



Civil Society Submission
34th Annual Meeting of Chairpersons of Human Rights Treaty Bodies
30 May - 3 June 2022

1. Introduction

This is a joint submission prepared by [TB-Net](#) (NGO Network on UN Treaty Bodies)¹ and the [International Service for Human Rights](#). We express our appreciation to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for preparing and publishing the different reports on the key areas of the work of the UN Treaty Bodies (UNTBs) in advance of the 34th Annual Meeting of Chairpersons. We also welcome the OHCHR's initiative to invite civil society representatives to a private consultation meeting with the Chairs during the upcoming Annual Meeting. In the present document, we wish to reiterate key recommendations from the perspective of civil society.

2. The importance of the UN Treaty Body system and its strengthening process

The UNTB system is of vital importance for the promotion and protection of human rights, ensuring monitoring and accountability at the international level and on the ground. The discussions on the strengthening process are key to continuing the work of the UNTBs in a progressively improved manner.

In this context, civil society organisations have, since 2017, actively engaged and presented concrete proposals at several occasions, including during the [2020 treaty body review process](#) and the [33rd Annual Meeting of Chairpersons](#). Since that meeting, we have been particularly pleased to observe the emerging consensus among UNTBs on the fixed calendar based on a 8-year cycle, as recommended by TB-Net, the ISHR and other civil society representatives.

¹ TB-Net is comprised of: the Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR Centre); Child Rights Connect; the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR); the International Disability Alliance (IDA); the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR); International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IRAW Asia-Pacific); and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

However, we believe that certain elements, outlined below, are still in need of further consideration by the Chairs of the Treaty Bodies, including those highlighted in [our previous submissions](#) which offer a comprehensive civil society perspective for the strengthening of the UNTBs system.

3. Fixed calendar of reviews

We welcome the emerging consensus to create a fixed calendar of reviews, based on an 8-year review cycle. We believe that it is key to ensure predictability and a solid and prepared engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations. This calendar is especially relevant in the context of the post-pandemic work of the UNTBs, as a means to address the disruptions and significant backlog in the review of States cumulated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We acknowledge and welcome the decisions of the UNTBs that have already adopted the fixed calendar. However, the timeline of its implementation has not been published yet. Additionally, the lack of predictability and last minute changes in the current sessions schedule have negatively impacted the ability of all relevant stakeholders to participate and must be addressed.

As a result, we **call on all UNTBs to implement a fixed and coordinated calendar for reviews from next year. We therefore encourage the OHCHR to prepare a costing and the Fifth Committee to provide adequate funding for the implementation as of next year.**

4. Implementation of the Focused reviews and the Follow-up procedure

We welcome the growing debate on a mid-cycle phase in the review cycle of State Parties as an important step to ensure a robust review process. This key stage will ensure ongoing dialogue and continuity in the monitoring of the human rights situation at the country level, with periodic updates on key issues. In this sense, we have advocated for an 8-year review cycle, initiated with a comprehensive review of a given State. Four years later, a focused review would take place to address key areas of concern identified in the comprehensive review or any other pertinent urgent matter.

After considering the [OHCHR Summary of trends emerging from informal conversations](#), the difference between the focused reviews and the follow-up reviews proposed by the chairpersons is unclear to us. It seems that the proposed "follow-up review" would be the current follow-up procedure with a different nomenclature. However, our proposed focused review is a very different and more comprehensive procedure than the current follow-up procedure. Therefore, we would like to understand and propose further **debates on how the UNTBs understand the difference between the focused reviews and the follow-up reviews, as well as the UNTBs' views on how to implement them (e.g., their timing in the review cycle, among other details to be clarified).**

However, while welcoming the growing consensus around a reinforced follow-up in the short-term procedure by the different Treaty Bodies, we would like to **strongly encourage the UNTB Chairs and the OHCHR to consider the implementation of "focused reviews" as**

proposed by civil society within a reasonable timeframe and with the adequate budgetary allocations. For this purpose, civil society organisations and other stakeholders carried out a pilot focused review of [Sierra Leone in 2021](#) and [Grenada in 2022](#) to offer a concrete example of the benefits of this proposal, and to identify areas for improvement and fine-tuning before an eventual implementation by the UNTBs.

Therefore, despite the Chairs' concerns highlighted in the [OHCHR Summary of trends emerging from informal conversations](#), this pilot reinforced the viability and advantages of the focused reviews, which allow part of the review process to take place in the State concerned, outside Geneva. For instance, the engagement of relevant stakeholders on the ground (e.g., Ministries, State agencies and CSOs) is enhanced and the work of the UNTBs is more visible. As a result, more context-specific Concluding Observations can be addressed to the States, which may impact the implementation of the recommendations.

In this exercise, it was also clear that in order to ensure an effective dialogue between the States and the UNTBs, **the focused reviews must be an official, public and transparent activity of the UNTBs and receive the adequate allocation of resources.** To this end, the OHCHR has offered to prepare a costing exercise to show the UNTBs the required resources for implementation of this proposal. In this regard, we would like to **collaborate with the OHCHR to ensure civil society participation in all the relevant discussions regarding the implementation of the focused reviews.**

5. Intersectionality and cross-referencing

It is fundamental to apply an intersectional approach to human rights work and therefore we welcome all efforts to mainstream it in all UNTBs work. However, UNTBs are not always working through this lens and are thereby diminishing the multidimensional nature of human rights violations in their analyses. For example, the notion remains that violations involving women should only be dealt with by the CEDAW Committee, and a violation of children's rights only by the CRC Committee.

In this context, we welcome the [OHCHR Background Paper in coordination of thematic issues in the reporting procedure](#), as it provides concrete findings on the current level of cross-referencing among the UNTBs. It also proposes crucial elements to initiate the debates on a consistent usage of this tool in order to ensure that the UNTBs' recommendations complement each other in a comprehensive manner and coordination of thematic issues in TB reviews is enhanced.

While this may result in some repetition, **consistent usage of cross-referencing of the UNTBs recommendations should be encouraged for positive reinforcement and to put more pressure on States for important issues.** We encourage the UNTBs to continue to integrate their distinct perspectives and expertise on situations that affect different groups of rights-holders in different ways. We also encourage UNTBs to urgently discuss the contradictory recommendations identified by OHCHR, as diverging positions undermine the credibility of the whole system.