

Wednesday, June 2nd 2021

Dear Chairs,

Since 1988 several initiatives have been taken to enhance the effectiveness of the treaty body system and significant efforts have been made to maintain it as the cornerstone of the United Nations framework for human rights. Nevertheless, a number of concerns related to the functioning of the treaty body system persist, while new challenges have arisen or have become evident during the pandemic.

The current situation provides a unique opportunity for change in which the treaty body Chairs should play a leading role. In this regard, we thank the Chairs for their letter dated January 20, 2021 and we welcome the strategic directions outlined in this letter. We also take this opportunity to renew our full support to the work of the treaty bodies.

Therefore, based on the January 20 letter and in line with the recommendations made in the report of treaty body review Co-facilitators Morocco and Switzerland (A/75/601), the “Position paper of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies on the future of the treaty body system” (Annex III, A/74/256), the report of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies of last year (A/75/346) and General Assembly Resolutions 68/268 and 75/174, we encourage you to adopt the following forward-looking measures at your upcoming formal meeting from 7 to 11 June:

1. Introduce a predictable calendar of review cycles that is coherent, that maximizes synergies, ensures complementarity among treaty bodies and avoids unnecessary repetition. Such a calendar also needs to take into account, *inter alia*, the increasing reporting burdens and resource constraints of States parties, in particular Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, and factor in other reporting obligations such as the Universal Periodic Review. When producing this schedule, we strongly recommend the treaty body Chairs to replace every second review with a focused review so as to enhance reporting compliance.
2. Move to a model of rationalized, harmonized, streamlined and modern working methods and rules of procedure. Ensure a uniform simplified reporting procedure is the default procedure for all periodic reports and to limit the number of questions in the list of issues prior to the reporting on the basis of a standard methodology. Frequent meetings amongst Chairs and consultation with Member States to monitor implementation, as well as further initiatives to enhance coordination and planning and to share best practices across treaty bodies, would be desirable.
3. Keep pace with the new technological developments to increase the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the treaty body system. Online and hybrid work models are tools for

enhanced engagement with all actors involved and should form part of a balanced approach that encompasses both online working methods and traditional physical meetings.

From our own side we are cognizant of the difficult circumstances in which the treaty bodies have had to work during the COVID-19 pandemic, as highlighted in your letter. Therefore, we appreciate that seven treaty bodies have held -- or will hold -- State party dialogues during online sessions in 2021. In this new working environment in which we all find ourselves, we recognize that a discussion is required on how to appropriately support, including financially, the participation of experts in remote meetings for the good functioning of the treaty body system in the future and to continue to ensure highly qualified independent and impartial experts from diverse geographical backgrounds.

To conclude, we are convinced there is a growing momentum for measures that will enable the system to be more rational, coherent, coordinated and effective. We look forward to continuing to engage the Chairs, all treaty body members, civil society and the Office of the High Commissioner to maintain the status of the treaty bodies as a cornerstone of the United Nations framework for human rights.

Please accept, dear Chairs, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Signed by the following countries :

- Argentina
- Australia
- Austria
- Barbados
- Belgium
- Brazil
- Bulgaria
- Canada
- Chile
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Ecuador
- Estonia
- Iceland
- Israel
- Fiji
- Finland
- France
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Ireland
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Liechtenstein
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Panama
- Peru
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovenia
- Slovakia
- Switzerland
- The Netherlands
- United Kingdom of Great Britain
- United States of America
- Uruguay

Copy to:

- Ms Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Mr Mahamane Cissé-Gouro, Director of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights