



INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF  
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION AND  
PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (ICC)

## **2014 ANNUAL MEETING OF CHAIRPERSONS OF UNITED NATIONS TREATY BODIES**

**GENEVA, 26 JUNE 2014**

### **ICC STATEMENT**

#### **Welcome**

Distinguished Committee Chairpersons, Colleagues from civil society and the secretariat

The International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) greatly values the opportunity to meet with you today, jointly with colleagues from civil society, on the occasion of the 2014 Annual Meeting of Treaty Body Chairpersons.

My name is Jonas Christofferson, I am the Director of the Danish Institute for Human Rights and have the honour of representing the ICC at today's meeting.

#### **Introduction**

The ICC and its members recognise and value the unique role of treaty bodies, not least because of the treaty bodies' legal mandates to monitor the effective implementation of universal human rights norms and standards at the national level.

In as much as treaty bodies are indispensable for the national human rights protection system, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) in turn can be key partners to the treaty body system, as they work to bridge the gap between the international and national human rights systems, with a view to strengthening human rights on the ground.

Critically, research shows that States with an independent and effective Paris Principles compliant NHRI are more likely to ratify international human treaties and meet reporting obligations.

#### **Treaty body position papers and working methods on NHRIs**

The ICC therefore welcomes the consideration that treaty bodies have given to the role of NHRIs to their work, including in their rules of procedures and by developing position papers on cooperation with national human rights institutions.

In particular, the ICC welcomes the position paper by the Human Rights Committee on cooperation with NHRIs, which was adopted by the Committee in 2012, and the ongoing

development of position papers by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, respectively, and in close consultation with the ICC.

The ICC and its members are encouraged that treaty bodies see a role for NHRIs in all stages of their work and procedures. This includes reporting, development of the list of issues, development of general comments, procedures in the absence of the state party, and communications. The ICC particularly welcomes the consideration treaty bodies have given to the roles of NHRIs in treaty bodies' follow up procedures to concluding observations.

At the practical level, the ICC acknowledges the important support that treaty body secretaries provide, in close cooperation with the ICC Geneva Representative, so as to facilitate and ensure NHRIs' most effective participation in the treaty body process.

As a result, the treaty body system has witnessed an increase in NHRI contributions over the past years, which has also been positively acknowledged by both Human Rights Council and the General Assembly in their respective resolutions on NHRIs.

### **Harmonised approach**

Notwithstanding these important and encouraging developments, and mindful of the specificities of each of the treaty bodies and treaties, the ICC continues to encourage treaty bodies to consider developing a harmonized approach of working methods when engaging with NHRIs.

The ICC anticipates that a harmonised approach, or alignment of, working methods, will further facilitate NHRIs' engagement with treaty bodies and ensure their most effective participation.

Such a harmonised approach is an important statement of the treaty bodies as a collective, and it will enhance NHRIs' advocacy at the national level on the importance of their contributions to the international human rights systems.

It is the view of the ICC that a harmonised approach should recognise the unique roles of NHRIs, which are distinct from, yet complementary to, the ones of States and civil society and other actors. It should build on best practices and ensure the most effective participation of all stages of the treaty bodies' work and processes.

In this regard, the ICC reiterates its support to efforts by all treaty bodies aimed at increasing the accessibility of the system to national-level actors, including human rights defenders, non-governmental organisations, disabled persons organisations (DPOs) and victims' associations.

This includes in particular: treaty bodies' and OHCHR's efforts for global outreach by enhanced information sharing and publication about the treaty bodies' work; and by the use of new technologies such as video-conferencing, for those who cannot travel to Geneva.

## **Reprisals**

In addition, the ICC is concerned by acts of reprisals and acts of intimidation against those cooperating with the United Nations and its human rights mechanisms.

As the outgoing Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders has pressed in her 2014 report to the Human Rights Council, every State and the international community as a whole has the responsibility to protect human rights defenders from violations and to ensure that defenders enjoy a safe and enabling environment.

This is a responsibility that the treaty bodies clearly share.

The ICC therefore welcomes that some treaty bodies have addressed the issue of reprisals in their rules of procedures and by appointing a rapporteur or focal point within their Committees.

The ICC encourages all treaty bodies to collectively and unequivocally condemn reprisals and any other acts of intimidation against those cooperating with the international human rights system and to develop a common approach to effectively address and respond to, the issue of reprisals.

At this point, the ICC wishes to refer to General Assembly resolution 68/171 on NHRIs, adopted by broad cross-regional consensus in 2013, and in which the General Assembly “recognizes that national human rights institutions and their respective members and staff should not face any form of reprisals or intimidation, including political pressure, physical intimidation, harassment or unjustifiable budgetary limitations, as a result of activities undertaken in accordance with their respective mandates, including when taking up individual cases or when reporting on serious or systematic violations in their countries” (operational paragraph).

## **Training and capacity building**

The ICC and its regional coordinating committees, with the support of OHCHR and other partners, is committed to supporting the effective engagement of NHRIs in the treaty body system by providing training and capacity building to its members.

In May 2014, the ICC in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the OHCHR hosted a training for NHRI staff from across the globe on NHRIs roles in the international human rights system, focusing on the treaty bodies. Further training at the regional level for NHRIs is also underway.

In September 2014, at the initiative of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the ICC and OHCHR will host a one day event, to exchange experiences and lessons learned between the Committee and NHRIs on monitoring the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability at international and national level. The ICC extends its warmest appreciation to the Committee, and particularly to Chairperson Maria Soldedad Cisternas Reyes, for her initiative, support and cooperation.

## **Strengthening NHRIs through Concluding Observations**

Finally, the ICC encourages the treaty bodies to recommend to State Parties the establishment, strengthening and accreditation of NHRIs in full compliance with the Paris Principles, where appropriate, in their concluding observations.

This would help support the ICC's efforts aimed at promoting NHRIs' independence in line with the Paris Principles. It would also serve as an authoritative recommendation for States, and NHRIs themselves, to help ensure that NHRIs are independent and operate effectively and in line with the Paris Principles, and have the appropriate mandates to prevent, protect and monitor on the rights enshrined in the international human rights treaties.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is imperative that national human rights institutions in accordance with their mandates take appropriate steps to ensure State accountability including through promotion of the ratification, domestication and implementation of treaties, and by monitoring progress thereof, to strengthen human rights on the ground.

Against this background, the ICC pledges its full commitment on behalf of its members to effectively contributing to the treaty bodies system.

Thank you.