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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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Agenda item 18

STATUS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Reporting obligations of States parties under
United Nations instruments on human rights

Note by the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 42/105, the Secretary-General convened, from 10 to 14 October 1988, a meeting of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies to consider problems relating to the reporting obligations of States parties to international instruments on human rights and to the functioning of bodies established under such instruments. The report of that meeting (HRI/MC/1988/1), was given preliminary consideration by the General Assembly at its forty-third session.
2. In paragraph 13 of its resolution 43/115, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to convey to the Commission on Human Rights at its forty-fourth session the conclusions and recommendations of the meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies together with any views and comments he may have thereon". In paragraph 14 of that same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Commission on Human Rights "in view of its overall responsibilities in the field of human rights, to consider at its forty-fifth session, as a matter of priority, the conclusions and recommendations of that meeting, in particular those identified as matters requiring urgent action, and to report to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, at its forty-fourth session".
3. In accordance with the foregoing, the conclusions and recommendations of the aforementioned meeting are submitted in the annex to this note for consideration by the Commission. The report is available in document HRI/MC/1988/1.

Annex

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING OF PERSONS
CHAIRING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

78. The following conclusions and recommendations are respectfully submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration in accordance with its resolutions 41/121 and 42/105. Some concern action which might be taken by the General Assembly itself or by other appropriate organs of the United Nations while others fall within the competence of the respective treaty bodies or of the States parties to the treaties. However, for the purposes of the present report no distinction is drawn in this regard since the mandate of the meeting is to propose diverse means by which to improve the functioning of the treaty supervisory system.

A. Matters requiring urgent action

79. The respective treaty bodies should be requested to consider, on the basis of a proposal prepared by the Secretariat (see A/40/600, para. 21), a possible consolidation of their respective guidelines governing the initial part of each State party's report.

80. Each treaty body should use whatever means are appropriate in order to promote the submission of overdue reports. For this purpose, the Secretary-General should consider instituting a regularly scheduled consultation with the representatives of States concerned while they are in attendance at the annual session of the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly or other appropriate occasions.

81. Technical assistance and advisory services to assist States parties in fulfilling their reporting obligations should be provided on a regular basis by the Secretary-General. Regional and subregional training courses on the preparation and submission of reports by States parties are of particular value in this regard. Priority should also be given to the provision of assistance to States which are contemplating ratification of the relevant instruments and request assistance in that regard.

82. A task force on computerization should be appointed by the Secretary-General to explore the costs and benefits of computerizing, as far as possible, the work of the committees. A member of one of the expert committees should be a member of the task force.

83. The General Assembly, in carrying out its responsibility relating to the proper functioning of the human rights treaty bodies established to monitor the implementation of instruments adopted by the Assembly itself, should, as a matter of the highest priority, ensure the financing of each of the committees from the United Nations regular budget or make whatever other financial arrangements are necessary in order to enable each of the committees to operate effectively.

84. The General Assembly should entrust one or two experts with the task of preparing a study on possible long-term approaches to the supervision of new instruments in the light of all relevant considerations.

85. More adequate staffing resources should immediately be provided to service the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and, as soon as the overall financial situation permits, additional resources should be provided to the other committees in respect of the discharge of all of their responsibilities.

B. Other matters requiring attention

86. The Secretariat should provide the members of each committee with relevant statistical information whenever it is readily available from an intergovernmental body. Committee members should at least have access to a copy of the Statistical Yearbook of the United Nations and the annual statistical report of the International Monetary Fund, entitled "International Financial Statistics", and should each receive annually a copy of the statistical tables appended to the World Development Report of the World Bank and The State of the World's Children by UNICEF.

87. The detailed reporting manual to assist States in the fulfilment of their reporting obligations, which is under preparation by the Centre for Human Rights in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), should be given high priority. Each of the committees should be given an opportunity to comment on a draft of the manual.

88. Each Government should be encouraged to consider establishing a unit which would prepare all of the reports submitted by that State to the treaty bodies.

89. In drafting their reports, States parties are urged to refer, whenever appropriate, to information contained in reports submitted to other treaty bodies, rather than repeating the same information.

90. Each treaty body should keep under review the possibility of revising the requirements as to the periodicity of reporting, taking account of the burden on States and the need for an effective reporting procedure.

91. Treaty bodies should consider how best to make use of individual rapporteurs or co-ordinators as well as working groups in order to expedite the timely and effective consideration of periodic reports.

92. Each treaty body should consider imposing some general time limits on speakers, while at the same time acknowledging that some exceptions will have to be made in particular cases.

93. The treaty bodies should be consulted in the drawing up of the relevant parts of the advisory services programme and, if a board of trustees is established to advise the Secretary-General on the functioning of the Voluntary Fund for Advisory Services and Technical Assistance in the Field of Human Rights, consideration should be given to including one or more experts from the treaty bodies.

94. In order to facilitate a more efficient exchange of information and documentation, occasional meetings between the Chairpersons of the United Nations treaty bodies and those of the relevant regional commissions and the ILO and UNESCO committees on conventions and recommendations and other competent bodies should be convened.

95. The treaty bodies should consider establishing procedures designed to facilitate regular meetings with relevant special rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights or the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities who are working on directly relevant subjects, whenever this would be useful.

96. As far as possible, requests for information directed to the specialized agencies by the treaty bodies should be as precise as possible. Efforts should also be made to develop direct dialogue with competent officials from the agencies concerned where appropriate.

97. The meeting of Chairpersons should be scheduled regularly on an annual or biennial basis with a view to exchanging experience and improving the implementation of the different instruments.

98. Continuing efforts should be made to ensure publicity for the work of the treaty bodies, at both international and national levels. The United Nations information centre in each country should be directed to disseminate a copy of the report itself as well as details of the Committee's consideration of it, whenever a report of the State party in question is considered.

99. It is desirable that a better gender balance than the current one be achieved in respect of the composition of the various committees.

100. Each treaty body should consider how best to make use of the expertise of its members during the periods between sessions.
