

[NGOs welcome UN resolution to strengthen treaty body system](#)

20.02.2014

A coalition of 23 human rights NGOs welcomed a resolution by the UN General Assembly to strengthen the treaty body system.



(New York) - [A coalition of 23 human rights NGOs welcomed a resolution by the UN General Assembly to strengthen the treaty body system](#). Since April 2012, States in New York have been participating in an intergovernmental process established under the guise of strengthening the UN's human rights treaty bodies. The UN treaty bodies are independent, expert committees mandated to review and promote States' compliance with international human rights treaties. The discussions have culminated in a draft resolution ([A/68/L.37](#)), to be submitted to the budgetary committee of the General Assembly for approval in March.

'Given that at points the process seemed far from achieving its stated goal, we are pleased to see some modest gains that will provide a useful platform for further improvements to the treaty body system', said Madeleine Sinclair, Legal Counsel with the International Service for Human Rights.

'Despite the fact that the treaty body system was facing very real and grave challenges, the process was marked at times by the efforts of some States to attack and weaken these bodies', Ms Sinclair said. In that regard, NGOs are pleased that the final text avoided attempts by those States to infringe on the independence of the treaty bodies by imposing a code of conduct and so-called accountability mechanism.

'Throughout the process, NGOs urged States to focus on the key goals of the process', said Ms Sinclair, 'that is, how to improve the protection and promotion of human rights on the ground.'

Some of the most significant gains include additional meeting time for the treaty bodies that will allow them to review reports more efficiently and clear backlogs, as well as additional resources for capacity building to enable States to comply with their treaty obligations to submit reports. 'Resources for capacity building will be particularly important for those States that have never come under review by the treaty bodies, despite having ratified the relevant treaties several years ago' said Ms Sinclair.

On some issues States missed an opportunity to make key improvements. Ms Sinclair noted 'it is disappointing that States could not agree to immediately fund webcasting of public sessions - a move that would have significantly increased the visibility and accessibility of the treaty body system'. 'States also did not address the need for renewed efforts toward universal ratification of the core international human rights treaties,' said Ms Sinclair. 'More than 10% of States have yet to ratify either of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights or Economic, Social and Cultural Rights', she noted, adding that 'it has not gone unnoticed that

some of these States were very vocal in the intergovernmental negotiations’.

NGOs also expressed disappointment with the lack of effective action on the issue of reprisals and intimidation against those engaging with the treaty bodies. ‘It is very disappointing that States took a step backward on the issue of reprisals and intimidation against those cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the treaty bodies, watering down previously agreed language and reducing the scope of calls for preventing and eliminating such acts’, said Ms Sinclair.

The impact of the resolution will be reviewed in six years time.

Click here for the [Joint NGO statement on the outcome of the treaty body strengthening process](#)

Background

Nearly four years have passed since a group of current and former Treaty Body experts adopted the ‘Dublin Statement’, catalysing the most recent attempt to strengthen the UN human rights treaty body system that would eventually become known as the [Dublin Process](#). But before that process—which involved some 20 consultations with different stakeholders—could run its course, a group of States led by Russia decided 18 months ago that the issues were properly left to States to address and initiated the ‘[Intergovernmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system](#)’ (the Intergovernmental process).

Armed with the wealth of ideas, views, suggestions and emerging consensus of the Dublin Process, a divided General Assembly initially spent much time debating its role in treaty body strengthening, given its lack of legal competence to decide matters properly left to States parties to the treaties and the treaty bodies themselves. The result was an agreement by States, implicit in some cases, that while the GA may not be able to *decide* certain matters, it could *recommend* that certain actions beyond its competence be taken by relevant stakeholders.

Contact:

International Service for Human Rights: Madeleine Sinclair, Program Manager and Legal Counsel,
m.sinclair@ishr.ch, [+1-917-544-6148](tel:+19175446148)

Photo: UN Photo/John Isaac