Through its increased involvement in field work in recent years, the United Nations agencies and programmes as well as the United Nations Secretariat have collectively developed a great deal of experience in both organizational and methodological aspects of field operations. Human rights monitoring has been a major and recurrent - although not the only - function of United Nations field operations. This Manual is part of OHCHR effort to consolidate and record the collective experience of the United Nations - with specific regard to human rights monitoring - in a way that it could be usefully incorporated into future United Nations efforts.

OHCHR has long been involved in developing methodology for the effective conduct of human rights monitoring. This is both in recognition of the importance of the human rights monitoring function as a tool to improve protection of human rights, as well as to stimulate dialogue with governments and contribute to the development of national capacities in this regard.

In particular, OHCHR has been engaged in several training initiatives for United Nations field personnel with human rights monitoring functions - in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Rwanda, as well as in numerous pre-deployment training initiatives. It has also developed methodological materials for use by human rights monitors, including but not limited to those officers employed in United Nations operations, which are now incorporated in this Manual.

This Manual is intended to be a further contribution to these ongoing efforts. Undoubtedly, owing to the specificity of the country of operation, the mandate, the political context, and other factors - each field operation has its particularities which must be carefully taken into consideration when dealing with all policy and management matters related to the operation. The
Manual will nonetheless be useful to provide a general framework for the methodological aspects of such operations, with particular regard to human rights monitoring.

The Manual seeks to integrate and consolidate existing expertise on the subject of human rights monitoring. It is mainly based on the experience developed by the United Nations in recent years, through the work of various human rights field operations, including, for example, the HRFOR Field Guidance prepared in 1996 by the Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda, the Manuel d’Haïti developed in 1993 by the International Civilian Mission in Haiti - UN/OAS (MICIVIH), the Manuel de Vérification produced in 1994 by the United Nations Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), and La Guía metodológica para el trabajo de la division de derechos humanos de la Misión de observadores de las Naciones Unidas para El Salvador developed by the United Nations Observation Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) in 1992.

The Manual incorporates as well the experience and materials developed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in providing training on human rights monitoring to United Nations and other international staff (including to UNCRO, UNPREDEP and UNPROFOR staff in the Former Yugoslavia in 1995, OSCE staff in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996, and the training programmes for peace-keeping personnel organized by OHCHR since 1996 at the UN Staff College), as well as the experience of the various field offices established under the High Commissioner's responsibility and entrusted with a monitoring mandate, including Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Croatia.

In addition, the Manual draws upon the experience in human rights monitoring and field work of many non-governmental organizations, individuals and humanitarian organizations.

It is complemented by a Trainer’s Guide, which is intended to assist trainers in preparing human rights officers to effectively and professionally perform human rights monitoring functions, and to apply the methodology contained in the Manual to their specific tasks.
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This Manual reflects many recognized principles of human rights monitoring which should be respected by United Nations human rights field operations, and - as such - is meant to be a contribution to increased effectiveness of human rights field work. Although primarily addressed to United Nations human rights monitors, it is hoped that it will prove useful as well for human rights monitors of other organizations, whether of an inter-governmental or non-governmental nature.

As experience evolves in this relatively new endeavour of human rights field operations, the numerous suggestions and ideas in the Manual will no doubt need to be improved and applied in revised form to different situations. For this reason, the Manual is also made available in electronic format, so that it can more easily be modified, applied, and split into teaching modules as required by particular operations. All those who consult and use this Manual are encouraged to suggest ways in which it can be improved.