



Economic and Social Council

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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Sixty-seventh session

Summary record (partial)* of the 1st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 17 February 2020, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the sixty-seventh session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
2. **Mr. Salama** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that the 2020 review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/268, on the strengthening of the human rights treaty body system, would focus on the progress made in eliminating the backlog in the consideration of periodic reports, improving the visibility of the treaty bodies and harmonizing working methods. It would be an opportunity to make adjustments in order to provide treaty bodies with the resources they needed to respond to current challenges. The Secretary-General's third report on the status of the human rights treaty body system (A/74/643) would play a particularly important role in the review process. The report set out the challenges related to regular budget funding for the mandated activities of the treaty bodies, including funding for meeting time and staff. There had recently been an 80 per cent increase in the number of individual communications registered by the treaty bodies, but the resources required to process them had not been forthcoming. The report also listed proposals for the treaty body review process, including the common vision of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, which had been publicly endorsed by the High Commissioner, and made recommendations for action to be taken by States in key areas. OHCHR was prepared to work with the Committee to operationalize the vision of the Chairs in the lead-up to their thirty-second meeting.
3. The Committee had experienced a significant increase in the number of communications registered, but had not been allocated the corresponding resources in terms of meeting time and staff. That situation was all the more problematic as the Committee was developing its jurisprudence and the question of the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights was being called into question by many. The fact that such work was currently being carried out by Committee members outside official meeting hours testified to their exceptional commitment. Hopefully, the 2020 review would, in line with the requirements presented for the 2021 budget, provide the Committee with the resources it required to do its work.
4. In the context of the 2020 review, the treaty bodies were seeking innovative solutions to ensure the impact of their work, for example through improved coordination of State party reviews, including the use of lists of issues prior to reporting, coordination among the treaty bodies to reduce duplication, the upgrading of systems through the use of technology and the further simplification of the reporting process. In 2020, the Human Rights Committee would begin using its predictable calendar, which should improve the predictability of reviews and provide for better coverage of all States parties, while also making it possible to ensure better compliance with reporting schedules. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had already introduced some innovations relating to the preparation of lists of issues prior to reporting; he encouraged it to continue along those lines, in cooperation with the other treaty bodies. It would be useful for the Committee, together with States parties and other stakeholders, to examine the impact of such innovations on the quality of its dialogues, the meaningfulness of its concluding observations and the preparation of State party reports and other submissions. The Committee might also soon consider the effectiveness of the simplified reporting procedure and the advisability of expanding its use. He was aware that the Committee was reaching out to States with long-overdue initial reports. OHCHR would consider how its capacity-building programme could support such efforts, and it stood ready to support the 2020 review process by providing technical advice and facilitating dialogue among the various stakeholders.
5. The regular budget adopted by the General Assembly for 2020 provided some relief to the treaty bodies, but the main budgetary challenges remained. The budget included resources for webcasting of treaty body sessions, which had previously been funded through voluntary contributions, and it provided for webcasting in additional languages. The General Assembly had also decided to allocate an additional working language for the work of the treaty bodies. However, it had not addressed the shortfall in resources for the human rights mechanisms, including travel expenses for mandate holders and staffing.

Notwithstanding the continuing financial difficulties and the possible reappearance of the cash-flow problems encountered the previous year, OHCHR planned to hold the same number of treaty body sessions in 2020 as it had in 2019. For the first time, the Office was seeking voluntary contributions from Member States to pilot innovative ideas such as those included in the Chairs' common vision, but reliance on voluntary contributions was not a sustainable approach. He trusted the 2020 review would give the situation careful consideration.

Adoption of the agenda

6. *The agenda was adopted.*

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 10.20 a.m.