

29 May 2019

Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations Headquarters, New York
By email: sgcentral@un.org

Ms. Michelle Bachelet
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais Wilson, Geneva
By email: mbachelet@ohchr.org

Dear Secretary-General Guterres and High Commissioner Bachelet,

We write to express our deep concern regarding the proposed cancellation, for financial reasons, of the sessions of six UN human rights treaty bodies scheduled to take place in late 2019, and to call on you to urgently explore taking emergency measures to avert this outcome.

As you are aware, the human rights treaty bodies are created by legally-binding international conventions that have been adopted by the UN General Assembly and ratified by States. They are comprised of unpaid experts and as a result require relatively modest resources to function, amounting to a mere fraction of the UN's regular budget. As the Secretary General noted in his 2018 report on the status of the human rights treaty body system pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/268, "[t]he treaty body system constitutes a precious tool for the protection of human rights that is the foundation of all other human rights mechanisms, and it is relied upon as being authoritative by diverse actors worldwide."

However, this "precious tool" is poised to be the system most seriously harmed by the effects of the UN's present financial difficulties. We understand that the proposed cancellation of upcoming sessions of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee against Torture, and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, is a consequence of a projected \$2.7 million budget shortfall in the budget for the treaty body system.

The cancellation of these sessions would be unprecedented. It would not only infringe the treaty body system's legally obligatory oversight function, but will also have harmful consequences for all stakeholders who expected to participate in these proceedings, including the Member States, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations which have prepared information about the countries to be reviewed, as well as the authors of individual petitions to the treaty bodies that would have been considered at these sessions. We are concerned that countless other stakeholders will be affected should treaty body activities planned for 2020 need to be rescheduled to complete the activities originally scheduled for 2019.

We recognize that the precarious financial situation currently facing the UN is a consequence of decisions by Member States, including an across-the-board reduction by 25 percent of the costs of the travel of representatives, a category which includes the treaty body experts, as well as the failure of several Member States to pay assessed contributions to the United Nations in a timely manner. We also appreciate that Member States must act as expeditiously as possible to reach a sustainable solution to the financial crisis facing the treaty bodies, and we have urged them to do so.

Nevertheless, we urge you both to urgently explore how resources could be redeployed in order to avert the cancellation of sessions of the treaty bodies. We also note that a number of Member States have

reportedly recently paid their assessed contributions, and we ask that you reassess the projected shortfall in light of these changed circumstances. As a last resort, we request that you make an urgent appeal to Member States to make available funds that could forestall this outcome.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International

International Service for Human Rights

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights

Open Society Justice Initiative

TB-Net (Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR Centre); Child Rights Connect; The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR); International Disability Alliance (IDA); the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR); International Women's Rights Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP); and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT))