



**International covenant  
on civil and  
political rights**

Distr.  
GENERAL

CCPR/C/SR.2499  
31 October 2007

Original: ENGLISH

---

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Ninety-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2499th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,  
on Thursday, 25 October 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. KHALIL  
(Vice-Chairperson)

CONTENTS

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS

Working methods

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.07-44837 (E) 291007 311007

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

## ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS

### Working methods (CCPR/C/91/CRP.1)

1. Mr. SHEARER, introducing his paper setting out suggestions for improving the quality and effectiveness of the Committee's relations with the media (CCPR/C/91/CRP.1), said that the aim was to raise the profile of the Committee and improve public understanding of its work. The paper included suggestions that had been made by members of the Committee, the OHCHR Media Unit and the secretariat. The paper should act as a platform for wider discussion of the issue. He drew particular attention to the paragraphs concerning the end-of-session press conferences and the timing of publication of concluding observations. Paragraph 10 (v) made reference to the OHCHR website, which was, in his opinion, less user-friendly in its current state than it had been previously. The Committee should be given the opportunity to express its preferences for the new version of the website.
2. Mr. O'FLAHERTY suggested that the current exercise should focus on the Committee's overall public information strategy, since its website and electronic media in general constituted the most important medium for communication. The Committee should emphasize its need for a vigorous, interactive web page. The treaty bodies database was an utter mess; in its current state, it was unusable.
3. It was somewhat anachronistic to discuss televising the Committee's proceedings. Rather it should examine the possibility of creating podcasts and visual or aural streaming from its sessions. That would constitute a remarkably powerful and accessible way of generating interest in the Committee's work, particularly in concerned countries. He was unaware whether there was any opposition to filming Committee proceedings. If that was the case, he urged colleagues to review that question in the light of the contemporary reality of the workings of the Internet.
4. The Committee should focus on local media in countries affected by its work rather than international media. To some extent, local media were indirectly informed through the Committee's press conferences; while items that were picked up by press agencies were sometimes then reported at the local level, that system was too random. The Committee should enlist the assistance of the Department of Public Information (DPI) on finding ways of engaging with local media.
5. The Committee should maintain its standard press conference after each session, since it was not its job to determine what was interesting and what was not. The press conferences should, however, be radically reformed. He strongly supported Sir Nigel Rodley's proposal that country rapporteurs should attend press conferences. It followed that the identity of country rapporteurs should be disclosed, which would also bring the Committee into line with the current practice of most other treaty bodies.
6. The Committee should publicize information on follow-up procedures, since it was newsworthy and the criteria applied were completely objective. However, the Committee should await the comments of the Rapporteur on follow-up on how to further invigorate that process before agreeing on a media strategy. It should nominate a rapporteur for media communication.

7. Mr. SCHMIDT (Secretariat) said that he fully agreed with Mr. O'Flaherty's assessment of the new treaty bodies database, which was shared by a variety of end-users. The secretariat had duly recorded and forwarded all criticisms to the external information technology team in order to convey the urgency of addressing the problem. The team had undertaken to both produce a user manual and to solve any technical problems impeding the accessibility of documents. A new web page that was due to go live in December had been circulated to staff members for testing, in particular with regard to its user-friendliness. He urged Committee members to continue to report any difficulties with using the database. Doing so, he hoped, might help expedite problem-solving.

8. Ms. MOTOC agreed with Sir Nigel Rodley's proposal that the Committee should issue press releases on concluding observations, since that would increase the impact of the Committee's work. She also supported the proposal that country rapporteurs should attend press conferences, and added that other Committee members should be present. The public profile of the Committee's work was regrettably low; many people in States parties were unaware that they could address the Committee directly. Radio was a more important medium than the Internet in many African countries.

9. Mr. JOHNSON said that it was important to raise the profile of the Committee in both States parties and non-States parties. The Committee should call on DPI for assistance in that endeavour. It would be useful to have an updated document containing more practical suggestions of ways of improving the quality and effectiveness of the Committee's relations with the media after the current debate.

10. Ms. WEDGWOOD noted that Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, had been a master of public relations; the Committee should learn from his example. The Committee should strive to publicize its work among the peoples it purported to protect; such publicity should also act as a deterrent against abuses by police and prison officers in States parties. The Committee should raise its profile by increasing its presence on national and international law websites. She agreed that the popular and local press should be targeted. In addition, articles on the Committee's work should appear in sectoral publications such as magazines for police officers and prison guards.

11. Press conferences should not be held on Friday afternoons; Wednesday or Thursday press conferences would be more effective. They should be held on the same day as the Committee concluded its examination of a country report. The Committee should use plain language, not legalistic language, in its press conferences in order to facilitate the work of journalists. She agreed that podcasts would enable the Committee's work to have a greater impact worldwide, particularly on the radio in African States. She suggested that Committee members could issue their own press releases regarding their work on the Committee.

12. Ms. CHANET said that as a long-standing member of the Committee she was aware that the Committee's work had been more visible at some times than at others. Selecting country rapporteurs was part of the Committee's internal procedure, and the Chairperson and the Bureau were best placed to decide whether some members were more suited to talk about certain situations than others. There were also issues which certain members were in a better position than others to discuss with the media. She agreed that radio was particularly important, especially in Africa. Relations with the press during the Committee's sessions were vital, and the

most effective means of ensuring that the relevant national press was present during the session was to brief them before each session and inform them which issues of interest would be discussed. When the Committee's meetings were held in the Palais des Nations, there was a considerably greater press presence.

13. All legal information and decisions arising from the Committee's work should be published on the Committee's Internet site. She agreed with Ms. Wedgwood that the work of the Committee should be described in plain, simple language to make it accessible to all. The issue of press releases on concluding observations should be clarified in order to specify whether the concluding observations would simply be published in their entirety in the press, or whether press releases would be drafted drawing on information from the concluding observations. If the latter was to be the case, care must be taken to ensure that the Committee's concluding observations were not misquoted in a press release and then used in the Human Rights Council's universal periodic review process.

14. Mr. LALLAH said the Committee should ensure that the work it already carried out was effective. Although a system for the publication of information on the Committee's work, including press releases and summary records, was already in place, it was not effective, and those documents were not easily accessed by the Committee members themselves, let alone the general public. He agreed with Mr. O'Flaherty that the Committee must discuss all forms of dissemination of information, not simply the media. There were many other events in the United Nations that were newsworthy, and the Committee must therefore make a concerted effort to attract the attention of the media, rather than simply expecting the media to report on its work. He agreed with the proposal to appoint a rapporteur on information to look at the list of countries to be examined, obtain a list of the relevant press, radio and television services, and inform those who might be interested about the Committee's work. Concluding observations should be transmitted to courts, universities and bar associations.

15. Sir Nigel RODLEY said that the Committee's current strategy for becoming better known was not tenable. It should agree to hold its meetings with States parties for the consideration of periodic reports in the Palais des Nations, as proposed by Ms. Chanet, since that would increase the press attention given to that aspect of the Committee's work. The traditional media were particularly useful for transmitting information to State authorities, while new technologies, such as podcasts, blogs and streaming, were helpful in informing the general public. He did not wish to downgrade the importance of the traditional media.

16. Mr. SÁNCHEZ CERRO said that members of the Committee must act as diplomats rather than lawyers in publicizing its work, since information and awareness-raising would help ensure that the Committee's decisions were taken into account by Governments. The Committee's work should be made known to the general public first and foremost, and among jurists and academics. Hundreds of millions of people in the world did not have Internet access, and it was therefore particularly important to use traditional media. The public had an important influence over the Government and its implementation of the provisions of the Covenant, and the more aware the public were of the Committee's work, the more useful and effective that influence would be. The Committee should hold a meeting with press agencies at the beginning of each session in order to present the agenda and the subjects for discussion. A press release issued at

the midway point in the session would make public the progress thus far, and a press conference should be held towards the end of the session on a Wednesday or a Thursday. The public meetings and press conferences should be televised.

17. Ms. PALM said that the whole Committee agreed that its work should be more visible and better known at all levels. She supported Mr. O'Flaherty's idea of appointing a rapporteur on information. She was concerned that the Committee spent too much time discussing the issue of media relations without coming to any conclusions on specific measures to be taken. She agreed with the proposal to hold meetings with States parties in the Palais des Nations. It was important to have a basic information strategy, which should be subject to permanent follow-up.

18. Mr. RIVAS POSADA said that while it was important to discuss which media the Committee wished to use to disseminate information on its work, it must also decide what audiences it wished to reach. He considered that the Committee's work must be publicized among State authorities - since they were working towards implementation of the Covenant, specialists in academic circles, authors and commentators. The same media were not appropriate for disseminating information among all of those audiences. He was concerned that if the regular press was used, the work of the Committee could be devalued by media reports. The Committee must be realistic in its aspirations for media coverage, and must take into consideration its own potential for becoming better known.

19. The media constituted an effective tool for disseminating information about the Committee's work, and Committee members should therefore encourage direct contact with news correspondents. Such efforts would be justified in order to broaden interest in that work. There had always been a difference of opinion on the need for press conferences, which had become routine. The Committee should review its system for holding press conferences, and consider who should participate in them. He agreed that the Committee should appoint a rapporteur on information since that would ensure continuity, facilitate contact with media and press agencies, and help to guarantee follow-up, and identify and overcome any shortcomings.

20. Mr. BHAGWATI said that the Committee must concentrate on raising public awareness of the rights set forth in the Covenant. People could not seek the support of the Committee if they were unaware of their rights. For the Covenant to have meaning the public must be aware of its content. The support of NGOs was crucial in disseminating information and raising public awareness of the rights established by the Covenant. All members of the Committee could galvanize NGOs into action in their own countries. The Committee's duty was to ensure that human rights were respected, and NGO support was vital in that regard.

21. The CHAIRPERSON said that while he agreed with Mr. Bhagwati that NGOs had an important role to play in disseminating information on human rights, it should not be forgotten that in some countries NGOs did not exist and in many others their activities were curtailed.

22. Mr. AMOR said that the purpose of designing a media strategy was not to obtain publicity for the Committee, still less for its individual members, but to familiarize the general public with the Covenant and to ensure that it was respected by making information widely accessible. To that end, Committee members must first renounce the comforts of the ghetto in which it now resided, cut off from the outside world and unable to attract the media when matters requiring greater publicity arose.

23. The Committee should target two categories of audience. When addressing the general public, it should use language that was accessible and publicize items aimed at educating public opinion. The information should be prepared with journalists in mind, since the press was interested only in material that would “sell”. It should also be borne in mind that DPI was snowed under and that the Human Rights Council was gradually absorbing more and more of its resources. While he supported the idea of a rapporteur who would liaise with the media, he thought that there should be one for each of the Committee’s working languages.

24. The second category of audience was that of specialists, such as legal scholars, lawyers, judges and public officials. They could be reached both electronically and through specialist journals. Communications that were in the public domain, for example, would be of great interest to that audience. He suggested that each Committee member should publish an article on a communication, with appropriate comments, in a local journal of his or her choice.

25. Above all, the Committee should adopt a pragmatic and empirical approach, taking the initiative rather than waiting for others to take the first step. The rapporteurs should make every effort to track down journalists, but DPI should also assign one person to look after the Committee at each session.

26. Ms. MOTOC supported Mr. O’Flaherty’s proposal to appoint a special rapporteur.

27. She was in favour of continuing to hold one session at United Nations Headquarters with a press conference. DPI at Headquarters had appointed an officer with responsibility for human rights in general but she thought that it might be persuaded to reserve a staff member for the Committee. NGOs should be involved formally and continuously in the Committee’s activities in order to enhance their visibility.

28. When Mr. Kälin was drafting the Committee’s general comment on article 14 of the Covenant, he had published progress reports on the Internet, to which people could react. She strongly supported such an approach. In that context, she stressed the importance of maintaining an interesting and up-to-date Committee web page.

29. She agreed with Mr. Sánchez Cerro’s proposals for inventive ways of putting the Committee’s ideas across. She believed that press releases, if well prepared, could be a useful means of communication. With regard to the universal periodic review, if the Committee’s press releases were highly technical and the Council releases remained on a more general level, attention might focus on the latter even in cases where the Committee’s comments were more accurate and reliable. The language used by the Committee should therefore be made more accessible to the general public.

30. Ms. WEDGWOOD said that she was intending to request permission from the Committee to obtain a recording of oral presentations of the most interesting country reports at each session with a view to having them uploaded on academic websites in the United States and discussed in the “blogosphere”.

31. The CHAIRPERSON took note of the request.

32. Mr. IWASAWA said that publicity should focus on the Committee's concluding observations and Views. Subscribers to the OHCHR Internet services received e-mails from time to time on treaty body activities, but they consisted of lists of States parties and it took time to identify interesting material. When Views came into the public domain, a list of cases was provided with the relevant uniform resource locator (URL). Again, very few people would be willing to take the time to establish which case was important. He therefore proposed a new format for such services consisting perhaps of a summary of important developments.
33. With regard to press releases on concluding observations, he agreed that a summary text should be made available to journalists. Moreover, while the published selections of the Committee's Views were of great use to researchers, summaries of important Views should be made available to a wider readership.
34. Mr. O'FLAHERTY expressed support for the idea of issuing members of the Committee with recordings of meetings. He drew attention to the problem, however, of deciding which language to record.
35. He also supported the proposal to hold meetings at the Palais des Nations and felt that there was no cogent argument for continuing to hold a session at United Nations Headquarters.
36. He felt that the appointment of three rapporteurs for public information would defeat the purpose. A single rapporteur would have a greater sense of accountability.
37. He strongly advocated more open exchanges with NGOs, which should be invited, inter alia, to advise the Committee on its public information strategy.
38. While the concluding observations should certainly be made more user-friendly, a distinction should be made between public information in the form of a summary prepared by the Committee and editorial comment, which was best left to academics and NGOs.
39. Ms. MAJODINA said that any media strategy must be multifaceted in order to cater for a variety of stakeholders, such as Governments, academics, legal scholars as well as the general public. She agreed with Mr. Bhagwati that a great deal remained to be done at the grass-roots level. She knew from experience that Governments in Africa tended to be uncomfortable with the Committee's concluding observations and were only too pleased to withhold them from public scrutiny. Hence the importance of involving NGOs in the Committee's public information strategy. She did not agree that there were countries where NGOs were virtually powerless. More and more human rights NGOs were joining together at the regional level and exerting a greater influence at country level by that means. The assistance of NGOs could be enlisted alongside that of journalists in publicizing the Committee's concluding observations and Views and thereby increasing government accountability. She agreed with Mr. O'Flaherty that the Committee should engage in an interactive dialogue with NGOs, encouraging them to comment on the Committee's work, produce shadow reports and mount information campaigns.
40. The CHAIRPERSON said that he had merely wished to make the point that NGOs in some countries were less free and lacked the resources to spread a human rights culture.

41. The Committee should also seek out parliamentarians. At a recent meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union he had been surprised at some delegations' lack of awareness of the activities of the Human Rights Committee, even though parliamentarians were supposed to question their country's executive about human rights violations.
42. Sir Nigel RODLEY expressed support for the idea of a strategic discussion of implementation of the Covenant with parliamentary committees. A human rights committee in the United Kingdom Parliament had begun conducting hearings with the authorities on their implementation of the concluding observations of treaty bodies.
43. He formally proposed that the Committee should decide to hold meetings with States parties at the Palais des Nations. He also supported the idea of appointing a special rapporteur on the media and public information whose function should perhaps consist in promoting rather than personally maintaining relations with the media. Although different issues, countries and media certainly called for different linguistic and other skills, he feared that a linguistic "troika" would be too unwieldy to perform the task effectively.
44. The press conference should be maintained in its existing form until an effective alternative had been designed. Confining it to members of the Bureau was not a logical press policy. Special rapporteurs, rapporteurs on general comments and other members should also participate as appropriate. While he agreed that the press conference should be held one day earlier, it should be borne in mind that the translation of concluding observations presented a logistical problem. With regard to the possible issue of a press release at the time of adoption of concluding observations, the Committee had traditionally shunned controversy. Concluding observations consisted of both praise and criticism, but the press would naturally seize on the criticism as more newsworthy. The solution might be to issue the text at a meeting with the press in the presence of somebody who could draw attention to the most important points.
45. According to the OHCHR Media Unit, the media should be able to put names and faces to what the Committee did. That comment should be taken seriously. Existing press releases refrained from using members' names, referring solely to "an expert". The world had changed since the anonymity rule was adopted and he was in favour of revising it, at least after adoption of the concluding observations in each case.
46. Ms. CHANET suggested that the Committee should take a decision on the issues on which there was agreement. There had been no objection to holding future meetings involving the examination of State party reports at the Palais des Nations. Members had also agreed on the need to provide the press with information about the Committee's work prior to each session. It had further emerged that, while the practice of holding press conferences at the end of each session should be retained, procedures might need adjusting. Should the Committee decide to create the post of rapporteur on information, she suggested appointing at least two members to deal with the task. Nominations could, for example, be based on members' links with a particular region.
47. The idea for the Committee to convene in Geneva only was unrealistic; its spring session overlapped with the regular session of the Human Rights Council, which severely restricted the availability of conference services. Instead, the Committee should aim to make good use of its



New York sessions, inter alia by establishing closer links with local NGOs and the media and by considering the reports of those States parties that might perceive meeting in New York as an advantage.

48. Mr. JOHNSON, supporting the proposal for some future meetings to be held at the Palais des Nations, said that the Committee also might wish to consider holding one of its annual sessions in a third member State, which could enhance the visibility of its work in different regions of the world.

49. Mr. LALLAH said article 36 of the Covenant stipulated that “The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee.” He therefore strongly supported the proposal that a relevant request should be put to the Secretary-General.

50. Mr. AMOR concurred.

51. Ms. WEDGWOOD expressed doubt as to the media effectiveness of such a move. She was unsure that media attendance at the Committee’s examination of Sudan’s periodic report, which had taken place at the Palais des Nations, had been much greater than usual. Experience in New York had shown that journalists tended to follow the Committee’s public proceedings on United Nations television, rather than attend the meetings in person.

52. Mr. GILLIBERT (Secretary of the Committee) said that accredited journalists attended all of the Committee’s public proceedings. However, media coverage of meetings held at the Palais des Nations admittedly attracted greater media attention.

53. Mr. RIVAS POSADA said that, while he fully supported the proposal to hold some of the Committee’s meetings at the Palais des Nations, availability of conference rooms might be a problem.

54. He agreed that attendance at press conferences should not be limited to members of the Bureau. However, should the Committee decide that country rapporteurs or members of the task force should attend press conferences that were relevant to their mandate, the current anonymity policy should be reviewed. The appointment of members who should represent the Committee at press conferences should be decided in the plenary.

55. Mr. BHAGWATI said he objected to the idea of asking for meetings to be held at the Palais des Nations. The request had already been made - and rejected - some years before, and he saw no use or need for reiterating it. The Committee performed its functions effectively under the current arrangement.

56. Ms. MOTOC enquired about the secretariat’s views on the proposal.

57. Mr. GILLIBERT (Secretary of the Committee) said that the secretariat would do its utmost to accommodate the Committee’s request. However, availability of conference rooms could not always be guaranteed. Problems might also arise in cases where the Committee was unable to conclude consideration of a given report within the allocated time frame.

58. Mr. SHEARER acknowledged the potential constraints on conference room availability, but supported the proposal regardless. There was no reason why an additional, unscheduled meeting with a State party could not be held at the Palais Wilson, should the need arise.

59. Mr. LALLAH said he trusted that the secretariat would do its utmost to provide the Committee with suitable facilities for its scheduled meetings.

60. The CHAIRPERSON said he took it that the Committee wished to request the Secretary-General to arrange for the future presentation of State party reports to take place at the Palais des Nations.

61. It was so decided.

62. Ms. WEDGWOOD said that Committee members should be entitled to obtain recordings of its public proceedings for the purpose of dissemination. Publication of recordings of the Committee's dialogue with States parties, for example, would make its work known to a broader public.

63. Ms. CHANET disagreed. Although the Committee's dialogue with States parties was open to the public, it was unclear whether the Committee was authorized to disseminate the recordings. Certain delegations had specifically requested that recordings of their discussion with the Committee should not be made publicly available. Prior to taking any decision, the Committee must clarify the legal situation.

64. Mr. RIVAS POSADA agreed. The recordings were intended for use by the secretariat and their publication without consultation might displease States parties.

65. Ms. WEDGWOOD acknowledged that undesirable consequences, including the potential unwillingness of certain States parties to present their report if debates were subsequently made public, should be taken into account. However, the problem could be circumvented by requesting States' consent prior to publication. Given the implications for their image if they refused consent, States were unlikely to do so.

66. Sir Nigel RODLEY agreed that the legal situation must be clarified. However, in the absence of any formal obstacles, he would be strongly in favour of bringing the recordings of the Committee's public proceedings into the public domain. There was no need to concede to States parties the right to decide whether the recordings of their discussion with the Committee should be further publicized.

67. Mr. O'FLAHERTY agreed. Making the publication of recordings dependent on States parties' consent would undermine the Committee's autonomy. The Committee should be free to use the recordings of its public meetings as it saw fit. He further saw no need for taking decisions on whether or not a recording should be brought into the public domain in the plenary. Each member who gained access to a recording should be free to use it for his or her purposes.

68. Mr. AMOR disagreed. There was a danger, for example, that recordings might be published selectively to convey a given message, which might be inconsistent with the spirit underlying the dialogue as a whole. He strongly objected to bringing recordings into the public domain without prior approval by the Committee.

69. The CHAIRPERSON said he took it that the Committee wished to defer a decision on the proposal until the legal situation was clarified.

70. It was so agreed.

71. Mr. SHEARER undertook to review the notes on possible media strategies and incorporate the points raised by Committee members during the present meeting. The new document could serve as a basis for adopting decisions on strategic and specific issues at the Committee's ninety-second session.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.