

# Women's Major Group

## WMG input submitted to the call for inputs in relation to the implementation of the UN General Assembly resolution 68/268

The Women's Major Group (WMG) would like to extend its appreciation of this opportunity to provide its views on the call for inputs in relation to the implementation of the UN General Assembly resolution 68/268. We join the voices of many civil society organizations, including members of WMG, that brought together the [joint CSO proposal on Treaty Body Strengthening](#).

In this light, we would like to reiterate the *5 principles for treaty body strengthening* mentioned in the joint statement. We will further highlight some of the current issues and challenges facing the treaty body system and propose some recommendations to address them.

**1. Human rights protection.** The ultimate aim of the reform must be to improve the realization of human rights at all levels. The promotion and protection of human rights, particularly those pertaining to women, girls, youth, in all their diversity, and other groups in vulnerable situations, must be at the center of all approaches to treaty body strengthening.

**2. Specificity within one System.** The UN treaty body system should be seen as one system, in which the specificity of each Treaty and Committee is retained. It must foster strong links to other UN agendas, including the SDGs, human rights, equality and environmental protection commitments, while promoting global coherence and balance.

**3. Adequate Funding.** It is essential for the system's effective functioning that it receives multi-annual, flexible and sufficient funding to be able to carry out its mandate. The UNGA Resolution 68/268 continues to provide an appropriate framework concerning funding and States must respect the formula it established. States must also ensure adequate funding for the work of the UN treaty bodies under the individual communications and inquiries procedures, which are currently insufficiently supported. It is only possible to implement the recommendations highlighted in this input through the allocation of sufficient resources formulated in the UNGA Resolution.

**4. Civil society participation.** A vital part of the UN treaty body system is the contribution and sustained meaningful, effective, inclusive and resourced engagement of civil society. This should be reflected in the reform of the UN treaty body system, including strengthening civil society's accessibility to UN mechanisms. An institutionalized participation process, that can ensure to have an impact in the outcomes, through meaningful, effective, and inclusive participation through an

# Women's Major Group

institutionalized process, such as the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders in UN sustainable development processes or the The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) for relations with the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

**5. Independence.** Any reforms should preserve the independence of the UN treaty bodies and of committee experts, since independence is key to the credibility, proper functioning and effectiveness of the system. At the same time it is essential to keep transparency, while incorporating the interests, concerns and needs of all interested parties.

## *Current issues faced within the UN Treaty Body system, and recommendations towards their resolution, especially in relation to gender equality and women's human rights*

### **1. Backlog of reporting by states and backlog within UN treaty body system**

It has been documented by UN information from the [Status of the human rights system report](#) (A/73/309) of 2018 that more than 83% of states are late in reporting to treaty bodies. The reasons are multiple and intersecting - resources and mandate of the country level machinery in monitoring and developing the state report, the political will of state executive and legislature in popularizing its obligations under the treaty body system, and material resources of OHCHR and the UN in supporting states in reporting compliance, including within the CEDAW process. In addition to these, there are also more specific problems such as the state gender machineries being increasingly subsumed in institutions with multiple mandates, thus reducing the capacity and political mandate to deliver on gender equality.

### **2. Visits under the CEDAW inquiry procedure and [technical assistance](#) to states**

Resources for visits under the CEDAW inquiry procedures and technical assistance to states are extremely limited. For example, in the last 10 years CEDAW has only been able to initiate the inquiry procedure under its Optional Protocol (which requires country visits) in relation to only six (6) states parties to CEDAW. Without resources for country visits, the CEDAW's inquiry mechanism's ability to perform its mandate to support states in its compliance with CEDAW obligations is curtailed.

### **3. The legitimate role of civil society and protection of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in the UN treaty body system**

# Women's Major Group

The participation of CSOs is a cornerstone of the UN treaty body system and their contribution into the review process has been affirmed by states and [the treaty bodies](#). All UN treaty bodies should preserve and ideally strengthen the key elements of meaningful, formal, inclusive and effective civil society mechanisms for engagement, including the bilateral CSOs briefings (closed to member state representatives, between the Committees and CSOs, whether formal and informal), regularized/annual CSO meetings to allow for direct feedback of procedural as well as substantive feedback to treaty bodies. These briefings allow civil society to share first-hand information, concrete recommendations and their priority concerns, with the UN treaty bodies, and to ensure accessibility, including through video conferencing services.

The procedure for the engagement of CSOs should be further aligned and harmonized, including regarding the organization of the CSOs briefings and based on good practices. Written and oral inputs by civil society must be treated as confidential, unless they authorize otherwise, in order to ensure safe participation and prevent reprisals. As women's rights organizations face greater challenges in their public and social role as human rights defenders, treaty bodies should strengthen their processes for identifying such cases and ensuring greater protection for WHRDs who submit information to them prior to and post the treaty body review engagement. Engagement processes should also recognise language and accessibility needs for specific constituencies (interpretation/braille/sign language, video conferencing, etc). Many WHRDs have been facing logistical challenges to participation in UN treaty body processes, including heightened travel costs, but also [visa regimes](#), that disproportionately and negatively impact the participation of WHRDs from the Global South to the treaty body processes in Geneva.

Processes for NGO inputs/engagement into the discussions on treaty body strengthening should also be regularized through the treaty body Chair persons meetings.

#### **4. Constructive dialogue and meeting time**

Currently CEDAW amendment Art 20 (1) which seeks to increase the number of sessions to more than two annual sessions, has not yet achieved its required number to come into force which limits the budgeting for the sessions, times per country review and number of countries per session. The total amount of time for the country specific constructive dialogues between CEDAW and states could also benefit from additional time, currently it is between four to five hours, depending on interpretation availability as well as other factors in procedural and logistical arrangement between TB/OHCHR and member states.