**Virtual technical briefing on the review**

**of the United Nations human rights treaty body system**

**Thursday 4 June 2020, 10 am to 1 pm, New York**

***Presentation by***

***Ms. Hilary Gbedemah***

***Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women***

***and currently serving as the Chair of the meeting of Chairs***

***and***

***Mr. Jens Modvig, Chair of the Committee against Torture***

**Ms. Hilary Gbedemah**

I would like to start my presentation by acknowledging the presence of the other Chairs or Vice-Chairs that are participating in this meeting.

I would like to share an overview of our recent work and make reference to the vision the Chairs agreed upon at our meeting last June, which represents an agreed position among the 10 treaty body Chairs.

This vision builds upon the achievements and the framework of General Assembly resolution 68/268, including its funding formula, in order to further strengthen the treaty body system.

The process leading up to this vision has been consultative with contribution by all treaty bodies on key elements of the system, and is the result of several rounds of exchanges, including with States parties and civil society over the last years. It also has many commonalities with the elements identified in the non-paper coordinated by Costa Rica which has received support by a number of States.

The guiding principle that has underpinned our work has been the increased protection of rights holders through strengthened implementation of the treaties.

What we outline in our vision is what we consider are the necessary adjustments in our working methods that could be implemented over a period of 1-2 years, provided that there is appropriate support, including adequate staffing support from OHCHR and other relevant departments of the UN Secretariat, to make these measures operational.

We have agreed that we need to further align our working methods in offering the simplified reporting procedure (SRP) to all States parties for periodic reports and are looking into ways of reducing unnecessary overlap by further coordinating our list of issues prior to reporting. This has already been formally initiated by the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in coordinating list of issues prior to reporting for Finland .and concluding observations for Senegal. My Committee, CEDAW, has coordinated list of issues prior to reporting for Panama with the Committee against Torture, and most Committees have in place a formal or informal coordination mechanism. We wish to further build on our methodology for coordination so as to make dialogues with States more comprehensive.

We have agreed to establish predictable calendars for reviews based on fixed predictable review cycles. The Covenant Committees (CESCR and CCPR) will review countries on an 8-year cycle and will synchronize the timing of their reviews whether a report has been submitted or not. The Human Rights Committee has already published its 8-year predictable schedule and will review States irrespective of whether a report has been received. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has recently agreed to introduce a predictable review cycle and offer the simplified reporting procedure to all States parties. The Committee will consider, at its next session, modalities of introducing both and hopes that this will facilitate regular engagement of States parties

The Convention Committees will review countries in accordance with predictable, fixed review cycles.

The aim is to facilitate regular engagement of States parties as provided for in the treaties, and schedule reviews to make it predictable for States and stakeholders and ensure that the relevant information is received in a timely manner. This will strengthen our working as a system and ensure that human rights are indeed universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated.

On working methods we have agreed to align our working methods on the format of dialogues for the consideration of reports, the format of concluding observations to ensure that they are short, focussed, concrete and prioritised balancing immediate with longer terms priorities and objectives, and of the follow-up procedures

To achieve these we need to increase the capacity of the treaty bodies to review State party reports and individual communications by working in chambers, working groups or country teams or extending the review cycle.

We also agree that there are considerable benefits in conducting dialogues with States parties concerning their reports at a regional level, and this has already been piloted with success by the Committee on the Rights of the Child which held its last session in Samoa to review States in the Pacific region.

If you allow me I would hand the floor to Mr. Jens Modvig, the Chair of the Committee against Torture who will continue the presentation.

**Mr. Jens Modvig**

Ms Gbedemah has outlined some of the features of our vision which aim to alleviate some of the challenges the system has been facing and is continuing to face, such as reporting fatigue, lack of coordination, and reaching out beyond headquarter locations to the regions by carrying our reviews in the regional UN offices.

To be able to establish predictable calendars of review, undertake further coordination, and reviews in the regions, and carry out our mandated activities we also need to be able count on the forward-looking element of the formula of resources contained in General Assembly resolution to assess future needs of treaty bodies in a sustainable way.

Account must also be taken of the fact that many of the procedures did not have the current number of ratifications, or have been used recently for the first time, for example, individual complaints, inter-State communications, urgent actions of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances at the time the General Assembly resolution was adopted.

The needs of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture which has a visiting mandate to places of detention are not included in the formula, which makes it challenging to establish a regular visiting schedule.

In matching resources to needs, there needs to be a more realistic and sustainable allocation of secretariat resources that matches the workload.

In the current difficult circumstances that we are all operating under, our prime concern is the protection of rights holders.

This is the subject of the informal meeting of Chairs which is taking place this week virtually. As we are striving to discharge our mandates in a remote manner, as efficiently as possible, to ensure that there is no protection gap, we also realise that we need to adapt to new technologies and methodologies in view of the changing global circumstances caused by the pandemic.

The digital environment in which we need to operate has brought to the fore the over-reliance of our processes and procedures on methodologies that were developed twenty or so years ago and are over-reliant on paper processing. A case in point is the individual communications procedures. Most of the correspondence received and exchanged between the parties is on paper which is not so efficient and lengthens the time a Committee can examine an individual complaint and provide redress to an individual. The backlog of petitions is growing significantly due to sheer volume of newly registered cases.

Our current efforts are to find creative ways to work on-line. Whilst on-line interaction can never be a complete replacement for in person meetings, we are also learning lessons about how a digital shift could also improve some elements of our work in the longer term. The digital shift gives us the opportunity to transform the way we are currently working provided that we have the necessary tools and means to fulfil our mandates.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities and the provision of reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities so that they are able to perform their work and participate in the work of treaty bodies on an equal footing with others are necessary to ensure that we are not leaving any one behind. Certain steps have been taken by the United Nations in the area of sign-language interpretation and captioning for example, but more needs to accomplished to ensure that meetings and documents are accessible to persons with disabilities in both the physical and digital worlds.

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