



**International
Human Rights
Instruments**

Distr.
GENERAL

HRI/MC/2008/4
5 June 2008

Original: ENGLISH

Seventh inter-committee meeting
of the human rights treaty bodies
Geneva, 23-25 June 2008

Twentieth meeting of chairpersons
of the human rights treaty bodies
Geneva, 26 and 27 June 2008

**REPORT ON THE WORKING METHODS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS
TREATY BODIES RELATING TO THE STATE PARTY REPORTING
PROCESS**

Note by the secretariat

This report, produced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), updates the comparative report on the working methods of all committees.

The report is complemented by the report on implementation of the recommendations of the sixth inter-committee meeting and nineteenth meeting of chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies (HRI/MC/2008/2).

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report provides an overview of the current working methods of seven of the eight human rights treaty bodies: the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR); the Human Rights Committee (HRC); the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Committee against Torture (CAT); the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Committee on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW). The report is confined to the working methods of those bodies with respect to the reporting process. It does not consider the Subcommittee on Prevention (SPT) established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CATOP) which is mandated to set up a system of regular visits to places where people are deprived of their liberty.

2. A ninth human rights treaty body, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD), is created by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which entered into force, along with its Optional Protocol, on 3 May 2008. As of 26 May 2008, twenty-seven States are party to the Convention, of which 16 are party to the Optional Protocol. The Committee will be elected by a Conference of States parties which must be convened no later than six months after the entry into force of the Convention.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITTEES

3. Eight of the nine United Nations human rights treaties in force provide for the establishment of a committee of independent experts to monitor implementation of the treaty provisions by States parties. CERD, the first treaty body to be established, monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; HRC monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; CEDAW monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; CAT monitors implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; CRC monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; CMW monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; and the SPT monitors implementation of the CATOP. As noted above, the CPRD will monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

4. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) does not explicitly provide for the creation of a treaty body, but gives the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) a general mandate to monitor implementation of the Covenant by States parties and United Nations specialized agencies through consideration of regular reports. In 1985, a sessional working group established by ECOSOC to assist it in the consideration of States parties' reports (ECOSOC decision 1978/10 of 3 May 1978), was reconstituted on the model of the treaty bodies and renamed the "Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights"

(CESCR) (ECOSOC resolution 1985/17). The Committee, which first met in 1987, is regarded as a treaty body.¹

Membership

5. Each committee is composed of independent experts, ranging in number from 10 to 23 members (see table 1), who are nominated by States parties and elected by them for fixed, renewable terms of four years. Elections for half of the membership take place every two years. Except in the case of SPT and the CRPD whose members are eligible for re-election once if renominated, the treaties impose no limit on the number of times a member's term may be renewed, and some members have served for long unbroken periods.²

Table 1
Composition of the treaty bodies

CERD	18 members		
HRC	18 members		
CESCR	18 members		
CEDAW	23 members		
CAT	10 members		
CRC	10 members	18 members*	
CMW	10 members	14 members	41 States parties†
SPT	10 members	25 members	50 States parties**
CRPD	12 members	18 members	60 States parties***

* Amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention, approved by General Assembly resolution 50/155 of 21 December 1995, which entered into force on 18 November 2002 upon acceptance by two thirds of States parties.

† The membership of the CMW will increase on the entry into force of the Convention for its 41st State party.

¹ Human Rights Council resolution 4/7 calls for the initiation of a process to rectify, in accordance with international law, in particular the law of international treaties, the legal status of CESCR, with the aim of placing the Committee on a par with all other treaty monitoring bodies.

² This is also the case with respect to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, opened for signature, ratification and accession on 6 February 2007

** The membership of the SPT will increase on the entry into force of the Optional Protocol for its 50th State party.

*** The membership of the CRPD will increase on the entry into force of the Optional Protocol for its 60th State party.

Mandates

6. With the exception of the SPT, each treaty body currently operating and the CRPD is mandated to consider the reports which States parties are obliged to submit periodically on steps they have taken to implement the provisions of the relevant treaty and, in the case of the CRC, its substantive protocols. Five of the treaty bodies (CERD, HRC, CAT, CEDAW and CMW) are entitled to consider individual communications where States parties have accepted this procedure, and two may conduct inquiries into alleged violations of their treaty's terms (CAT, CEDAW), again where this procedure has been accepted by the State party. The CRPD will also have this competence in respect of States parties which have accepted these procedures. Where reporting is concerned, there are variations in the wording in the treaties in relation to the content of States parties' reports, but the content required is similar, and all committees have adopted guidelines on the form and content of reports to assist States parties with the preparation of their reports. It is to be noted that the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families contains a specific provision which entitles the CMW to adopt additional reporting guidelines (art. 73, para. 3) as does the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (article 35, para. 3).

7. The treaties do not set out in detail how the various treaty bodies are to treat the reports that they receive, but each (except ICESCR) establishes the same basic framework for "consideration," "study" or "examination" of reports by its committee and the adoption of such "general comments" (CRC, HRC and CAT), "suggestions and general recommendations" (CERD and CEDAW) or "comments" (CMW) as the relevant committee may consider appropriate. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities contain express provision for its committee to request additional information from States parties. All treaties allow States parties to respond to a treaty body's comments, recommendations or suggestions with their own observations.

8. Under ECOSOC resolution 1985/17, CESCR "shall make suggestions and recommendations of a general nature on the basis of its consideration of those reports and of the reports submitted by the specialized agencies, in order to assist the Council to fulfil, in particular, its responsibilities under articles 21 and 22 of the Covenant."

9. Several treaties state a wider purpose for which its committee is created: CEDAW is established "for the purpose of considering the progress made in the implementation of the [...] Convention" (art. 17); the CRC has a general purpose "of examining the progress made by States parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken" in the Convention (art. 43); and CMW the purpose of "reviewing the application of the [...] Convention" (art. 72).

States parties

10. Although universal ratification has yet to be achieved, progress in this regard has been steady. Table 2 sets out the number of States that have ratified, acceded or succeeded to the treaties.

Table 2
States parties

	No. of States parties
ICERD	173 (89%)
ICCPR	161 (83%)
ICESCR	158 (81%)
CEDAW	185 (96%)
CAT	145 (75%)*
CRC	193 (99%)
CRC-OPAC	120 (62%)
CRC-OPSC	126 (65%)
ICRMW	37 (19%)
CRPD	27 (14%)

* As of 26 May 2008, 34 out of the 145 States parties to CAT or 23% had ratified the CATOP.

Rules of procedure

11. All treaties, and in the case of ICESCR, ECOSOC resolution 1985/17, empower committees to formulate their own rules of procedure. ICCPR and CAT provide that specific rules relating to the quorum and adoption of decisions by majority vote should be included in the rules of procedure of each of their committees. All operative committees have adopted rules of procedure, compiled in the document HRI/GEN/3, which is revised regularly.

12. Each committee's rules of procedure are divided into two sections. The first section sets out the basic procedural rules governing decision-making within the committee. In most cases, these are based on the ECOSOC standard rules of procedure and contain detailed provisions for the resolution of deadlock within political bodies, which are rarely used by the treaty bodies. CEDAW and CMW have adopted a shorter set of procedural rules adapted in each case to the requirements of a body that functions on the basis of consensus.

13. Not all of the working methods of the treaty bodies are set out in their rules of procedure. Working methods included in the rules of procedure of some committees are compiled in working methods reports (normally included in the annual report) by other committees. Committees with competence to consider individual complaints or conduct inquiries have also set out procedures related to these activities in their rules of procedure.

Officers

14. All treaties, except the CRPD, contain provisions for the election of officers by the members of its committee for a term of two years. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture specify that officers may be re-elected, and other committees provide for re-election in their rules of procedure. Rule 17 of the rules of procedure of CEDAW provides that officers may be re-elected, provided that the principle of rotation is upheld.

Official and working languages

15. The official languages of the United Nations are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. All operative treaty bodies, except CAT, have adopted these languages as their official languages. Arabic and Chinese are not included as the official languages of CAT.

16. Five of the operative committees have adopted working languages: the working languages of CAT, CERD, CESCRC are English, French, Russian and Spanish; and those of HRC and CRC English, French and Spanish. The pre-sessional working group of CEDAW uses English, French and/or Spanish as needed.

III. CONSIDERATION OF STATES PARTIES' REPORTS

17. The treaties do not indicate how treaty bodies should approach the task of considering States parties' reports. However, all treaty bodies have adopted broadly the same approach, the main features of which are the "constructive dialogue" in which all committees engage with a delegation from the State party whose report they are considering, and the adoption of "concluding observations/comments", acknowledging progress made and indicating to the State party where further action is required. There is considerable variation in the practice of each treaty body with respect to report consideration. For instance, initial reports to OPAC will be considered at a regular session of the CRC if the State party is facing or has faced serious difficulties in implementing the provisions of the Protocol. States parties without these difficulties may be offered the option of a 'technical review' pursuant to Decision No. 8 (2005) of the Committee, adopted at its thirty-ninth session. Under a technical review, the Committee will consider all available information and will adopt concluding observations on that basis. The Committee, however, does appreciate the opportunity to discuss the implementation of an OPAC report with a delegation, and has used the technical review procedure less frequently.

A. Reporting guidelines

18. All committees have issued guidelines on reporting to provide guidance to States parties on the preparation of their reports which are designed to ensure that reports are presented in a uniform manner so that treaty bodies and States parties can obtain a complete picture of the situation of each State party with respect to the implementation of the relevant treaty. A number of committees have separate guidelines for initial and periodic reports.

19. Harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties comprising guidelines for a common core document and treaty-specific documents were accepted by the fifth inter-committee meeting and eighteenth meeting of chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies in June 2006. As requested by the sixth inter-committee meeting and the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies in June 2007, a note verbale was submitted to all States parties to human rights treaty bodies recommending reporting using these guidelines contained in HRI/GEN/2/Rev.4 which is continually updated. CERD and CEDAW have reviewed their treaty-specific guidelines in order to complement the guidelines for the common core document, as has CMW.

20. Currently, the HRC guidelines call for comprehensive initial reports, prepared on an article-by-article basis. Although they do not set out specific information required under each article, States parties are required to take into account the Committee's general comments which cover specific articles. States parties are not required to report on every article of the Covenant in their periodic reports, but only on those provisions identified by the Committee in its concluding observations on the previous report and those articles in respect of which there have been significant developments since the submission of the previous report (A/56/40, paras. 50-54). At its ninety-second session in March and April 2008, the HRC held a discussion on a paper prepared by one of its members on the revision of the guidelines for State reports under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee will continue its discussion on the matter at its next session in July 2008.

21. The current reporting guidelines of CESCR follow an article-by article approach and contain detailed and specific requests for information relating to each substantive article of the Covenant, effectively constituting a questionnaire for States parties to use to structure their reports. No distinction is drawn between initial and periodic reports. A rapporteur has been appointed to revise the reporting guidelines. At its fortieth session, in April/May 2008, the Committee began to consider the draft revised reporting guidelines which are designed to harmonize the reporting requirements under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, with the guidelines for the common core document.

22. CAT has adopted separate reporting guidelines for initial and periodic reports, and revised guidelines for initial reports were adopted in May 2005. Initial reports are to be structured in two parts, the first providing general background information and the second addressing each substantive article of the Convention in turn. Periodic reports should be presented in three parts, the first dealing with new measures and developments on the substantive articles since the previous report, the second covering any additional information requested by the Committee, and the third describing compliance with the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations on the previous report. The Committee emphasizes the importance of information related to the de facto implementation of the Convention. As

mentioned below in para. 45, the Committee has adopted a new procedure on preparation of lists of issues prior to State party reporting.

23. CRC has adopted four sets of reporting guidelines regarding the form and content of initial reports and of periodic reports under the Convention and initial reports under each of the Optional Protocols to the Convention. Revised guidelines for periodic reports were adopted by the Committee at its thirty-ninth session and are applicable from 1 January 2006. These guidelines build on the experience of the Committee and contain an Annex of nine pages indicating the data requested by the Committee.

24. The CRC guidelines on initial and periodic reports request relevant legislative, judicial, administrative and other information, including statistical data, as well as information on follow-up to the previous concluding observations of the Committee, comprehensive national programmes and monitoring that have been put in place, the allocation of budgetary and other resources and factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention at the national level. To facilitate a more structured discussion during the consideration of the report by the Committee, the guidelines group the articles according to content into eight clusters: (a) general measures of implementation; (b) definition of the child; (c) general principles; (d) civil rights and freedoms; (e) family environment and alternative care; (f) basic health and welfare; (g) education, leisure and cultural activities; and (h) special protection measures, including (i) children in situations of emergency; (ii) children in conflict with the law; (iii) children in situations of exploitation, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration; and (iv) children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group. The Committee has requested all States parties to the Convention to submit periodic reports that are concise, analytical and focused on key implementation issues, and do not exceed 120 regular-size pages (Decision, No. 5, (2002), CRC/C/148).

25. The CRC adopted revised guidelines on reporting under the OPSC and under the OPAC in September 2006 and September 2007, respectively, to assist States parties to understand better the information and data the Committee considers necessary to understand and evaluate progress made in implementing their obligations and to enable it to provide them with appropriate observations and recommendations.

26. The CMW guidelines, adopted during the Committee's second session in April 2005, request that States parties provide general information relating to the framework for implementation of the Convention, followed by information on the implementation of each substantive article, which may be arranged according to a series of clusters, respecting the distinction in the Convention between all migrant workers and documented migrant workers. As noted above, the Committee adopted new reporting guidelines for periodic reports at its eighth session in April 2008.

27. There is wide variation in the size and quality of reports submitted by States parties. Both the HRC and CERD allow States parties to complement the information in their reports with additional information. The HRC imposes a specified deadline, whereas CERD accepts additional information at any time, even if it cannot be translated in time for the relevant session. The practice adopted by most treaty bodies of submitting lists of issues and questions to a State party once the report has been submitted also provides an additional opportunity for States parties to supplement the information contained in the report.

B. Submission of States parties' reports

28. Except in the case of CATOP, each of the human rights treaties establishes a framework for regular reporting by States parties on implementation of their obligations under those treaties. In most cases, the treaty explicitly sets out a timetable for the submission of initial and periodic reports, commonly referred to as the reporting "periodicity", based on the date of entry into force of the treaty for the specific State party. In the case of the two Covenants, no periodicity is envisaged in their provisions. The HRC is given discretion to decide when periodic reports should be submitted, and so is the Economic and Social Council to establish its own reporting programme.

Table 3
Reporting periodicities under the treaties

	Initial reports within	Periodic reports every
ICERD	1 year	2 years
ICCPR	1 year	4 years [†]
ICESCR*	2 years	5 years
CEDAW	1 year	4 years
CAT	1 year	4 years ^{**}
CRC	2 years	5 years
CRC-OPAC	2 years	integrated in next CRC report, every five years; every five years for States not party to the CRC
CRC-OPSC	2 years	integrated in next CRC report, every five years; every five years for States not party to the CRC
ICRMW	1 year	5 years
CRPD	2 years	4 years

* Article 17 of the Covenant gives ECOSOC discretion to establish its own reporting programme.

** Average periodicity. The HRC may vary the date the next report is due in accordance with its follow-up procedure. CAT also varies the due dates of the next periodic reports.

Flexible application of reporting periodicities

29. Late submission of reports by States parties, as well as the time-lag between the submission and the consideration of a report can result in a State party's next periodic report falling due in the same year that the Committee considers the State's preceding report or even

before. The discretion given to HRC and CESCR to determine when periodic reports should be submitted has allowed these committees greater flexibility in this context, but other treaty bodies have also developed modalities to address this issue.

30. CESCR requires that, after submission of a State party's initial report, subsequent periodic reports should be submitted at five-year intervals (rule 58 of the rules of procedure). Since 2000, CESCR has, as a general rule, applied the five-year rule, but has reduced this period in light of the timeliness of submission of reports, the quality of information provided, the quality of the constructive dialogue between the Committee and the State party, the adequacy of the State party's response to the Committee's concluding observations, and its implementation of the Covenant (E/C.12/2001/17, para. 1024). The due date of the next periodic report is indicated in the concluding observations. CESCR has also accepted combined reports more commonly since 2004. Combined reports may be submitted by States parties, as well as requested by the Committee in its concluding observations with respect to future reports that are due. A combined report may be submitted where a periodic report is already due or due within the year following consideration of an earlier periodic report. The Committee has not adopted a formal position in this regard.

31. Since 2002, HRC has delegated the task of determining when a State should present its next periodic report to its Bureau. In general, subsequent reports are due four years after the submission of the previous report, but the Bureau may call for a report earlier or later, depending on the State party's level of compliance with the Covenant's provisions, including their reporting record (rules 66 and 70A of the rules of procedure). HRC does not allow an accumulation of overdue reports: for any State party, only one report is due at any one time, regardless of how long that report has been overdue.

32. Despite the fixed periodicities set in their treaties, other committees have taken a flexible approach to the submission of reports. CERD allows States parties to submit "combined reports" (the combination of several reporting obligations in a single document), and since 1984 has automatically accepted the submission of an unlimited number of reports in one document. In 1988, CERD decided that States parties should submit a comprehensive report every four years and a brief updating report in the two-year interim. Since 2001, in cases where the period between the date of examination of the last periodic report and the scheduled date for the submission of the next periodic report is less than two years, CERD can suggest in its concluding observations that the State party submit the latter report jointly with its subsequent periodic report (A/56/18, para. 477), thereby allowing the State to return to conformity with the reporting schedule set by the Convention.

33. CRC also exceptionally allows for the submission of combined reports. Thus, for example, a periodic report may be submitted combined with the next periodic report(s) at the time when the latter report is due, when the former is due within the year following the dialogue with the Committee or when it is already due at the time of the dialogue and the third (or fourth) report is due two years or more after the dialogue with the Committee. States are not entitled to submit combined reports automatically: the Committee must invite the State party to submit such a report in its concluding observations.

34. CEDAW has invited States parties with overdue reports to combine all outstanding reports in a single document (Decision 23/II). CAT has accepted combined reports, but exceptionally, and has not adopted a formal position in this context.

35. A number of Committees have adopted the practice of identifying the date for the submission of the next periodic reports in the concluding observations on the previous report. In the case of some Committees, such as CEDAW, consideration of a report has been delayed, the Committee will request the submission of a report combining the next two periodic reports in the concluding observations.

C. Pre-session preparation: the drafting of lists of issues and questions

36. All committees prepare lists of issues and questions for State parties whose reports are due to be considered, but the practice on how these lists are produced and their role in enhancing the work of the committees vary. Lists of issues provide an opportunity for States parties to supplement the information contained in their report and also provide a guide to States parties on the line of questioning they are likely to face when their report is formally considered.

37. CESCR, HRC, CEDAW and CRC adopt lists of issues with respect to both initial and periodic reports. CMW adopts lists of issues with regard to initial reports but it has not yet considered periodic reports. Currently, CAT adopts them only with respect to periodic reports but it has recently adopted a new procedure on the preparation of lists of issues prior to State party reporting, as outlined in para. 43 below. CRC also adopts lists of issues and questions with respect to reports under its optional protocols. In the case of CERD, lists of issues are not formally adopted by the Committee, but rather drawn up by the designated country rapporteurs with respect to the State party reports assigned to them. The country rapporteurs are to submit their lists of issues ten weeks in advance of the session.. All committees appoint one or more of their members to act as country rapporteur for a specific country whose report is under consideration, and the rapporteur frequently takes the lead in drafting the list of issues (see section D below).

Pre-sessional working group/country taskforce

38. Lists of issues are drafted prior to the session at which the report will be considered, either in a pre-sessional working group convened immediately after the previous session, immediately before the session at which the report will be considered, or during the plenary session.

39. CEDAW, CESCR and CRC convene a one-week pre-sessional working group to prepare lists of issues or questions with respect to the reports of States parties that are due to be considered by the Committee. CEDAW and CRC convene the working group immediately after the session, prior to the session at which the reports will be considered. CEDAW's pre-sessional working group prepares lists of issues and questions two sessions in advance of the consideration of reports while the CESCR pre-sessional working group prepares lists of issues and questions up to two sessions or 12 months prior to the consideration of reports. CMW prepares lists of issues in a closed meeting during the plenary session.

40. The pre-sessional working groups which meet in private, usually consist of four to five members of the respective committee, and in the case of CEDAW, include the country

rapporteurs wherever possible. The CEDAW pre-sessional working group may consist of up to 10 members when it is preparing lists of issues and questions in respect of reports to be taken up for two future sessions or in relation to sessions which meet in two chambers.

41. The CRC working group consists of all members of the Committee and from October 2005 to June 2006 met in two parallel chambers in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/261. CESCR pre-sessional working groups consist of five members, selected with due consideration for balanced geographical representation.

42. The HRC pre-sessional working group deals with individual communications and has no role in the preparation of lists of issues and questions relating to reports. HRC assigns the preparation of its lists of issues to country report task forces, composed of the relevant country rapporteur(s) and between four and six other members of the Committee nominated by the Chairperson on the basis of a balanced geographical distribution and other relevant factors. The task forces meet during the session prior to that at which the report is examined. The country rapporteur(s), who has overall responsibility for the list of issues, presents a draft to the task force for discussion. Once the members have made their observations, the list of issues is adopted by the task force as a whole, and principal responsibility for certain questions included in the list of issues is allocated, based in part on the areas of particular expertise of the member concerned. The list of issues is then transmitted to the State party (A/56/40, paras. 50 to 54).

43. For CAT, the lists of issues and questions are prepared by the two country rapporteurs and submitted to Committee members for written comments during the session prior to that at which the report will be considered and are not formally adopted by the Committee in plenary. At its thirty-eighth session in May 2007, CAT adopted a new procedure on a trial basis discussed with States parties in an informal meeting whereby the Committee will prepare a list of issues prior to the submission of a State party report and the written replies to the list of issues will constitute the State Party report. The Committee decided to initiate this procedure with periodic reports due in 2009 and 2010 and the procedure was introduced. Seven States parties have formally agreed to follow this procedure. CMW formally adopts lists of issues for each State party report which are drawn up by two country rapporteurs. Although CERD discussed this possibility during its sixty-third session in 2003, it currently does not convene a pre-sessional working group; lists of issues are elaborated by the country rapporteur, at his or her discretion, and transmitted to the State party in advance of its dialogue with the Committee. Lists of issues were drawn up for all States parties whose reports were considered at its last five sessions.

The form of the lists of issues

44. Lists of issues produced by CERD, CAT and CESCR are generally formulated on an article-by-article basis, drawing on the information contained in the State party's report. CEDAW adopts an article-by-article approach for lists of issues for initial reports (except in the case of articles 1 and 2; 7 and 8; and 15 and 16, which are considered together), whereas lists of issues for periodic reports are arranged in clusters. HRC formulates its lists of issues on a thematic basis, arranged by sequence of the substantive provisions of the Covenant, and grouped in clusters. Committees may include a number of standard questions, so that CAT, for example, routinely asks States parties about their counter-terrorism measures and about their intention to ratify the CATOP.

45. CESCR generally attempts to limit its lists of issues to 30 questions on matters that require more research than would be possible during the dialogue itself, such as supplementary statistical data, points of clarification regarding the report, and implementation of its previous concluding observations. The CEDAW list of issues focuses on data and information that require updating since the report was submitted or supplementary information, as well as a number of standard questions that relate, in particular, to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention and acceptance of the amendment of article 20, para. 1. For periodic reports, particular attention is paid to the State party's follow-up to previous concluding observations/comments, and questions are clustered according to priority issues rather than addressing specific articles. CEDAW limits itself to a total of 30 clear and direct questions (CEDAW/C/2004/II/4).

46. The CRC lists of issues for reports under the Convention usually call for: (i) additional data and statistics, requested according to the capacity of the State party to provide such data; (ii) information related to general measures of implementation; and (iii) updated information since the report was submitted. A final section highlights main issues to be raised during the dialogue, in order to assist the State party to constitute a delegation including experts in the appropriate fields. The lists of issues for the reports under the Optional Protocols to the Convention are shorter and specific, and relate primarily to issues requiring further elaboration or clarification, or requesting information that is lacking from the State party report.

47. Lists of issues for HRC, CESCR, CEDAW, CRC, CAT and CMW are official documents of general distribution. They are translated into the working languages of the relevant committee, and are publicly available on the Official Documents System (ODS). Those adopted by CERD are informal documents, submitted by the country rapporteur to the State party, and are translated into the relevant language for the State party concerned, but are not publicly available.

Replies to lists of issues

48. CEDAW, CESCR, CRC and CMW require the State party to respond to the lists of issues and questions in writing, while CAT and CERD encourage the State party to do the same. CEDAW requires replies to be short, precise and to the point, and under 25 to 30 pages, although additional pages of statistical data may be included (A/59/38, paras. 418 to 440). CEDAW formally requests a response within six weeks in order to allow time for translation before the session, and forwards unedited versions of the lists to the State party immediately after their adoption to maximize the time available for response.

49. Given the short period of time between the pre-session working group and the subsequent session of CRC, States parties normally have only six weeks in which to submit their written responses to the Committee. At its forty-second session, CRC urged States to limit the written replies to 40 pages. The HRC strongly encourages States parties to submit written responses, and since the Committee's eighty-sixth session in March 2006, States parties have been invited to submit written replies (with a maximum of 30 pages) at least three weeks prior to the examination of reports in order to allow sufficient time for translation. The HRC forwards unedited versions of the lists of issues to the State party immediately after their adoption to maximize the time available for response. In the case of CESCR, States parties may have three months to submit their responses to the lists of issues when they are scheduled for a consideration at the following session or nine months if they are scheduled for the session after.

They are requested approximately six weeks prior to the session at which the corresponding State party report is to be examined, in order to allow sufficient time for translation in the working languages of the Committee.

50. Subject to timely submission, written responses submitted to CEDAW are published as official documents in the six United Nations languages and, together with the list of issues, are currently posted on the CEDAW web page.. The annexes are distributed to the Committee in the language received, and posted on the CEDAW web page. States in general provide written replies within the given timeframe. In very few cases, where the lateness of replies does not allow for timely translation, only the original is posted on the website. Written responses to HRC in conformity with the above-mentioned guidelines (para. 51) are translated and posted on the HRC web page. CRC, CESCR and CAT also post the written responses on their websites as soon as they are received and, subject to timely submission, they are translated into the working languages of the Committees. In CERD, States parties are given six weeks to prepare their written replies, which are expected to be received by the Committee four weeks prior to the session, in order to leave sufficient time for translation. Written responses submitted to CRC and CMW are issued as official documents. They are translated into the working languages of the Committees and are available on the ODS.

The role of the list of issues in the constructive dialogue

51. The primary role of the list of issues in CEDAW, CESCR, CERD, CRC and CMW is to elicit additional or updating information. The list also provides the State party's delegation with advance notice of the issues with which the committee is likely to be concerned. HRC structures its constructive dialogue around the list of issues, and while the Committee requests that States parties provide full written responses to the questions for reference purposes, the members of the country task force pose additional questions based on the list of issues, and these may be followed up by other Committee members. In CAT, since the fortieth session, the delegation provides an opening statement which includes any new information not included in the report or the written replies, and Committee members may pose follow-up questions directly after the opening statement. If there are no written replies, CAT expects the delegation to provide answers orally to the list of issues and the members will then pose questions. CERD encourages the delegation to provide answers orally to the list of issues immediately after the opening statement by the head of delegation.

D. Constructive dialogue with States parties

52. Although not envisaged in the treaties, all human rights treaty bodies have adopted the practice introduced by CERD in 1972 of considering States parties' reports in the presence of representatives from the reporting State party. This approach may be contrasted with the 'technical review' adopted by the CRC with respect to the OPAC (see para. 16), and the paper-based procedures adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations in considering reports by States parties to the more than 150 ILO conventions that impose reporting obligations.

Number of reports examined per session

53. HRC and CRC convene three three-week sessions per year. CEDAW, CERD, CESC and CAT convene two three-week sessions annually. CMW initially met twice a year for a one-week session but as of 2008 it will meet two weeks in April and one week in November. At its sixty-second session in 2007, the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/62/218 in which it authorized CEDAW to hold three annual sessions of three weeks each, with a one-week pre-session working group for each session, for an interim period effective from January 2010, pending the entry into force of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention. The General Assembly also approved the Committee's request to hold a total of five sessions, in 2008 and 2009, three of these meetings in parallel chambers. In the past, the Assembly has also authorized more meeting time for CEDAW, CRC and CESC, and CAT, CRC and CESC are planning to request more meeting time in the future.

54. The committees examine between four and 18 reports per session: HRC currently examines an average of four reports per session, CESC five, CAT seven, CEDAW between eight (without parallel working groups) and 13 (with parallel working groups), CERD between eight and 11 and CRC between 10 and 12 (including Convention and Optional Protocol reports). CMW schedules the consideration of two to three reports in a two-week session and one report in a one-week session. Committees devote additional session time to consideration of countries in the absence of a report, and other matters such as the drafting of general comments. Some committees must also allocate a substantial part of their meeting time to the consideration of individual communications. At its ninety-first session, in October 2007, the HRC examined five country reports in order to reduce the backlog of pending reports.

55. The selection of reports to be considered at future sessions is based on chronological order of receipt, with priority being given to initial reports and reports submitted by States parties that have not reported for some time. Some committees seek to achieve a geographical balance in reports to be considered, and may give priority to consideration of certain reports at their discretion.

Duration and timing of meetings for the examination of reports

56. Each committee holds two meetings of three hours a day during the session. CRC, CERD and CEDAW devote two meetings (and CAT one meeting and a half) to the public examination of each State party report and, with the exception of CEDAW and CRC, they ensure that those meetings take place on two different days, allowing members of the delegation time overnight to address issues raised in the questioning. CRC considers each report over one day, although extra time may be allocated by CRC in exceptional circumstances, and it considers each report submitted under the Optional Protocols to the Convention in half a day. CESC generally considers reports over three meetings but has scheduled reports over two meetings, and HRC, in principle, considers initial reports over three meetings and periodic reports over two meetings. However, the Committee regularly calls for the cooperation of States parties, in particular their flexibility for a third meeting for periodic reports if needed.

Table 4
Number of reports examined each year by the treaty bodies

	No. of sessions per year	No. of weeks per session	No. of reports per session	No. of reports considered annually*
CERD	2	3	8-11	16-22
HRC	3	3	4	12
CESCR	2	3	5	10
CEDAW	2-3 [†]	3	8-13	16-38
CAT	2	3**	7	14
CRC	3 [†]	3	10-12	30-48
CMW [‡]	2	1-2	1-3	-

* Most committees also review a number of country situations in the absence of a State party report.

† The numbers vary, depending on whether the Committee concerned has been granted extra meeting time.

** In 2006, the pre-sessional working group of CAT for its two-week session in November was converted into a plenary meeting.

*** The number of reports includes both Convention and Optional Protocol reports.

‡ CMW currently convenes two annual sessions, one two week and one one-week session.

Briefings of the State party prior to the session

57. OHCHR provides collective briefings to representatives of States parties whose reports are due to be considered by one of the treaty bodies, generally four weeks in advance of the relevant session. These briefings provide an opportunity for States parties to familiarize themselves with the procedures of the specific committee with regard to the consideration of reports, especially in view of the differences of approach taken by each committee. The secretariat also has ongoing contact with delegations both in Geneva and New York and in the country concerned on matters relating to sessions.

Participation of members in the consideration of reports of States parties of which they are nationals

58. All committees have adopted decisions, requiring that members refrain from participating in any aspect of the consideration of the reports of the States parties of which they are nationals in order to maintain the highest standards of impartiality, both in substance and appearance.

HRC and CMW formally specify this in their rules of procedure (rule 71, para. 4, rule 33). The HRC has adopted guidelines for the exercise of the functions by its members (A/53/40 (vol.I), Annex 3).

Conduct of the constructive dialogue with States parties

59. The constructive dialogue in all of the committees follows the same broad structure:
- (i) The State party is invited to send a delegation to attend the meetings at which the committee will consider the State party's report;
 - (ii) The head of the delegation is invited to introduce the report in an opening statement and, in some committees, replies to the lists of issues are presented;
 - (iii) Members of the committee, usually led by the country rapporteur(s) or country task force members, raise questions to members of the delegation on specific aspects of the report of particular concern.

60. After a formal welcome by the chairperson, the head of the delegation is invited to make an opening statement introducing the State party's report and summarizing important developments. In the case of CEDAW, this statement should not exceed 30 minutes and the delegation is urged to provide precise, short and direct responses to questions asked in the interests of time management (A/59/38, Part II, paras. 418 to 440). In the case of the HRC, guidelines on the presentation of reports during their examination by the Committee are sent to the States parties. After introductory comments, committee members may make comments, observations and ask questions or seek clarification with regard to the report. CEDAW imposes strict time limits on members, with the time limit being monitored by a speech timer but is enforced flexibly. CEDAW considers initial reports on an article-by-article basis, with the exception of articles 1 and 2, 7 and 8, and 15 and 16, which are considered as three clusters. CESCR and CRC, as well as CEDAW (for periodic reports only), consider each report by clusters of articles, inviting the delegation to reply immediately to questions that do not require further reflection or research between each cluster. The remaining committees pose all their questions together, which are formulated article by article.

The role of the country rapporteur

61. Most committees appoint one member (two in the case of CAT, CRC and CMW and one to three in the case of HRC) to act as country rapporteurs with respect to the report under consideration. Where possible, CEDAW appoints a rapporteur from the same geographical region as the State party whose report is being considered. Except in the case of CEDAW, HRC and CERD, the identity of the country rapporteur is public. Harmonization of the practice of treaty bodies in relation to the identity of the country rapporteur/s has been requested by States parties and other stakeholders and may be a topic for discussion for the inter-committee and chairpersons' meetings.

62. Country rapporteurs undertake a thorough study of the report and assume the task of drafting lists of issues and questions. In some committees, they take the lead in posing questions to the State party's delegation during the constructive dialogue and summing up after the discussion. Rapporteurs have primary responsibility for drafting the committee's concluding

observations on the State party's report. In CERD, CAT and CRC, the country rapporteurs are the first members to pose questions to the delegation, and in the case of CERD and CRC, also the last to address the delegation. In CESCR, the country rapporteur opens the dialogue with questions concerning implementation of the previous concluding observations on the State party under review but he or she is not expected to sum up the discussion. CEDAW country rapporteurs have a strong and pro-active role in coordinating the work in chambers and prepare country briefing notes, circulated seven to ten days prior to the beginning of a session.

63. In HRC the members of the country task force are allocated specific questions from the list of issues to address to the delegation during the constructive dialogue. Country task forces, who took the lead in posing questions to delegations during constructive dialogue, were used for consideration of the four periodic reports considered at CEDAW's thirty-fourth session in January/February 2006. CEDAW has not used country task forces since then but its parallel chambers build on the experience gained with country task forces.

The delegation's responses to members' questions during the session

64. All committees provide an opportunity for members to pose questions additional to those included in the list of issues. In CEDAW, CESCR and CRC members pose questions by clusters of articles, and the delegation is invited to respond to each cluster immediately, before moving to the next group of questions. In CRC, a brief pause is allowed between each cluster of questions, in which the members of the delegation can confer. The delegation may defer answering immediately any question which it wishes to refer to its capital for information. Where questions have not been answered, the committees will request the State party to respond to such concerns expressed in the concluding observations in its next periodic report. CESCR will allow, upon request, a brief pause to enable the delegation to organize its responses and will allow questions that need referral to the capital to be answered later in the dialogue, which will normally be scheduled over two days. If outstanding questions remain, supplementary information submitted in writing within several days after the conclusion of the dialogue will be taken into consideration during the formulation of the concluding observations. This has not been formally adopted as a procedure of the Committee.

65. In HRC, following its statement, the delegation responds to the first part of the list of issues, and then members ask questions. The remainder of the list of questions is dealt with in the same fashion. A brief break after Committee members' questions allows State party delegates to confer. The delegation may defer answering immediately any question which it wishes to refer to its capital for information. Such information can then be provided in written form within specific deadlines publicly announced by the HRC Chairperson (in general within three days to enable the HRC to take them into account in the process of discussion and adoption of its concluding observations).

66. In CERD, following the statement by the head of the delegation, the delegation is encouraged to present its responses to the questions posed in the list of issues. Members then pose additional questions, to which delegations typically respond at the beginning of the second meeting, after which a further, inter-active exchange of questions and answers is held for the remainder of that meeting. In the case of CAT, reports are introduced by the delegation and immediately thereafter the Committee poses questions. In the case of periodic reports where no written replies to the list of issues and questions have been received, the delegation is requested

to provide such replies orally before the Committee poses further questions. Where both initial and periodic reports are concerned, the delegation returns the following afternoon to reply to the Committee's questions.

Postponement of the consideration of reports and consideration of reports in the absence of a delegation

67. Although this has become the practice, the treaties do not oblige States parties to send a delegation to present their reports, and all treaty bodies may consider reports in the absence of a delegation, *inter alia*, where there is a request for last-minute postponements, where the State party has failed to respond to the request to attend, or does not appear.

68. States parties whose reports have been scheduled to be considered by a committee at a session sometimes request that consideration be postponed to a later session.

69. CESCR adheres to the formal rule that once a State party has agreed to the scheduling of its report for consideration, the Committee will proceed with the examination of that report at the time scheduled, even in the absence of a representative (rule 62, paragraph 3, of the rules of procedure). Both HRC (rule 68) and CAT (rule 66, para. 2) may, at their own discretion, either notify the State party of the alternative date on which it intends to consider the report, or consider the report as originally scheduled in the absence of a delegation. In the latter case, provisional concluding observations on the report will be submitted to the State party and the date when the report will be further considered or on which a new periodic report should be submitted will be identified.

70. CEDAW agrees to reschedule consideration of the report to another session (rule 51, para. 5), but if at such a subsequent session the State party, after due notification, fails to have a representative present, the Committee may proceed with the examination of the report in the absence of the representative of the State party (decision 31/III, para (i), A/59/38, part II). At its thirty-first session in July 2004, the Committee decided that, in principle, it will consider implementation of the Convention by a State party in the absence of a report, only as a measure of last resort and in the presence of a delegation. CERD has no formal rules on this matter, but may consider a report in the absence of representatives of the State party when, after being notified, it does not provide compelling reasons for deferral of the consideration of its report.

E. Concluding observations/comments

71. All treaty bodies have adopted the practice established by CESCR in 1990 of formulating what are variously called "concluding observations," "conclusions and recommendations" and "concluding comments" following the consideration of the reports of States parties. In general, these take the following structure: introduction; positive aspects; principal subjects of concern; and suggestions and recommendations. Concluding observations may also include factors and difficulties impeding the implementation of the treaty, a request for their wide dissemination in the State party concerned, and a paragraph may be included requesting that additional information be provided to the respective committee by a specified deadline (usually one year), or on specific points of the concluding observations (see section F below). The concluding observations of HRC and CESCR and those committees that have adopted a flexible approach to periodicity of reporting may also indicate the provisional date when the State party's next periodic report is due. The last section of the concluding observations of CERD, CEDAW, CRC

and CAT systematically indicates the date when the next report is due. Some committees group all positive points, all points of concern and finally the recommendations together; others identify concerns followed by a corresponding recommendation. At its thirty-sixth session in August 2006, CEDAW agreed to emphasize further enhancement of the quality of its concluding comments, including their specificity. At its fortieth session, the Committee decided to change the title of its “concluding comments” to “concluding observations” in line with efforts to harmonize the working methods of the human rights treaty bodies. At its thirty-ninth session, CAT decided that as of its fortieth session it would use the term concluding observations, instead of conclusions and recommendations.

72. Concluding observations of the treaty bodies are normally four to eight pages long; but those of CRC, however, average 16 pages. In all committees, the country rapporteur coordinates the drafting process, collecting comments and suggestions from other members before the draft is discussed and adopted in formal session. The draft concluding observations of all committees except CRC are translated during the session into the working languages of the committee, if time allows, to facilitate the drafting and adoption processes.

Release of the concluding observations/comments

73. Advance unedited versions of the concluding observations are normally given to the State party concerned before they are made available to others. HRC releases the text of its concluding observations during the session. Those concluding observations are first transmitted to the State party once formally adopted and finalised, and are made public after at least 12 hours. The concluding observations of CESCR, once formally adopted, are not made public until 6 p.m. on the final day of the session, when they are sent to the States parties concerned. Similarly, CAT, CERD and CMW make their concluding observations public at the end of the session. CAT sends the advance unedited version of the concluding observations to States parties the evening before making them public on the last Friday of the session. CRC concluding observations are made public on the last day of a committee session during the adoption of the session report, of which they form part. CEDAW sends its concluding comments to the State party as soon as possible after the session and makes them public several days later in advance unedited versions. Final versions in the six languages are posted on the website when these are available.

74. Concluding observations/comments are included in the respective committee’s sessional or annual reports, in accordance with specific provisions of most of the treaties, and all committees publish their concluding observations as separate official documents in all official languages. These are posted on the OHCHR web site, initially in advance unedited form to allow interested parties immediate access. Once the translated texts are finalized, they are publicly available on the ODS. The concluding observations/comments are also distributed electronically to subscribers to the treaty bodies’ list serve, an electronic notification service administered by OHCHR.

Comments by States parties on concluding observations/comments

75. In accordance with specific provisions in the treaties, States parties may, if they wish, submit to the relevant committee comments on the concluding observations/comments adopted with respect to their reports. All treaty bodies may make any such comments received publicly available. Observations by States parties on concluding comments of CEDAW are circulated to the Committee members and their receipt acknowledged in an annex to the Committee’s report

to the General Assembly (Decision 21/II, A/54/38/Rev.1, p. 45). The Committee may also decide to make the observations available independently of its annual report. In accordance with article 9 of the Convention, comments on CERD's concluding observations are included in the Committee's annual report to the General Assembly. Comments on the concluding observations of HRC and CAT may be issued as an official document, and they may be referred to, but not included, in their annual reports. CRC similarly acknowledges comments received in its sessional and biennial reports, and may reproduce them in its biennial reports to the General Assembly upon formal request. CESCR makes any comments received public, as submitted, for information purposes only, as Committee documents and mentions them in its annual report (E/2005/22).

F. Follow-up to concluding observations

Follow-up procedures

76. All treaty bodies request States parties to provide information on implementation of the recommendations contained in previous concluding observations/comments in their subsequent reports or during the constructive dialogue. Several treaty bodies also have formal procedures to monitor more closely implementation of specific concluding observations.

77. HRC systematically applies a follow-up procedure whereby the Committee identifies a number of specific recommendations in its concluding observations as requiring immediate attention, and requests the State party to provide additional information on their implementation within a set period of one year. The concluding observations set a provisional date for submission of the next periodic report. Since October 2006, the procedure is applied in cases where the Committee examines implementation of the Covenant by a State party in the absence of a report. The HRC examines the rapporteur's follow-up progress report in a public meeting, and includes a section in its annual report on follow-up.

78. CAT identifies a limited number of recommendations that warrant a request for additional information following the review and discussion with the State party concerning its periodic report and requests follow-up reports within one year. Such "follow-up" recommendations are identified because they are serious, protective, and are considered able to be accomplished within one year (rule 68, para. 1). A rapporteur to monitor the State party's compliance with these requests is appointed by the Committee who presents progress reports to the Committee on the results of the procedure. In Chapter IV of the Committee's annual report for 2005-2006 (A/61/44), it described the framework that it had developed to provide for follow-up subsequent to the adoption of the conclusions and recommendations. It also presented information on the Committee's experience in receiving information from States parties from the initiation of the procedure in May 2003 through May 2006. Chapter IV of the Committee's annual report for 2006-2007 (A/62/44) updated the Committee's experience to 18 May 2007, the end of its thirty-eighth session.

79. CERD has a long-standing procedure, set out in rule 65 of its rules of procedure, whereby the Committee may request further information or an additional report concerning, inter alia, action taken by States parties to implement the Committee's recommendations which has been supplemented with the appointment of a coordinator on follow-up. The coordinator, the first of whom was appointed at the sixty-fifth session in August 2004, is appointed for a period of two years and works in cooperation with the country rapporteurs. A working paper clarifying the

terms of reference of the coordinator was adopted by CERD at its sixty-sixth session in February/March 2005 (CERD/C/66/Misc.11/Rev.2). Guidelines to follow-up on concluding observations and recommendations were adopted at its sixty-eighth session in February/March 2006 (CERD/C/68/Misc.5/Rev.1) and are sent to all State parties together with the concluding observations. The co-ordinator on follow-up of CERD presented his first report to the Committee at the sixty-eighth session.

80. CESCR may, in its concluding observations, make a specific request to a State party to provide more information or statistical data prior to the date on which the next periodic report is due. Information provided in accordance with this procedure will be considered at the next pre-session working group, which, based on that information, can recommend that the Committee take note of the information, adopt specific additional concluding observations in response to that information, recommend that the matter be pursued through a request for further information, or authorize the Chairperson to inform the State party, in advance of the next session, that the Committee will take up the issue at that session, preferably in the presence of a representative of the State party. If the additional information requested in accordance with these procedures is not provided by the specified date, or is considered to be unsatisfactory, the Chairperson, in consultation with the Bureau, may pursue the matter with the State party but this procedure is rarely used. Where the Committee has been unable to obtain the information it requires, it may request that the State party accept a technical assistance mission consisting of one or two Committee members, an approach which it has applied in relation to two States parties. In cases where the State party is unwilling to accept the proposed mission, the Committee may make appropriate recommendations to the Economic and Social Council. CESCR entrusts its country rapporteurs with the task of following up on the countries for which they served as rapporteur in the inter-sessional period until the next time they appear before the Committee.

81. The CRC does not have a written follow-up procedure nor does it identify priority issues for follow-up in its concluding observations as, given the burden of considering reports under three treaties (the Convention and its two Protocols) and the special role that UNICEF plays in follow-up to the concluding observations of CRC, such a formal follow-up procedure was not considered the best approach. CRC members also regularly participate in follow-up activities in States parties, with the support of OHCHR, UNICEF as well as others. Other treaty body members also participate in these sorts of activities, and encourage their organization by States parties, the United Nations system and civil society.

G. Strategies to encourage reporting by States parties

82. All committees have adopted strategies to encourage reporting by States parties. Several allow for the combination of reporting obligations in a single document. A list of reports that are overdue are included in the annual reports of most treaty bodies, with some, such as HRC, CEDAW and CERD, providing lists of States parties whose reports are five and 10 years overdue, respectively. Most committees send targeted reminders to States parties whose reports, in particular initial reports, are overdue. In the case of CAT, two members have been appointed by the Committee to maintain contacts with representatives of non-reporting States in order to encourage the preparation and submission of reports. In the case of CRC, reminder letters and informal contacts by the Chairperson with representatives of non-reporting States, or through

UNICEF or OHCHR field presences are maintained, in particular with regard to the pending initial reports.

83. CESCR follows a three-stage approach, in which non-reporting States are first invited to submit its overdue report. If no response is received, a second letter is sent inviting the State to submit the report by a specified date and informing of the session at which that report would be considered. If the report is not submitted by the deadline, a third letter is sent in which the State is informed that at a certain session, the status of implementation of the Covenant in the State party would be examined in the absence of a report. If no report is submitted, the Committee proceeds to consider the situation in the State party on the basis of all information available and prepares preliminary conclusions. A consideration of one non-reporting State party has been scheduled for all future sessions until November 2010 under this procedure.

The review procedure: consideration of a country situation in the absence of a report

84. All committees, except CMW, have adopted the practice, pioneered by CERD in 1991 under its “review procedure,” of proceeding with examination of the state of implementation of the relevant treaty by the State party even though no report has been received (see CERD, A/58/18, annex IV, Section P; CESCR, E/C.12/2004/9; CEDAW, rule 65; HRC, rule 70; CAT, rule 65; CRC, CRC/C/33, paras. 29 to 32 and rule 67). This procedure is specifically provided for in article 36, para. 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In general:

- (i) The committee notifies a non-reporting State party of its intention to examine implementation of the relevant treaty by the State party in the absence of a report during a public meeting on a specified date. The State party may respond by submitting a report, at which time the procedure is suspended and the normal process of consideration of the report begins. Where the State party concerned indicates that a report will be provided, pending receipt of that report, the review may be postponed to another session;
- (ii) The committee may formulate a list of issues and questions for the State party, which is invited to send a delegation to attend the session. If the State party is not represented, the committee may decide to proceed with the review, or it may notify the State party of a new date for consideration;
- (iii) The committee reviews the situation in the country on the basis of information available to it, including any dialogue with the State party delegation and information submitted by United Nations partners, national human rights institutions and NGOs. Some treaty bodies prepare provisional concluding observations, which will be referred to, but not published, in its annual report and which will be transmitted to the State party. These provisional concluding observations become final if the State party does not respond or indicate that it will submit a report in the near future. Other treaty bodies issue concluding observations in the usual way.

85. In many cases, notification by the committee that it intends to consider the situation in a country in the absence of a report encourages the State party to produce a report. Generally, the procedure is invoked where reports are very overdue. CESCR, HRC and CERD, for example, review States parties that are at least five years late in the submission of their initial or periodic

reports. When no report has been received from a State party after the initiation of the first review, a subsequent round of reviews may take place. CESCR normally adopts preliminary concluding observations at the first review. If a report is subsequently submitted, it is examined according to the usual procedure and final concluding observations are adopted. If no report is received, the Committee reviews the State party's compliance with the Covenant based on all information available, and adopts preliminary concluding observations.

86. CRC, CEDAW and CAT have yet to carry out a review under this procedure as notices of planned reviews have always resulted in the submission of a report. At its thirty-eighth session in May 2007, CEDAW decided to send reminder letters to States parties whose initial reports were more than 10 years overdue and to request the States parties that were more than 20 years overdue in submitting their initial reports to submit all their overdue reports as combined reports by a fixed date. Failing the receipt of the reports within the suggested timeframe, the Committee has decided to proceed with consideration of the implementation of the Convention by States parties in the absence of a report.

H. Early warning and urgent action procedures

87. Since 1993, CERD has developed procedures relating to early warning measures and urgent action (A/48/18, annex III), the former directed at preventing existing problems in States parties from escalating into new conflict or preventing a resumption of conflict, and the latter to respond to problems requiring immediate attention to prevent or limit the scale or number of serious violations of the Convention.

88. The procedures may be invoked by the Committee itself or by interested parties such as NGOs. The Committee has established a working group to direct its work under the procedures, which may request written submissions from the State party and may formulate questions for it. A delegation from the State party is invited to attend the meeting at which the matter will be discussed in order to respond to members' questions, but the Committee may proceed with consideration of the matter even if the State party declines to send a delegation. Written submissions may also be made by other interested parties. After considering the matter, the Committee adopts a formal decision, which may include requests for action by the State party and the provision of further information in the next periodic report. These procedures have been used since 1993 in relation to more than 20 States parties. At its seventy-first session in August 2007, CERD adopted new guidelines for its early warning and urgent action procedure (A/62/18, Annex III). The guidelines are based on the procedures developed in 1993 but sets out more detailed criteria and indicators for the necessity of action as well as possible measures to be taken. They also include terms of reference for the five-member working group on early warning and urgent action.

89. In the 1990s, HRC requested that several States parties facing serious difficulties in the implementation of rights contained in the Covenant either present their overdue initial/periodic reports without delay or prepare ad hoc reports on specific issues. Three States parties submitted ad hoc reports as requested. In March 2004, the Committee's Bureau discussed the possibility of reviving this urgent procedure/ad hoc reporting procedure and in March 2005, after further discussion, the Committee requested one State party to produce an ad hoc report, which was submitted in 2006.

I. Participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes

90. Most treaty bodies have adopted modalities for interaction with specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations. This interaction is specifically envisaged in the provisions of some of the treaties (articles 16 to 24 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; article 40, paragraph 2, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; article 22 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; article 45 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; article 74 of the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Most treaty bodies have made provision for this in their rules of procedure (HRC, rule 67; CEDAW, rules 44 and 45; CAT, rule 62; CRC, rule 70; CESCR, rules 66-68; CMW, rules 28-29). Two treaties, the Conventions on the Rights of the Child and on Migrants, mention specific specialized agencies in relation to the work of their treaty bodies - the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in article 45 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO in article 74 of the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers.

91. Most of the treaties provide for their committees to forward States parties' reports to relevant United Nations entities through the Secretary-General, although not all committees actually do this. Reports, as official documents, are sent to these entities as part of the general distribution, are available through the ODS and are posted on the OHCHR web site.

Submission of written information by specialized agencies to the treaty bodies

92. Four of the treaties (the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) provide for United Nations specialized agencies to submit specific reports to the relevant treaty bodies on implementation of the treaty in areas falling within the scope of their activities. In practice, committees do not require the specialized agencies to submit separate reports on their own activities, but most committees may invite specialized agencies to provide written reports containing country-specific information on States parties whose reports are before them. Depending on the committee, such information is requested for the full committee session and the pre-session working group/country task force. All relevant agencies are informed by e-mail or fax of the countries whose reports are due to be considered in the pre-sessions or sessions of CEDAW, CESCR, CRC, HRC and CMW, and input is requested. CERD systematically receives information from ILO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at the request of the secretariat. CESCR and CRC systematically receives information from UNICEF, UNHCR as well as from other UN bodies including UNESCO, ILO, WHO and UNAIDS. CAT maintains regular contacts with UNHCR, which provides confidential information on a regular basis. UNICEF, ILO, WHO and UNHCR provide written information systematically to the treaty bodies. CMW systematically receives information from ILO and IOM. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNAIDS, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Population Fund and the International Organization for Migration (which is outside the United Nations system) also provide input on occasion. Some agencies may request that written information submitted be kept confidential.

93. CEDAW has adopted guidelines for the submission of reports by specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system (A/61/38, Part I, annex II). Accordingly, such entities are invited to provide country-specific information on the implementation of the Convention and the Committee's concluding comments. They are also invited to provide information about efforts made by the concerned entity to promote implementation of the provisions of the Convention and the Committee's concluding comments through its own policies and programmes. As applicable, United Nations bodies and agencies are invited to provide information about ongoing efforts towards supporting the ratification of the Optional Protocol, and acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time in the State party concerned, or efforts to give publicity to the procedures available under the Optional Protocol.

Provision for participation of representatives of specialized agencies

94. Representatives of specialized agencies are also invited by CEDAW, CERD, CESCR, HRC and CMW to meet with the committee during the session to discuss the situation in the countries whose reports are being considered. Representatives of United Nations entities may address CESCR and CEDAW during a designated meeting at the beginning of the pre-session working group. CERD and HRC invite representatives to a designated meeting in plenary at the beginning of the session. CRC invites representatives of specialized agencies to address the Committee at a meeting during the pre-session working group and encourages attendance during the session. CEDAW and CESCR invite representatives to the session, in addition to the pre-session working group meetings. At its fortieth session, CAT requested to Secretariat to invite UNHCR to meet with the Committee in private in the afternoon of the first day of each session.

95. The participation of specialized agencies in the pre-session working groups of CEDAW and CRC and the beginning of CEDAW and HRC sessions takes place in closed meetings. In CERD and CESCR, all or part of the meeting may be open or closed, according to the wishes of the representatives of the agencies present. In order for the Committee to benefit fully from the information provided, CEDAW encourages in its guidelines that agencies or bodies ensure that representatives are equipped to respond to the questions and comments that may be raised by Committee members. Joint reports have been submitted by United Nations entities to treaty bodies on occasion as well as by United Nations Country Teams. Discussions on expanding the latter are ongoing among interested entities and, in particular, in relation to CEDAW. Committees also encourage the United Nations country teams to undertake follow-up activities on the basis of concluding observations, to support States parties in their implementation of the concluding comments at the country level, and to submit further information at the time of the next consideration of the respective State party reports.

96. Certain agencies maintain close links with specific committees. The working relationship between UNICEF and CRC, encouraged by the Convention, is close and extends beyond consideration of reports to include assistance to States parties to facilitate the reporting process, drafting of general comments, involvement in days of general discussion and assistance with informal field visits. The relationship between ILO and CMW is also specified in the Convention. CESCR has forged a close working relationship with UNESCO through the Joint Expert Group in connection with the right to education, and it also has a close working relationship with the ILO Committee of Experts on Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) with which it meets annually, on an informal basis. CESCR

regularly receives information from ILO, UNHCR and UNESCO on the States parties being reviewed. UNHCR submits comments to the members of CAT on States parties whose reports are being examined and where UNHCR is active. UNHCR representatives attend the sessions of the Committee and report back on issues of concern raised by Committee members. ILO and UNHCR regularly submit reports to CERD, and, at each session, both agencies as well as UNESCO are invited to attend. At the past two sessions, ILO and UNHCR briefed the Committee on the first day of the session on matters of common interest. Representatives of ILO, UNESCO and UNHCR are also regularly invited to participate in, and make interventions during thematic discussions organized by CERD and CESCR. Some United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have also worked together with certain treaty bodies to assist in the drafting of specific general comments.

97. At its forty-first session, the CRC appointed a member to act as focal point for various United Nations entities, and may consider increasing the number of focal points as required. In March 2006, the HRC appointed a rapporteur to liaise with specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system. CESCR has appointed a focal point in 2005 to liaise on specific issues.

J. Interaction with special procedures

98. Although relevant information from the reports of country-specific and thematic special rapporteurs is routinely provided to treaty bodies by OHCHR, input from the special procedures of the former Commission on Human Rights and the current Human Rights Council to the reporting process has been irregular, except for the close collaboration between the Special Rapporteur on torture and CAT, which includes the sharing of country-specific information relating to States parties' reports, article 20 inquiries and individual communications, as well as a formal annual meeting between the Special Rapporteur and the Committee.

99. Outside of its work in considering of reports, CESCR has often invited special rapporteurs of the former Commission on Human Rights, the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and members of its working groups, and the current Human Rights Council to address the Committee and engage in discussions. It has formed particularly close relations with the Special Rapporteurs on the right to adequate housing, the right to education, and the rights of indigenous persons. The Committee tries to organize a meeting at each of its sessions with one of the special procedures mandate holders with an economic, social and cultural rights mandate but it has not met with any special procedures mandate holders at its most recent sessions. Special procedures mandate holders have attended CERD session in the context of both its annual thematic debates and ad hoc debates that are held periodically. CERD has exchanged information on numerous occasions with the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and has attended all sessions of the Inter-Governmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and provided it with written input. CERD has also held extensive dialogues over recent years with several mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteurs on racism, adequate housing, health and minority issues. CERD also cooperates with the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on genocide.

100. CEDAW has interacted, in particular, with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and with the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a

component of the right to an adequate standard of living. The independent expert appointed by the Secretary-General to lead an in-depth study of the question of violence against children and several special rapporteurs have interacted with CRC. In 2007, HRC held an informal lunch-time meeting with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. CMW has interacted, in particular, with the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants.

K. Participation of national human rights institutions (NHRIs)

101. Three committees have adopted general comments on the role of national human rights institutions in their work. General Comment No. 10 of CESCR acknowledges the role of NHRIs in monitoring implementation of the Covenant at the national level. In its general recommendation No. XVII concerning the establishment of national institutions to facilitate implementation of the Convention, CERD recommends that where NHRIs have been established, “they should be associated with the preparation of reports.” The detailed general comment No. 2 (2002) of CRC includes a section on reporting to the Committee and cooperation between NHRIs and United Nations agencies and human rights mechanisms. The Committee suggests that NHRIs should contribute independently to the reporting process and “monitor the integrity of government reports to international treaty bodies with respect to children’s rights, including through dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its pre-sessional working group and with other relevant treaty bodies.” It also considers it appropriate for States parties to consult with independent human rights institutions during the preparation of their reports to the Committee, provided that the independence of these bodies and their independent role in providing information to the Committee is respected. The CRC considers that “it is not appropriate to delegate to NHRIs the drafting of reports or to include them in the government delegation when reports are examined by the Committee.”

102. At its thirty-third session in July 2005, CEDAW allowed an NHRI to make an oral presentation to the Committee for the first time. At its fortieth session in January 2008, the Committee adopted a Statement on its relationship with NHRIs, in which the Committee recognized that NHRIs may contribute in various ways to the work of the Committee under the monitoring procedures of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.

103. NHRIs of the States parties which are to be considered by CAT and CRC are routinely informed about the forthcoming consideration and invited to submit written information. NHRIs may request a private meeting with CAT, as is the case with the CRC. NHRIs may provide information to CRC in closed meetings during the pre-sessional working group and may respond to requests to clarify or supplement such information. CRC engages both with general NHRIs and child-specific NHRIs, including children’s ombudsmen, where these exist. NHRIs are also informed about the programme of work of CERD for each session and provided with copies of the reports due to be considered by the Committee (A/58/18, annex IV). For HRC, NHRIs may provide information to any interested members on issues relating to the consideration of reports of States parties, in informal meetings outside the Committee’s working hours, and may respond to requests to clarify or supplement such information. On several occasions, NHRI representatives have taken part in such informal breakfast or lunchtime briefings.

104. At its last three sessions, with the agreement of the State party’s delegation, CERD provided NHRIs that were present with the opportunity to make an oral presentation in the

plenary on the second day of the consideration of the State party's report. NHRI representatives were seated separately from representatives of NGOs, with a sign clearly identifying them. At its seventy-second session in August 2007, the Committee formalized this procedure through inclusion of relevant provisions in its Rules of Procedure (Rule 40 (2)). Concluding observations on States parties reports increasingly refer to national human rights institutions (a compilation of references to national human rights institutions in concluding observations has been prepared by the secretariat). CESCR and CEDAW regularly invite NHRIs, through the National Institutions Unit of OHCHR and, more recently, the Geneva-based representative of the ICC, to submit information and attend its sessions. CMW routinely informs NHRIs of the States parties which are to be considered by the Committee about the forthcoming consideration and invites them to submit written information and to attend both the private meeting with the Committee in preparation of the list of issues as well as the consideration of the report. Since its fifth session, the Committee provides the representative of the NHRI present an opportunity to make an oral presentation in a public meeting during the session at which the State party's report is considered.

L. Participation of non-governmental organizations

105. Although all treaty bodies have developed modalities for interaction with NGOs, article 45 (a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 74, paragraph 4, of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and article 38, paragraph (a) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressly envisage a role for NGOs in the work of the treaty body. Article 45 (a) entitles CRC to seek expert advice on implementation of the Convention from specialized agencies and UNICEF, and "other competent bodies", which is understood to include NGOs. Since its first session in 1991, the Committee, in cooperation with the NGO Group for CRC, has systematically encouraged NGOs to submit reports, documentation or other information in order to provide it with a comprehensive picture and expertise as to how the Convention is being implemented in a particular country. Written information is received from international, regional, national and local organizations, and may be submitted by individual NGOs or national coalitions or committees of NGOs. Article 74 (4) of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families provides that the CMW may invite the specialized agencies and organs of the United Nations, as well as intergovernmental organizations and other concerned bodies to submit written information to the Committee. The Committee has interpreted 'other concerned bodies' as including NGOs.

106. Article 38, paragraph (a) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as in the case of article 45 (a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, provides that the CRPD may invite specialized agencies and other competent bodies as it considers appropriate to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their respective mandates.

107. CESCR and CRC have adopted specific guidelines on NGO participation in their work (CESCR, E/C.12/2000/6; CRC, CRC/C/90, annex VII). CESCR sets aside a half-day during the first day of both its sessions and pre-sessional working groups to hear statements from external partners. This is normally dedicated, in whole or in part, to statements by NGOs, which are issued as UN documents if these are presented in a single synthesis report. Individual submissions are not processed. The Committee requires that NGO statements be specific to the

articles of the Covenant, focusing on the most pressing issues from the NGO perspective and providing suggestions for specific questions that the pre-sessional working group may consider incorporating in the list of issues with respect to the State party concerned. NGO input should also be of direct relevance to matters under consideration by the Committee, be reliable, and not abusive. CEDAW invites representatives of NGOs to make oral or written statements and provide information or documentation to the Committee or its pre-sessional working group (rule 47), and an information note on modalities of participation is provided on its webpage.

Submission of written information

108. HRC, CERD, CAT and CMW invite NGOs to provide reports containing country-specific information on States parties whose reports are due for consideration (see for example, CERD, Section B, Annex IV (A/58/18); CAT, rule 62; CMW, rule 29, see also A/60/48, para. 15), as well as to the country task forces in charge of the lists of issues. CESCR and CEDAW similarly welcome written information from national and international NGOs at both their pre-sessional working groups, during the drafting of the list of issues, and the full committee session at which the State party report will be considered. When many NGOs submit information, they are encouraged to organize and summarize their submissions in a single synthesis report. In a number of instances, synthesis reports of NGOs have consolidated the reports of over one hundred national NGOs. The CRC requires submissions to be made two months prior to its pre-sessional working group. CERD also accepts written submissions from NGOs in relation to its early warning and urgent action procedures, and these procedures may be invoked by NGOs. Written statements that are submitted at least three months in advance by NGOs with ECOSOC status (or sponsored by such an NGO) are issued as UN documents.

Confidentiality of NGO information

109. CESCR asks the secretariat to ensure that any written information formally submitted to it by individuals or NGOs in relation to the consideration of a specific State party's report be made available as soon as possible to the representative of the State concerned. From its thirty-sixth session in May 2006, this has been done through the website of OHCHR. However, when an NGO requests confidentiality, the Committee respects it. A similar approach is followed by the HRC and CMW, and CAT has adopted the same principle, although individual NGOs may object to the State party being given its written submission, in which case the Committee will disregard the submission. HRC, CAT, CEDAW and CMW make NGO information available on their respective websites. The CRC guidelines allow NGOs to request that their written submissions be kept confidential. If a request is not made to CRC, these submissions are posted in an external internet web page by the NGO Group for the CRC.

Oral briefings during pre-sessional preparations

110. CESCR, CEDAW and CRC devote specific meetings during their pre-sessional working groups to NGOs to enable them to brief members orally on the situation in States parties whose reports are under consideration. Since March 2005, the HRC has invited NGOs to address the Committee during the process of drafting list of issues.

111. NGOs wishing to participate in the CRC pre-sessional working group must submit a written report to the Committee at least two months in advance. The Committee then invites selected NGOs to attend, on the basis of the written information submitted. Introductory remarks

by participants are limited to a maximum of 15 minutes for NGOs coming from the country concerned and 5 minutes for others, allowing time for questions and answers. The CRC, CEDAW and CESCR pre-sessional working groups meet with NGOs in private.

Oral briefings during session time

112. Most committees make provision for representatives of NGOs to brief members during the session at which the State party's report is to be considered. HRC and CESCR set aside meeting time on the first day of the session for this purpose and CEDAW at the beginning of the first and second week of the session, according to its schedule. CAT invites NGOs to brief Committee members orally in private during formal meetings, devoted to one country at a time, the day before the report of the State party is considered. NGOs do not brief CERD during formal session time. Except in the case of CESCR, where the meeting is open and covered by the press services, and CEDAW, where the meeting is open, oral briefings during session time take place in closed meetings. At its fourth session, CMW decided that in future, it would provide an opportunity for NGOs to brief the Committee publicly and during the session at which the report of the State party concerned is to be considered.

Country-specific briefings to members at the time of committee session

113. Additional breakfast or lunchtime briefings are regularly convened for CEDAW, HRC and CESCR to allow NGOs to provide the most up-to-date country-specific information to members, in advance of the examination of a particular State party's report by the Committee. The Human Rights Committee has reserved the right, in the future, to determine whether other briefings by NGOs should also become part of the Committee's official programme and thus be provided with interpretation (A/57/40, vol. I, annex III, para. 12). NGOs may request a private meeting with CRC. Lunchtime briefings are regularly convened by NGOs for CERD members on the first day of the examination of a particular State party's report by the Committee or for States whose situation is examined under the review procedure or under the early warning and urgent action procedures.

The role of coalitions of NGOs in coordinating NGO input into the treaty bodies

114. In the case of several treaty bodies, coalitions are active in coordinating input. For example, CRC maintains a close working relationship with the NGO Group for the CRC, a coalition of some 60 to 70 international NGOs, which were active in the drafting of the Convention and work together to promote its implementation. The NGO Group has a liaison unit that supports participation of NGOs, particularly national coalitions, in the CRC reporting process, including coordination of NGO written submissions. It also supports attendance of national NGOs at the Committee's sessions in Geneva. International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP)-Asia Pacific facilitates interaction between NGOs and CEDAW through training sessions convened at the time of the Committee's sessions and, as is the case with other NGOs, coordinates the submission of NGO reports to CEDAW in advance of sessions. An informal network of NGOs (APT/FIDH/OMCT) working on torture-related issues, works with their national partner NGOs to submit a consolidated report to CAT.

115. The International NGO Platform on the Migrant Workers' Convention coordinates NGO input for the CMW and facilitates interaction of national NGOs with the Committee. In an increasing number of States parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights, national coalitions for the coordination of NGO submissions have been formed. Often they are constituted on the occasion of the submission of the State party report and subsequently produce the synthesis report.

IV. OTHER ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE REPORTING PROCESS

A. General comments/recommendations

116. All committees have adopted the practice of elaborating their views on the content of the obligations assumed by States parties in the form of “general comments”. Two committees, CEDAW and CERD, refer to these as “general recommendations”. CERD issued its first general recommendation in 1972 on the basis of article 9 of the Convention, which allows the Committee to make suggestions and general recommendations based on its examination of reports. CEDAW issues its general recommendations under article 21 of the Convention and HRC under article 40, paragraph 4, of the Covenant. CESCR began preparing general comments at the invitation of the Economic and Social Council, with a view to assisting the States parties in fulfilling their reporting obligations (rule 65). General comments have evolved in length and complexity and now constitute detailed and comprehensive commentaries on specific provisions of the treaties and on the relationship between the articles of the Convention or Covenant and specific themes/issues. Several treaty bodies have revised or replaced their general comments in the light of experience gained through consideration of reports.

117. CESCR has defined the purpose of issuing general comments as:

- (i) To make the experience gained so far through the examination of States parties’ reports available for the benefit of all States parties, in order to assist and promote their further implementation of the Covenant;
- (ii) To draw the attention of States parties to insufficiencies disclosed in a large number of reports;
- (iii) To suggest improvements in the reporting procedures, and to stimulate the activities of the States parties, international organizations and the specialized agencies concerned in achieving progressively and effectively the full realization of the rights recognized in the Covenant.

Process of adoption of general comments

118. All treaty bodies have developed modalities for the formulation of general comments, which broadly follow the procedure adopted by CEDAW in 1997 (A/52/38/Rev.1, para. 480). This includes the following three basic stages:

- (i) Wide consultations with specialized agencies, NGOs, academics and other human rights treaty bodies, sometimes in the context of a day of general discussion or thematic debate;
- (ii) Elaboration of a draft by one or more designated members of the committee on the basis of the consultation process, for further discussion by the committee and interested parties;

- (iii) Formal adoption of the revised draft of the general comment in plenary session;
- (iv) Some committees seek expert advice from United Nations specialized agencies or other sources, including academics, in the elaboration of general comments, and informal background papers may be requested from other interested parties.

119. CESCR has adopted an outline for drafting general comments (E/2000/22, annex IX). The outline aims at ensuring consistency and clarity in the content, format, structure and ambit of future general comments, thus promoting their accessibility and strengthening the authoritative interpretation of the Covenant provided. In the Committee's view, general comments should be reader friendly and readily understandable to a broad range of readers, primarily States parties to the Covenant. The Committee may dedicate a Day of General Discussion to review the subject of the general comment or draft text, inviting inputs and discussion from a range of external experts in the subject.

120. At any time, members of a treaty body may propose that a general comment relating to a specific article, provision or theme be prepared. Most committees circulate draft general comments with a selected number of experts, including those from other treaty bodies, for comments, with some adopting the practice of calling for comments on the text of the general comment from other treaty bodies. Some treaty bodies request that draft general comments be posted on the OHCHR web site to allow for wider input. The fourth inter-committee meeting recommended that treaty bodies consider drafting joint general comments on issues of common concern, but a joint general comment has yet to be adopted.

B. Days of general discussion and thematic debates/discussions

121. Four treaty bodies (CESCR, CERD, CRC and CMW) have adopted the practice of organizing what are variously described as "thematic debates", "thematic discussions" or "days of general discussion" in order to discuss issues of general concern to the implementation of their treaties. Thematic discussions have been convened by CERD on specific themes in order to specify the extent of its responsibilities under the Convention and provide States parties with guidance on more complete fulfilment of their obligations. CERD and CRC hold regular annual thematic discussions, whereas CESCR organizes these on an ad hoc basis, mainly in relation to the preparation of a general comment, and may decide to invite general participation or restrict it to a limited number of experts. CEDAW convenes open discussions in the context of preparation of general comments only.

122. Since 1992, CRC has convened 17 days of general discussion, open to all interested parties, including discussions in working groups on sub-themes, identified in an outline adopted by the Committee up to twelve months in advance. At the end of its discussion days, CRC adopts recommendations. The general discussions of CRC can also work in conjunction with article 45 (c) of the Convention, a unique provision that allows the Committee to recommend that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to undertake action on specific issues related to the rights of the child. The 1992 discussion day on children in armed conflict formed the background to the Secretary-General's comprehensive study on the impact of armed conflict on children, while the general discussion days in 2000 and 2001 led to the General Assembly's request to the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on violence against children.

C. Committee statements

123. Some treaty bodies formulate statements on international developments and issues that bear upon the implementation of their treaties. CESCR has adopted statements in the context of a number of world conferences, as well as statements on globalization, trade, intellectual property and the world food crisis. CERD has adopted statements directed to world conferences. More recently, it adopted a statement on racial discrimination and measures to combat terrorism (2002) and a “declaration on the prevention of genocide” (2005). Statements by CEDAW have covered issues such as reservations, gender and racial discrimination, solidarity with Afghan women, gender and sustainable development, discrimination against older women, the situation of women in Iraq, and the tsunami disaster that occurred in South-East Asia on 26 December 2004. CEDAW has also issued statements in conjunction with the Convention’s twenty-fifth anniversary, and with regard to the review and appraisal processes of the Beijing Platform for Action. Several committees have issued statements jointly with other United Nations bodies: CESCR has issued a joint statement with the special rapporteurs with regard to the Millennium Development Goals, and CAT issues an annual joint statement with the Special Rapporteur on torture, the SPT, the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the occasion of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. HRC has not adopted the practice of issuing formal statements. The Chairperson of CMW issued a joint statement with the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants on the occasion of International Migrants’ Day on December 2005. At its fourth session, CMW adopted a ‘written contribution’ to the High-Level Dialogue of the General Assembly on International Migration and Development.

124. CRC and CEDAW also adopt “decisions,” which can concern either its methods of work or substantive issues. Since 1991, the CRC has adopted over 40 such decisions/recommendations (see CRC/C/19/Rev.10). Recent decisions by the Committee have included the exceptional combination of reports, content and size of reports and the proposal for the committee to sit in two chambers. Other decisions, such as those concerning children in armed conflict, administration of juvenile justice and children without parental care have been made in the context of the Committee’s days of general discussion. CEDAW’s decisions generally concern working methods. Decisions are generally included in the annual reports.

V. OTHER MATTERS

A. Meetings with States parties

125. Committees regularly convene informal consultations during sessions with States parties to discuss matters of mutual concern. CEDAW has also convened such a meeting with States that are not party to the Convention.

B. Sources of additional information concerning the treaty bodies

Official publications

126. OHCHR publishes a series of human rights fact sheets on a range of human rights issues, which include individual fact sheets on each of the human rights treaties, setting out in accessible language the provisions of the treaty and the work of its treaty body. These were supplemented in 2005 by a fact sheet on the “United Nations Human Rights Treaty System,” which provides an overview of the seven core treaties and the seven human rights treaty bodies. A full list of fact

sheets is available on the OHCHR web site, as well as the fact sheets themselves, in Portable Document Format (PDF).

127. OHCHR regional offices have also published compilations of the concluding observations relating to States parties while as CD-Rom, compiling the past concluding observations and summary records of CEDAW, was produced in 2007 by the Division for the Advancement of Women to mark the Committee's twenty-fifth anniversary.

128. A DVD which includes a short film on the treaty body system and the main human rights instruments and which is available in English, French and Spanish was produced by OHCHR.

Information related to the treaty bodies on the OHCHR website

129. OHCHR maintains a treaty bodies database, which contains all official documentation related to the State party reporting process in English, French and Spanish, as well as the full reporting history of each State party to each treaty. The database is accessible through the OHCHR website which is currently being updated and improved. OHCHR also operates an electronic list serve which automatically circulates treaty body outputs to subscribers.

130. The Universal Human Index is an online database compiling the concluding observations adopted by the seven treaty bodies since 2000 as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the Human Rights Council special procedures concerning specific countries since 2006. The database is searchable through criteria such as keyword, right, country, body and/or affected persons. The Index is linked to the OHCHR website. A CD-ROM providing the information contained in the website is being finalized and will be distributed to Governments, United Nations entities, including field presences, and NGOs.

131. The secretariat maintains web pages for each of the Geneva-based treaty bodies, hosted on the OHCHR website presenting information related to the work of the treaty bodies and their sessions in a consistent way.
