



**Inter-governmental treaty body strengthening process  
Monday, 16 July, 10 to 11 am  
UN Headquarters New York**

**Opening Statement by  
ICC Chair Dr Mousa Burayzat**

Mister President,  
Madam High Commissioner,  
Excellencies, distinguished experts,  
Colleagues from civil society,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Chairperson of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, it is a great honour for me to address the opening of this week's long deliberations on the treaty body strengthening process.

The important role of the United Nations treaty bodies in protecting and promoting human rights on the ground is unanimously acknowledged. H.E. The Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has eloquently put it his foreword to the High Commissioner's report on the treaty body strengthening process, *“the treaty bodies are at the heart of the international human rights protection system as engines translating universal norms into social justice and individual well being.”*

*(Madam High Commissioner – I would like to warmly thank you for your very important report, which signifies your leadership in this process all along).*

On its part, the ICC recognises the treaty bodies' invaluable contributions to the effective implementation of universal human rights standards at national level.

In as much as treaty bodies are indispensable for the national human rights protection system, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), in turn, can be, and indeed are, key partners to the treaty body system. As independent institutions with a clear constitutional mandate to protect and promote human rights in their respective states, NHRIs work to bridge the gap between international and national human rights systems, with a view to enhancing the well fare of the individual by ensuring respect for his or her human rights on the ground, particularly in dire situations.

NHRIs are a trusted source for treaty bodies of independent and authoritative information on national situations. In their respective national scenes, they can and they are following up on treaty bodies' recommendations, including by: disseminating such recommendations largely within all sectors of society, advising the state on implementation, and monitoring and reporting on progress therein.

Because of their unique mandates, NHRIs have a distinct role from – though complementary – to the ones performed by states and civil society in the treaty body monitoring process.

As nationally established but operating on the basis of international guidelines, the Paris Principles, NHRIs are most qualified to observe how international standards and norms

are implemented at the national level without the complications that would usually be associated with other inter-state mechanisms.

In fact, evidence is increasingly showing that where there exists an independent and effective Paris Principles compliant NHRI, a state is more likely to ratify international human rights treaties and meet its reporting obligations.

Mr President,

Therefore, it is only logical that this treaty body strengthening process provides a unique opportunity for stakeholders to discuss how to deepen the role of NHRIs in the work of the treaty bodies.

And it is useful to mention here that NHRIs have already been engaged in this process earlier on. In the *Marrakech Declaration* - adopted in June 2010 at the Marrakech Consultation Forum with NHRIs, and subsequently endorsed by the ICC at large – NHRIs offer practical suggestions on how the treaty body system could be further strengthened.

Acknowledging this early engagement in this matter, the Human Rights Council, in its resolution on NHRIs of 5 July 2012, unanimously welcomed NHRIs' contributions to the process and encouraged their continued participation therein.

The ICC and its members are therefore most grateful for the invitation to contribute to this week's deliberations.

As the High Commissioner puts it in her *Report On Strengthening The Treaty Body Process*, we stand at a “critical juncture”. So deriving from contributions by all stakeholders, it is now left to our collective responsibility to identify

concrete and sustainable suggestions to enhance the system's effectiveness while preserving the integrity and strength of the system, but, at the same time, improving the system's effect on human rights on the ground. This could be achieved, first, by: increasing states' ability to meet their treaty obligations; second, improving the system's accessibility to rights-holders and those defending them, including national human rights institutions.

The High Commissioner's report provides a good basis for discussions and collective thinking at this stage.

From your report, *Madam High Commissioner*, and as shared priorities for national human rights institutions, I would like to highlight the following.

### **Proposals related to the reporting system**

First, organizing the current reporting deadlines into a single Comprehensive Reporting Calendar, is a very pertinent suggestion. It would alleviate to some extent the heavy workload demanded by many states because of the current reporting requirements. Moreover, the fixed-nature of the Calendar will provide for predictability and stability in reporting and the optimal use of resources by states, the treaty bodies, and other stakeholders, including national human rights institutions and civil society. Most importantly, the adoption of the Calendar would further allow for greater national strategic planning and mutual synergies with other UN human rights mechanisms such as the UPR process.

We do recognize however that the idea of the Master Calendar requires further discussions on questions on funding as well as regarding the capacity of all actors to implement it.

Further, simplifying the reporting procedure, with the overall objective of making the process more focused and effective, will be an additional improvement to the system. We support the High Commissioner's practical recommendation that they could be effectively achieved by having treaty bodies put in place specific requests for information addressed to states, as well as to other stakeholders including NHRIs and civil society. By setting strict page limits to states reports; as well as by the identification of priority issues for consideration in light of the specificities of each state party.

### **Proposals related to the system's visibility and accessibility**

My second point relates to the system's visibility and accessibility. The ICC supports the High Commissioner's proposals aimed at making the treaty body system more visible and accessible to rights-holders and those defending them, including national human rights institutions.

As outlined in the *Marrakech Declaration*, the ICC supports the development of harmonized working methods of treaty body engagement with national human rights institutions. The current multiplicity of treaty bodies' models of engagement with NHRIs has resulted in NHRIs having to seek out the requirements of each individual treaty body making them hardly able to adapt to such multiplicity of differences.

The harmonization of existing working methods should take into due account the unique status of NHRIs within both the treaty body system and the domestic human rights infrastructure and should ensure NHRIs' most effective participation at all stages of the treaty body process, including reporting, review and follow up. Best practices of cooperation with NHRIs such as those already established by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism and

Racial Discrimination and by the Committee Against Torture may inform the harmonization process of working methods for all treaty bodies.

Further, the ICC supports the High Commissioner's proposals aimed at increasing information-sharing and training for stakeholders on the treaty body system and opportunities to engage, as well as facilitate access for national actors, including by the use of new technologies such as videoconferencing.

Mr President,

As stated in the *Marrakech Declaration*, ICC sees the merit of Treaty Bodies meeting from time to time outside of Geneva and New York, in UN regional hubs such as Bangkok and Nairobi, and others. This would immensely increase visibility and participation in ways that no other means could do. While there would be some administrative challenges initially, yet such challenges are not insurmountable; and their implementation would be cost effective for states, other participants.

### **Communications procedures**

Thirdly, the ICC welcomes the references in the High Commissioner's report to the individual communication procedures of the treaty bodies. We look forward to further consideration of concrete steps in this connection.

### **National-level implementation and UN system-wide coordination**

My fourth and final point relates to the importance of strengthening national-level implementation and encouraging

broader UN-system wide coordination with treaty bodies to this end.

The objective is to provide for the most effective support for all stakeholders in the preparation, review and follow-up to a state party examination. This includes support coming from UN Country Teams to NHRIs and others stakeholders at the national level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by reiterating the ICC's and its membership's' full commitment to continuing to contribute to the discussions on the effective functioning of the treaty body system. I will us all fruitful discussion over the next days ahead.