

## **UN must act to strengthen human rights treaty body system**

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The UN treaty bodies - such as the Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture - are made up of leading independent human rights experts from around the world. Their mandate is to hold governments to account for their international human rights obligations. They do this by periodically conducting expert reviews of states' human rights records and also by hearing complaints from individuals who have been subject to human rights violations.

Several issues are on the agenda for discussion - including the accessibility and visibility of the treaty bodies to all stakeholders, the nomination and election of treaty body experts, and measures to increase the effectiveness of the reporting processes.

Regrettably, some States have sought to shut out crucial stakeholders from the process - including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). "As rights holders and representatives of rights holders, NGOs are key stakeholders in the treaty bodies' work and must therefore remain part of the discussions on treaty body strengthening", said Madeleine Sinclair of the International Service for Human Rights. The treaty body experts are another group of key stakeholders who have been marginalized in the process. "This is highly problematic as treaty bodies are actually self-governed institutions with the sole competence to deal with issues relating to their working methods", said Ms. Sinclair.

At a hearing on February 26, NGOs, including ISHR will make a series of joint statements calling for reforms that would help develop the treaty body system into one capable of enabling individuals to better enjoy their rights under the international human rights treaties.

These calls for reform include asking States to make modest, yet significant, changes to encourage the selection of treaty body members who are truly independent and expert. "The need to improve the membership of the treaty bodies has been a recurring theme of past reform discussions and must remain central, given how integral the quality of the membership is to the credibility of the system," said Ms. Sinclair.

NGOs are also calling for increased accessibility and visibility of the treaty bodies, including through the use of modern technology such as webcasting and videoconferencing. "Proper communication with, and visibility of, the treaty bodies is crucial to ensuring that their work goes beyond a technical discussion in Geneva and has real impact in the countries under review", said Ms. Sinclair.

NGOs also note the need to address reprisals against human rights defenders who engage with the treaty bodies, stating that "[f]ear of reprisal can hinder participation, effectively rendering the treaty bodies inaccessible, and depriving treaty body experts of the knowledge and experience they depend on to carry out their mandates effectively".

The joint NGO Statements are available here:

- [Joint Statement - Accessibility and Visibility](#)
- [Joint Statement - Effective Reporting](#)
- [Joint Statement - Membership](#)

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