



**Convention against Torture
and Other Cruel, Inhuman
or Degrading Treatment
or Punishment**

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COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

Twenty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 529th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 11 November 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BURNS

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.529/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

STATEMENT BY THE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. Mr. RAMCHARAN (Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, recent developments of relevance to the Committee's activities, included the report of the Secretary-General entitled Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387) in which the need to modernize the human rights treaty system was stressed. The report recalled that, in paragraphs 25 and 26 of the Millennium Declaration, the Member States resolved to strengthen their capacity at the country level to implement the principles and practices of human rights. The establishment or enhancement of a national protection system in each country, reflecting international human rights norms, should therefore be a core objective of the Organization.
2. As part of efforts to support human rights at the country level, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had begun to work through the resident coordinator system to ensure that human rights were incorporated into country-level analysis, planning and programme implementation. Any insights which the treaty monitoring bodies could provide to the process of building national protection systems would be invaluable.
3. The Secretary-General's report also noted that the current structure of disparate human rights committees imposed difficult reporting requirements on treaty signatories, and accordingly proposed two measures to rectify the shortcomings in the existing system. The committees should evolve a more coordinated approach to their work and standardize their varied reporting requirements and, secondly, each State should be allowed to produce a single report summarizing its adherence to the full range of international human rights treaties to which it was a party.
4. The report also called for initiatives to reduce the amount of documentation and improve its quality in the context of streamlining procedures. That was an observation which was less relevant to the reports submitted to the Committee against Torture than to those addressed to some other committees.
5. The High Commissioner had also been requested to consult the treaty bodies on new streamlined reporting procedures and to submit his recommendations to the Secretary-General by September 2003. The Committee might, therefore, wish to start thinking about that topic at its current session, it being understood that a clear distinction should be made between the legal responsibilities devolving upon the treaty bodies and those that devolved upon the States parties.
6. It was vital to ensure follow-up to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations at the national level. However, the Committee's internal follow-up activities were equally important. Consequently, the Committee's decision to appoint a rapporteur on follow-up to decisions under article 22 of the Convention and a rapporteur on follow-up to conclusions and recommendations on State party reports was welcome. OHCHR stood ready to assist the Committee in defining the modus operandi of the new mandates.

7. On 7 November 2002, the Third Committee of the General Assembly had approved the text of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, as previously approved by the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council. The resolution in question had been adopted by a vote of 104 in favour, 8 against and 37 abstentions. Once approved by the plenary of the General Assembly, the Optional Protocol would be open for ratification and would require 20 ratifications to enter into force, an event that would have direct implications for the Committee's work and impose additional responsibilities on it.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (item 1 of the provisional agenda) (CAT/C/69)

8. The provisional agenda (CAT/C/69) was adopted.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 2)

9. Ms. GAER said she welcomed the news that the Optional Protocol had been approved by the Third Committee of the General Assembly. There had recently been a tendency for new human rights instruments to be ratified quite quickly. Consequently, it was not impossible that the Optional Protocol might come into force before the Committee held its next session. It might be advisable, therefore, for the Committee to find time during its current session to discuss its expectations with regard to the implementation of the Optional Protocol and the possible modalities therefor.

10. Mr. MAVROMMATIS said that it would be important to establish strong ties with the proposed Subcommittee, through full dialogue and exchange of information, to avoid any risk of divergent interpretations of the Protocol.

11. The CHAIRMAN said that the members of the Committee might consider discussing, at some point during the session, whether to adopt the practice of transmitting a list of issues and questions to States parties in advance of the examination of their reports, in accordance with the recommendation made in the report of the first Inter-Committee meeting of the human rights treaty bodies (HRI/ICM/2002/3, para. 59).

SUBMISSION OF REPORTS BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 19 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 3)

12. Ms. RUEDA CASTAÑÓN (Secretary of the Committee) said that, since the previous session of the Committee, the Secretariat had received the reports listed in the annotations to the agenda (CAT/C/69), together with the initial reports of Cambodia and Yemen, the third periodic reports of Bulgaria and Germany and the fourth periodic report of Canada. The number of overdue reports was 165.

13. The number of States parties to the Convention currently stood at 131, following ratifications by Equatorial Guinea and the Holy See. Equatorial Guinea had not made a declaration under article 21.

The public part of the meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.