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RATIONALIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

Note by the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights

1. In its resolution 57/300, the General Assembly, having considered the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387), requested the Commission on Human Rights and the relevant intergovernmental bodies to review the human rights special procedures in order to rationalize their work and enhance their effectiveness, consistent with their mandates, and also requested the High Commissioner to support this exercise, including through the submission of recommendations, as appropriate, and by providing adequate administrative support to each of these special procedures. The purpose of this note is to set out some considerations that might be of interest to the Commission.
2. In its paragraph 56, the Secretary-General's report (A/57/387) identifies two sets of recommended measures: the improvement of the quality of the reports and analyses produced by special procedures, including through the development of clear criteria for the use of special procedures and the selection of appointees and by establishing better guidelines for their operations and reporting functions; and the need to strengthen the Organization's capacity to support special procedures, including by appointing more senior professionals and providing better administrative support.
3. Pursuant to decision 2000/109 of the Commission on Human Rights on enhancing the effectiveness of the mechanisms of the Commission and to other relevant resolutions, a number of steps have been taken or facilitated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in this direction. They include the drafting and adoption by the annual meeting of special procedures mandate-holders of a manual for special rapporteurs; the drafting

and endorsement by OHCHR of internal guiding principles regarding the working relations between special procedures mandate-holders and OHCHR staff; the introduction of an induction kit for special procedures mandate-holders, which is routinely updated and used to brief new mandate-holders; the development of a roster of experts who could be called upon to serve under special procedures; efforts to keep mandate-holders regularly informed about the latest General Assembly resolutions and other instructions in the area of control and limitation of documentation and of the resulting requirements vis-à-vis their reports (page/word limits, executive summaries, deadlines for submission, languages, etc.).

4. Further measures might include assistance in the development of additional criteria for the selection of experts and in rationalizing reporting obligations and methods, so as to avoid duplications. Furthermore, pursuant to Commission resolution 2002/84, another measure might be the production of a comprehensive and regularly updated compilation of the recommendations made by the various special procedures over the years with respect to thematic issues.

5. With regard to the second set of measures indicated by the Secretary-General, it must be noted that in recent years the number of special procedures mandates has grown significantly. The growth in number and scope of special procedures has not been matched by a growth in resources. Efforts have been undertaken to strengthen the analytical, communications, information and logistical assistance that the Office is mandated to provide to special procedures. As a result, OHCHR has increasingly resorted to the recruitment of human resources from extrabudgetary resources in order to provide the necessary assistance to the special procedures mandate-holders. Furthermore, in July 2001, a Quick Response Desk was established to handle urgent interventions by mandate-holders and to ensure better coordination of and follow-up to their communications with Governments. Since the establishment of the Quick Response Desk there has been a clear progression in the number of individual and joint communications addressed by mandate-holders to Governments and responses thereto. The Quick Response Desk is at present envisaging extending the use and scope of the thematic database and strengthening its services to provide systematic follow-up to communications with Governments.

6. In line with the report on the management review of OHCHR by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) which saw a substantive rationale in establishing an entity specializing in the special procedures, and in order to provide strengthened substantive and administrative support to the special procedures, OHCHR will establish as a new entity a dedicated Special Procedures Branch. This will enable the Office to better support special procedures mandate-holders and assist in efforts to improve the quality of their reports and analyses, as recommended by the Secretary-General.

7. To strengthen the quality of the assistance provided to special procedures and to ensure harmonization and continuity of the services provided to them, an increase in regular posts is being requested for the servicing of special procedures for the biennium 2004-2005. Such an increase will facilitate the establishment of clear guidelines for the operations and reporting functions of Special Procedures and the elaboration of a compilation of practices and working methods to ensure consistency in the manner these functions are discharged in practical terms.

8. As part of the strengthening of the Office's capacity to support special procedures, and to ensure follow-up at the country level to their recommendations, efforts are under way to link more closely special procedures' recommendations to technical cooperation activities and to achieve greater involvement by mandate-holders in the work of the United Nations country teams. Forums such as the annual meeting of the special procedures will be used to increase interaction among mandate-holders and between them and the other partners within and outside the United Nations. Occasional meetings will also be organized, as needed and appropriate, for exchanges of views and information among mandate-holders working on related issues.
