

Rigi Retreat on the Future of the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Body System

Outcome Report

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1. Introduction

The treaty body system is facing the most significant challenge in its history. For more than fifty years, treaty bodies have played a central role in advancing implementation of international human rights obligations. Through constructive dialogue with States, engagement with rights holders and the progressive development of international human rights law, the treaty bodies have contributed to legislative reform, policy change, accountability and improved protection of human rights around the world.

The ongoing United Nations liquidity crisis has exposed a system already operating under significant strain. Treaty body sessions have been cancelled, reviews postponed and mandated activities disrupted. In 2025 alone, over 40 State party dialogues were cancelled and approximately 185 individual communications were delayed because of the liquidity crisis. More broadly, reporting backlogs continue to grow, reporting rates remain uneven and the system is increasingly struggling to consistently deliver impact and activities mandated by States through international human rights treaties and General Assembly resolutions.

At the same time, a substantial body of work has emerged over the past decade exploring options for treaty body strengthening that could not only address the current crisis, but improve the overall impact, accessibility, effectiveness and sustainability of the system. The Rigi Retreat was convened

against this backdrop by the Government of Switzerland and the Geneva Human Rights Hub (GHRH) with additional support from the European Union and the Kingdom of Belgium. It brought together representatives of the key stakeholder groups that are central to shape, support and implement any future reforms, including treaty body chairs and members, States, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society organisations, senior OHCHR officials and leading experts.

The objective of the Rigi Retreat was not to revisit whether reform is required, but to consider which reform options might best address the challenges currently facing the treaty body system and what further work is required to move discussions forward.

2. Objectives of the Report

This outcome report has three objectives:

1. To document the key discussions, observations and outcomes emerging from the Rigi High-Level Retreat on the Future of the Treaty Body System.
2. To identify areas of convergence, including the potential benefits, challenges and outstanding questions associated with the reform proposals discussed during the retreat.
3. To provide a the basis for a common roadmap for further consultation among States, treaty bodies, OHCHR, NHRIs, civil society organisations and rights holders on the future of the treaty body system.

The Geneva Human Rights Hub thanks the participants for their extensive feedback on a first draft of this document. While we tried to address them as much as possible, this document is to be seen as our reading and condensed take-out of the discussions and may not reflect all opinions and details discussed at the event.

3. Key Reform Proposals Discussed at Rigi

Participants considered three tracks outlined in the program and backed up with background papers prepared by the GHRH. To inform the discussions, a OHCHR Working Paper¹ outlined the position of the OHCHR on those areas, representing some of the most advanced options currently under discussion.

Proposal 1: Digitalisation

The digitalisation track discussed the need to establish a single digital multilingual platform for treaty body reporting. The purpose of such a platform would be to introduce efficiencies, reduce duplication, simplify reporting requirements and improve accessibility for States and stakeholders

Discussions focused on how advances in digital technologies, including AI-assisted translation and information management, could significantly facilitate reporting compliance while improving accessibility and engagement across languages. Participants noted that a single platform could support reporting, implementation tracking and follow-up while enabling interoperability with existing

¹ [OHCHR Working paper on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the UN human rights treaty system \(29 May 2026\) for discussion](#)

national human rights tracking and reporting platforms such as NRTD, SIMORE+, and IMPACT OSS.

Digitalisation was viewed as an essential development as well as an enabling reform capable of supporting a range of other reforms, including harmonised reporting, clustered reviews and more structured follow-up. Participants generally recognised the potential to improve efficiency, accessibility while reducing duplication across the reporting cycle of States to various Treaty Bodies. Digital tracking could further contribute to better implementation of the recommendations. Questions focused primarily on implementation, governance, accessibility and interoperability rather than on the principle of reform itself. The necessity to secure extra-budgetary funding for the initial development of such a platform was also discussed.

Proposal 2: Regionalisation

The OHCHR working paper proposed that Treaty Party dialogues be held periodically in major regional hubs. These dialogues would involve States from the specific region, with up to 3 members of each Committee for the Conventions considered. These regional dialogues would then be complemented by plenary committee sessions in Geneva, where concluding observations would be adopted and other treaty body business conducted, presenting the central backbone of the system.

Regionalisation seeks to bring treaty body engagement closer to States, rights holders, NHRIs, CSOs and implementation actors. It seeks to increase accessibility, participation and implementation by bringing engagement closer to both the duty bearers and rights holders. Participants reflected on evidence emerging from regional treaty body initiatives² which has demonstrated how regional engagement can increase public awareness and overall engagement by State authorities and bodies, as well as civil society with the treaty bodies and drive implementation.

Questions were raised regarding the period between dialogues and adoption of concluding observations, consistency across regions, risks of fragmentation, the number of members in the taskforce and the criteria for their selection, and the capacity required to facilitate regular regional engagement, including practical challenges relating to travel itineraries, including for persons with disability, and digital connectivity. Concerns were raised also on risks relating to reprisals and shrinking civic space, noting that while this proposal has the capacity to enhance accessibility these risks may in fact limit accessibility for rights holders if not adequately addressed. The value of hybrid participation was repeatedly emphasised. A request was made to OHCHR to further flesh out and operationalize the concepts presented, in order to better assess the practical implications of the proposed changes.

Proposal 3: Predictable Scheduling, Clustering and Follow-Up

This proposal seeks to replace the current reactive reporting model with a predictable 8-year review cycle supported by clustered reviews³. Participants considered proposals relating to linear reviews, partial clustering and full clustering, together with different scheduling arrangements for treaty body reviews. Discussions highlighted that predictable scheduling should not be viewed simply as a calendar exercise. Rather, it has the potential to provide the organisational framework for a more coherent, universal and manageable treaty body system.

² Including [the Pacific CEDAW Session 2025](#), [Extraordinary 84th Session of CRC](#) and the [mid-term pilot series](#).

³ Clustering refers to a combination of reports and reviews of the implementation of various conventions. Contrary to a merging, clustering upholds the independence of each treaty.

Reducing reporting burdens and thus facilitating timely reporting emerged as a consistent theme throughout the discussions. Participants noted that clustering could significantly reduce duplication and streamline engagement across the reporting cycle, while further analysis undertaken at Rigi suggested that a fully clustered model in particular would enable genuinely equitable regionalisation by allowing all regions to participate through the same model, without requiring smaller regions to join dialogues in neighbouring regions. This model also appeared to have the greatest potential cost effectiveness, with the least number of session days required. However, it also poses some challenges for Treaty body members, states and civil society in terms of the scope to be covered over the review period.

Another concern, across States, CSOs and NHRIs, was that the current lack of a regular and predictable cycle undermines efforts to adequately plan and prepare for Treaty Body reviews.

As discussions progressed, participants increasingly explored how the benefits of clustering and scheduling could be maximised. This led to broader discussions regarding harmonised reporting processes, including the potential value of a harmonised List of Issues Prior to Reporting. Participants observed that clustering alone may not fully address obstacles faced by States in reporting and that greater harmonisation of this nature could further reduce duplication while improving coherence across the system. Caution needs to be given to potential effects of significantly reduced review time and time for meetings with civil society.

Discussions also increasingly focused on implementation. Participants noted that many of the challenges facing the treaty body system relate not only to reporting, but also to the difficulty of translating recommendations into sustained implementation and measurable change. This prompted wider discussion regarding how future reforms to cluster and regionalise should place emphasis on implementation between review cycles and strengthen connections between treaty body recommendations, national implementation processes and broader United Nations and development partner support.

4. Convergence and mutual reinforcement

While discussions often began by considering digitalisation, regionalisation and predictable scheduling/clustering separately, participants increasingly focused on the characteristics that any future treaty body system should seek to achieve.

Participants noted that while impact of the system was confirmed as underlying priority, facilitating streamlined reporting was seen as a major step towards that aim throughout the retreat. Further analysis undertaken at Rigi suggested that while both partial and full clustering could improve efficiency and predictability, a fully clustered model appeared capable of supporting equitable regionalisation across all regions without requiring smaller regions to participate through neighbouring regional hubs. Participants also observed that the individual elements of the proposed new model are mutually reinforcing. Digitalisation supports harmonisation and implementation tracking. Harmonisation enables clustering. Clustering enables regionalisation. Regionalisation has the potential to increase participation, accessibility and implementation ownership. Enhanced follow-up helps ensure that increased engagement translates into improved implementation and outcomes.

At the same time, participants also discussed whether the proposals could be implemented independently of each other, with some highlighting that digitalisation and a predictable calendar are a priority to address the current crisis moment.

A first area of convergence emerged around the overall objectives of reform. Participants broadly agreed that any future model should seek to deliver:

- Regular, predictable and accessible treaty body engagement;
- Meaningful participation by CSOs, NHRIs and rights holders;
- Reduced reporting burden and facilitation of regular reporting through harmonisation and digitalisation, enabling greater focus on implementation;
- Better dialogue and cooperation between treaty bodies, as well as with States and thus stronger implementation support and outcomes;
- A regionalised component to enhance proximity and dialogue, and
- Follow-up mechanisms that are built into the review cycle.

A series of guiding principles also emerged from the discussions and are set out in the Rigi Roadmap. As discussions progressed, participants increasingly explored how the three reform proposals might operate together in practice to achieve these objectives. The table below tries to schematize the multiple aspects of a possible integrated approach:

	Emerging Model Based on Rigi Discussions	Justification
Digital reporting and implementation platform	Single multilingual digital platform supporting reporting, implementation tracking and follow-up, interoperable with national systems such as NRTD, SIMORE+ and IMPACT OSS. Potential use of AI-assisted translation and workflow management.	Reduces duplication and reporting burden; improves accessibility; supports harmonisation; strengthens implementation tracking and follow-up.
Regular 8-year review cycle	An 8-year predictable review calendar. Could be complemented by a lighter-touch mid-cycle implementation review and linked to other reporting and review processes, including UPR and Voluntary National Reviews where appropriate.	Creates predictability for States, treaty bodies and stakeholders; supports planning, sustainable financing and participation; strengthens implementation monitoring between reviews.
Fully or semi clustered dialogues	A single dialogue covering all treaties ratified by the State, conducted over approximately three days, involving up to three members from each relevant treaty body committee. Alternatively, several ways of clustering reviews of 2-4 treaties can be considered. Pilot projects will be helpful to provide more clarity on the pros and cons of each model.	Reduces duplication; supports whole-of-government engagement; enables more coherent consideration of implementation challenges; provides the foundation for equitable regionalisation.
Harmonised reporting	Common reporting supported by a harmonised List of Issues Prior to Reporting (for example, each Committee could propose up to xx questions).	Reduces duplication in reporting; improves coherence; shifts resources towards implementation and substantive dialogue.
Regionalised dialogues	Dialogues conducted through regional hubs, bringing treaty body engagement closer to States, rights holders and implementation actors. Does not create regional treaty bodies or diminish committee authority. Regional hubs as identified through OHCHR mapping.	Strengthens accessibility, participation and implementation; increases visibility of the treaty body system; creates opportunities for broader regional engagement and awareness.
Geneva plenaries	Treaty bodies continue to meet in Geneva to adopt concluding observations, consider individual communications, develop general	Preserves treaty body authority, independence, collegiality, consistency and treaty-specific

	comments and undertake other formal committee functions. This is also the fall-back option to undertake state reviews when safety and accessibility could not be secured in a region.	expertise. Also preserves Geneva as human rights hub.
Accessibility, inclusion and meaningful participation	Accessibility integrated throughout the review process, including both, formal participation opportunities for NHRIs, CSOs and rights holders; hybrid participation options; language support; as well as disability inclusion and reasonable accommodation; and measures to address barriers faced by marginalised groups.	Ensures the system is accessible, inclusive and responsive to those most affected by human rights violations; aligns with a human rights-based approach.
Implementation and follow-up embedded	Mid-cycle implementation review and ongoing engagement throughout the review cycle, supported by implementation tracking tools and OHCHR regional engagement.	Shifts focus from reporting to implementation; strengthens accountability; supports sustained progress between reviews.

Taken together, participants observed that such an approach has the potential to create a treaty body system that is more regular, predictable, accessible, inclusive, implementation-focused and sustainable than the current model, while reducing duplication and reporting burdens for States and stakeholders.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that important questions remain regarding governance, safeguards, resource implications, treaty body working methods and implementation arrangements, civil society access and participation and how to mitigate against fragmentation and ensuring that reviews and outcomes maintain the details required by the treaties.

Participants also discussed the potential value of pilot initiatives as a means of testing the emerging model in parallel with wider consultations among these stakeholder groups. There was broad support for advancing both processes concurrently, enabling practical experience and stakeholder feedback to inform one another. Participants noted that this approach could help maintain momentum, build the evidence base and identify any risks and adjustments required, while ensuring that the future development of the model remains informed by the views of all stakeholder groups.

5. Reform Feasibility and Funding

The current reform process effectively began in 2012 when the General Assembly launched an intergovernmental process to strengthen and enhance the effective functioning of the treaty body system. The process culminated in the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 68/268 (2014)⁴, which remains the principal framework governing treaty body strengthening today.

Participants discussed the feasibility of reform and the mechanisms through which change could be achieved. There was broad agreement that amendment of the human rights treaties themselves is neither desirable nor realistic, and that reform efforts should focus, wherever possible, on measures that can be implemented within existing mandates, existing budgets, working methods and governance arrangements. While GA res.68/268 seems to have a role to play, it was not viewed as the only vehicle and not necessarily the starting point for reform.

⁴ <https://docs.un.org/en/a/res/68/268>

Many of the areas of convergence emerging from Rigi could be explored, tested or piloted without requiring formal intergovernmental agreement, subject to resources and conference services being available. Committees already possess significant authority to determine their methods of work and organise their activities, while OHCHR has some flexibility in how it supports reporting, stakeholder engagement and implementation tracking, including through its capacity building program. Dialogue and cooperation between treaty bodies could accelerate the harmonization of their working methods, which could in turn facilitate the fulfilment of States' obligations.

There was broad agreement that core treaty body functions mandated by States, including reviews, dialogues, individual communications and other treaty body activities, should continue to be funded through the United Nations regular budget. At the same time, participants recognised that innovation and reform initiatives, such as the development of a digital reporting and follow-up platform, may be suitable for extra-budgetary funding, particularly during initial development and testing phases.

Participants agreed that the reform proposal on digitalization needs to be implemented. Also, participants generally viewed pilot initiatives and practical testing as a good possibility for advancing reform in the near term, and that the emerging model of fully clustered regionalised dialogues could possibly be piloted within the existing regular budget scope⁵ and not dependent on a new UN resolution or other intergovernmental amendment or agreement. It would, however, require broad support across all key stakeholder groups which could be achieved, for example, through a streamlined 68/268-plus follow-up resolution or through targeted expansions of the biennial TB resolution. A clear signal from Member and a shared understanding that a new interpretation of "reporting" is adopted, signifying rather "filing information" / reporting on the platform, whatever the form and timing. A strong political signal from member States would be needed.

Participants generally viewed these issues not as arguments against reform, but as areas requiring further consultation, more detailed information, in particular from OHCHR, refinement and testing as part of the next phase of the treaty body strengthening process.

Cross-Cutting Issues Requiring Further Consultation

Across all stakeholder groups, several recurring questions emerged:

- The appropriate balance between harmonisation and preservation of treaty-specific expertise;
- The design and governance of regional dialogues;
- Safeguards relating to reprisals, civic space and protection of participants;
- Accessibility, inclusion and language support arrangements;
- The role and design of a mid-cycle implementation review;
- Capacity requirements for OHCHR and regional support structures;
- Governance and interoperability of the proposed digital platform;
- Transition arrangements and change management; and
- Resource requirements during implementation and testing phases.
- Sustainable financing of any new model of review

⁵ To become the default regular procedure, the clustered model still needs to be fully costed and may need different budget provisions; Additionally these reforms would require short term investment to build capacity and deliver activities such as the unified digital reporting platform. These initial costs would be funded through the Extra Budget or external partnerships.