

*Check against delivery*

**Committee against Torture**

**64th Session**



Opening Address by  
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**Geneva, 23 July 2018**

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I declare open and welcome you to the sixty-fourth session of the Committee against Torture.

Chairperson, Committee Members,

On 31 May 2018, Bahamas became the 164th State party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, while on 8 June 2018 Niger submitted its initial report, which was overdue for almost 20 years.

Such positive developments are directly linked to two key actors with whom you exchanged at your last session in April-May 2018: the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI) and the OHCHR Capacity-Building Programme.

As you may remember, in November 2017, a delegation of the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI) undertook a visit to the Bahamas to offer technical assistance to the Government and share experiences of ratification of the Convention against Torture. It was preceded by the participation of Bahamas to the April 2017 CTI regional seminar on the Convention against Torture held in Chile. The CTI strategy and targeted actions definitely contributed to the ratification by Bahamas of the Convention against Torture.

As to the long-overdue initial report of Niger, the OHCHR Capacity-Building Programme (CBP) played a key-role in remedying this situation through the Regional Office for West Africa in Dakar and the OHCHR national officer based in Niamey. The CBP provided technical assistance to the Inter-Ministerial Mechanism to facilitate the drafting of the initial report. A two day workshop co-organized by OHCHR and the Ministry of Justice of Niger took place in Niamey in December 2017. This led to the submission of the initial report of Niger to the Committee.

The Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI) and the OHCHR Capacity-Building Programme are therefore key-partners to States and to the Committee, including as they assist States to meet their reporting obligations which is a challenge for many.

In that regard, let me refer to the thirtieth annual meeting of the Chairpersons of the treaty bodies which took place in New York from 28 May to 1 June 2018.

In order to ensure enhanced protection of rights on the basis of increased compliance with State obligations under the human rights treaties, the Chairpersons focused on the alignment of working methods in particular in relation to the reporting compliance by States, the independence and impartiality of treaty body members, reprisals and follow-up to concluding observations, decisions and views.

Particular attention was paid to the preparations for the 2020 review of the treaty body system. In that regard, Chairpersons highlighted their inherent responsibility emanating from their mandates and their right to contribute to the strengthening of the system.

The long-standing issue of lack of sufficient resources for the work of treaty bodies was also raised during many of the meetings held with several stakeholders, in particular States.

Allow-me to add that several of the meetings of the Chairpersons were made public and were also webcast for the first time to increase transparency and accessibility of their work.

One of the outcomes of the Chairpersons' meeting was the agreement to propose the appointment of focal points in each treaty body to develop a common "treaty body based" position ahead of the 2020 review. They also agreed to explore further alignment of the simplified reporting procedure at the meeting next year. In this regard, the experience of your Committee will certainly provide a substantial contribution to that process. Furthermore, the Chairpersons endorsed possible elements for a common aligned procedure for follow-up to concluding observations, decisions and views.

The Chairpersons also had a meeting with the Secretary-General, who expressed his strong support for treaty bodies. His next report on treaty body strengthening will be an opportunity to raise various challenges faced by treaty bodies, including in terms of resources.

The report of the Chairpersons' meeting has been circulated to all members, and I am sure your Chairperson will brief you in detail.

Committee members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to welcome the joint statement “70 years on, torture is still widespread: more action needed to achieve a torture-free world for all” issued on 26 June 2018 for the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. For the first time, the coalition of UN anti-torture actors – the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and your Committee – was joined by the Committee on the Prevention of Torture in Africa, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Let me quote from the statement: “With the mobilization of the human rights movement, the international community has made remarkable progress towards the eradication of torture. The ban on torture and other ill-treatment has been incorporated into an extensive network of international and regional human rights treaties. The prohibition of torture has since been elevated to *ius cogens*, thus recognizing that it is so fundamental that it supersedes all treaties and customary laws.” Your Committee together with the other anti-torture mechanisms constantly pursue efforts for a torture-free world for all.

*The Committee's work under article 22*

The Committee's workload on individual complaints under article 22 of the Convention 22 has remained significant over the past year, as demonstrated by the large number of complaints registered during the last twelve months, and the Committee's efforts to reduce its backlog by considering an increased number of such complaints. At the end of the sixty-third session, 148 complaints were pending consideration, which represents a partial reduction of the backlog. Despite the limited resources, the Committee, with the support of the Secretariat, has managed to adopt, over the last three sessions, decisions in 67 cases (29 decisions on the merits, 15 decisions of inadmissibility and 23 discontinuances).

In a continuous effort to make your working methods more effective, you decided last session to establish an inter-sessional working group on individual complaints. The Working Group is meant to rationalize the Committee's workload by considering the draft discontinuances and inadmissibility decisions before the session. You will receive at this session the report of the working group and assess its first experiences.

As regards the work on follow-up, the Committee continues to assess the progress in implementation of the Committee's decisions on individual complaints by evaluating written reports on the status of follow-up, and by engaging concerned State parties' delegations in a constructive dialogue in order to seek compliance with the obligations under the Convention. It should be noted that some States have failed to implement the decisions on individual complaints, while others have honored their commitments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I conclude let me add that the additional activities you will be conducting during the Session, including your joint plenary meeting with the Human Rights Committee as well as the NGO thematic briefing on vulnerable groups are all contributing to make the Convention against Torture a living instrument for all stakeholders and rights-holders despite the obstacles faced. My colleagues and I look forward to working with you during the coming weeks.

On a personal note, as some of you may have heard already, I must inform you that I will retire from the United Nations at the end of August this year, after 27 years with the UN human rights office. This is thus my last session with you. I would like to take this occasion to thank you for the good cooperation we have always had. It has been a real pleasure working with you and I look forward to keeping in touch also after my departure – I am leaving my UN function, but I will not give up my commitment to human rights.

Let me conclude by wishing you a fruitful and successful session for a full realization of the Convention against Torture.

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