Informal guidance note for the States Parties on procedures for the submission and consideration by treaty bodies of individual communications[1]

March 2026

A. Registration of communications

1. Engagement of a Committee with a State Party on an individual communication starts with the note verbale by which the Secretariat informs the State that the communication has been registered with a Committee under a specific number. By the same note verbale, the State Party is provided with a copy of the communication submitted by the author of the communication and is requested to provide observations on the admissibility and the merits of the author's claims within six months. Depending on the specific circumstances described in the communication, the Committee may request initially that the State submit observations on admissibility only.

2. Communications must be submitted through a dedicated online submission portal, which requires authors to provide certain mandatory information within a set word limit. In exceptional cases, the Secretariat may accept communications submitted in other written formats.

3. An electronic version of the note verbale, the communication and any attachments, as well as subsequent notes verbales on the communication in question, are sent to the Permanent Mission in Geneva. States may request the Secretariat to send electronic versions of notes verbales and attachments directly to a particular authority in their capital, with or without an electronic copy being sent to their Permanent Mission in Geneva.

4. The decision to register a communication is taken by the Committee in question acting through a special rapporteur or a working group on communications, depending on the Committee.[2] The special rapporteurs and working groups are also entrusted to deal with any procedural issue that may arise from the moment of registration to the moment when the Committee examines the admissibility and/or the merits of a given communication, including requests from authors seeking the adoption of interim measures and protection measures by the State; requests from States to lift interim measures; and requests from the parties to suspend the consideration of a communication.[3]

5. A communication is registered and transmitted to the State concerned only after the Committee, acting through its special rapporteur or working group on communications, with the assistance of the OHCHR Secretariat, has ascertained that the basic admissibility criteria have been prima facie met (i.e. that the relevant instrument has been ratified by the State

[1] The treaty bodies referred to in the present note are the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee against Torture, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

[2] In the case of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the function of the working group on communications is to facilitate and expedite the examination by the Committee, in plenary, of the admissibility and the merits of communications. Procedural issues, such as registration of new communications, are dealt with by the Special Rapporteur on new communications and interim measures.

[3] For the Human Rights Committee, see the report entitled "The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on new communications and interim measures" (CCPR/C/110/3).

concerned, that the identity of the alleged victim has been ascertained, that the powers of attorney have been submitted, and that sufficient information is included on the facts –including exhaustion of domestic remedies and claims). This may require the Secretariat to request the author to complete or clarify the information provided when he or she initially approached the Committee. Inadmissibility decisions on registered cases can be taken by the Committee without prior transmission of the communication to the State concerned for observations. However, the decision is transmitted to the author and the State, for information.

B. Interim or provisional measures

6. At any time after the receipt of a communication and before a determination on the merits has been reached, the Committee may request the State to take measures to avoid irreparable damage to the alleged victim. Typical interim measures involve, for instance, potential violations of the right to life or the prohibition of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In case of children, it may also involve measures aimed at preventing violations to the right to education, the right to housing or the right not to be separated from their parents. Failure by the State concerned to adopt interim measures is considered by the Committees to constitute a breach of the State's procedural obligation under the respective treaties.

7. In some circumstances, the Committee's decision to request interim measures is issued subject to the author providing additional information to the Committee within 60 days. If no relevant information is received by that time, the interim measures request is lifted. States may in some instances be requested to provide observations on a request for interim measures before a decision thereon is taken by the Committee.

8. The State can, at any stage in the proceedings, ask the Committee to lift the request for interim measures. The information provided by the State to justify the lifting of interim measures should be succinct and focus, preferably, on the question of the existence of a risk of irreparable harm to the alleged victim(s). In responding to a request to lift interim measures, the Committee in question does not carry out an anticipated examination of the admissibility or merits of the communication. The State's request to lift interim measures should be clearly formulated at the beginning of the letter addressed to the Committee.

9. The State's request to lift interim measures is generally transmitted to the author of the communication, to give him or her the opportunity to provide comments within a brief deadline. Once the comments have been received, or should the author fail to submit them within the given deadline, the Committee takes a decision on the State's request on the basis of the information contained in the file.

10. Decisions of the Committees to request interim measures or not and decisions to grant or reject a State's request to lift them do not imply that any conclusion has been reached in respect of the admissibility or the merits of the communication. The reason for such decisions is not communicated to the parties.

C. Protection measures

11. In the course of the proceedings, the Committee may also request the State to take protection measures with respect to individuals involved in the communication. Protection measures are to be distinguished from interim measures in that their purpose is not to prevent irreparable damage to the alleged victim, but to protect those who might suffer intimidation or reprisals (including counsel and family members) as a result of a communication or cooperation

with the Committee. The Committee may seek from the State written explanations or statements clarifying the matter and describing any action taken in that regard.

D. Submission of observations and comments by the parties

12. Observations from the State on admissibility and the merits, as well as the author's comments thereon, should not exceed 10,000 words excluding annexes. Submissions should be sent to the Secretariat (ohchr-petitions@un.org) in electronic form (PDF or Word).

13. The observations on admissibility and the merits submitted by the State are transmitted to the author of the communication with a request to provide comments within two months.

14. The parties to a communication can request the Committee to extend the deadline within which to submit observations and comments, but such requests should be duly reasoned and submitted well in advance of the relevant deadline.

15. If the parties do not comply with the given deadline, the Secretariat of the Committee sends one reminder. If no response is provided by the State Party despite the reminders, the Committee examines the communication on the basis of the information contained in the file. Failure by the State to submit observations is considered by the Committee a lack of cooperation in the procedure and is referred to as such in the Committee's final decision on the communication. In case of failure by the author of the communication to provide comments, the Committee may decide to discontinue the examination of the communication as a result of having lost contact with the author. When submitting observations and comments, the parties may indicate particular circumstances that should prompt the Committee to expedite its consideration of the communication.

16. States are welcome to submit to the Committee a background note explaining the procedure for exhausting domestic remedies, generally or with respect to a particular type of claim, for instance the procedure for requesting asylum. Such a note can be referred to by States in formulating their observations on specific communications, to reduce the length of submissions.

17. After the parties in a communication have submitted one round of observations and comments on admissibility and merits or merits only, the communication is generally considered ready to be examined by the Committee. The rules of procedure of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provide for a possibility for States to submit an optional rejoinder to the author's comments on their observations. The admission of any further submissions requires the authorisation of said Committees. The rules of procedure of other Committees do not provide for a specific number of rounds of submissions. However, subsequent submissions should be limited to addressing new factual developments and avoid duplication of previous submissions.

18. The additional submissions are transmitted to the other party for information only or for information and comments. However, the fact that a submission is transmitted for information only does not mean that the party to which it is addressed cannot comment on it, within a reasonable time. The Committee may also decide to make a specific request for information to any of the parties, e.g., to clarify a particular aspect of the case or to receive a factual update.

19. Requests for observations and comments on additional submissions or requests for information emanating from the Committee on specific issues are given ad hoc deadlines, shorter than those applicable to first-round submissions.

20. At any given time the Committee may inform the parties that no more additional submissions are required from them in order for it to examine the admissibility and/or the merits of the communication.

21. While the procedure is under way, the Committee may request or accept relevant submissions from third parties. Such submissions are transmitted to the parties in the communication for information and/or comments. Several Committees have issued guidelines on third-party interventions that apply to these exchanges.

E. Split requests

22. For reasons of procedural efficiency and structural resource constraints, on 8 May 2024, all Committees decided to suspend, until further notice, the possibility for States Parties to request that Committees consider the admissibility of a communication separately from its merits (split request). This does not preclude the possibility for Committees to request from States observations only on admissibility issues, as provided for in paragraph 1 of this Guidance note.

F. Requests to suspend examination or to discontinue examination of a communication

23. At any stage of the proceedings, the parties can request, in view of developments having an impact on the issues raised in a communication, that the examination of the communication be suspended for a limited period of time or that it be discontinued. Such requests are transmitted to the other party, as applicable, for information only or for information and comments within a given deadline. The Committee takes a decision on the basis of the information submitted to it and informs the parties accordingly. Communications may be typically suspended when new proceedings are engaged that may address the claims raised before the Committees, or when the parties engage in a process aimed at resolving the complaint through friendly settlements. Communications may be discontinued inter alia when the complaint has lost its object because the claims raised have been resolved, or when the author loses interest in the case.

24. Regarding communications where the consideration has been temporarily suspended, the parties are requested to keep the Committee regularly informed of any relevant developments. The Committee may resume the examination of a suspended communication in the light of relevant developments.

25. A decision to discontinue proceedings is final. The decision is formally issued and made public. If the same author subsequently submits to the Committee information on new facts linked to the original claim, the submission will be dealt with by the Committee as a new communication, separate from the original one.

G. Examination of admissibility and the merits

26. Once the parties have provided one round of observations and comments, or after the deadline to submit such observations by the State has elapsed and no submissions have been received, as described above, the communication is considered ready to be examined by the Committee, which shall proceed to an examination of the admissibility and/or the merits at one of its future sessions.

27. In deciding the order in which communications are examined, the Committees generally follow the chronological order in which they were registered. However, other criteria may also

be taken into consideration including: (a) the urgency of the matter in view of the circumstances of the alleged victim (imminent execution of a death penalty, imprisonment after an unfair trial, etc.); (b) the fact that the State has acceded to the Committee's request to grant interim measures pending the Committee's disposition of the case; or (c) the possible implications that a decision by the Committee may have for future developments in the State on an issue of general concern.

H. Follow-up to Views

28. A decision in which a Committee declares a communication admissible and examines its merits is referred to as Views. Where the Committee finds a violation of the relevant treaty, it will include in its Views recommendations to the State Party to remedy the violation. These recommendations usually have an individual limb, with measures to be taken in respect of the victim(s), and a general limb with recommendations to ensure non-repetition. The State Party is invited to submit a written response within three or six months of the transmission of the Views, depending on the Committee's rules of procedure.

29. Information provided by the State Party should address the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee. These may include, where appropriate, individual remedies for the author, such as restitution, compensation or other forms of redress, as well as general measures aimed at preventing similar violations in the future, such as legislative, policy or administrative changes.

30. The Committees have established a follow-up procedure to monitor the implementation of recommendations adopted in relation to individual communications under the responsibility of a designated Special Rapporteur or Rapporteur for follow-up to Views. The Committee examines the information received from the State Party and the author regarding the implementation of the recommendations. The Committee may request additional information where necessary.

31. Based on the information received, the Committee assesses the extent to which the State Party has implemented the Views, including by awarding a grade[4]. The Committees adopt follow-up progress reports on individual communications with said assessments, which are made public. The follow-up procedure may continue until the Committee considers that satisfactory measures have been taken or that no further action is possible.

I. Contact with the Committees' Secretariat

32. Observations and requests on individual communications, as well as any other queries regarding the consideration of individual communications addressed to the treaty bodies, should be sent to the Petitions Section of OHCHR at ohchr-petitions@un.org.

[4] For most Committees, the assessment criteria are the following: an assessment of "A" is adopted when the measures taken are largely satisfactory, "B" when substantive measures have been taken, but additional information and/or action is required, "C" when a reply has been received but the measures taken do not implement the Views/recommendations, and "D" in case no reply has been received to all or parts of the recommendations, following a reminder.