

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

12th Session (Geneva, 5 to 8 June 2000)

Introduction

The Chairpersons have met since the General Assembly's adoption of Resolution 37/44 in December 1982. Although issues related to effective implementation of international instruments, including reporting obligations, have been addressed in a variety of forums (human rights treaty body sessions, State party meetings and the meetings of other organs such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)), these issues have principally been reviewed at meetings of the Chairpersons, which have been conducted annually since 1995. The Chairpersons aim to revise current procedures of implementation for the various international instruments and to propose appropriate reforms related to methods of work. The Chairpersons also address reporting guidelines, focusing on the form and content of State party reports but also considering timing and quality. Conclusions and recommendations from the meeting of the Chairpersons are given priority consideration during meetings of the General Assembly.

During the 12th session of the meeting of the Chairpersons, Ms Virginia Bonoan-Dandan (Chairperson of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) was elected Chairperson-Rapporteur of the meeting, and Mr Michael E. Sherifis (Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) was elected Vice Chairperson. Also attending the session were Mr Peter T. Burns (Chairperson of the Committee against Torture) and Mrs Awa Ouedraogo (Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child). No representative of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was present due to the special session of the General Assembly on Beijing + 5 running concurrently. Mr Victor Rodriguez Cendeno, Vice-Chairperson of the 56th session of the Commission on Human Rights, and Mr Asbjørn Eide, member of the 51st session of the Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, also addressed the 12th session of the meeting of the Chairpersons.

Issues addressed

A. Review of recent developments

The Chairpersons briefed the meeting on recent developments in the work of their respective treaty bodies. Once again, several Chairpersons expressed concern regarding increases in workload due to measures taken to reduce the backlogging of reports. For example, the Committee on the Rights of the Child reported that it had to consider as many as nine State party reports during each session, in contrast to the six examined in the past. The adoption of the two new Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child would also create significant increases in work in the future.

Chairpersons raised concern in relation to the recent denunciations of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the impact these denunciations have on the status of the treaty. Non-appearance of State parties at the sessions and problems with translation have posed disruptions to the work of the Human Rights Committee.

The Chairpersons also expressed concern about the continuing problems with the large backlog of unexamined State reports and the growing backlog of unanswered correspondence. Unbalanced gender and geographical representation in the Committees were also identified as problems.

Mr Asbjørn Eide, member of the Sub-Commission, stressed the importance of consultations between the treaty bodies and the Sub-Commission. He referred to a number of

studies undertaken by the Sub-Commission and stressed the need for practical approaches to different issues of concern.

B. Joint meeting with special rapporteurs and representatives

The session of the Chairpersons also comprised a joint meeting with special rapporteurs, special representatives, independent experts and chairpersons of working groups. This was the second joint meeting aimed at the improvement of exchange of information between treaty bodies and the special procedure mandates. The participants agreed on the following recommendations:

- the treaty-bodies should be provided with informational notes about the activities of relevant special procedures mandates;
- periodic lists of planned country visits of special rapporteurs should be made available to the treaty bodies;
- special rapporteurs should rapidly distribute summaries of their report preparations to the treaty-bodies;
- information should be exchanged between the treaty bodies and special procedures mandates when country reports are to be examined and when situation reports are to be made.

C. Benchmarks and indicators

The Chairpersons also discussed the problems of measuring State compliance with human rights standards. In the search for reliable means to assess the realisation of human rights, a number of so-called indicators or benchmarks have been developed. In relation to the right to education, for instance, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights uses literacy and enrolment figures to indicate how many enjoy the right to education in a given country. The Chairpersons agreed that one has to explore further how various indicators could be developed to measure the enjoyment of rights and to identify the needs of countries in different aspects. It was stressed that this was not an attempt to rank countries or to reprimand them, but rather to identify where scarce international resources could be effectively utilised in countries in need of assistance.

D. Recommendations

The Chairpersons agreed that there should be a common procedure for the examination of State reports. They issued a number of recommendations aiming at the facilitation of this goal. They also recommended that the Special Adviser on Regional Strategies should appear before each treaty body to present the new regional approaches of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Human rights indicators were considered useful measures of the level of enjoyment of human rights, and their development was therefore recommended.