

About monitoring protection mechanisms

The eight treaty bodies (or committees) created by virtue of international human rights treaties are responsible for ensuring that the main human rights instruments ratified by State Parties are implemented. They are composed of independent experts who meet two to three times a year in Geneva or New York.

In accordance with their mandate, Treaty Bodies have two main activities: to examine the reports submitted by State Parties on the implementation of pacts and conventions, and to examine individual complaints or communications.

All State Parties must regularly present Treaty Bodies the reports (initial and periodical) on the implementation of the rights included in the various human rights treaties. Treaty Bodies examine each report and share their preoccupations and recommendations with the State Party in their "Final Observations".

Moreover, in specific conditions, certain Treaty Bodies can examine individual complaints or communications from persons who claim to be victims of a rights violation recognised in the relevant convention or agreement.

These mechanisms are often complex and difficult to implement, especially for victims and local NGOs. OMCT works to facilitate access to these various Treaty Bodies through lobbying activities, denunciation and workshops. However, OMCT also contributes by submitting, in collaboration with national NGOs, alternative reports to Treaty Bodies.

The review of initial and periodical reports of State Parties constitutes a delicate exercise for governments in power, who often balk at the idea of being critical of their own actions, and have a tendency to present a partial view of the human rights situation in their country. This is the reason why OMCT, in close collaboration with national NGOs and civil society groups in the concerned country, submits alternative reports on human rights violations. These reports paint a more objective portrait of the situation, which often facilitates the revelation of the "big picture".

"The work of OMCT is of great assistance to all treaty bodies and is crucial in keeping world attention focused on the serious issue of violence against women. I am grateful that you still send me these reports which are of great interest to me personally and are important to treaty bodies generally and in particular the Committee on the Rights of Child." - **Jane Connors, Treaty Implementation Unit II, Support Services Branch, United Nations**

Alternative reports are prepared jointly with national NGOs. This method allows them to gain a deeper understanding of the workings of Treaty Bodies, and allows independent experts in Treaty Bodies to obtain first-hand information on the human rights situation in the country in question.

Depending on the agenda of the review of the State Party's report by Treaty Bodies, OMCT begins by contacting national NGOs with the purpose of establishing a partnership to prepare the alternative report. If this idea is accepted, an OMCT preparatory mission is sent to the concerned

country in order to meet with the partner NGO, conduct the investigation on the human rights situation, meet with relevant authorities and offer workshops on the workings of the Treaty Bodies.

Afterwards, partner NGOs have the opportunity to attend the Treaty Body's sessions (either in Geneva or New York) to present the alternative report with OMCT.

Finally, when the "Final Observations" have been adopted to order State Parties to take certain measures to conform to the provisions of the relevant legislative instruments, OMCT, in collaboration with partner NGOs, then conducts an intensive lobbying effort to ensure that these "Final Observations" are actually implemented.

In this area, OMCT's reputation has grown continuously. Indeed, alternative reports, which are often their main source of information on human rights violations, have a real impact on the work of Treaty Bodies, especially during the interactive dialogue with delegations from State Parties or in the Final Observations they adopt. It is difficult to verify the application of a Treaty Body's Final Observations, both at the legislative and practical levels. The collaboration of local NGOs is thus essential to ensure this follow-up. This verification task can take many months when the task at hand is to ensure that the "Final Observations" have produced their desired effects on the country's legislation. It is even more difficult to determine if State agents acting on the ground are conforming to recommendations. This verification task often requires many years.

OMCT's main objectives are:

- To contribute to the implementation, by State Parties, of the instructions mandated by the Treaty Body in terms of human rights, as they appear in the legislative instruments of the United Nations. To support the development of strict legal norms and to verify their concrete application.
- To provide legislative and practical assistance to victims and local NGOs who aim to use United Nations procedures such as the Committee against Torture (CAT) and the Human Rights Committee (HRC).