



Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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Summary record of the first part (public)* of the 1460th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 7 November 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Modvig

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.1460/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the fifty-ninth session of the Committee against Torture.

Statement by the Representative of the Secretary-General

2. **Mr. David** (Chief, Capacity-Building and Harmonization Section, Human Rights Treaties Division), recalling that one of the outcomes of the treaty body strengthening process was the establishment of the treaty body capacity-building programme, said that the programme had 10 staff in regional offices and 6 in Geneva, making it possible to sustain support for States. Since the programme's establishment, procedures had been developed and were running smoothly across all regions of the world and a general treaty reporting manual and trainer's guide were being finalized. Work had begun on a treaty-specific training manual and trainer's guide with regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; similar documents would be developed for the other treaty bodies in due course. All programme staff were qualified human rights trainers.

3. Skills enhancement had begun among government officials: some 170 officials from 77 States had become trainers in treaty reporting and had then joined a network of peers within their subregion. Train-the-trainers events would continue to be held in 2018, and State officials who received training committed to replicating training activities at the national level. The programme was maintaining "communities of practice" with all State officials trained. Officials from 50 countries had taken part in human rights activities carried out at the national level. News from the treaty body system was shared with the communities of practice at least once a month. With particular regard to the Convention, he said that the programme had worked with Fiji on its ratification of the Convention, was supporting Angola, Malaysia and Suriname in their ratification processes, and had provided training in the Convention to Nauru, Rwanda and Vanuatu. The programme had also taken part in three events on universal ratification held by the Convention against Torture Initiative.

4. Thus far, the programme's technical assistance had had a positive impact on the submission of outstanding periodic reports, replies to lists of issues and updated common core documents, on the effectiveness of constructive dialogues between treaty bodies and States parties, and on the interest of States in establishing national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. In that connection, a practical guide on national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up had been prepared; it recommended that national mechanisms should be permanent, rather than tied to the completion of a single report, should have a formal legislative or policy mandate, and should have a staff of qualified professionals. Furthermore, the effectiveness of national mechanisms should be measured on the basis of their engagement, coordination, consultation and information management capacity. The programme considered national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up to be one of the key components of the national human rights protection system.

5. As another capacity-building tool, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture trained over 1,000 specialized doctors, lawyers, psychologists, paralegals, social workers and other professionals in victim rehabilitation each year. Since the Fund's inception, a highly specialized and unique group of practitioners had been formed in more than 100 countries. In addition, a growing portion of the Fund's resources was being allocated to building capacity among professionals who provided direct assistance to victims. Lastly, the Special Fund of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture was changing its strategic direction and would be focusing its support entirely on national preventive mechanisms as from 2017.

6. **The Chair** said that the Committee appreciated being kept up-to-date on a more regular basis and was pleased to note the cooperation between the programme and the Convention against Torture Initiative.
7. **Ms. Gaer** asked whether the development of the capacity-building section had been to the detriment of the budget allocated to support staff for the committees that monitored implementation of the treaties. She also asked how States were selected for assistance and what steps were taken to ensure that capacity-building efforts took into account the lacunae detected by the Committee.
8. **Mr. Bruni** asked who was contributing to the Special Fund of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, at what level and how the money was allocated.
9. **Mr. Hani** asked whether the treaty body capacity-building programme took into account the situation of small island States with very scarce resources in terms of their participation in the reporting process and what its position was regarding the use of new information and communications technologies.
10. **Mr. David** (Chief, Capacity-Building and Harmonization Section) said that no resources had been taken away from the treaty bodies to service the treaty body capacity-building programme. However, treaty body support staff and staff assigned to the programme should not be seen as carrying out different functions; in fact, through their work at the national level, programme staff were of increasing assistance to the treaty bodies. The programme engaged with States at the latter's request and based its areas of action on the specific needs of a given State. Thus far, the programme had had the capacity to respond to all requests from States. Although it was possible for States to be reviewed by a committee via video link or to send a partial delegation while the rest participated remotely, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) did not wish person-to-person dialogues to be supplanted.
11. **Ms. Meinecke-Chalev** (Coordinator, Capacity-Building and Harmonization Section) said that, while requests from States were the main determinant of the priorities of the treaty body capacity-building programme, the programme focused on States in which OHCHR did not have a presence. It had identified gaps in terms of non-ratification of treaties and non-reporting once treaties had been ratified. Another initial priority had been to raise awareness of the programme's existence in all regions, which had been done to date by delivering six training sessions for some 170 State officials. In the Caribbean, the training had led many State officials to realize how they could improve their engagement with the treaty bodies by creating a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up. Similarly positive results had been seen in southern Africa. The staff of the programme would explore ways of regularly updating the Committee on its work, and would welcome the Committee's suggestions on areas on which it should focus.
12. In the Pacific region, there had been a significant focus on encouraging ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which had proved an effective means of preparing the way for ratifications of other treaties. Such a focus on one treaty in a region or subregion might well be a good strategy for programme staff to adopt in the future.
13. States were increasingly interested in using technology, including databases, to improve their engagement with the treaty bodies. The programme staff were currently updating the Universal Human Rights Index and working to improve the search functions, including by adding a new means of conducting a search based on the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, programme staff were currently working on the prototype of a database to track national recommendations. The aim was to enable each State to download all the recommendations the treaty bodies had made to it from the Universal Human Rights Index to a national database, free of charge, as of summer 2017.

14. Given that there was a dire lack of money in the Special Fund established by the Optional Protocol, significant efforts were being made to conduct outreach to Member States so as to encourage them to donate to the Fund. The strategic focus of the Fund had been narrowed to support national preventive mechanisms only.

15. **The Chair** said that the Committee was keen to provide input into the work of the treaty body capacity-building programme and to be updated about its work on a regular basis.

Adoption of the agenda (CAT/C/59/1)

16. *The provisional agenda was adopted.*

The first part (public) of the meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.