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**Report on the activities of the Office of Internal
Oversight Services**

Audit of the activities, performance and results of staff support provided to the human rights treaty body system by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the activities, performance and results of staff support provided to the human rights treaty body system by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The audit showed the need for OHCHR to strengthen planning and performance management to enhance the effectiveness of staff support provided to the human rights treaty bodies by, inter alia: (a) incorporating the relevant workload and performance data in its workforce assessments to comprehensively explain and justify its staffing needs; (b) defining the scope of activities that should be considered under the two weeks of additional meeting time allowed per treaty body for other mandated activities; (c) strengthening internal coordination by developing appropriate protocols and workflows; (d) developing sectional workplans with clear output targets and establishing formal mechanisms to solicit feedback from experts; (e) strengthening the management of individual communications by prioritizing the development or acquisition of a case management system, identifying and sharing best practices among the treaty bodies, and improving the reporting and monitoring of the backlogs; (f) updating the strategy for the capacity-building programme to include aspects of coordination among the entities involved in its implementation; and (g) tracking the implementation status of decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of the treaty bodies.

As a result of the audit, OIOS made 10 important recommendations; OHCHR accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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I. Introduction

1. At the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 75/252, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the activities, performance and results of staff support provided to the human rights treaty body system by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) from February to June 2021. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of OHCHR governance, risk management and control processes in providing effective and efficient staff support to the treaty body system.

2. The human rights treaty body system consists of 10 treaty bodies or committees of independent experts (hereafter referred to as treaty bodies) that monitor the implementation of the core human rights treaties to assist State parties to fulfil their treaty obligations. The 10 treaty bodies are altogether comprised of 172 independent members (experts) who are elected by State parties and serve in their individual capacity on a pro bono basis.

3. The core mandate of the Human Rights Treaties Branch within the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanism Division of OHCHR is to support the treaty bodies and the various procedures through which the treaty bodies implement their mandate. The two main procedures of treaty bodies are: (a) review of the reports that each State party to a human rights treaty is required to submit regularly (see figure I); and (b) examination of formal complaints (communications) received from individuals and groups of individuals on alleged violation of their rights by a State party (see figure II).

Figure I
Standard procedure for review of State party reports
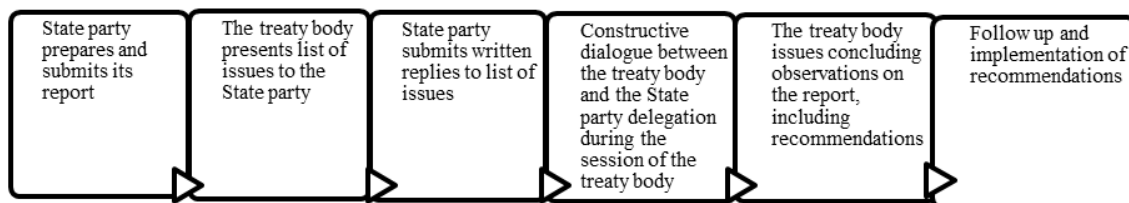
Figure II
Workflow for individual communications
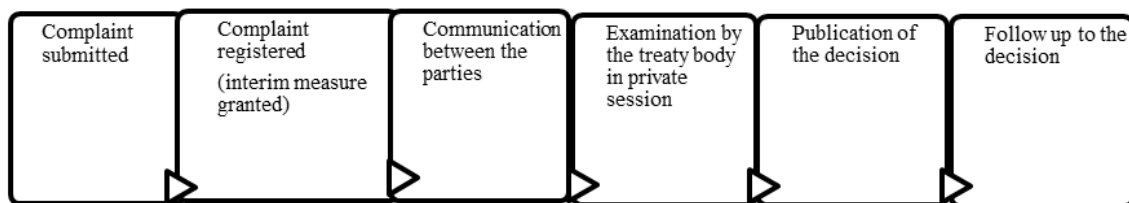
4. The Human Rights Treaties Branch also supported other mandated activities and procedures of the treaty bodies such as: (a) the inquiries procedure; (b) the adoption of general comments clarifying the contents of the international obligations of States under the relevant human rights treaties; (c) the urgent action procedure; (d) the follow up or request of further information procedures; (e) the inter-State communication procedure; and (f) country visits.

5. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights supports the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/268 on strengthening the human rights treaty body system by: (a) implementing the capacity-building

programme established by the resolution to increase State parties' compliance with their reporting obligations; (b) undertaking initiatives to harmonize and improve the efficiency of the treaty bodies' working methods; and (c) preparing biennial reports of the Secretary-General on the state of the treaty body system.

6.   The audit scope included a review of areas relating to: (a) staffing and structure; (b) workplanning and performance management; and (c) support for harmonization of working methods. The audit methodology included: (a) review of relevant documentation; (b) interviews with key personnel and stakeholders; (c) analytical review of data; (d) survey; and (e) sample testing of transactions. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

II.   Staffing and structure

A.   Staffing needs were assessed based on the established funding formula

7.   As at April 2021, the Human Rights Treaties Branch had 77 posts and 8 general temporary assistance positions funded from the regular budget and 14 posts funded by extrabudgetary resources whose core functions were to support the treaty bodies. General Assembly resolution 68/268 sets out the formula for assessing the meeting time for treaty bodies' sessions and requests the Secretary-General to provide the corresponding financial and human resources. The resolution provided for a biennial review of the meeting time. The formula established by OHCHR for assessing the staffing needs (staff funding formula) was explained in the background paper submitted by OHCHR (A/68/606) and the programme budget implications report (A/68/779). The staff funding formula is based on the assessed meeting time for treaty bodies' sessions and an estimated productivity rate of: (a) 15 weeks of professional staff time needed to support one week of meetings for review of State party reports; and (b) 70 weeks of professional staff time needed to support one week of meetings for review of communications.

8.   Although the overall assessed meeting time decreased marginally by 1.6 weeks during the period from 2015 to 2020, the meeting time assessed for communications (which is more labour-intensive) had almost doubled from 8.3 weeks in 2015 to 16 weeks in 2020. OHCHR was required to fully justify additional staffing needed to support the increased meeting time in each budget submission because there was no provision for automatic increase in staffing resources based on the increased workload.

9.   The review by OIOS confirmed that the posts requested by OHCHR in its budget submissions were computed based on the staff funding formula. However, not all the posts were approved by the General Assembly, as shown in table 1 below. The meeting time for communications assessed in the third biennial report (A/74/643) had also increased significantly by an additional 8.9 weeks, and the related resources will be assessed in the 2022 budget.

Table
Number of staff posts requested and not approved

	2018–2019		*2020*		*2021*	
	Requested	*Not approved*	*Requested*	*Not approved*	*Requested*	*Not approved*
P-3	10	5	12	7	12	5
General Service	1	1	2	2	2	1
Total	**11**	**6**	**14**	**9**	**14**	**6**

B.   Need to strengthen the workforce assessment

10.   There was a sharp increase in the number of registered communications, from 307 in 2015 to 709 in 2019, as well as increase in backlog of communications pending review, from 769 in 2015 to 1,595 in 2020. OHCHR needed to clearly demonstrate the linkage between the additional resources required for the period 2018 to 2021 and the increased workload, but this was not done effectively. In the first report on the proposed programme budget for 2021 (A/75/7), the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions pointed out that OHCHR had not sufficiently presented the need to reduce the backlog in communications and State party reports as a justification for the additional posts requested.

11.   OHCHR relied on the staff funding formula for assessing the staffing needs arising from the increase in meeting time and related workload, instead of using actual performance data to justify the staffing requirements. Since the productivity rates used in the staff funding formula are broad estimates, OHCHR needs to refine them based on available performance data such as historical averages or other relevant data generated from workload assessments. This should help the Human Rights Treaties Branch to comprehensively justify its staffing gaps based on verifiable data. The comparison by OIOS of the productivity rates used in the staff funding formula with the average productivity rates showed some variances as discussed below.

12.   For communications, on average during the period 2015 to 2019, about 62 weeks of professional staff time was used in supporting one week of meetings. This was lower than the 70 weeks indicated in the staff funding formula, reflecting higher productivity than was assumed in the formula. Unless there were convincing explanations for the variance, the workforce assessment should have been based on actual performance data rather than the estimate indicated in the staff funding formula.

13.   For State party reports, on average about 20 weeks of professional staff time was used for supporting one week of meetings during the period from 2015 to 2019, which was more than the 15 weeks indicated in the staff funding formula. This increase could be attributed to several factors, including the decreasing trend in the number of State party reports received and reviewed.

14.   While the staff funding formula serves as a starting point for assessing staffing needs, the use of performance and workload data should enable OHCHR to develop more reliable workforce assessments to support the treaty bodies.

Recommendation 1
OHCHR should incorporate the relevant workload and performance data in its workforce assessments to comprehensively explain and justify its staffing needs.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would calculate the average productivity rates and reflect this in the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system.

Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence of the action taken by OHCHR to improve its workforce assessments for justifying its staffing needs.

C. Need for defining the scope of meeting time allowed for other mandated activities

15. The additional two weeks of meeting time approved in General Assembly resolution 68/268 was expected to meet the commitments of other mandated activities (i.e., activities other than the review of State party reports and communications). The first biennial report of the Secretary-General on the status of the human rights treaty body system (A/71/118) indicated that the staffing resources provided for the meeting weeks of additional mandated activities were insufficient to carry out work in the following areas: (a) urgent actions; (b) inquiries; and (c) implementation of recommendations, decisions and views. The biennial report stated that for all the three procedures, the additional meeting time of two weeks allowed per treaty body would not resolve the challenges faced by the treaty body system in these areas. Successive biennial reports (A/73/309 and A/74/643) recommended the allocation of additional resources for these activities.

16. In the absence of any estimation of staff weeks and meeting time per activity, it was difficult to determine the effectiveness of utilization of the meeting time allowed for other mandated activities. Since the scope of such mandated activities is likely to increase, it is essential that the related workload is defined and assessed.

Recommendation 2
OHCHR should define the scope of activities that should be considered under the two weeks of additional meeting time allowed per treaty body for other mandated activities.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch will estimate the staff weeks and meeting time per activity and reflect this in the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system.

Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that OHCHR has defined the scope of activities that should be considered under the two weeks of additional meeting time allowed per treaty body for other mandated activities.

D. Need for addressing the risk of staff turnover and potential knowledge gaps

17. The length of service put in by P-2/P-3 staff in the Human Rights Treaties Branch ranged between one to two years in 57 per cent of the cases. About 44 per cent of staff in the Petitions and Urgent Actions Section moved to other sections of the Branch within one to two years. About 48 per cent of P-2/P-3 staff moved out of the treaty body system within one to two years. The knowledge and experience of individual staff within the Branch is vital to its service delivery. The issue of unevenness in the quality of support provided by the Branch was a recurring concern raised by several experts who responded to the OIOS survey. Although the risk of staff turnover was high, it had not been recognized and adequately mitigated. If not addressed through appropriate knowledge management activities, the high turnover of staff could impact the quality of decisions/views of the treaty bodies.

18. With regard to training, staff were required to complete five days of substantive training annually which was expected to be monitored through their performance appraisals. The review by OIOS of the performance documents of 20 staff members

indicated that this activity was not appraised consistently. For example, 65 per cent of these staff did not plan for any substantive training, and 42 per cent had not completed the mandatory training stipulated in the Secretary-General bulletin ST/SGB/2018/4. OHCHR needs to address these shortcomings to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its staffing support to the treaty body system.

Recommendation 3
OHCHR should: (a) recognize the risk of high staff turnover in the Human Rights Treaties Branch and identify appropriate mitigating measures; and (b) ensure that all Branch staff complete the required substantive and mandatory training.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would ensure that: (a) the risk of high staff turnover in the Branch and related mitigating measures are incorporated in the OHCHR risk register; and (b) all Branch staff complete the required substantive and mandatory training by using the ePerformance tool in Inspira for the current cycle ending in March 2022.

Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that: (a) the risk of high staff turnover in the Branch and related mitigating measures have been incorporated in the risk register; and (b) action has been taken to ensure that staff complete the required substantive and mandatory training.

E. Need to strengthen internal coordination

19.   The review of State party reports requires the Human Rights Treaties Branch to effectively coordinate with other parts of OHCHR, particularly the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division which is responsible for field operations. In actual practice, the Branch pursued coordination mostly through informal contacts. Only one of its four sections had reflected coordination activities in its workplans. Further, only 39 per cent of Branch staff who responded to OIOS survey expressed satisfaction with the level of collaboration with other divisions of OHCHR. To ensure effective coordination and optimize the support to the treaty bodies, OHCHR needs to institutionalize coordination activities and develop appropriate protocols, checklists and workflows.

Recommendation 4
OHCHR should strengthen coordination arrangements for review of State party reports by developing appropriate protocols and workflows.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would strengthen its internal coordination for review of State party reports by documenting the appropriate protocols and workflows with other parts of OHCHR.

Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that appropriate protocols and workflows have been developed to strengthen internal coordination for review of State party reports.

III. Workplanning and performance management

A. Need for strengthening workplanning and performance management

20. The Human Rights Treaties Branch performance results and management outputs reported through the OHCHR performance monitoring system indicated that it had provided organizational, legal, analytical, policy and technical support to the treaty bodies to carry out their functions and mandates. The Human Rights Treaties Branch had also facilitated the monitoring and analysis of compliance by State parties with obligations under the 10 treaties, and the results were reported through biennial reports. Programme implementation of the Branch was monitored through performance reports incorporated in programme budgets. For example, the 2020 performance report was incorporated in the proposed budget for 2022 (A/76/6 (Sect. 24)). On an annual basis, the Branch defined its deliverables such as parliamentary documentation, substantive servicing of meetings and seminars, workshops and training events.

21. The Human Rights Treaties Branch prepared Branch-wide annual workplans that fed into the OHCHR management plan at the entity level, but it did not formalize section level workplans aligned to outputs in the Branch-wide annual workplans. The Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Section and the Coordination Unit had prepared their section and unit level workplans, but in the absence of measurable targets, their performance could not be objectively assessed. Sections within the Human Rights Treaties Branch also prepared calendar of meetings but targets were not clearly established; besides, there were other activities relating to management of their programme, such as outreach-related initiatives, that needed to be reflected in their workplans.

22. Since the Human Rights Treaties Branch is a service-oriented entity, assessing the satisfaction of experts could serve as a useful performance management tool. OHCHR explained that it had systematically consulted the experts in preparation and review of its plans. However, there were no formal mechanisms for soliciting feedback from experts. While the treaty bodies' sessions provided opportunities to gather feedback informally, a formal mechanism is required to capture such feedback from all experts and use it for purposes of programme planning.

Recommendation 5
OHCHR should ensure that the Human Rights Treaties Branch strengthens its workplanning and performance management by: (a) developing sectional workplans with clear output targets and monitoring the planned results effectively; and (b) establishing formal mechanisms to solicit feedback from experts.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 5 and stated that: (a) the Human Rights Treaties Branch sections without workplans would develop sectional workplans complying with the internal performance monitoring system of OHCHR; and (b) the Human Rights Treaties Branch would establish a formal mechanism to solicit feedback from experts in coordination with other parts of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division.

Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of evidence that: (a) sectional workplans have been developed with clear targets, and planned results are monitored effectively; and (b) feedback is solicited from experts.

B. Need for a case management system and strengthening the management of backlogs

23.   The number of communications that the treaty bodies reviewed annually with support from the Human Rights Treaties Branch increased from an average of 197 per year from 2015 to 2017 to 247 per year from 2018 to 2020. However, the backlog of communications pending review had more than doubled to 1,595 in 2020 due to the increasing trend in the number of communications registered. At the current rate of review, it would take over six years to clear the backlog of pending communications, assuming no new registered cases are considered. This would significantly delay or deny justice for victims of human rights violations.

24.   The review by OIOS of the workflow for processing communications showed significant inefficiencies associated with manual procedures. For instance, the Human Rights Treaties Branch had about 50 templates for transmittal letters at various stages of the communications workflow which had to be filled in and subjected to a layer of reviews. Documentation was maintained in paper-based format which was prone to inefficiencies, was not environment-friendly, and posed a risk to confidentiality. The database used for case management was inadequate and needed to be replaced because: (a) it was not fully aligned with the workflow outlined in the Manual on Communications and Urgent Actions; (b) it was not accessible to experts; (c) it was not accessible to petitioners; (d) it did not have the capacity to store registered complaints in electronic form; and (e) it was not user friendly to facilitate effective tracking of complaints and extract information for analysis. The Human Rights Treaties Branch had identified the need to develop or acquire a case management system, and there were ongoing efforts to raise funds for this purpose.

25.   With regard to the working methods of the treaty bodies, there were varying practices in processing communications which presented the opportunity to identify and institutionalize best practices to enhance efficiency. The Human Rights Treaties Branch also needs to strengthen reporting and monitoring of the backlog of pending communications. No clear targets had been established to monitor the impact, if any, of the additional meeting time of 5 per cent allocated to the treaty bodies to overcome the backlogs. Monitoring needs to be improved to capture the status of backlogs at various stages of the communications workflow. Additionally, the level of communications received needs to be reported as required by General Assembly resolution 68/268 to monitor the workload between receipt of communications and registration.

> **Recommendation 6**
> **OHCHR should strengthen the management of individual communications by: (a) prioritizing the development or acquisition of a case management system; (b) identifying and sharing best practices among the treaty bodies to enhance overall efficiency; and (c) improving the reporting and monitoring of the backlog of communications pending review.**
>
> OHCHR accepted recommendation 6 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would (a) document action taken to develop or acquire a case management system; (b) document the sharing of best practices in working methods among the treaty bodies and continue to align working methods, where possible; and (c) further report and monitor the backlog of communications pending review.

Recommendation 6 remains open pending receipt of evidence of: (a) action taken to develop or acquire a case management system; (b) sharing of best practices in working methods among the treaty bodies; and (c) improved reporting on the status of backlogs of communications pending review.

C. Need to develop a road map for implementing the predictable review cycle

26. There is an ongoing initiative by the treaty bodies to move to a predictable review cycle for reviewing State party reports to improve predictability in reporting and help ensure regular reporting by all States parties. The initiative to implement a predictable review calendar had been ongoing for years. At the time of the audit, the Human Rights Treaties Branch had been drafting a schedule and estimated costing for the predictable review cycle, to be discussed by the Chairs of the treaty bodies. While key decisions on the initiative would be made by State parties, the Branch needs to define a road map for implementing the predictable review cycle.

Recommendation 7
OHCHR should prepare a road map, including assessment of costs, for implementing the predictable review cycle.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 7 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would prepare a road map, including assessment of costs for implementing the predictable review cycle.

Recommendation 7 remains open pending receipt of evidence of a roadmap for implementing the predictable review cycle, including assessment of costs.

D. Need to strengthen some aspects of the capacity-building programme

27. The capacity-building programme aims at supporting State parties in building their capacity to implement their treaty obligations. According to the biennial reports (A/71/118, A/73/309 and A/74/643), between January 2015 and October 2019, the programme had achieved the following: (a) contributed to 24 new treaty ratifications; (b) contributed to 66 submissions of outstanding State party reports, responses, and common core documents; (c) facilitated participation of State officials in dialogue with the treaty bodies; (d) encouraged and assisted States to establish new or strengthened national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up; (e) increased the knowledge and skills of State officials on specific treaties or issues; (f) issued five publications on capacity-building; and (g) developed a training package on treaty reporting, among others.

28. However, there were shortcomings in the development and maintenance of roster of experts on treaty body reporting. Although the programme had conducted 12 "training of trainers" programmes between 2015 and 2018 and trained around 350 participants, no such "training of trainers" programmes were conducted in the Central Africa and Europe regions. OHCHR was also using the "training of trainers" participants list as the roster of experts instead of identifying suitable experts from the participants list to be placed on the roster based on established criteria, as well as their interest and availability. The absence of an up-to-date roster of experts may limit

the choices of OHCHR field offices in getting the right talent at the right time to meet the programme's expectations.

29. The programme's strategy also had the following shortcomings: (a) the roles and responsibilities of other entities within OHCHR who were responsible for implementing the programme had not been defined, as also the related coordination arrangements; (b) General Assembly resolution 68/268 expected the programme to facilitate the sharing of best practices among State parties but the strategy did not address this aspect; and (c) the strategy had not been updated to incorporate the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic response and initiatives that the programme was undertaking.

Recommendation 8
OHCHR should: (a) update its strategy for the capacity-building programme to include aspects of coordination among the various entities involved in its implementation, and to include the COVID-19 pandemic-related initiatives; and (b) review and update the roster of experts to ensure that the programme's expectations are effectively met.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 8 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would: (a) update its strategy for capacity-building; and (b) review and update the roster of experts and include these recommendations in its sectional workplans.

Recommendation 8 remains open pending receipt of: (a) an updated strategy for the capacity building programme that includes internal coordination and COVID-19 pandemic-related initiatives; and (b) evidence that the roster of experts has been reviewed and updated.

IV. Support for harmonization of working methods

A. Need for tracking the decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of treaty bodies

30. There were ongoing initiatives to harmonize working methods of the various treaty bodies as required by General Assembly resolution 68/268. The Chairs of treaty bodies had the mandate to make decisions regarding their working methods and procedures. The Coordination Unit in the Human Rights Treaties Branch which was responsible for monitoring the progress in harmonization of working methods of the treaty bodies had prepared its workplan with defined activities to promote harmonization through annual meetings of Chairs. However, the Branch had not established a system of tracking the decisions and recommendations of the Chairs to facilitate effective monitoring of progress in harmonization. During interviews with OIOS, experts and staff indicated a strong need for such tracking.

Recommendation 9
OHCHR should establish a system for tracking the implementation status of decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of the treaty bodies.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 9 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would establish a system for tracking the implementation status of decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of the treaty bodies and present it to their forthcoming meeting in June 2022.

Recommendation 9 remains open pending receipt of evidence that a system has been established to track the status of decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of the treaty bodies.

B. Need to finalize the internal guidelines on the simplified reporting procedure

31. The simplified reporting procedure is an optional procedure for review of State party reports offered to State parties, in lieu of the standard reporting procedure indicated in figure 1. It is aimed at easing the reporting burden and producing more focused reporting. Under the simplified reporting procedure, a State party's response to a "list of issues prior to reporting" constitutes its report. To address the diverse practices in how the various treaty bodies implemented the simplified reporting procedure, in June 2019, the Chairs recommended that it would be useful to have an aligned methodology for the procedure. At the time of the audit, the Human Rights Treaties Branch had developed draft guidelines that were yet to be finalized. However, the draft guidelines had not taken into account the lessons learned from the experience in implementing the simplified reporting procedure.

Recommendation 10
OHCHR should finalize the internal guidelines and methodology related to the simplified reporting procedure, taking into account the lessons learned.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 10 and stated that the Human Rights Treaties Branch would finalize the internal guidelines and methodology related to the simplified reporting procedure by taking into account the lessons learned.

Recommendation 10 remains open pending receipt of evidence that internal guidelines and methodology related to the simplified reporting procedure have been finalized taking into account the lessons learned.

C. Efforts were ongoing to address the challenges in holding treaty body sessions online

32. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the High Commissioner provided regular updates to the Secretary-General on the pandemic's impact on the work of the treaty bodies, and the action taken to mitigate the impact. The Human Rights Treaties Branch developed a webpage providing information on this subject, and also issued timely and specific recommendations to States. It also developed a toolkit of treaty law perspectives and jurisprudence in the context of COVID-19. Further, the Branch

supported the treaty bodies' working group on COVID-19 which was established to address the procedural and substantive aspects of the pandemic's impact on the work of treaty bodies.

33. The treaty bodies were able to continue with some of their work remotely during the pandemic, although at a significantly reduced level. In 2020, the Human Rights Treaties Branch supported the treaty bodies during 50 weeks of online meetings (about half the number of planned sessions). The treaty bodies adopted decisions on 237 individual communications, which was almost the same as the average of 259 decisions adopted in 2018 and 2019. However, review of State party reports was significantly affected with only 28 State party reports reviewed in 2020 compared to the annual average of 136 in 2018 and 2019. Only one State party review was done online in 2020. As a result, the backlog in State party reports pending review increased from 183 in 2018 to 345 in 2020. The treaty bodies also adopted 84 "list of issues" and 58 "list of issues prior to reporting" as preparatory to State party reviews.

34. Interviews with experts and response to the OIOS survey showed that there were still some lingering challenges associated with online meetings such as: (a) poor communication systems; (b) a lack of reliable data systems; (c) the need for online platforms to be tailored to meet the special needs of people with disabilities; (d) insufficient interpretation services; and (e) concern regarding lack of compensation to help experts to offset the costs associated with online meetings. OHCHR had raised these issues with the relevant offices of the Secretariat and they were also highlighted in the reports of the treaty bodies working group on COVID-19. The digital strategy developed by the Human Rights Treaties Branch in January 2021 aimed to address some of the risks and challenges associated with remote working. In view of the ongoing efforts by OHCHR to address these issues, OIOS did not make recommendation on this aspect.

(*Signed*) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
August 2021

Annex

Comments received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on an audit of the activities, performance and results of staff support provided to the human rights treaty body system by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Recommendation	Critical[a]/ Important[b]	Accepted?	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Comments
Recommendation 1 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should incorporate the relevant workload and performance data in its workforce assessments to comprehensively explain and justify its staffing needs.	Important	Yes	All Chiefs, Human Rights Treaties Branch	31 December 2021	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will use the same methodology as recommended by OIOS in paragraph 11 of the report to calculate the average productivity rates and reflect this in the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system (report to be submitted in January 2022). The Human Rights Treaties Branch would welcome receiving further methodological examples of any other best practices used in the United Nations Secretariat for the same purposes.
Recommendation 2 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should define the scope of activities that should be considered under the two weeks of additional meeting time allowed per treaty body for other mandated activities.	Important	Yes	All Chiefs, Human Rights Treaties Branch	31 December 2021	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will estimate the staff weeks and meeting time per activity as recommended in paragraph 16 of the report and reflect this in the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system (report to be submitted in January 2022). The Human Rights Treaties Branch would welcome receiving further methodological examples of any other best practices used in the United Nations Secretariat for the same purposes.

Recommendation	Critical[a]/ Important[b]	Accepted?	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Comments
Recommendation 3 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should: (a) recognize the risk of high staff turnover in the Human Rights Treaties Branch and identify appropriate mitigating measures; and (b) ensure that all Human Rights Treaties Branch staff complete the required substantive and mandatory training.	Important	Yes	(a) Office of the Director, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division and (b) All Chiefs, Human Rights Treaties Branch	30 April 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will ensure that: (a) the risk of high staff turnover in the Human Rights Treaties Branch and related mitigating measures are incorporated in the OHCHR risk register; and (b) all the Human Rights Treaties Branch staff complete the required substantive and mandatory training by using the ePerformance tool in Inspira, current cycle ending in March 2022.
Recommendation 4 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should strengthen coordination arrangements for review of State party reports by developing appropriate protocols and workflows.	Important	Yes	All Chiefs, Human Rights Treaties Branch	30 April 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will strengthen its internal coordination for review of State party reports by documenting the appropriate protocols and workflows with other parts of OHCHR by including this recommendation in the sectional workplans to begin implementation by April 2022.
Recommendation 5 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should ensure that the Human Rights Treaties Branch strengthens its workplanning and performance management by: (a) developing sectional workplans with clear output targets and monitoring the planned results effectively; and (b) establishing formal mechanisms to solicit feedback from experts.	Important	Yes	(a) All Chiefs, Human Rights Treaties Branch, and (b) Director, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division	31 December 2021	The Human Rights Treaties Branch sections without workplans will: (a) develop sectional workplans complying with the internal performance monitoring system of OHCHR. Focal points in each section will need to be identified; and (b) Human Rights Treaties Branch will establish a formal mechanism to solicit feedback from experts in coordination with the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division and overall OHCHR policies and based on current United Nations Secretariat practices, and will include the present recommendation in the sectional workplans. Implementation of these recommendations will require additional staff capacity.

Recommendation	Critical[a]/ Important[b]	Accepted?	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Comments
Recommendation 6 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should strengthen the management of individual communications by: (a) prioritizing the development or acquisition of a case management system; (b) identifying and sharing best practices among the treaty bodies to enhance overall efficiency; and (c) improving the reporting and monitoring of the backlog of communications pending review.	Important	Yes	Chief, Petitions and Urgent Actions Section, Human Rights Treaties Branch	30 April 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will: (a) document action taken to develop or acquire a case management system; (b) document the sharing of best practices in working methods among the treaty bodies and continue to align working methods, where possible; and (c) further report and monitor the backlog of communications pending review.
Recommendation 7 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should prepare a road map, including assessment of costs, for implementing the predictable review cycle.	Important	Yes	Chief, Human Rights Treaties Branch	30 April 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will prepare a road map, including assessment of costs for implementing the predictable review cycle.
Recommendation 8 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should: (a) update its strategy for the capacity-building programme to include aspects of coordination among the various entities involved in its implementation, and to include the COVID-19 pandemic-related initiatives; and (b) review and update the roster of experts to ensure that the programme's expectations are effectively met.	Important	Yes	Chief, Anti-Torture, Capacity-Building, Coordination and Funds Section, Human Rights Treaties Branch	30 April 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will: (a) update its strategy for the capacity-building and (b) review and update the roster of experts and include these recommendations in its sectional workplan.

Recommendation	Critical[a]/ Important[b]	Accepted?	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Comments
Recommendation 9 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should establish a system for tracking the implementation status of decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of the treaty bodies.	Important	Yes	Chief, Anti-Torture, Capacity-Building, Coordination and Funds Section, Human Rights Treaties Branch	28 February 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will establish a system for tracking the implementation status of decisions and recommendations of the Chairs of the treaty bodies and present it to the forthcoming meeting of Chairs of treaty bodies in June 2022.
Recommendation 10 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should finalize the internal guidelines and methodology related to the simplified reporting procedure, taking into account the lessons learned.	Important	Yes	Chief, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Section, Human Rights Treaties Branch	30 June 2022	The Human Rights Treaties Branch will finalize the internal guidelines and methodology related to the simplified reporting procedure by taking into account the lessons learned by June 2022.

[a] Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

[b] Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.