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REFERENCE:

30 April 2019

Dear Chairpersons of the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies,

I am writing to you further to the letter from my predecessor, dated 2 February 2018, regarding the decisions of the General Assembly in respect of the evolving requirements of the treaty body system, and in light of the current financial situation of the United Nations. I know that you have already received some additional information about the constraints we are facing in the limited allocation of resources for this biennium, and I would like to be fully transparent about the difficulties we must address.

For a number of years now, Member States have been pressing to slow or even reverse the growth in the overall budget of the United Nations. In adopting the budget for the 2018-2019 biennium, in addition to the unfortunate decision regarding the staffing resources needed to service the expanding workload of the treaty bodies, the General Assembly also approved some broad reductions to nearly every part of the Organization. Global percentage reductions were applied to most budget lines, including 25 per cent of the resources budgeted for travel of high-level experts. This of course has particular relevance for the treaty bodies, and for the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, as this is the main element of funding for the conduct of their work.

This has already had significant implications for the treaty body system as a whole and the support the Office has been able to provide to the human rights treaty bodies. As you know, it was not possible to support all the approved meeting time last year, which meant that the treaty bodies were unable to meet their workload targets established under General Assembly resolution 68/268. This situation was clearly described in the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system (A/73/309), presented to the 73rd session of the General Assembly last autumn.

Recently, this unfortunate shortfall in funding has been further exacerbated by a deepening cash-flow crisis for the Organization, primarily related to delays by Member States in paying their assessed contributions. As a result, the 2019 allocation of the approved funds within the Secretariat has been restricted, and all Departments have been instructed to prioritise their work and limit overall expenditures, delaying or postponing even mandated activities as possible. And while there has been no freeze on recruitment, the Departments have all been advised to carefully manage vacancies in order to reduce staffing costs within a reduced total for the year.

Chairpersons of the
United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies

Bearing this in mind, it is important to note that these budget constraints affect all regular budget mandated human rights activities and are not limited to the treaty bodies. In all areas of the Office, we have had to review the mandated work plans and implement a number of measures to comply with these constraints. Considerable reductions are being made, for example, in resources for consultants, travel of staff and contractual services, in order to redeploy funds where most needed. For the treaty bodies, there are simply not sufficient funds to support all of the sessions foreseen during the year. I have repeatedly reminded member States of their responsibilities to adequately finance the treaty body system from the regular budget, in all my encounters and dialogues with them, individually and in groups. I have outlined the realities of under-funding and its impact on your work, particularly in the area of petitions, and recall that General Assembly resolution 68/268 approved clear provisions that should be implemented to ensure the system is adequately supported into the future.

In the effort to bring some additional assistance to the treaty body system, I am pleased that we have been able to allocate additional resources from unearmarked voluntary contributions to support that workload; however, this will still not be sufficient to sustain the full calendar of meetings for the year.

In spite of these efforts, we may not be able to hold a number of sessions scheduled for later this year given the cash flow crisis and the 25 per cent reduction of the resources budgeted for travel of high-level experts. This would include the third sessions for those treaty bodies who would normally meet more than twice during the year, i.e.:

2019 sessions to be postponed

Committee on the Rights of the Child	9 September-4 October 2019
Human Rights Committee	7 October-8 November 2019
Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women	16 October-15 November 2019
Committee Against Torture	11 November-6 December 2019
Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture	18-22 November 2019
Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination	25 November - 13 December 2019

At mid-year we should have a clearer understanding of the financial situation for the Organization in general and for OHCHR, particularly the treaty bodies, for the remainder of the year. We will confirm at that time whether it will be possible for these meetings to proceed.

We have also been informed that the Secretariat's budget proposal for 2020 will not restore the resources reduced by the General Assembly for the current biennium. Thus, the constraints on our work appear likely to continue in the future.

While the current situation continues to evolve, and we remain hopeful for improved outcomes soonest, I count on your understanding and cooperation as we work through this difficult situation.



To end on a more positive note, I would welcome any suggestions you may have both in the short-term and in the longer-term, and also encourage you to accelerate your efforts to reach a common vision and share it with States, in respect of the 2020 review that should address the current challenges in a fair and sustainable manner that enables respect for and implementation of the ten human rights treaties.

I very much look forward to receiving your suggestions before the end of June 2019, when we will also need to finalize the third report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system, so that we may appropriately integrate your vision in the report.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Bachelet'.

Michelle Bachelet
High Commissioner for Human Rights