 2030 Agenda beyond the narrow focus of SDG16, revealing latent grievances, potential points of conflict and systematic patterns of maladministration.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** As an oversight body, the data that ombuds institutions collect allows them to monitor and evaluate systematic issues. As such, they may identify broader trends that occur on longer time frames which, in turn, may prove to be invaluable for informing future policy and holding public institutions accountable. Moreover, overseeing broader societal changes positions ombuds institutions as ideal arbiters on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, ensuring that governments take action across the SDGs. In this position, ombuds institutions are furthermore incentivized to engage with actors that may proactively use the data in different ways, such as NGOs, civil society, or academia.
- **Harmonizing policy language and increasing awareness:** To a large extent, ombuds institutions already contribute to SDG16 specifically and the 2030 Agenda more generally, and merely require the reframing of their extant work to evidence said link. Recognizing the role of ombuds institutions – mentioned explicitly as such – and creating awareness regarding their enabling role, increases incentives for other actors to approach ombuds institutions. This may lead to opportunities for increased funding, as well as a greater appreciation of their work within the public eye.
- **Expertise on good governance and its measurement:** Given that the main activities of ombuds institutions concern measuring good governance, reporting on good governance, and issuing recommendations on how to improve good governance, they have a vast amount of expertise and invaluable experience they may share with the wider global policy community. Thus, injecting ombuds institutions into the policy debate on SDG16 will have knock on effects for the policy fora related to good governance in general.

### Questions for discussion

- Why is it important for ombuds institutions to link their work with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and SDG16?
- What does your office currently do to contribute to SDG16?
- What are some challenges you face in aligning your work with SDG16 or contributing to SDG16?
- What does your office hope to do in the future with regards to the 2030 Agenda and SDG16?