Meeting of the Coordination Committee – Joint civil society statement

We, a group of 18 NGOs, would like to take this opportunity to express our support for the Coordination Committee’s efforts in recent years to strengthen and increase the effectiveness and accountability of the Special Procedures.

In the past years, the Special Procedures and the Coordination Committee have taken concrete steps to increase the transparency of their working methods and to strengthen the mechanism of the Special Procedures as a whole. These efforts have allowed for better responses to acts of reprisals and intimidation, the creation of a searchable, public database of communications, wider adoption of good practices in working methods of mandate holders, improvements in information available on the OHCHR website regarding activities of Special Procedures, and stronger Annual Reports of Special Procedures (including references to State cooperation and reprisals).

We take this opportunity to share our perspective as organizations that engage directly with the Special Procedures, and that support human rights defenders, victims and survivors in engaging with the mandates as they seek to halt ongoing violations, claim justice for past violations and strive for the full enjoyment and realization of human rights.

We would like to reiterate that it is fully within Special Procedures’ mandates, and key to reach domestic audiences, to issue timely public statements to address human rights situations including through the use of social media and regular, sustained engagement with media professionals and organisations. While press releases are generally a product of previous confidential engagement with a concerned state, the flexibility of the Special Procedures and their ability to pronounce themselves rapidly is key to the role as an early warning mechanism of the Human Rights Council. In no circumstances should procedures around State notification be allowed to be abused by States or other actors to seek to prevent the Special Procedures reacting in an effective and timely manner.

Transparency

We note that coordinated engagement is difficult for NGOs that engage with the Special Procedures, in particular for those based outside Geneva. We believe that it would be beneficial for all stakeholders to know what issues will be discussed at the Annual Meeting. Publicising the agenda, with an indication of private and public sessions, would enable interested stakeholders to provide relevant inputs. We would also encourage the Coordination Committee to publish a summary of the discussions held and any decisions taken, in a similar manner to the Treaty Body Chairpersons’ meeting.

Failures to cooperate - along with a lack of resources - are the greatest threats to the ability of Special Procedures to conduct their vital work. Consequently, we encourage you to seek ways to increase accountability for a lack of cooperation or selective cooperation by States. We recommend the inclusion of more details in the Annual Reports and by making lack of cooperation, and selective cooperation, a central piece of the item 5 discussions at the Human Rights Council.

Victims and their representatives who cooperate with Special Procedures are asked to provide consent while not being able to know, up until 60 days later and through their own research, whether action has been taken on their behalf. We believe that notification to victims must be provided when the Special Procedures communicate with a State, the duty bearer, concerning allegations of violations of their rights. We urge that the Special Procedures systematically notify the source of a communication that action is taken. Notifying victims would also enable them to be better informed about and alert to risks of intimidation and reprisals and to report these in a timely manner.

We also recommend that the Coordination Committee communicate more openly (in particular on its webpage) about the work that it does in addressing cases of intimidation and reprisals, and by informing victims of when mandate holders have taken action to respond to their situation.

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Increased visibility of and access to the Special Procedures

We encourage the Special Procedures to provide more timely information about thematic focus of their future work, and to publish at least tentative plans of upcoming reports and to **publish all calls for input/consultations for reports on a single page of the OHCHR website to make it as easy as possible for all stakeholders to know when these opportunities arise. We urge the Coordination Committee to step up its efforts to ensure timely publication of all reports to the Human Rights Council.**

We welcome the creation of a dedicated webpage for ‘good stories/impact’ and hope that this work will also trigger a larger discussion within OHCHR on follow-up to recommendations and communications of the Special Procedures.

Up to date and complete information of pending country visits is vital for an effective implementation of the country visit mandate of the Special Procedures, including to assess cooperation, and to encourage follow-up and implementation of recommendations. **We recommend that OHCHR and the Coordination Committee, while reworking the ‘visits requests page’, ensure that it provides a clear overview of up-to-date, actual priorities of the current mandate holders while also demonstrating states’ cooperation over time with the mandates, including the number of reminders sent.**

It would also be beneficial if application periods could be standardized so that proper dissemination of opportunities can take place in order to widen the pool of qualified candidates and encourage applications by persons from underrepresented communities and identities. **We believe that the deadlines for appointment of Special Procedure mandate holders can be made available for a longer period than by calendar year.**

Finally, **we recognize the need for states to provide the necessary resources to enable Special Procedures and the Coordination Committee to implement their mandates effectively and address some of the system wide concerns and suggestions made by various stakeholders.**

We look forward to continuing to work with the Coordination Committee, all Special Procedure mandate holders and other stakeholders with a view to further strengthen the Special Procedures’ contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights on the ground.

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
Amnesty International
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
Center for Reproductive Rights
Child Rights Connect
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
FIAN International
Forum Menschenrechte
Geneva for Human Rights (GHR)
Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC)
Human Rights Watch
ILGA World
International Commission of Jurists
International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI)
Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN)

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