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Country reviews: lessons learned from the first year of the current review cycle

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note contains an overview of process issues relating to the first year of the work of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, established by the Conference of the States Parties in its resolution 3/1.

I. Organization and schedule of country reviews

A. Drawing of lots

1. In accordance with paragraph 14 of the terms of reference of the Review Mechanism (hereinafter “the terms of reference”), “[t]he selection of States parties participating in the review process in a given year of a review cycle shall be carried out by the drawing of lots at the beginning of each review cycle”. Furthermore, paragraph 19 provides that “[t]he selection of the reviewing States parties shall be carried out by the drawing of lots at the beginning of each year of the cycle, with the understanding that States parties shall not undertake mutual reviews”.

2. At the first session of the Implementation Review Group (hereinafter IRG), held in Vienna from 28 June to 2 July 2010,¹ a drawing of lots was carried out to determine the States parties under review in each year of the first review cycle, as

¹ CAC/COSP/IRG/2010/7.



well as the reviewing States parties for the first year.² In some cases (see below), the drawing of lots had to be carried out or repeated at the intersessional meeting of the IRG held on 23 August 2010.³

Selection of States parties under review

Deferrals

3. In accordance with the terms of reference, a State party selected for review in a given year, may, with a reasonable justification, defer participation to the following year of the review cycle. At the first session of the IRG it was decided that in case a State party decided to defer its participation to the second year, the selection of the two reviewing States parties would be carried out or repeated at the time of the drawing of lots for the second year.

Consequences of a deferral on the reviews of other States parties

4. As a result of deferrals of States parties selected to undergo review in the first year of the review cycle, the number of States parties of each regional group to undergo review proved to be lower than the proportional number of States parties for the first year, and increased correspondingly for the second year. When a selected State party exercised its right to defer, the States parties from the same regional group selected to be reviewed the following year were invited to indicate whether they wished to take the place of the deferring State party.

Selection of reviewing States parties

Selection of the second reviewing State party

5. Paragraph 19 of the terms of reference provides that one of the two reviewing States parties shall be from the same geographical region as the State party under review. Two distinct boxes were therefore used for the drawing of lots: one containing all States parties from the same regional group and a second one containing the States parties without consideration of regional groups. In five country review pairings, both reviewing States parties belong to the same regional group as the State party under review.

Selection of States parties that had not submitted a list of governmental experts at the time of the drawing of lots

6. In accordance with paragraph 21 of the terms of reference, each State party shall appoint up to 15 governmental experts for the purpose of the review process. At the time of drawing of lots during the first session of the IRG, 94 States parties had submitted their list of experts and the question was raised how this would affect the drawing of lots for reviewing States parties. Several States parties drawn to undergo review in the first year of the cycle did not consider the absence of such a list as a reason to request a redraw and allowed additional time for the reviewing States parties to submit their lists.

² A link to the updated list of country review pairings is available on the UNODC website: www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Microsoft_Word_-_Country_pairings_-_Year_1-4.pdf.

³ CAC/COSP/IRG/2010/10.

7. 64 States parties were selected to conduct a review in the first year of the review cycle, from which 16 had not submitted a list of governmental experts for the purpose of the Review Mechanism at the time of the drawing of lots.
8. From those 16 States, six had complied with the requirement to submit a list of governmental experts one month after the drawing of lots. At the end of August 2010, three additional States parties had submitted a list of governmental experts to participate in the Review Mechanism.
9. From the States parties that had submitted their list of experts by 2 July 2010, approximately half amended their list following the same procedure between the first session of the IRG and its intersessional meeting held on 23 August 2010.
10. As at 24 March 2011, 115 States parties had submitted their list of governmental experts. Notes verbales were sent to the remaining States parties in February 2011 with a request to submit a list of governmental experts in accordance with paragraph 21 of the terms of reference before the second session of the IRG.

B. Schedule of country reviews conducted in the first year

11. The guidelines for governmental experts and the secretariat in the conduct of country reviews (hereinafter “the guidelines”) set out indicative timelines for country reviews in order to ensure the consistency and efficiency of the review process. The purpose of this section is to give an overview of the schedule of country reviews conducted in the first year.⁴

Initial steps of country reviews

Confirmation of readiness to undergo review

12. At the first session of the IRG, 34 States parties were selected by drawing of lots to undergo review in the first year of the review cycle.
13. From these 34 States parties, 19 had indicated their readiness to undergo review by the adjournment of the session, whereas six States parties had notified the IRG that they wished to defer their participation to the following year in accordance with paragraph 14 of the terms of reference of the Review Mechanism. Four States parties selected to undergo review in the second year volunteered to advance their review, thus taking the place of deferring States parties from the same regional group.
14. In paragraph 42 of its report, the IRG requested the secretariat to inform those States parties selected for review during the first year of the cycle but not present at the session that they should indicate within two weeks after the drawing of lots their readiness for such a review. From these nine States parties, three had notified the secretariat of their readiness to undergo review in the first year of the review cycle and three had indicated their wish to defer their participation to the following year at the time of the intersessional meeting of the IRG held on 23 August 2010. One additional State party communicated its wish to defer its review in October 2010.

⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, the present data are based on the 26 country reviews confirmed as at 24 March 2011.

15. At the time of the resumed first session of the IRG, held from 29 November to 1 December 2010, two States parties had not officially informed the secretariat of their decision. As reflected in paragraph 15 of the report of the resumed first session, the Group decided that a letter of the Bureau should be sent to unresponsive States parties through their Permanent Missions. The States parties concerned would be requested to inform the Bureau of their decision in the shortest time possible. As no response was received by the end of January 2011, a second letter was sent following the same procedure and indicating a deadline for response, in line with the decision of the Group. As at 24 March 2011, neither of the two unresponsive States parties had notified its decision regarding participation in the Review Mechanism.

Appointment of a focal point to coordinate the participation of a State party under review

16. In accordance with paragraph 17 of the terms of reference and paragraph 13 of the guidelines, a State party under review, within three weeks of officially being informed, shall appoint a focal point — and shall inform the secretariat accordingly — to coordinate its participation in the review.

17. For the 26 States parties that had indicated their readiness to undergo review in the first year of the review cycle as at 24 March 2011, the time period between the beginning of the review and the official notification of the appointment of a focal point was as follows:

Less than 3 weeks: 17 States parties;
3 to 5 weeks: 4 States parties;
Over 5 weeks: 5 States parties.

Communication of contact details of governmental experts by reviewing States parties

18. Paragraph 16 of the guidelines provides that a telephone conference shall be organized within one month after the State party under review has officially been informed of the beginning of the conduct of the country review. This telephone conference involves the State party under review, the reviewing States parties and the secretariat staff assigned to the country review. With a view to organizing the initial telephone conference, the secretariat requested reviewing States parties to designate contact persons among the governmental experts and to communicate their contact details. The information on contact details of governmental experts had to be transmitted to the secretariat separately from the curricula vitae of the governmental experts. All experts performing reviews are on the lists of governmental experts and where appropriate for the purposes of conducting reviews, reviewing States parties have added experts to their lists by the same procedure. States parties under review have been notified of the relevant changes.

19. The figures below reflect the time period between the beginning of the review and the communication of contact details of governmental experts designated to participate in the country review:

Less than 3 weeks: 33 States parties;
3 to 5 weeks: 12 States parties;
Over 5 weeks: 7 States parties.

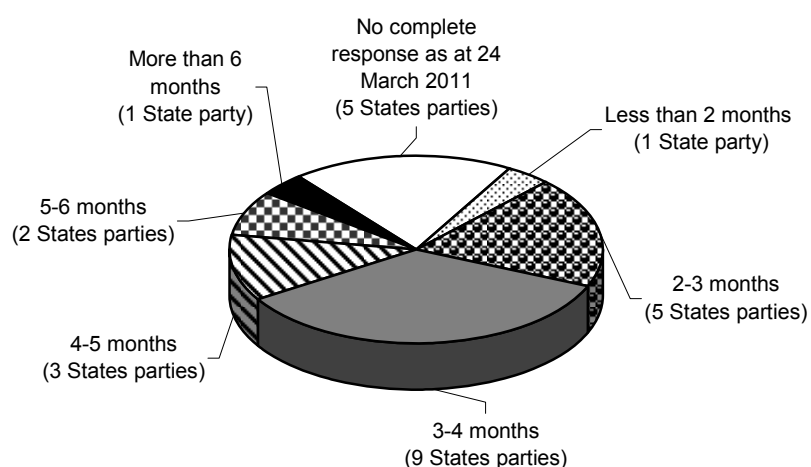
Self-assessment

20. According to paragraph 15 of the guidelines, the State party under review, within two months of being officially informed of the beginning of the conduct of the country review, shall provide to the secretariat its response to the comprehensive self-assessment checklist.

21. The date for submission of the self-assessment checklist was discussed during initial telephone conferences. In several cases, States parties under review indicated that they would require a longer time period to complete the self-assessment, taken into account, *inter alia*, technical constraints and the need for inter-agency coordination. Some States parties under review also subsequently requested an extension of the timeline for submission and/or submitted first a tentative response covering part of the provisions under review. Delays in the completion of the self-assessment in the first year of the review cycle were partly due to the fact that States parties under review had no possibility to prepare in advance, unlike States parties under review already selected to undergo review in the following years of the review cycle, and that trainings of the focal points and governmental experts had been organized relatively late in the first year.

22. The following chart reflects the time period between the beginning of the review process and the submission of the complete and final response to the self-assessment checklist.

Time required for the completion of the self-assessment



23. The average length of time required to complete the self-assessment checklist based on the 21 complete responses received as at 24 March 2011 was 17 weeks. Considering that five States parties had not yet submitted complete responses at the time of writing this report, a considerably longer average required time will result for the first year of the review cycle.

24. The average length of complete responses to the self-assessment checklist (excluding attachments) submitted by 24 March 2011 was 284 pages.

25. In 11 cases where the State party was a member of a competent international organization whose mandate covers anti-corruption issues or a regional or international mechanism for combating and preventing corruption, information relevant to the implementation of the Convention produced by that organization or mechanism was submitted for the consideration of the reviewing experts in accordance with subparagraph 27 (c) of the terms of reference. In line with paragraph 6 of the terms of reference, governmental experts were reminded to bear in mind that, while such reports were to be taken into account, they shall make their own analysis of the facts provided by the State party under review.

26. As at 24 March 2011, six States parties (at least one from each regional group) had notified the secretariat of their wish to make their response to the self-assessment checklist public on the UNODC website.⁵

Desk review

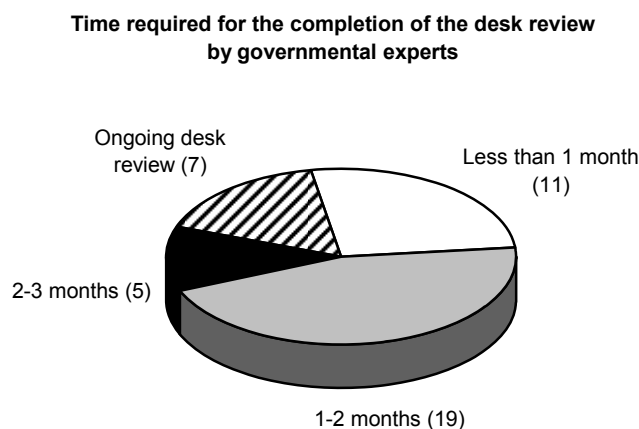
27. According to paragraph 21 of the guidelines, within one month of the receipt of the response to the comprehensive self-assessment checklist and any supplementary information provided by the State party under review, governmental experts shall submit to the secretariat the outcome of the desk review.

28. During the initial introductions and in accordance with the guidelines, reviewing experts were invited to take a decision on how to divide tasks and issues among themselves, taking into account their respective fields of expertise. In 10 cases the reviewing experts agreed to divide their work according to the two chapters under review and in others they decided that both sets of reviewing experts would work on both chapters III and IV.

29. As at 24 March 2011, 32 reviewing States parties had submitted the outcome of their desk review. In many cases, governmental experts informed the State party under review and the secretariat that they would need an extension of the timeline foreseen by the guidelines in order to thoroughly review the information submitted. In several cases, the State party under review expressed its readiness to host a country visit before formally receiving the outcome of the desk review.

⁵ www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/country-pairings-year-1-of-the-review-cycle.html.

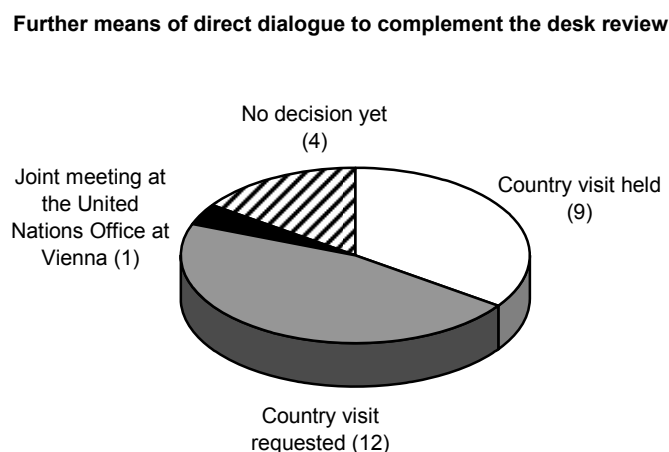
30. The following chart reflects the time period between the circulation of the self-assessment (after translation where appropriate) and the submission of comments by governmental experts.⁶



Further means of direct dialogue

31. Pursuant to paragraph 24 of the guidelines, if agreed by the State party under review, the desk review should be complemented with any further means of direct dialogue, such as a country visit or a joint meeting at the United Nations Office at Vienna.

32. As at 24 March 2011, nine country visits had been held and 12 additional visits were expected to be held. One joint meeting at the United Nations Office at Vienna was scheduled. The following chart reflects the use of further means of direct dialogue foreseen by the terms of reference.



⁶ Breakdown by reviewing States parties based on the 21 country reviews where a complete response to the self-assessment checklist had been submitted and translated by 24 March 2011.

33. In accordance with paragraph 24 of the guidelines, the country visit is to be planned and organized by the State party under review. Focal points drafted the agenda and submitted it to the reviewers and the secretariat prior to the country visit. In most cases, the State party under review invited reviewers and the secretariat to comment upon the draft. Country visits lasted on average three to four days, and included meetings with a variety of national stakeholders. While reviewing States parties were generally represented by one to two governmental experts each during country visits, some countries designated additional experts to attend. Two staff members of the secretariat participated in each country visit.

Role of the secretariat of the Mechanism

34. According to paragraph 49 of the terms of reference, the secretariat shall perform all tasks required for the efficient functioning of the Mechanism, including providing technical and substantive support, upon request, to States parties in the course of the functioning of the Mechanism.

Training workshops

35. In accordance with the terms of reference and the guidelines, the secretariat organized training workshops to familiarize focal points of States parties under review and governmental experts of reviewing States parties with the substantive provisions of the Convention and the methodology of the review process. These workshops were funded through voluntary contributions and based on a linguistic distribution of States. Eight workshops were held, thus ensuring that all States parties under review and reviewing States parties had an opportunity for training.

36. During the workshops, focal points and governmental experts participated in interactive exercises on the substantive provisions of Chapters III and IV of the Convention, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their content and with a view to using the *Travaux Préparatoires*⁷ and the Legislative Guide,⁸ as appropriate. The participants performed mock reviews covering every aspect of the country review process: filling out the self-assessment checklist for selected articles using the omnibus software; analysing responses to the checklist and preparing a desk review; engaging in dialogue including further means of direct dialogue; and, preparing and agreeing on a report drafted using the blueprint for country review reports.

37. Secretariat staff delivered the training, which was also attended in some cases by UNDP and bilateral technical assistance providers. The participants were requested to fill out evaluation questionnaires in each workshop, thus providing the secretariat with an assessment of the workshops, their delivery and content, as well as lessons learned for future workshops.

⁷ *Travaux Préparatoires of the negotiations for the elaboration of the United Nations Convention against Corruption*, United Nations, 2010.

⁸ *Legislative Guide for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption*, United Nations, 2006.

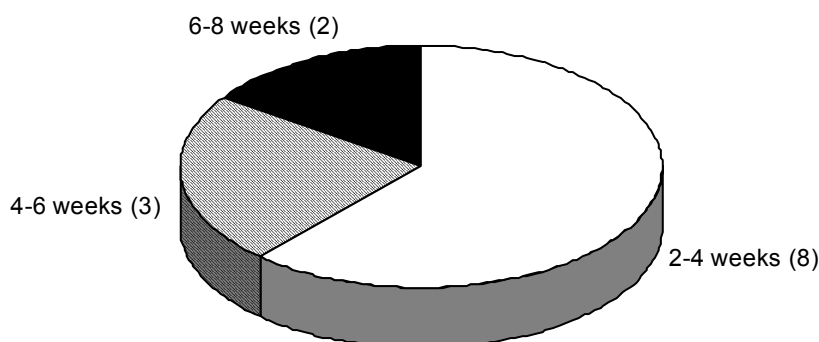
Role in the conduct of country reviews

38. Subsequent to the selection of States parties under review in the first year of the review cycle, two staff members of the secretariat were assigned to each country review, with consideration *inter alia* to the agreed working languages of the reviews.

39. As a follow-up to the training workshops organized pursuant to the terms of reference, certain States parties under review requested further assistance from the secretariat to complete the self-assessment, as foreseen by paragraph 15 of the guidelines. The availability of national training opportunities on the self-assessment checklist for States parties under review might be considered by the IRG in view of its mandate regarding technical assistance for the implementation of the Convention.

40. According to paragraph 15 of the guidelines, the secretariat shall have responses to the self-assessment checklist translated, if necessary, and circulated to the governmental experts within one month. Responses were immediately circulated to the reviewing experts working in the language of submission. At the same time, responses were submitted for translation, as appropriate, with the assistance of UNODC field offices. The following chart reflects the time period required for the translation of responses to the self-assessment checklist.⁹

**Time required for the translation of responses
to the self-assessment checklist**



41. In six cases, the secretariat also ensured translation and/or interpretation during the desk review in order to facilitate the coordination between governmental experts from both reviewing States parties. In order to support the desk review and the ensuing dialogue, it was agreed in most cases that the secretariat would assist by drafting a consolidated version of the outcome of the desk review upon receipt of comments from the governmental experts. This consolidated version was then submitted to the reviewing States parties for approval, and communicated to the State party under review, after translation, where required.

⁹ Data based on the 13 responses to the self-assessment checklist received by 24 March 2011 that required translation from and into working languages of the Mechanism.

42. Where the State party under review requested further means of direct dialogue, i.e. a country visit or joint meeting at the United Nations Office at Vienna, in accordance with paragraphs 29 of the terms of reference and 24 of the guidelines, the secretariat secured funding from voluntary contributions for one of these means of direct dialogue. If required and within available resources, the participation of up to two governmental experts per reviewing State party was funded. It should be noted here, however, that the cost estimates submitted to the IRG at its first session were based on the assumption that country visits or joint meetings would be requested in approximately half of the reviews. This assumption proved not to be accurate in the first year of the first cycle, with most countries requesting either a country visit or joint meeting in Vienna.

43. For country visits the secretariat facilitated practical and legal arrangements pursuant to paragraph 24 of the guidelines. This involved, inter alia, the conclusion of agreements with States parties under review, which set out the conditions for the country visit, including immunities for participants, on-site logistics and working languages. Host agreements were concluded in the form of an exchange of letters between the State party under review and the United Nations in its capacity as secretariat of the Mechanism. With a view to facilitating practical arrangements for governmental experts of reviewing States parties, official invitation letters were sent to participating experts, confirming the agreed dates and conditions for funding, where appropriate. Travel arrangements were carried out for those experts whose costs were covered by the secretariat.

44. In accordance with paragraph 30 of the guidelines, the secretariat was requested to assist governmental experts in drafting the country review report and executive summary at the final stage of the process, thus ensuring that the review of implementation was conducted in a consistent, coherent and comprehensive manner. Where requested, the draft country review report and executive summary were translated into the working languages of the country review before being approved and finalized.

Follow-up with States parties

45. The secretariat followed up with States parties on the procedural requirements set out under paragraphs 14, 16 and 18 above through contacts with the respective Permanent Missions and official communications, as needed. Special efforts were undertaken through the Permanent Missions in New York with regard to the two cases described under paragraph 15 above, which were referred to the Group at its resumed first session. It was also the secretariat's role to encourage all parties to the country reviews to meet the timelines set for the submission of the various inputs, e.g. the response to the self-assessment checklist and comments from governmental experts.

C. Language issues

46. In accordance with paragraph 51 of the terms of reference, "[t]he country review process may be conducted in any of the working languages of the Mechanism. The secretariat shall be responsible for providing the required

translation and interpretation into any of the working languages of the Mechanism, as necessary for its efficient functioning.”

47. Pursuant to paragraphs 12 to 14 of Resolution 3/1 of the Conference of the States Parties, the IRG considered the resource requirements of the Review Mechanism at its first session. In its Resolution 1/1, entitled “Resource requirements for the functioning of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption for the biennium 2012-2013”, the IRG welcomed “the voluntary contributions received so far, which cover partially the operational requirements of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption for the biennium 2010-2011, including the costs of communication and translation from and into the working language or languages of the Mechanism designated for individual reviews, travel and daily subsistence allowance for representatives of least developed countries to attend the annual sessions of the Implementation Review Group, training and general operating expenses, as well as country visits, joint meetings in Vienna, and translation and interpretation into languages other than the six working languages of the Mechanism, if requested by a State party under review” (paragraph 1) and requested “the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Review Mechanism, to seek voluntary contributions to cover costs of the Mechanism not covered by the regular budget”.

48. From the 26 country reviews conducted in the first year of the review cycle, 10 were conducted in one language, 14 in two languages, and two in three languages. While the translation of the complete response to the self-assessment checklist was ensured, States parties under review were requested to select most relevant supporting documents to be submitted for translation as well. In accordance with paragraph 52 of the terms of reference, the secretariat has also provided translation from and into two languages which are not working languages of the Mechanism.

49. Translation requirements had to be accommodated throughout the review process. In addition to the translation of the response to the self-assessment checklist and of the final country review report, translation and interpretation were provided during the desk review for comments submitted by reviewing States parties, in the ensuing dialogue with the State party under review and for the agreement on the country review report.

II. Lessons learned from the first year of reviews

50. The following are some lessons learned from the conduct of the first year of country reviews as well as actions taken by the secretariat to address challenges that arose. The Implementation Review Group may wish to consider how to provide guidance to the focal points of States parties under review, governmental experts of reviewing States parties and the secretariat to further enhance the implementation of the terms of reference and the guidelines.

Updated version of the software for the self-assessment checklist

51. Pursuant to its endorsement by the Conference of the States Parties at its third session and in accordance with the terms of reference of the Review Mechanism, the comprehensive self-assessment checklist was to be used by all States parties under review as the first step of the review process. Given the innovative nature of this self-assessment tool, the familiarization of focal points with the checklist software was one of the key objectives of the training workshops organized by the secretariat. Building on the experience gained during these workshops and in the country reviews, as well as on comments from several States parties over the course of the first year of reviews, an updated version of the software was developed to address and resolve technical issues and thus enhance the user-friendliness and effectiveness of the software. The updated version of the software is meant to facilitate the compilation of the self-assessment reports by States parties under review, as well as the analysis by governmental experts.

52. As background knowledge about the State party under review was identified as a premise for effective review, the introductory part of the self-assessment checklist, entitled “General information”, was further expanded in order to provide governmental experts with an understanding of the domestic legal, institutional and political system. A question on previous assessments of the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures was also added to this section of the self-assessment checklist. Similarly, questions relating to possible draft laws or measures under consideration were placed under this heading.

53. The amendments do not affect substance but streamline the question flows so as to avoid duplication. Several generic questions of the self-assessment checklist were therefore rephrased and further adapted to the specific requirements of the provisions under review. Where appropriate, related subparagraphs of articles of the Convention were merged in order to be reviewed jointly rather than one by one. Moreover, questions relating to technical assistance were moved from the paragraph level to the article level, thus avoiding the repetition of identical technical assistance needs for the implementation of the various paragraphs of a given article, while maintaining the possibility to indicate such specific needs.

54. The self-assessment checklist contains hyperlinks to excerpts of the Legislative Guide providing additional information on the requirements of individual provisions. In the updated version, various hyperlinks appearing in the text of provisions were merged into a single Legislative Guide button per provision. The excerpts of the Legislative Guide contain citations of the *Travaux Préparatoires*.

55. The self-assessment checklist further includes cross-references to provisions of other anti-corruption instruments, thus facilitating the consideration of previous assessments carried out in the framework of relevant international or regional organizations or mechanisms. Whereas the cross-references used to cover only those conventions which the State party conducting the self-assessment was a party to, the updated version of the software lists all instruments relevant to a given provision regardless of their ratification status.

56. In order to facilitate the review conducted by governmental experts on the basis of responses to the self-assessment checklist, references to documents attached

by the State party under review will automatically appear under the relevant provisions in the self-assessment report generated by the software.

57. Given the need for follow-up procedures, as foreseen by paragraph 40 of the terms of reference, compatibility between the versions of the self-assessment checklist had to be ensured in the above mentioned process, thus allowing States parties to import previous self-assessment reports into the updated version of the software. Compatibility was generally maintained, with certain limitations due to structural changes in a few cases. As a result of the consideration of technical assistance needs on the article level rather than the provision level, only information provided under the first provision of each article will be imported into the technical assistance section of the updated version.

58. Along with the training provided for focal points and governmental experts, a guidance note will be provided to the focal points with practical tips on completing their responses to the self-assessment checklist.

Initial steps of the review process

59. The delay in appointing focal points affected the participation of States parties under review in training workshops organized by the secretariat to familiarize focal points with the Review Mechanism and it entailed delays in the submission of the response to the self-assessment checklist. States parties under review in the second and subsequent years are strongly urged to nominate their focal points as soon as practicable. Several States parties under review in the second year have already informed the secretariat of ongoing preparations and should be further encouraged.

60. Focal points were assisted in installing the software on their computers during the training workshops as well as remotely. Focal points of States parties under review should bear in mind the possibility to seek assistance, including technical support, from the secretariat when completing the self-assessment checklist. In several cases, communications with the secretariat allowed to address technical difficulties in a speedy manner, thus facilitating the self-assessment.

61. While the quality and thoroughness of responses to the self-assessment are crucial to the review process, focal points should bear in mind translation constraints in reviews conducted in two or more languages and quote only laws or other measures specifically relevant to the implementation of provisions under review. In addition and where the deadline for submission of responses has passed, focal points may wish to consider submitting the responses to the two chapters separately as they become available.

62. Issues regarding the submission of the list of governmental experts have been outlined above regarding the drawing of lots, where the absence of such a list could lead States parties under review to request redraws. With a view to complying with paragraph 20 of the terms of reference, the submission of such lists by all States parties should be ensured as soon as possible.

63. Furthermore, as the communication of contact details of governmental experts is a prerequisite for the organization of the initial telephone conference, this introduction could not always be held within the timeframe indicated in the guidelines. Furthermore, in cases where only one expert was nominated to conduct a

review, this posed a challenge for the organization of the different steps of the review as well as the burden of work.

64. Focal points and governmental experts were requested to inform the secretariat in a timely manner of their possible attendance to meetings of the Implementation Review Group, as well as the working groups on asset recovery and prevention, in order to organize and schedule meetings with the reviewing experts where requested by the State party under review. Face to face meetings, with teleconferences connecting any missing parties, proved to be a valuable and effective means of communication during the reviews.

65. Similarly, the secretariat has planned to hold trainings at every opportunity back to back with upcoming sessions of the Implementation Review Group and the working groups. Focal points and governmental experts will be provided with a schedule of trainings that will be held after the drawing of lots of the reviewing States parties of the second year of reviews.

Conduct of country reviews

66. During the initial introductions and in accordance with the guidelines, reviewing experts were invited to take a decision on how to divide tasks and issues among themselves, taking into account their respective fields of competence. As the division of labour proved to be a crucial factor in how the country reviews were conducted, governmental experts were encouraged to give this issue careful consideration and to amend the initial division where circumstances required.

67. In order to facilitate the experts' work in this respect, the outcome of the desk review was in most cases submitted to the secretariat in the form of free-text observations or as a list, with reference to the relevant articles. The secretariat then organized the outcome of the desk review according to the report blueprint format. Reviewing experts could also request the secretariat for any further assistance with the production of the outcome of the desk review. Preparing the desk review in the blueprint format prior to the country visits also greatly contributed to focused discussions during the visits and facilitated the finalization of the country review reports. The involvement of the secretariat throughout the review process contributed to the consistency of standards used by reviewers in their conclusions.

68. For the review of compliance with obligations to consider, governmental experts were advised to not only analyse whether the State party under review considered the measures foreseen by the relevant provisions, but also review the content of such measure itself where appropriate. In several cases, States parties under review also submitted draft legislation and requested the experts to comment on it. This should be clear from the outset of the reviews.

69. In accordance with paragraph 18 of the guidelines, reviewing experts shall establish open lines of communication with the State party under review, but the secretariat must be kept abreast of all these communications. Experts may wish to engage in such communication while preparing the outcome of the desk review, in particular for requests for additional materials or information, in order to gain time in their analysis.

70. In a similar vein, several States parties under review indicated at the outset or during the review process, depending on the timeline of each step foreseen in the

terms of reference and the guidelines and in order to facilitate the work of the reviewing experts, that the outcome of the desk review could be presented during the further means of direct dialogue. This proved to be useful in particular where translation was required and where communications via email and telephone were difficult due to logistical challenges, time differences and language.

71. On the further means of direct dialogue, most States parties requested a country visit at the time of the initial introduction and confirmed this request sufficiently ahead of time to plan and organize the country visit. One State party requested a joint meeting at the United Nations Office at Vienna. Debriefing meetings with the reviewing experts and the secretariat, and with the focal point where appropriate, were very useful to prepare the meetings and to gather information with a view to compiling and completing the draft country review report.

72. With regard to the consideration of technical assistance needs, such needs were highlighted in responses to the self-assessment checklist and taken up by the reviewing experts, but further work was often required to provide a comprehensive overview of needs with regard to implementation. Several States parties also wished to identify needs beyond the strict implementation of the two chapters under review and the Implementation Review Group may wish to consider this issue.

73. As at time of writing, the final stages of the country review process, i.e. drafting of country review reports and executive summaries as well as agreement to these were ongoing in most cases, the secretariat will provide an oral update on this issue to the Implementation Review Group. The Group also may wish to provide guidance on how to stagger reviews throughout the cycle.
