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Summary record (partial)* of the 2519th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 24 March 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Palm (Vice-Chairperson)

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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In the absence of Mr. Rivas Posada, Ms. Palm, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Working methods

A strategic approach to public relations, including relations with the media (CCPR/C/92/CRP.2)

1. **Mr. Shearer**, introducing his revised paper, said that the title had been changed to embrace all public relations, not just relations with the media. The paper contained 11 recommendations, most of which were preceded by an introductory paragraph.

2. Regarding recommendation 1, he said that, in the past, there had been complaints about the ease of use of the OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) website. Other websites and online indexes also contained information about the Committee, but most members of the public were unfamiliar with such sources of information. Therefore, it was essential for the human rights section of the United Nations website to be constantly reviewed, updated and improved with regard to its layout, content, topicality and ease of use. He wondered if the Secretariat or other Committee members could provide information on the most recent website developments.

3. **Mr. Gillibert** (Secretary of the Committee) said that he had received no progress report regarding the website update.

4. **Ms. Wedgwood** said that it would be useful if the OHCHR website also offered links to other websites with useful indexes.

5. **Mr. Shearer** responded that such links would be a useful addition. Moving on to recommendation 2, which dealt with the importance of NGOs, he said that, in the Committee's experience, reforms did not work best from the top down, but rather from the bottom up. Results depended on the willingness of Governments to protect human rights; such action was most often inspired by the work of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The recommendation in question was designed to draw attention to the importance of engaging with national NGOs, especially in countries of particular concern, in order to foster exchange of information. Meetings were already being held with international NGOs, and their help should be

enlisted in identifying appropriate NGOs working at the grass-roots level.

6. **Mr. Lallah** said he strongly supported recommendation 2, but suggested that the Secretariat itself should compile a list of national NGOs in all countries through its regional representatives, which would later be used to establish direct contact with the NGOs and inform them of the Committee's work. He noted that there was a particular lack of such information in developing countries because very few NGOs from those countries attended meetings of the Committee.

7. **Mr. Khalil** said that he was constantly struck by the lack of knowledge of the Committee's concluding observations in much of the world; in fact, in some countries, Governments sought to hide the Committee's work from the general public and NGOs in particular. He therefore suggested that copies of the Committee's concluding observations should be sent directly to national NGOs, and that such action might be reflected in Mr. O'Flaherty's paper on revision of the guidelines for State party reports under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR/C/92/CRP.1). In some countries, the legislature had a human rights body, the duties of which included calling on the executive power to state its position on international obligations and to follow up on progress made by the Government.

8. **Ms. Chanet** said that it would be useful to have special rapporteurs on information and suggested the establishment of a kind of troika, with three different rapporteurs for the Committee's three working languages. It was important not only to disseminate information on the Committee's work, but also to attract media attention when States parties' reports were discussed. In such cases the rapporteurs might take on the role of information managers and, in cooperation with the Secretariat, identify the media sources capable of promoting interest in the Committee's work. Such initiatives were essential for spreading awareness of the study of periodic reports. Clearly, the more interesting the discussion of such reports was, the more media attention it would arouse.

9. **Mr. Amor** said that all NGOs should be given the same opportunity to contribute to the human rights dialogue. It was also important to bear in mind the potential contribution of universities, especially faculties of law and political science, in making

available information on the Covenant and the work of the Committee. Members of Parliament should also be kept regularly informed, as they normally focused on local issues and showed little awareness of the international system for the protection of human rights.

10. **Ms. Motoc** said that relations with the press were among the most important aspects of public relations. As lawyers, Committee members were not accustomed to engaging with the media, or perhaps they believed that the legal issues they dealt with were too complex for others to grasp. It was especially important to endeavour to give the Committee a higher profile. As former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she had worked with a number of NGOs, and she fully supported other members' remarks regarding NGO involvement. National and international NGOs cooperated with each other, the former being a useful source of information for the latter. It should be noted that small national NGOs with scant means often provided the most reliable information because they were in direct contact with the victims of human rights violations and because they did not take general policy stances. It was therefore imperative to involve local NGOs and be in direct contact with them.

11. **Ms. Wedgwood** said, with respect to recommendation 2, that it would be useful for OHCHR to invite NGOs to register with it, not for the purpose of accreditation but, rather, in order to make their contact information more readily available to the relevant committees and the public. The tendency for four or five major NGOs in developed countries to dominate discussion of human rights at the international level was a source of some resentment among developing-country NGOs, which could be addressed by such a register.

12. **Mr. Shearer** said that Ms. Chanet's suggestion concerning a troika of special rapporteurs on information was partly reflected in recommendation 11 on the appointment of a rapporteur for public information who could assist in publicizing the work of the Committee in the various languages. While he had some problems with the troika concept, he agreed that efforts to inform the public should be expanded.

13. **Mr. Lallah** said that he agreed with recommendations 3, 4 and 5 of the document. Regarding access by NGOs and States parties to audio recordings of the public meetings, he said that,

although such recordings had been available in the past, he had been told by one organization that its request for a meeting recording had been denied. They should in fact be provided upon request to NGOs and States parties alike.

14. **Mr. Gillibert** (Secretary of the Committee) said that, as some members had opposed making such recordings available to NGOs during the Committee's discussions on the issue at its previous session, cassettes were no longer provided. It was for the Committee to decide if it wished to make them available again.

15. **Mr. Amor** said that he would appreciate an explanation of recommendation 4 in non-technical terms. Concerning recommendation 3, he requested feedback from the Secretariat on the Committee's wish to hold meetings of the Geneva sessions on State party reports at the Palais des Nations. The site of the Committee's current session was much less open to the public than the Palais des Nations. The Committee should also reconsider the issue of holding meetings at Headquarters. That posed an obstacle to non-Western colleagues, who sometimes had difficulties in obtaining United States entry visas. He himself had been detained in 2007 for more than an hour by immigration authorities at John F. Kennedy Airport and had been obliged to make five visits to the United States Embassy in Tunis to obtain a three-month visa. If the Committee wished to be more visible, it should hold its meetings elsewhere than the present hall and the Palais Wilson.

16. **Mr. Gillibert** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Conference Services Division of the United Nations Office at Geneva was looking into the possibility of providing conference facilities for the Committee at the Palais des Nations. If there was sufficient organization and discipline in the examination of State party reports, it would be possible as of the next session of the Committee to hold such meetings at the Palais des Nations. The other activities of the Committee would take place at the Palais Wilson.

17. **Ms. Chanet** said that the issue under consideration was whether or not to hold meetings on State party reports at the Palais des Nations, not whether they should be held in New York or Geneva. Concerning recommendation 5, there were pitfalls to encouraging States parties to involve their national

media in the Committee proceedings, as some States had no influence over the press while others, on the contrary, had State-controlled media. The recommendation should therefore be withdrawn.

18. **Ms. Wedgwood** said that the podcasting of the meetings could help the Committee to publicize its work. For instance, a news organization such as Jeune Afrique could reach tens of thousands of West African readers with such a podcast. Furthermore, the coverage of meetings would be more vivid than through Committee documents. Podcasting would also facilitate coverage even if meetings were held at the Palais des Nations, as journalists would be able to monitor the proceedings more easily. She assumed that the broadcasts would be in all three working languages of the Committee. Many people would attend the Committee's public meetings if they were made more accessible, including school groups and persons with a particular interest in the countries under consideration. There was therefore a need to hold discussions with the Department of Safety and Security at Headquarters so as to facilitate public access. She favoured continuing to hold sessions of the Committee in New York, because it was important for members to remain in contact with the relevant missions, the Secretariat and persons such as the Legal Counsel. Lastly, there was no need for crews to film the proceedings as their coverage could give an incomplete or false picture of the Committee's work.

19. **Ms. Motoc** said that she was in favour of webcasting the Committee's proceedings. There was no need for the Committee to transfer its Geneva meetings from the Palais Wilson to the Palais des Nations, which would place a burden on the Secretariat. Furthermore, a change of venue would not encourage the news media to give the meetings greater coverage. Strict guidelines should be established by the Committee for media coverage, especially as some media were State-sponsored.

20. **Mr. O'Flaherty** said, regarding recommendation 3, that moving back and forth between the Palais Wilson and Palais des Nations would be highly inconvenient for the Secretariat and States parties alike. Changes of venue would create confusion. He wondered whether the Committee would have to return to the Palais Wilson in the event that it concluded its consideration of a State party report earlier than planned. Furthermore, he was not convinced that transferring proceedings to the Palais des Nations

would in any way increase media coverage. It was for the Committee to make its work more newsworthy. The meeting room of the Palais Wilson was rarely filled to capacity. He suggested that the proposal to provide podcasting of the public meetings should be made directly to the High Commissioner for Human Rights rather than to the Information Officer, as it had budget implications. Concerning recommendation 5, it was unusual to invite States to encourage the media to cover an event. Nevertheless, there was a need to stimulate interest in the Committee's proceedings among as many parties as possible, including the news media.

21. **Sir Nigel Rodley** said he strongly endorsed recommendation 3. Meetings at the Palais des Nations would clearly be more accessible to the press and NGOs and could maximize attention to the Committee's work. The problems which would arise for the secretariat were not insuperable and were minor compared with the difficulties faced when it travelled to New York. It was as difficult to access the Palais Wilson as it was United Nations Headquarters. States parties would not have to be informed of where the Committee was meeting when it was not in public session. Furthermore, the Committee could meet at the Palais Wilson when it needed to be near to the relevant files. With respect to recommendation 5, it should be recast to say that the Department of Public Information, rather than States parties, should facilitate media coverage of the meetings. Lastly, he did not consider that there was a need to meet at Headquarters in March in order to be in contact with such bodies as the Office of the Legal Counsel, especially when most relevant NGOs and diplomats involved in human rights were in Geneva working with the Human Rights Council.

22. **Ms. Motoc** said that meeting in New York gave members an important opportunity to maintain contacts with other bodies dealing with human rights at Headquarters such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which dealt with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for example, and the Department of Public Information.

23. **Mr. Kälin** said that he had doubts as to whether holding proceedings at the Palais des Nations would add any value to the Committee's work. He supported recommendation 4, which would give journalists and NGOs greater access to and increase interest in the Committee's deliberations. With respect to

recommendation 5, it was important for public meetings to be open to all kinds of media.

24. **Mr. Shearer** noted that opinion on the possibility of moving proceedings to the Palais des Nations was divided. In the past there had been cases in which the Committee had transferred its meetings to the Palais des Nations as the Palais Wilson could not accommodate all interested persons. He was of the view that public meetings on State party reports should be held at the Palais des Nations as a standard procedure. He understood that the Committee would return to the issue at a later date.

25. **Mr. Kálin** provided an explanation of podcasts, webcasts and streaming media.

26. **Ms. Wedgwood** said that there was no need to involve film crews in covering meetings, as there were problems with lighting, and cameras tended to be intrusive. Releasing the audio recordings which already existed in three languages would be sufficient.

27. **Mr. O'Flaherty** agreed that there was no need for cameras or images, which increased costs. The spoken word would suffice and worked equally well for podcasting, streaming and other media.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.