



Submission to the Inter-Committee Meeting of treaty bodies, 1 December 2008

Madam Chair,

We would like to take this opportunity to raise a number of issues related to the harmonisation of working methods of treaty bodies and the work of the Inter-Committee Meeting (ICM) in this regard.

The NGO Group that submitted a joint paper to the ICM at its June 2008 meeting appreciated the consideration that was given to its recommendations and was encouraged to see action on a number of these recommendations, including a reaffirmation of the Meeting of Chairpersons' 1997 statement on independence of experts and the consideration of a meeting to share best practice on methods of follow-up. The NGO Group would further wish that other recommendations contained in its submission be revisited at the current and future sessions of the ICM as these continue to be relevant. In particular, we would like to propose that the ICM address the issue of developing a **common and more transparent procedure on the drafting of general comments**. This would include a more visible process of soliciting comments from NGOs, NHRIs, academics, other experts and UN and regional bodies. For example, recent drafting meetings of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have demonstrated that they have benefited from the input of NGOs, although it was also clear that a much greater opportunity for engagement could be utilized.

The ICM could consider recommending to treaty bodies to adopt a common transparent procedure for consulting on and drafting general comments. This should include soliciting and considering contributions from NGOs, academics, other experts and UN and regional bodies; posting submissions on the relevant treaty body's website; and holding public discussions on draft general comments during sessions, with the opportunity for NGO and other experts to intervene.

ISHR is encouraged by a number of committees' consideration of the possibility of **webcasting** the examinations of States parties. Webcasting would substantially increase the accessibility and visibility of the public work of the treaty bodies and would also serve as an historical archive of the examination for all relevant stakeholders. Conscious of budgetary and other administrative difficulties involved, ISHR would consider that the Inter Committee Meeting is the appropriate forum to reach **collective agreement on the need to establish webcasting across the treaty bodies**. We would recommend that a request for webcasting to the UN Department of Public Information could be presented by the ICM as a whole, as this is likely to have a better chance of success than individual requests from different treaty bodies.

In order for the ICM to contribute towards the harmonization of working methods of treaty bodies, consideration may be given to the **improvement of the current organization of ICM meetings**. In preparing the draft agenda for each meeting, it may be useful for treaty bodies to highlight priority issues during their working methods meetings for possible discussion at the ICM. This could be transmitted to the Secretariat, which could draft the agenda on a basis of collective priorities identified. The nominating treaty body may then take the lead in the discussion and outline possible outcomes at the ICM meeting.

Finally, under the present arrangement it is unclear whether ICM members are in a position to adopt substantive recommendations on harmonisation of working methods without first seeking prior approval from their respective committees. ISHR would strongly urge that the ICM recommend to all treaty bodies that they **invest the authority in their ICM representatives** to make decisions on their behalf. Only on this basis could more concrete outcomes be expected from each ICM session and an acceleration of the harmonization process.

Thank you Madam Chair