

[Treaty Bodies | Following up: The key to seeing States act on treaty body recommendations](#)

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UN treaty bodies need to monitor and follow-up on the recommendations they make to States. Some have begun doing so in innovative ways, and more could be done.

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Implementation of the human rights obligations that States have agreed to under UN treaties is critical in order to ensure the fulfillment of human rights in people's lives. There is growing recognition that [better ways are needed to measure and evaluate human rights implementation](#). The [UN Human Rights Committee](#) (HRC) which oversees country compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Covenant), established unique follow-up procedures in order to encourage and monitor selected areas of implementation. These include a grading system for rating a State's progress in implementation, and undertaking follow-up visits to countries. These are proving effective, but a number of other steps could also be taken.

The HRC's new [follow-up procedure](#) was adopted in 2013. When the Committee reviews compliance with the Covenant by State parties, it generally selects two to four recommendations from the full set for follow-up, based on two criteria: (1) whether the recommendations can be implemented within one or two years and (2) whether they require immediate attention because of their gravity or an emergency. States have one year to reply to these specific concerns. National human rights institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other organisations can submit reports in reply as well. The Committee then considers the responses and adopts a grade for the State's action to implement the recommendations selected as follows:

- "A" (largely satisfactory)
- "B" (partially satisfactory)
- "C" (not satisfactory)
- "D" (no cooperation with the Committee)
- "E" (contrary to or reflects rejection of the Committee recommendation)

The Committee releases an official report with summaries of the information it receives. At the end of this procedure, further information may be requested from the State, or the follow-up procedure may be suspended, with any further information requested to be addressed during subsequent periodic reviews. Since 2016, the follow-up sessions have been made public and are webcast live on UN TV, accessible for viewing worldwide and [archived online](#). From 2011 to 2019, the Committee reviewed 158 States under its follow-up procedure.

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Committee members also conduct missions to some countries to follow up on national progress in implementing recommendations, although not official UN missions. The [Centre for Civil and Political Rights](#), a Geneva-based NGO set up in 2008, organises these country visits with current and former Committee members. Since 2013, there have been 31 such visits, 18 of these in the past two years. These visits include meetings with high-level national authorities, national human rights institutions, civil society, in-country

development partners, and journalists to discuss follow-up. The annual number of the visits is increasing and this trend appears likely to continue.

There are additional ways missions can be organised to effectively encourage follow up. As a promising example, I recently carried out a mission which may suggest ideas for the future. On the occasion of Human Rights Day on 10 December 2018, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in the Lao People's Democratic Republic invited me, as a sitting member of the Committee, to Vientiane to discuss with the government their plans to implement UN human rights recommendations and how the UN might support these efforts. Laos' constructive dialogue with the Committee had been held a short time before, in July 2018.

I met with government officials from various ministries, development partners such as the UN Country Team and the European Union, and other stakeholders on feasible ways for the government to implement recent human rights recommendations through cooperation with the UN and donors. The recommendations comprised those drawn from the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council, multiple treaty bodies, and a thematic Special Rapporteur on human rights. With the full support of the UN Country Team, I proposed how ongoing and planned development programming in the country, which was based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), could directly support the implementation of the human rights recommendations.

National development plans could combine human rights and the SDGs to advance and monitor the results of reforms in these areas together.

Next year, Member States of the UN General Assembly will [review the effectiveness of treaty bodies](#). In discussion leading to the review, one idea put on the table by a network of knowledgeable NGOs is precisely to formalise follow-up missions by treaty bodies as part of their normal functioning.

There are a number of other ideas to strengthen the follow-up to treaty body recommendations.

Human rights principles underpin the Sustainable Development Goals. Where there is momentum to achieve the SDGs, government follow-up of human rights recommendations could be enhanced by linking human rights and the SDGs. National development plans could combine human rights and the SDGs to advance and monitor the results of reforms in these areas together, given that they are [interrelated and mutually reinforcing](#). The connection between human rights and the SDGs should be strengthened. Even though the SDG agenda is not fully inclusive of the guarantees in UN human rights treaties, State commitment to the SDGs can be a supporting argument for working to attain certain human rights goals. Treaty bodies are mandated to review national progress on human rights and this can be done in the context of State parties' efforts to achieve the SDGs. In fact, treaty bodies have recently been recognised as [leaders in SDG monitoring](#). More broadly, it is important that the current emphasis on human rights in the SDGs is sustained at the UN.

UN Resident Coordinators lead UN Country Teams in [131 countries](#). Their terms of reference include human rights as one of the pillars of the UN. As development partners on the ground, Country Teams have the potential to play a critically important role in follow-up by supporting UN programme countries in this regard. Country Teams should consistently work across the peace, development and human rights pillars of the UN. Committee recommendations should be used as a basis for development programming. Results should be defined to include improvements in the human rights situation. Governments in UN programme countries would then be better supported to implement human rights recommendations at the domestic level.

Finally, quality data collection by States and other stakeholders is needed to gauge progress on follow-up or implementation of UN human rights recommendations. One promising system to transparently coordinate and prepare reports and track follow-up and implementation is [SIMORE Plus](#). The latest generation of this tool links progress on human rights to the SDGs. These systems [exist in a growing number of countries](#) to plan, track, and systematise implementation and reporting. That number should continue to grow.

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