

AT A CROSSROADS: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF CRISIS

JOINT CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR INPUT TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM PURSUANT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 68/268

The undersigned civil society organizations (CSOs) submit these observations and recommendations in response to the call for input by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the preparation of the sixth biennial report of the Secretary-General on the status of the UN human rights treaty bodies (treaty bodies) pursuant to [General Assembly resolution 68/268](#).¹

The preparation of the Secretary-General's report comes at a moment of profound crisis for the UN's human rights system, including the treaty bodies. International human rights treaties form the legal backbone of the UN human rights architecture, and the treaty bodies responsible for monitoring them are essential to ensuring compliance and delivering justice. They provide authoritative guidance to States, shape national laws and public policies, provide redress to victims when national efforts have failed, and create institutional spaces through which rights holders and civil society can contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights for civil society worldwide.

Today, however, the treaty body system is being steadily weakened by a severe financial and operational crisis. Like other human rights mechanisms, the treaty bodies were forced to significantly reduce their activities in 2025; this included [forced cancellation](#)² of whole sessions, reduction of other sessions and cancellation of pre-sessional working groups. Treaty bodies with visiting and inquiry functions were additionally affected, with on-site visits cancelled or indefinitely delayed. These are not administrative inconveniences: they directly affect the rights and safety of people and communities, erode fundamental rights and amount to denial of justice.

A system undermined by its own member States and the Secretariat

Although all States committed by consensus in General Assembly resolution 68/268 to objectively and adequately fund the treaty bodies in accordance with the resource formula, since 2017 this commitment has been consistently undermined—by inadequate budget proposals from the Secretary-General, by a politicized Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budget Questions (ACABQ) and by States in budget negotiations. This is despite subsequent reaffirmation of the budget formula in four subsequent General Assembly resolutions [A/RES/73/162, para. 5, A/RES/75/174, para. 5, A/RES/77/210, para. 5 and A/RES/79/165, para.5].

Since 2017, States have repeatedly denied the treaty bodies the full amount of resources they require to function, including by partially rejecting budget requests from the Secretary-General for additional staff support to allow the treaty bodies to process rising numbers of individual petitions (justified with reference to the resourcing formula in resolution 68/268); by making across-the-board cuts to UN travel funds aimed at reducing the overall UN budget that had an outsized impact on the treaty bodies; and by maintaining a financial architecture at the UN in which the Secretariat lacks cash reserves to draw upon when Member States fail to pay their assessed contributions to the UN in a timely fashion, leading to repeated cash flow crises that have threatened, in turn, OHCHR's ability to facilitate the treaty bodies' meetings and other activities.

We are also concerned that, on several occasions since 2017, the Secretary General's budget proposals did not request States to provide the full allocation of additional resources that the resourcing formula in resolution 68/268 indicates they require, let alone the additional resources that the Secretary-General's biennial reports to the UN General Assembly on the treaty bodies notes that they require to carry out mandated functions that are not covered by the resolution 68/268 formula. We understand that this is a reflection of political pressure by States that are

¹ General Assembly resolution 68/268, *Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system*, UN Doc. A/RES/68/268, 21 April 2014, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/68/268>

² Human Rights Treaties Branch Information Note on upcoming sessions/activities impacted by the UN liquidity situation in 2025 (updated as of end December 2025), available at https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fhrbodies%2Ftreaty-bodies%2Finformation-note-2025-session-hrtb_0.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

averse to growth in the regular UN budget in general and to the growth of resources allocated to support the treaty body system in particular.³

It is also concerning, as regards individual complaints, that there has never been a suitable formula for predictable funding resulting from the last strengthening process. The formula provided for communications erroneously focused overly on funding meeting time instead of increasing the number of specialized staff needed to process these individual complaints. The current formula funds only registered cases and allocates just 1.3 meeting hours per communication, ignoring the preregistration phase, which averages 6.8 hours per complaint. In 2024, the Secretary-General requested resources to cover the full life cycle of complaints—including preregistration, interim measures, case management, drafting, and follow-up [A/79/336, para. 59.] The formula in 68/268 did not provide for the calculation of resources needed for mandated activities relating to urgent actions, inquiries and inter-state communications. The General Assembly further has failed to provide the resources needed for increased mandated activities, hampering the treaty bodies' capacity to perform their protection mandates adequately [A/74/643, para. 56].⁴

As a result, the system is trapped in a perpetual crisis cycle with a backward looking formula that only partially addresses the mandated activities of the treaty bodies—unable to plan, unable to deliver on the prevention and protection mandates entrusted to them in the treaties, and unable to assist States parties in upholding their legally binding treaty obligations. We believe that at this time, putting in place the fixed calendar would enable much needed clarity for all stakeholders involved in the review process, furthermore, providing the much-needed predictability for a forward looking allocation of resources.

The Secretary-General has a crucial role to play in this regard to the above. The proposed programme budget by the Secretary-General for 2027 must include the resources required to ensure the full implementation of such a calendar as well as all other mandated activities.

Backsliding on predictability and alignment

Resolution 68/268 calls for increased coordination and predictability with the aim of achieving “a clear and regularized schedule for reporting” [para. 34] and greater alignment of working methods [para. 9]. Yet insufficient resourcing has made these goals unattainable. Even the meaningful progress achieved up until 2024, such as the Chairs' proposal for an advisory mechanism to support alignment of working methods, has not been able to advance without dedicated funding.

The critical agreement to make the simplified reporting procedure the default⁵ risks unravelling as committees have started opting out, reportedly due to resource constraints. The eight-year predictable reporting cycle also remains unachievable as long as the Secretary-General does not request the resources required and States do not honour their commitments to provide those resources.

Barriers to civil society participation

CSOs face shrinking civic space and mounting barriers to engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms, including increasing challenges in engaging effectively with UN treaty bodies due to a combination of financial, political, and procedural factors. Worldwide, CSOs are operating under growing financial constraints and mounting political pressure. Since January 2024, civil society actors have been unable to engage virtually with treaty bodies during in-session briefings and pre-sessions, significantly limiting access for organizations unable to travel to Geneva.

These challenges are compounded by the mentioned lack of predictability in treaty body scheduling. Ongoing financial constraints have resulted in sessions not being confirmed in a timely manner, leaving CSOs without sufficient notice to prepare for effective engagement, including the preparation and submission of reports, visa applications, and travel arrangements. For organizations with limited resources, particularly those based outside Geneva and especially in the Global South, this unpredictability creates an insurmountable logistical and financial

³ *The ongoing business of strengthening the UN human rights treaty bodies*, Joint NGO response to the report of the co-facilitators of the UN General Assembly's review of the UN human rights treaty body system (IOR 40/3319/2020), 30 November 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/3319/2020/en/>

⁴ ISHR submission to OHCHR Questionnaire in relation to General Assembly resolution 68/268 May 2019, https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ishr_submission_to_questionnaire_on_tb_strengthening.pdf

⁵ *Report of the co-facilitators on the process of the consideration of the state of the UN human rights treaty body system*, September 2020, A/77/228, para. 55, No. 1(d) and A/78/354, para. 8, see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/simplified-reporting-procedure>

burden. For CSOs requiring visas, the absence of confirmed session dates can render participation entirely unfeasible.

In parallel, fear of reprisals remains acute for civil society actors in many countries, particularly under increasingly authoritarian regimes, further constraining their ability to engage openly with UN human rights mechanisms.⁶

These barriers have already had a measurable impact on civil society participation. In 2025, 65 CSOs engaged with the Committee against Torture through private briefings, compared to 111 CSOs that engaged with the Committee in 2023, which represents a significant reduction in civil society participation. Likewise, CSO engagement at the Human Rights Committee's sessions dropped from 220 participants in 2024 to 94 in 2025.

The backtracking on, and insufficient use of, digital technologies

[Resolution 77/210](#) noted the “considerable potential of digitalization for improved efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the treaty bodies and the interaction with all relevant stakeholders” [para. 6] and encouraged the treaty bodies to further the use of digital technologies in their work, recognizing that the pandemic demonstrated the necessity of sustained online engagement.

Restrictive rules and high costs for hybrid or online modalities set up and regulated by other parts of the UN system effectively undermine participation and accessibility. While some treaty bodies have attempted to provide much appreciated informal workarounds, these cannot substitute for institutional guarantees of meaningful civil society participation. Since then, CSOs have been unable to brief the treaty bodies virtually during formal sessions, removing a vital channel for inclusive and accessible engagement. At the very moment when in-person engagement is harder than ever due to resource challenges for civil society actors, uncertainty in scheduling of treaty body sessions and last-minute postponements, hybrid participation—explicitly encouraged by the General Assembly for States—is not provided for civil society. In practice, however, by January 2024, hybrid modalities were discontinued for all activities except state dialogues, sharply limiting participation by NGOs, victims, NHRIs, UN country teams, and other key stakeholders—directly contradicting the intended expansion of digital access. The larger issue of hybrid modalities across the UN system was debated later in 2024 by the General Assembly's Fifth Committee (the ‘Complementary Meeting Modalities resolution’), where States were unable to come to an agreement, and no progress has been made since.

Besides the introduction of an online individual-complaint submission form launched in December 2023 [A/79/336, para. 42], OHCHR has begun developing an online submissions portal and a case-management system for individual communications. However, these improvements represent only partial fulfilment of the broader digital strengthening repeatedly requested by OHCHR and lack dedicated funds. In 2023, the treaty body chairs called for a joint submission and document management platform for States parties reporting and a number of other tools that would facilitate their work. [A/78/354, p. 91] Accessibility considerations must be built in from the start to ensure access for persons with disabilities. Simple digital tools, such as translation tools, should be made available for drafts and working documents. Until resources are adequately provided for the technical implementation, it is an ambition on paper only.

Accessibility measures for persons with disabilities

Despite a clear duty to provide all necessary support to the CRPD Committee to effectively perform its functions and ensure accessibility,⁷ 20 years after the adoption of the CRPD, it is only the CRPD Committee that benefits from dedicated accessibility services. In 2024, the UN Office in Geneva (UNOG) discontinued the provision of national sign language for constructive dialogues with States, and neither UNOG nor OHCHR duly and fully addressed the request of reasonable accommodation of the then incoming CRPD Committee member Mr. Hiroshi Tamon. Very recently, the CRPD [Committee sounded the alarm](#) on the unequal impact of the UN liquidity crisis on persons with disabilities, including on some of its members. Funding shortfalls may end up resulting in the loss of essential accessibility services, namely international sign interpretation and captioning, thereby preventing access to the work of the Committee by deaf persons and persons with hearing impairments.

Further UN80 budget cuts

Further UN80 budget cuts to staff posts at OHCHR who provide the treaty bodies with substantive, technical and logistical support will severely undermine the capacity of treaty bodies to carry out their core functions. The recent

⁶ *Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights - Report of the Secretary General*, <https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/60/62>

⁷ CRPD art. 34, Secretary-General Disability Inclusion Strategy (2019).

ACABQ recommendations and Fifth Committee decisions to cut 18 posts (a decrease of 16% from 2025) of the treaty bodies will further erode the staffing that supports the work, further entrenching a vicious circle of reduced ability to review state party reports and manage growing backlogs.

The above describes a circle of inaction to implement resolution 68/268 and the requests put forward in previous biennial reports from UN member states that ultimately weakens the treaty bodies rather than the stated aim of strengthening them.

Recommendations

We urge the Secretary-General to:

- Put in place the fixed calendar for state party reviews and seek through the regular budget the resources required in full for the functioning of the treaty body system, beginning with a proposal in next year's proposed program budget that is in line with the treaty bodies' forward looking financial needs.

We urge all UN Member States to:

- Pay their assessed contributions in full and on time, as required under Article 17(2) of the UN Charter.
- Urgently amend the current financial rules and agree on a temporary suspension of the return of credits, to avoid the UN being forced to return over USD 400 million in unspent cash in the form of 'credits' to Member States contributions in 2027.⁸
- Reaffirm political and financial support for the UN human rights system and ensure that the UN80 process strengthens—not weakens—the human rights pillar allocating the necessary resources to all human rights mechanisms.
- Ensure the necessary resources for the treaty bodies to function through a forward-looking budget allocation that effectively provides resources to the treaty bodies for all aspects of their work from the UN regular budget, this includes allocating the resources required for the implementation of the fixed calendar of reviews.
- Ensure allocation of resources to the efforts to align working methods, where in line with the respective mandates.
- Guarantee, through the necessary human, technical and financial resources, inclusive participation with necessary accessibility services, including through hybrid modalities, predictable scheduling, and protections for CSOs, victims of human rights violations, and other actors engaging with the UN.
- Develop the necessary tools for digitalization, making the necessary adjustments to ensure that the tools are accessible to persons with disabilities, including a joint submission platform and case management system for individual communications, as well as a joint submission and document management platform for States parties reporting.
- Ensure removal of undue costs for the use of digital tools and services that the UN human rights mechanisms, including the treaty bodies, rely on, and enable the use of tools that can increase efficiencies and positive ways of working.
- Ensure transparent, participatory and merit-based nomination procedures; appointing members who meet the highest standards of moral character, competence, independence, with due regard to gender parity, diversity and equitable geographic representation and] provide the resources necessary for treaty bodies to function effectively.

As civil society, we remain committed to working alongside the treaty bodies, rights holders, and states to defend and strengthen the UN human rights system. Member States must act now to honour their commitments and prevent the collapse of the mechanisms that give life to international human rights treaties.

⁸ UN80 Reform: States endorse slashing of human rights budget, 9 January 2026, <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/un80-reform-states-endorse-slashing-of-human-rights-budget/>

Signatories:

Amnesty International

AFRIRights

Blue Diamond Society

Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)

Center for Reproductive Rights

Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos - CNDDHH

Franciscans International

GIN SSOIE NPC

GQUAL Campaign

Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)

Human Rights Watch

IDHEAS Litigio Estratégico en Derechos Humanos

Indigenous Environmental Network

InterAction for Health and Human Rights (Australia)

International Federation of ACATs (FIACAT)

ILGA World

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture victims

International Service for Human Rights

Last hope refugee association "LAHORA"

Namibia Diverse Women's Association (NDWA)

NGO Network on UN Treaty Bodies (TB-Net) and its members:

- Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR-Centre)
- Child Rights Connect
- International Disability Alliance (IDA)
- International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP-Asia Pacific)
- The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GIESCR)
- The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Researchers Without Borders

Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC)

Annex: Previous submissions

Urgent support needed for the UN Treaty Bodies: Joint public statement by Civil Society Organisations on the Occasion of the 37th Annual Meeting of the Chairpersons of the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies (IOR 40/9491/2025), 12 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/9491/2025/en/>

Joint civil society statement on Secretary-General's fourth biennial report on the status of the treaty body system (IOR 40/6127/2022), 19 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/6127/2022/en/>

The ongoing business of strengthening the UN human rights treaty bodies (IOR 40/3319/2020), 30 November 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/3319/2020/en/>

Statement ahead of the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Chairpersons of the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies (IOR 40/2397/2020), 14 April 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/2397/2020/en/>

Joint NGO submission to the co-facilitators of the General Assembly review of resolution 68/268 on the human rights treaty body system (IOR 40/2685/2020), 7 July 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/2685/2020/en/>

Civil Society Position Paper on the 2020 Review of UN General Assembly Resolution 68/268 on 'Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system' (IOR 40/1217/2019), 23 October 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/1217/2019/en/>

Position paper on strengthening the human rights treaty bodies in 2020 and beyond (IOR 40/1218/2019), 23 October 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/1218/2019/en/>

Treaty body strengthening- Joint NGO submission to the third biennial report of the Secretary General (IOR 40/0329/2019), 9 May 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/0329/2019/en/>

Joint open letter regarding the 2018 biennial report by the UN Secretary-General on the state of the treaty body system (IOR 40/7959/2018), 26 February 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/7959/2018/en/>