**Estonia’s reply to the Questionnaire in relation to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/268**

Estonia highly values the continued work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on strengthening and enhancing the work of the treaty bodies and thanks the OHCHR for the questionnaire giving States another opportunity to share their views in relation to the implementation of resolution 68/268.

A strong and effective human rights treaty body system remains fundamental for protection and promotion of human rights and in ensuring and monitoring the implementation of States’ human rights obligations. Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system is our common responsibility. Estonia, in our national capacity and in cooperation with the EU and its Member States and other States, has been committed to preserving the integrity and independence of the treaty body system and supporting all efforts to strengthen it and increase its efficiency.

The work done by the co-facilitators and the treaty body Chairpersons, together with their recommendations, remain valid also today and efforts to implement their recommendations should continue.

Estonia highly values the coordinated efforts of the treaty bodies Chairpersons in aligning and strengthening working methods of the treaty bodies and in enhancing the capacity of the treaty bodies.

Estonia would like to elaborate on some aspects of the work of treaty bodies that deserve particular interest taking into account *inter alia* COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the work of the treaty bodies and added to the already existing backlog of the review of the State reports.

Although each human rights treaty body has its own rules of procedure and specificities how dialogues with the Member States are carried out, we welcome all efforts of the human rights treaty bodies to align procedures and working methods and stress the importance to implement recommendations of the treaty bodies Chairpersons. Coordinated approach on reporting of different treaty bodies help to avoid overlapping and possible discrepancies in their respective concluding observations.

**Unified implementation of the simplified reporting procedure and mutual coordination by all treaty bodies should be further encouraged.** **Estonia has accepted the simplified reporting procedure as offered by some treaty bodies and we are ready to continue this kind of practice** when offered by other treaty bodies, which have so far not used this practice. Estonia has positive experience in replying to the lists of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR), which has helped to focus on issues that are more specific and of interest to the treaty body avoiding overburdening reports with unnecessary information.

**Use of modern technologies**

Estonia is keen to harness the potential and benefits of new technologies and a firm believer in the advantages that a wider use of digital means can bring, including in protection and promotion of human rights. Broader use of modern technologies has already had positive impact on accessibility and awareness raising of the treaty bodies monitoring system. We would like to encourage the treaty bodies to continue to widen the usage of ICTs within their activities, including online consideration of reports via videoconferences and offering the officials of the Member States to participate in the meetings from their capitals.

Estonia introduced the idea of hybrid meetings via videoconferences of Treaty Monitoring Bodies in 2019 and we are glad to see some progress made in this respect, although further and more focused efforts could be taken. At the same time, we regret that in 2020-2021 this potential was not fully used.

We are glad that the UPR continued efficiently also at the time of the pandemic. We have had a positive experience from the UPR proceedings in May 2021 when review of Estonia’s third UPR was carried out in a hybrid form due to COVID-19 pandemic where the Government’s delegation participated remotely. We highly value the effective conduct of the meeting in VTC format that enabled us to ensure good representation of all relevant authorities in the delegation and enabled efficient use of financial resources in avoiding travel costs. We would like to stress that VTC meeting did not have an effect on the quality of the UPR of our report.

In March 2021 the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities considered in an online dialogue Estonia’s first report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Estonia is grateful to the Committee for organizing the VTC form of the meeting and we again highly value the effective conduct of the meeting and high quality of the constructive dialogue with the Committee.

While being aware of the advantages of direct contact with the members of treaty bodies in Geneva or New York with State Parties’ delegations, we would like to encourage treaty bodies to exchange best practices and consider further possibilities to carry out VTC meetings with State Parties in reviewing their periodic reports. Possible introduction of this option into the rules of procedure of different treaty monitoring bodies can also be discussed. Meanwhile, States could express their readiness to participate in online dialogues with a treaty body and VTC form could be an option for States being ready for online dialogue. **Estonia is ready and willing to continue with online dialogues when offered by the Treaty Bodies.**

**Treaty bodies and individual complaints**

What concerns the competence of treaty bodies to receive and review individual complaints, we would like to raise an issue of possible overlapping of jurisdictions and conflicting findings of different human rights monitoring bodies as this may present a threat to the coherence of human rights law and to the credibility of human rights institutions. Better cooperation and dialogue between various human rights treaty bodies and awareness and acknowledgment of each other’s practices enables the Member State to avoid potential uncertainty over how to best fulfil its human rights commitments.

In order to avoid possible contradictory interpretation of procedural rules and human rights standards and to limit the possibility of forum-shopping, the coherence of the findings should be strengthened by promoting dialogue between the various treaty bodies and with the regional systems for the protection of human rights, the European Court of Human Rights, in particular.

Estonia has above already referred to the importance of better use of ICT, which helps to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the treaty bodies. The same principle applies in handling individual complaint by treaty bodies. Introduction of a modern case-management system allowing speedy and efficient introduction and reviewing of the individual complaints would strengthen protection of victims of human rights violations. In addition, a comprehensive database providing easy access to the case law of the treaty bodies would also be useful to raise awareness of the potential authors of the complaints and public at large. This kind of enhancement of the use of ICT could require allocation of necessary financial resources in the beginning, but better protection of victims, effective case-management of individual communications and well-functioning independent and impartial treaty monitoring bodies deserve our support.