

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Thirty-fifth session
15 May-2 June 2006**

Towards a harmonized and integrated human rights treaty bodies system

Statement by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

1. The present statement is the contribution of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to the ongoing reform debate concerning the human rights treaty bodies.
2. The Committee recalls the Plan of Action of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/59/2005/Add.3) and the proposals contained therein for the reform of the human rights treaty bodies. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the concept paper by the High Commissioner for Human Rights concerning her proposal for a unified standing treaty body (HRI/MC/2006/CRP.1).
3. The Committee notes that the principal objective of the human rights treaty bodies is to contribute to the strengthening of the protection and promotion of human rights at the national level through a constructive dialogue with States parties on their effective implementation of obligations contained in human rights treaties. In this regard, the Committee stresses that, over the years, the treaty bodies have achieved an increasing impact on ensuring the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by all rights holders at the national level. The work of the treaty bodies has also contributed to strengthening the international commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights.
4. The Committee acknowledges that the existing treaty bodies are facing serious challenges, which have been described in the concept paper of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, the Committee is of the view that her proposal to create a unified standing treaty body does not respond to those challenges and implies a serious risk to undermine the differentiation and specificity of human rights as enshrined in the seven major international human rights treaties.
5. The Committee believes that it is imperative for the existing treaty bodies to work as much as possible as a harmonized and integrated treaty bodies system so as to enhance the visibility, accessibility and effectiveness of the treaty bodies. The Committee also believes that such efforts should build on the progressive interpretation of the different treaties by the treaty bodies, as relevant.

6. The Committee furthermore emphasizes the importance of the newly established Human Rights Council and the need for developing effective cooperation between the Human Rights Council and the treaty bodies.

7. The Committee therefore proposes that the treaty bodies intensify their efforts to enhance the long-term efficiency of the treaty bodies system in the coming years, and increase their efforts to further harmonize, coordinate and integrate the various aspects of their mandates without losing the specificity of their different roles. In order to give substance to harmonization, coordination and integration efforts, the Committee proposes that the treaty bodies take procedural and substantive steps, including the following:

- further harmonize, where appropriate, the working methods of the treaty bodies;
- harmonize the rules of procedure and working methods of the treaty bodies on individual communications and inquiry procedures, where applicable;
- work to ensure that the States parties use the new harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties;
- recommend an increase in the number of meetings of Chairpersons from one to two per year, to coincide with sessions of the Human Rights Council;
- work to create an effective joint relationship with the Human Rights Council;
- work to ensure that the (rotating) Chairperson of the meeting of chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies addresses the Human Rights Council during its annual session, on behalf of, and on matters pertaining to all treaty bodies;
- work to ensure that the Chairperson of each treaty body addresses the Human Rights Council during its annual session on matters that are specific to that treaty body.

8. The Committee calls on States parties, and urges the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women to ensure adequate secretarial and financial support for the long-term efficiency of the activities of the treaty bodies. It also urges the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women to strengthen the visibility of the work of the treaty bodies as elements of a harmonized, well-coordinated and integrated treaty bodies system within an invigorated framework of human rights protection and promotion.

9. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women invites the fifth Inter-Committee meeting, scheduled to take place from 19 to 21 June 2006 in Geneva, to consider this statement. It encourages the treaty bodies established under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families to lend their support to this statement.