

ISHR Statement on the occasion of the Twenty-ninth meeting of UN treaty body chairs

27-30 June 2017, New York

Thank you. As we did in recent years, ISHR coordinated a joint submission to this meeting signed on by 21 organisations that engage with treaty bodies on a regular basis.

ISHR welcomes the opportunity to address treaty body chairs. Our ultimate objective is to foster a more accessible, transparent and user friendly system which enables and maximizes engagement by all rights holders, especially human rights defenders.

The present statement focuses on 3 important issues:

- Treaty body strengthening
- Treaty body outreach
- Reprisals

1. On treaty body strengthening

As mentioned in the consolidated NGO joint submission, we understand that the annual meeting of treaty body chairs is a mostly consultative process, rather than decision-making. Clarification on the scope, limits and mandate of the annual meetings of chairs would be welcome. We consider that treaty body chairs could be more proactive in encouraging the adoption of measures readily implementable to all treaty bodies. This is particularly important as part of the ongoing process of treaty body strengthening, and in preparation for the 2020 review. A number of proposals have been made as part of the academic platform on treaty body strengthening, we understand a summary of which has been submitted to this meeting. We urge the Chairs to discuss these proposals, as well as the proposals for reforms made by civil society, and make sufficient time available during each individual treaty body meeting time to discuss the substantial proposals made by the platform.

Treaty body chairs can and should play a strong and visible role in facilitating the replication of good practices throughout all treaty bodies. NGOs have identified several such practices in submissions made in recent years. We welcome consultations involving treaty body members and other actors to work towards harmonised treaty body procedures, such as on follow up, an area where current treaty body procedures widely diverge, making engagement from civil society difficult. Finally, we urge treaty body chairs to consider the political risks associated with the current General Assembly political process which is likely to open the door to a new round of hostile proposals, such as codes of conduct or other measures which could negatively impact on treaty body independence, independence which we see as critical.

2. On treaty body outreach

We believe that the perspective of rights holder is absolutely crucial to maintain and enhance the relevance of treaty bodies. As an organisation that trains hundreds of human rights activists every year on UN human rights mechanisms, we hear demands for a more accessible, transparent and user friendly UN system. The complexities and unpredictability of the current set up for State reviews makes it particularly difficult for those who are not insiders of or familiar with the system to understand how to best engage. The limited proactive outreach of treaty bodies towards civil society makes it even more difficult for them to engage. Joint NGO submissions made in recent years contained a range of recommendations as to what treaty bodies could do to enhance their outreach, starting with having an established and strong presence on social media. We welcome a discussion on that subject in the current meeting and look forward to seeing some immediate and substantial measures implemented in that regard.

3. Reprisals

We were delighted that suggestions for a coordinated treaty body response to the common challenge of reprisals led to the adoption of the San José Guidelines in 2015. Despite this significant advancement, it is problematic that two years down the line, two treaty bodies have yet to endorse the Guidelines. We call on these treaty bodies to endorse the guidelines, we further urge all treaty bodies to ensure that the guidelines are fully implemented. Finally, as set out in a joint open letter to treaty body chairs and the OHCHR petition unit, we urge treaty bodies to proactively request protective measures in cases of reprisals, threats and assaults on treaty body petitioners.